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Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

**HERE AND NOW, THEN AND THERE:
PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE IN THE TREE OF HISTORY**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

LITERATURE

by

Courtney Valdez

June 2021

The Thesis of Courtney Valdez
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Abstract
“Here and Now, Then and There: Past, Present, and Future in the Tree of History”
Courtney Valdez

This thesis is a creative/critical project with an essay and footnote structure designed to frame my long sequence of novels, collectively titled *The Sophist Chronicles*, and more specifically my current novel-in-progress, *Second Exodus*, in an exploration of the complicated, multivalent, interdependent relationship between past, present, and future. The projects are an effort to dispel notions of history as past, something which is over and done with rather than occurring around us at all times, a recognition that allows for a more conscious and conscientious personal and collective engagement between the people and peoples of the world. To carry out this work, I turn to speculative fiction as a narrative mode that bears the capacity to affectively orient readers in the position of living within the process of historical formation rather than outside of it. I draw on theorists and critics—including Walter Benjamin, Judith Butler, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Édouard Glissant, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Gayatri Spivak—as well as my own fiction, using a traditional academic apparatus to compose a running commentary on the speculative narrative and history-as-process, and how this mode of fiction and my own work narrativizes such theoretical and philosophical concepts. Charting a reflexive, discursive inquiry into these subjects, I engage in a kind of metareflection that orbits between creative and critical, body and paratext, between what I intend either one to achieve and where I feel that they (and I) failed at achieving it, but using that “failure” as a space of generative discourse for reaching a greater empathetic appreciation for the capacity of each individual to be an historical agent, affecting and effecting the future for the diverse multitudes of humanity.

A Klee painting named ‘Angelus Novus’ shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

—Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”

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... though extrapolation is an element in science fiction, it isn’t the name of the game by any means. It is far too rationalist and simplistic to satisfy the imaginative mind, whether the writer’s or the reader’s [...] If you like you can read it [...] as a thought experiment. [...] In a story so conceived, the moral complexity proper to the modern novel need not be sacrificed, nor is there any built-in dead end; thought and intuition can move freely within the bounds set only by the terms of the experiment, which may be very large indeed.

—Ursula K. Le Guin, “Introduction,” *The Left Hand of Darkness*

~

Overambitious projects may be objectionable in many fields, but not in literature. Literature remains alive only if we set ourselves immeasurable goals, far beyond all hope of achievement. Only if poets and writers set themselves tasks that no one else dares imagine will literature continue to have a function. Since science has begun to distrust general explanations and solutions that are not sectorial and specialized, the grand challenge for literature is to be capable of weaving together the various branches of knowledge, the various “codes,” into a manifold and multifaceted vision of the world.

—Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*

~

To risk the Earth, dare to explore its forbidden or misunderstood impulses. Establish in so doing our own dwelling place. The history of all peoples is the ultimate point of our imaginative unconscious.

—Édouard Glissant, “From this discourse on a discourse”

Forethought(s)¹

I write fiction about questions. I'm preoccupied with questions, so it's only natural that history plays a significant role in my work. What is the historical record if not answers to questions: who and what and when and where and why and how? And so heavily

¹ How do you write about how to write? This isn't a new or original concept, of course, but to critically engage with the writing of fiction isn't something I'm wholly attuned to—I've never thought of myself as a critic, beginning my writing life at the age of seven with fiction and, having done so into my mid-thirties now, whatever critical energy I've concerned myself with has been almost exclusively subconscious...maybe as a way to help me understand my own methods and purposes, but never at length outside of a purely academic setting where I was obligated to do so, something I always did with great (if ineffectual) psychic resistance. Yet, because *this* is a critical project, it's an unavoidable task. However, because this project is so inextricably bound to my creative work, I can make it easier on myself and, hopefully, more interesting and, with even *more* hope, make something new and urgent by prefacing this thesis with some iteration of an artist's statement, an introduction into my primary concerns and purposes—that is, what I've staked my life on, my artistic, intellectual, “humanistic” energies on, for better or worse. The zeroth “Forethought(s)” section (borrowing from how DuBois uses his “Forethought” at the start of *The Souls of Black Folk*) is, then, a unification of my creative spirit of sorts and those flickering critical cinders that must be now be stoked.

Preceding this, the epigraphs are, I believe, a solid grounding for three central concepts that have run through what amounts to my entire body of work, to varying degrees, and come together rather resoundingly in the novel-in-progress/process I'll be engaging with here shortly (and by shortly, I mean once I've worked through the several pages of preliminary theoretical stuff that needs to be properly disentangled for any of it to begin making sense...such is the “critical” nature of it). Marrying Benjamin's “angel of history” and its incessant progression into the future as the past continually, violently imposes itself on that movement with Le Guin's explication of science fiction as a means of engaging with possibility, potentiality, and imagination naturally gets one (or at least myself) to Calvino's wonderful call to action in such a way that they collectively capture everything that I've pursued in my creative and critical endeavors, which will be made clear in the pages to come. Concluding with Glissant brings forward the necessary acknowledgment of the risks involved (historical, social, personal) with such a grand purpose, but also that the capacity for success in the face of near certain failure is the point of everything we do—to tell our stories (ours individually and ours collectively) and communicate, and connect, and *maybe* understand each other a little more, to see the human in the other.

Together, these introductory interventions allow me to step aside here, in the periphery of the work, to comment on and explain these few things as a means of priming the reader for the parallel-though-intersecting discussions taking place. To this end, I'm utilizing these paratexts (with this footnote as a kind of preface or forethought to *them*) not just as a space to unpack ideas as they come up but also as a running dialogue, to comment on, clarify, and narrativize my creative process both in writing a novel currently in progress as well as the critical process of having to *write about writing*, particularly as it relates to the speculative nature of *future narratives* and history-as-process, and how this mode of fiction and my own work narrativizes these theoretical and philosophical concepts, playing around in a liminal space between what I intend either one to achieve and where I feel that I failed at achieving it, but using that “failure” as a space of generative discourse. Oscillating from macro to micro, body to periphery, thorough explication to open-ended commentary and back again, the discursive qualities at work in this attempt reflect, I believe, my own style of storytelling, especially as it relates to the novel-in-process I am engaging with here, and will be justified in the way(s) they affect, connote, allude to, and embody the very purpose of the whole enterprise.

does fiction rely on history for its ability to provide context, reference, and insight, that it cannot be wholly ahistorical, always existing in dialogue with some element of historical contention. It is, however, only ever an attempt to answer these questions—what more can the written word can do?

There is a recognition, implicit in this preoccupation, of diversity—of experience, thought, identity—as a force of liberation from the restricting power of assimilation into a single dominant tradition, identity, philosophy. The multitudes of the human experience necessarily generate a confrontation with the difficult complexities of History, a confrontation that, if done critically and open-minded, may allow me to overcome the limitations of the implied ambiguities in a way that makes me more conscious (and conscientious) of the power and value of the difference that vibrates between people and peoples, from which learning and growth ripple and cascade.

We exist in such complex conditions that are in many ways unique to every collection of peoples, and people within those peoples, that to seek to eliminate or inoculate any semblance of that uniqueness because of the difficulty of those differences, perhaps for fear failure and, as a result, spreading the harmful pathogen of misrepresentation, merely serves to assimilate people into a singular banality where no resistance to infection can develop, no growth can occur, nothing new can be synthesized, because there will be no difference, no questions, and where no questions exist, the inspiring, driving force of “Why?” is eliminated. There is an inherent ambiguity, an uncertainty, that simply *is* when dealing with people and peoples that we must accept in order to *begin* to get anywhere with each other. The individual, in fact,

has a right to that opacity, the right to not be pinned down by any singular interpretation or totalizing answer. This characteristic in literature, in fiction, grants it the capacity to work as a bridge between the individual and collective human experience and History—there may be no true completion of that bridge, no final crossing, but the attempt is what is significant because it makes they who do so more conscious and conscientious of what makes each and every one of us interesting and worthwhile. Failure is always a risk, of course. And this is powerful. Art is human, and human life is at risk at all times—the stakes of living within our world are very real, imposed on us by our mere existence, inescapable and violent. To take on this challenge is to engage historically and futurologically with that sense of universal understanding through the imaginative capacities of human expression.

There is an opacity to the written word that I seek to employ in this, inherent in its complex ambiguity, an ultimate indefinability, which allows it to challenge and question and risk *itself* in its effort to grapple with human complexity. The contact point(s) and conflicts of histories and History, people and peoples, then and there, here and now, are places of productive discourse and potential synthesis, an uncomfortable nexus that speaks to the actual conditions of people. And it is a work that never truly ends—the work of historical formation, the work of speculating upon ourselves and our place and time, of tracing and narrativizing the connections we feel, of reaching out to try to better understand each other against all odds, perhaps all hope, never-ending even if our individual efforts will, at some point, conclude, because it is a collective, generational, and futurological work, for all of us, for humanity. So I say let my work be human, let it risk itself (and myself). In that failure, I (we) might learn.

1. The Work(s) in Question²

In many ways, my current work-in-progress, *The Sophist Chronicles: Second Exodus*, is the act of putting these theoretical ideas into practice.³ The novel is set a few decades into our future, precisely beginning in 2067 and ultimately spanning the following forty years. As the narrative begins, environmental collapse has set firmly into motion, crosspollinating with the lingering sociopolitical conflicts of the early 21st Century such as energy shortages, Middle East instability, water, food, and land scarcity, each affecting economic collapse, mass migration, social revolt, and geopolitical

² The thought I put into how to begin this thesis proper was not insignificant—as will become clear (I hope) over the course of the project, I consider form and content as working at all times in dialogue, one never fully independent of the other. I experimented with several iterations of this first section/chapter, none of which were about the “work in question” at all—this segment was, actually, for the longest time, planned to emerge at the midway point, the center from which the thesis would burst into all kinds of directions, both creative and critical. Because my current work-in-process *is* the object of study, though, I wanted to make sure it has a prominent, clear place within the thesis, even if I have to spend time in the early pages introducing my foundational ideas and arguments, defining my terms, and orienting the reader around my framing of these various elements. It became clear to me that placing this short section/chapter later in the paper meant it would be awkward to then have any engagement at all with the novel-in-process before that point, and I didn’t want the novel to emerge suddenly halfway into the thesis, seemingly out of nowhere, when it would suddenly become *the thing* you’re supposed to care about. Over several drafts (and much advice from others), I realized that having this introduction here, then pulling back to deal with the more deeply critical and theoretical stuff, creates a more comfortable space to work the novel in throughout the early sections alongside the other works...a way of falling right into the gravity well of the object (and purpose) of my engagement with these ideas while playing around with the elliptical discursiveness that the argument and novel(s) deal in so heavily (the angel of history turning back as it also pushes forward).

³ Planning for this novel dates back to sometime between late 2007 and summer of 2008, as I was already writing the third of the *Sophist* novels (which will be explained very soon) and taking a break from classes at Diablo Valley College, being in a recession and suddenly unemployed, without the money even to afford community college courses. This timeframe can be pushed even further back if I consider its conceptual stages in May 2005, when I began work on the second *Sophist* novel—at the time, it existed only as a title and the image of a generation ship against the backdrop of climate catastrophe. Over a couple years of gestation, and work on an even larger project, I began to envision how the scenario would play out, from certain characters to specific narrative beats, until I realized I had two *very* different volumes here...despite *Second Exodus* as a whole being only about half the overall length of that second novel (being the four-volume *The Sacred and the Damned*) it’s probably the far more complex work because of how it must be structured, not to mention its reliance on more immediate speculations upon the very present, very real world. Being that this all began so long ago, long before I was consciously aware of many of the thinkers and concepts I’m dealing with *here*, I want to emphasize that even now, as I’ve begun the actual writing of the novel in the past twenty-four months, the project isn’t so much a conscious invocation of their ideas, but merely a manifestation of them as they’ve developed over the course of my creative and intellectual life...for what it’s worth.

breakdown. This leads several powerful nations/corporations to construct a fifty-mile-long ship to escape Earth aboard, a ship designed to be self-sustaining for hundreds, if not thousands, of years, whose limited space, resources, delicate internal environment, and the need to consider exponential population growth, demand the governments at its helm form a selection committee to decide who among mankind is to be given the privilege to form its “seed population.” Using this situation as a foundation, the project brings to the fore the complexities of deciding who can be saved, who should be saved, who *will* be, how we go about valuing human life, and the pressure such questions of economic and social privilege impose upon societies on the brink.

The novel itself is divided across two volumes—*Act X: The Human Calculus* and *Act XI: Second Exodus*, which gives the novel as a whole its title—the former covering the events detailed in the previous paragraph, and the latter, much longer volume, covering the following forty years spent aboard the ark as it travels the cosmos, facing the problems everyone believes they have escaped only see those conflicts transplanted to the smaller, much more volatile environment of the so-called Ark. Two parallel plot threads run through this, representing the macrocosmic and the microcosmic elements of the questions being engaged with: one, anchored by Faye Le Guin⁴ and her efforts heading the secret selection committee and the larger societal

⁴ Yes, a nod to Ursula, but no, not because of her recent passing, as the character was named and sketched out over a decade ago. Faye Le Guin and Danny Flores (originally David Knight—a nod to another science fiction giant of old, Damon Knight) were among the first two ideas that came to mind as I began planning this work. But Faye isn’t an attempt to write *Ursula K. Le Guin* into the novel. What a cruel project that’d be, given how much of a cold-hearted bitch Faye is, especially in the first volume...just being honest, and to be clear she actually has pretty good reasons for her attitude in the novel’s early stages. I *am* trying to do right by her name, though, as Faye evolves into one of the few characters who fights against impossible odds to try to realize the potential of the hope the Ark *Titan* symbolizes, in a way becoming the truest embodiment of the capacity for overcoming absolute despair, reflecting, I suppose, a touch of that utopian aspiration that her namesake spent a lifetime writing into her stories.

conflicts involving the Ark *Titan*, geopolitics, and the list and its related philosophical problems; two, anchored by Danny Flores,⁵ a garbage man who pilots a rig in Earth's orbit with dreams of more, who eventually works to become a member of the Ark's crew, and the personal struggles of people within the larger conflicts—the individual struggling against the greater political, economic, ecological, and cultural forces produced by the degrading conditions.

The novel also works as a microcosm to the macrocosmic future history it lives within. As suggested by the title and volume numbers, *Second Exodus* is not a work unto itself, but part of a larger whole. The project of speculative works I have been laboring to compose for the past twenty-one years is a sequence of five novels, to be spread across thirteen total volumes, titled *The Sophist Chronicles*.⁶ The microwork-

⁵ If I'm going to comment on the seed of Faye's conception...David Knight became Danny Flores after a close friend of mine suddenly passed from heart failure. He was in his early 50s, had heart problems, and had for a couple years been living out of his car. We worked together for about five years at a local pizza place—I was a shift manager and he was a delivery driver—and we hit it off. We talked history a lot and he liked talking about what I was working on at the time (a period that bridged the first and second *Sophist* novels). I'd been gone from the pizza place for a few years when it happened, but we still hung out on occasion, talked on the phone, kept in touch. He'd fallen into a financial hole and was kicked out of his house at one point...I helped him move his stuff out, have a yard sale, find a place for his elderly mother to live while he was stuck living out of a car that was almost repossessed one morning about a year earlier before I hurried over and managed to pay the guy off to go the other way—should probably say I was unemployed at the time, after I was laid off from the job I went to after leaving the pizza place...this was right after the recession hit in 2008, so it was bad for all of us. In a couple years—and one hospital stint from having circulation problems (from sleeping in his car)—he'd managed to find a house to move into and get his mother back with him. Things were looking up. I went to visit him at the house one night with my girlfriend, and we sat and chatted about something he thought I'd be interested in helping him bring to the city council. About a week later, I got a call from another former coworker (from the pizza place) saying he'd died. Probably from bad circulation exacerbated by living out of his car for so long. His family was cautious with details (they didn't have a good relationship) so I wasn't able to go to the wake, never even knew where or when it was until weeks after it happened.

David Knight became Danny Flores because my friend's playful, optimistic, yeoman-like personality was what I wanted for the character, Faye's opposite, so when I write Danny I'm working to do right by my friend as well, who was there near the start of my *sophist* chronicling.

⁶ I use the term “sophist” in a number of ways at once. Contemporaneously, *sophist* carries wholly negative connotations—a person playing at an intellectually sound (and probably superior) position using fallacious argumentation—but the word does originate from the Ancient Greek *sophia*, meaning wisdom, as well as cleverness, skill, and intelligence at different times in different contexts. A *Sophist*, one who carries wisdom, is wise, came to be contrasted with A *Philosopher* in a negative manner, but I

in-process, *Second Exodus*, is the fourth novel of an eventual five, consisting of the tenth and eleventh volumes of the macrowork-in-process, *The Sophist Chronicles*. To trace the History—and histories—of the universe, I have set the sequence in reverse chronological order, from the end of the grand narrative (also being the end of time) back to its truest beginning (the beginning of time) fourteen billion years ago. That is:

Genesis Star (~1770 years After Earth)

Act I: Seed of Eden

Act II: The Philosophers

Act III: Genesis Star

The Sacred and the Damned (~1750 AE)

Act IV: The Arbiters

Act V: The Lost World

Act VI: Love and War

Act VII: Age of Innocents

Babel's Trespass (~1100 AE)

Act VIII: A Confusion of Tongues

Act IX: Thy Kingdom Come

play with these multiple meanings. The Sophists in the novel sequence are a group of scientists and philosophers who live on the small world Tarus VII (in actuality, a terraformed Titan, the largest moon of Saturn), who descend from the people of Nibiru, the “civilization” that seeded Earth with life billions of years ago as an experiment in search of the life essence (or soul, to simplify the matter) they knew they lacked. I don’t believe in the “ancient alien” myth, nor in the orchestrated panspermia-like scenario I depict here (being an empiricist, I’d need *evidence* to even begin believing something so extraordinary), and scattered throughout the sequence are moments where characters admit to themselves the things they are involved in are hard to believe. Much of my intent with them is to simultaneously take them seriously within the narrative while also acknowledging that what’s significant about them isn’t their literal existence but what they signify. The Sophists’ wavering presence in the narrative(s), spending most of the time in the background, also speaks to that: they have key roles to play in the second half of *Genesis Star*; a significant role throughout much of *The Sacred and the Damned*; no presence at all (just a moment that gestures to them) in *Babel's Trespass*; a very small role in *Second Exodus* (one character, Val, is actually an outcast Nibiruian, who, had they lived some centuries later, would have been one of the Sophists); and no presence in *Ab Aeterno*, since it has no characters to speak of. Because the story (and stories) of the sequence is not theirs but humanity’s, they remain in the periphery doing their thing, pursuing knowledge without concern for anything else, without consideration for the potential long-term (historical) impacts of the products of that knowledge. They are, in varying ways, sophists in the positive and negative sense—wisdom, knowledge, intelligence, these are necessary and vital to life, but, isolated from their human element, also carry great potential for misapplication, exploitation, and harm.

Second Exodus (~0 AE)
Act X: The Human Calculus
Act XI: Second Exodus

Ab Aeterno (~14 billion years ago)
Act XII: The Heaven
Act XIII: The Earth

As these novels run in reverse chronological order, separated by increasingly large gaps of time—from thirty years between the first and second novels, to about five hundred between the second and third, to one thousand between the third and fourth, to fourteen billion years between the fourth and the final novel—there is a temporal oscillation as one progresses through the sequence, each and every novel, and each and every volume, and each and every character, and each and every reader, an angel of its (and our) own histories, and collectively of History, turning and reaching ever further backward into the piling wreckage of the past, while being irresistibly propelled into the future one's back is turned to by the inescapable, exponential accumulation of time (and history), this being the process of the creative project to engage with movement of bodies through, and across, time and space. Such are the bounds of my experiment, an impossible task I have taken on to speculate my way through the multitudinous diversities of humanity's position(s) and capacities within History-as-process and imagine the potential for the creation of our future, embodied in the structure of the sequence's composition, its macrocosmic being.⁷

⁷ Individually and collectively, the sequence is my attempt to give form to my conceptualization of History-as-process...and I suppose this thesis is my attempt to explicate how and why that is. The sizes of these works are no incidental thing, either—the first three completed novels, as well as the in-process fourth (making up approximately 9.5 volumes thus far), total roughly 2.3 million words at the present moment. I estimate the final total of the sequence to reach 3 million. That they're rendered on such a

The other work in question, being this thesis, is my critical intervention into that creative process. Here, I am working to bring into dialogue with my own creations a plexus of ideas inside and out of the speculative field that often conflict but whose contradictions illuminate tracings of potential connective tissues within their differences, a perpetual growing of meaning(s) that give power to the difficult but necessary diversities of knowledge, truth, and history. I refer to the violences of History that Glissant recognizes while he also argues for the value of the embedded differences individuals unavoidably bear within them from their history, differences which are both product and motivator of that violence; to the pessimism of Benjamin's historical musings, in which the so-called wreckage of our past continually gathers behind us as we move onward into the future having to contend with its incredible weight in our every thought, feeling, action, and Kierkegaard's capitulation to our incapacity to ever come to understand our lives and world because of our constant psychic, temporal, physical motion through it; to Le Guin's futurological speculations on developments of the contemporary, material world that enliven historical considerations of days past, days we occupy, and days to come, extending to Spivak's use of Earth as a metaphor to imagine a new paradigm for humanity to break from divisive national relations that work against human understanding that draws one to the historical dimensions Csicsery-Ronay describes in the inventive but necessarily bounded to Earthly, human reality that may be realized in the kinds of polyphonous expressions that Bakhtin explicates, thrown back out once more, perhaps, to Glissant's diverse, transversal

massive scale is meant to further emphasize the "cosmic" nature and intent of the sequence as a whole, which will be further explicated later. Also—if I felt the need to defend myself, and I guess I do—probably the reason why this thesis is 60,000 words instead of 20,000.

histories...among others. A labyrinthine oscillation, granted, from one text and idea and expression to the next and back again, orbiting the gravitational well of my present novel and its sequence as a discursive exhumation of literature and history's inherent union, and the capacity to use its very process to think and act historically and futurologically.

To pursue this immeasurable goal, far beyond any hope of achievement, I take the speculative form fictively and critically. The literature *of* questions—of Ifs, and Whys, and Hows—it works on a level of extrapolation and *speculation* that grants greater imaginative room to expand upon the possibilities inherent within the idea being narrativized, a particular lens which examines the realities of the here and now through the analogizing process in a very specific and powerful way. In this space, psychic conflict takes place between subjects, objects, within similarity and difference and change over time, conflicts so central to the speculative mode that the literature quite literally embodies its own historical dimensions. Recognizing history as a living process, however, I cannot simply transpose events of the past to the present to produce perfect projections of our future, and I have no desire to do so. Instead, I am working to think through and reimagine the boundaries of the human experience by engaging in the very process, speaking to historical realities via the subjective, multitudinous messiness of fiction, of the speculation, of the capacity and potentiality of growth. This immense expanse of possibility empowers the speculative form, in whose complications, confusions, and diversities I seek to indict the unrelenting imperfection of the world in ways that I hope will help myself to better understand and approach the

desperate questions of history-as-process.⁸ I do not expect to definitively answer them—my purpose is to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the questions themselves, of what motivates them, what makes them necessary in the first place. In creating this literature, I seek to engage in as absolute a manner I believe is possible with the kinds of questions that pry open the scars of history and our world today, the kind of questions that truly matter. I am attempting this in order to address the multivalent nature of the novel in question, its larger novelistic sequence, the speculative mode and its own inherent historical interventions, as a means of explicating what makes the form—and, I hope, my own work—so vital to my, and our, ability to construct psychic, humanistic, imaginative and *new* frameworks for our work in shaping our future, our tomorrow, as people and peoples living within our world

⁸ The concept of the “process” is significant to me, if that isn’t fundamentally clear by now. As I view history—a process of constant development, the past shaping the present which shapes the future which speaks to its past(s)—I view the work that I do. Indeed, “the process” evokes a state of development, of happening, of coming into being. The work is a concept, is a plan, is a manuscript being written, is a story being *rewritten*, evolving with every creative (and critical) intervention. At what point is the work developed, processed, complete? It is “done” when it sees publication, I suppose...yet the works of mine that most clearly embody the philosophy I am presenting in this statement, the *Sophist* novels, are designed to resist that sense of finality, a kind of discursive challenge to the settling of history—the history of the narrative’s imagined universe and the history of the text’s creation. “Work” is also very deliberate. Writing—the creation of another world—is work, a day-in, day-out labor of thinking, researching, writing, thinking, rewriting, thinking, rewriting...every piece, whether it be a five-hundred thousand word tome or a two thousand word short story, is hard work, stress, anxiety, missed meals, missed dates, of always being just one sentence or one word away from realizing perfection and always falling short, the tedium of grinding day after day never knowing if you will ever finish, if you even *can* finish, and, at the so-called end, only taking *a* form of the conceptualization rather than the truly final, authoritative one. The work, as it appears (or *will* appear) in this “final” form embodies its own process as well—the separate novels within the sequence contain endings in their internal structures, but no true ending, each one moving onward in time knowing there is more time, more histories beyond them, complicating the subtexts of the preceding novel(s) while also creating the space for the subsequent novel’s narrative to bloom outward in the chronological past. The endings, as they are, take on a provisional state, existing as moments of seeming finality that are, undeniably, just as singular a point of convergence of many stories—many histories—as any other point is, however emotionally and philosophically and thematically resonant they are in the moment. The novel ends, but its stories resonate beyond its borders, forward and backward across time, space, people, and peoples. The work, occurring within, never ends.

together.⁹

2. Future Narratives and Speculation, History and Analogy

Walter Benjamin's ninth "thesis" on the philosophy of history considers the Paul Klee monograph *Angelus Novus*. He describes the eponymous subject in the work, an angel that appears to be some bird and humanoid hybrid, as

looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. ("Theses on the Philosophy of History" 259-260)

We do not learn from the past, but instead progress forward in this storm, leaving debris—our leftovers, our wreckage—with every stride, carrying that past with us,

⁹ The process of my critical interventions, my thesis, like the orbiting around certain ideas already mentioned in the body, is my attempt to embody and contextualize that work that doesn't end. It may seem to take the form of repetitions or recapitulations—and I suppose they are to some extent—they are also purposeful gestures, a continued turning back and pulling that perpetually collecting wreckage forward to be read in new, sometimes conflicting but always generative contexts. I'm trying to think through the concepts, terms, and arguments I employ critically and creatively as meaningful yet indefinite formulations, capable of synthesis but open for failure, requiring the work of having to be engaged with and influenced in order to grow and evolve, work that I am striving to do, in part, in the various openings and closings throughout this thesis that are more efforts to bridge rather than wall-off at a conclusion. That is, narrowing everything I have to say—that which implies, alludes to, symbolizes, and otherwise packs-in everything that will come after—in that singularity of the beginning (of each section and the thesis as a whole), from where I will burst outward in an unraveling, seam-by-seam, thread by thread, until it comes back around at chapter's end, offering a gesture of returning to the thesis' past, before bursting outward again from this new singularity of sorts to then return once more at the *next* "ending," bursting outward yet again once that looking back is done... Consider the ending to this section of the body, which is a turning back toward and pulling forward of material from that Forethought(s), a recapitulation that engenders growth of meaning and a wider spectrum of thought with the new wreckage that has piled in time and space between that "ending" and *this* chapter's "ending," making *some more* sense of what lies behind it, in its past, and speculating upon the potential developmental pathways in the time and space that lies ahead, in its future.

turning back to see it piling up and burdening us but continuing anyway without hesitation, without reflection, without critically engaging with what that wreckage means for the next encumbered step, because time moves forward unceasingly, incapable of being slowed or stopped, apathetic to our condition of needing to consider and contextualize and understand the what and how and why of what we have made and done and left behind, that which informs every step thereafter. The storm of history compels us forward because we believe there is no resisting the pressures of time. The melancholic note this strikes is compounded by Benjamin's writing on this subject almost a decade before, writing that "[o]ne must have [seen Klee's angel] to understand a humanity that proves itself by destruction" ("Karl Kraus" 273). And, indeed, humanity *is* incapable of putting a stop to the passage of time, a power that would otherwise free ourselves from the burden of our lives and times and worlds so we could then do the work of understanding them and ourselves from a position unaffected by our inherent limitations of human subjectivity, temporality, vulnerability. Kierkegaard conceptualized this nearly a century earlier:

It is quite true what philosophy says, that life must be understood backward. But then one forgets the other principle, that it must be *lived forward*. Which principle, the more one thinks it through, ends exactly with temporal life never being able to be properly understood, precisely because I can at no instant find complete rest to adopt the position: backward (*Journals and Notebooks Volume 2* 179).

Our lives, filled with the mundane struggles of sustaining life, with the compulsion to have to keep moving forward, simply cannot be stopped for us to carry out this work, at least not in a literal way. And, without the understanding that could come from that critical engagement, there can be no full knowledge of what it all means, no learning from that knowledge, and no ability to do better, to maybe work toward a better

tomorrow free from our piled, piling wreckage. Yet, breaking from the constraints of literal, material reality—and absolute literal accuracy—there is the possibility of creating an imagined, speculated removal from time and place, being the creative act. That is, of reimagining our lives and times and worlds in other forms, as only we might know them, as we want them to be, as we fear they may be, and to express this to each other—other people, those with whom we share our lives and worlds and times with—narrativizing our thoughts and feelings in ways that will be powerfully unique to each and every person who carries out this work. The imaginative spaces of these expressions, formed from our familiarity with the world as it is, exists within its own reality, its own truth and time accurate only to itself. Though bound to its foundations of that history piled at the heels of its creator, the narrative space allows for that turning toward the past to occur within itself, unburdened by the storm-like forward momentum of reality outside of its borders, to engage not only with things that have happened and are happening, but also with that which may yet happen. This is carried out in the interstices of truth as it exists within the work and outside of it, a process of comparing, contrasting, conflicting, and capitulating to the connections and disconnects between “real” and “imagined.” It is not a stretch to argue that the nature of a narrative is the work to build up meaning through analogization. An analogy, after all, works to develop itself in a process of attaining meaning through the tension between the specificity—the accuracy or closeness to the original thing being represented—and the imagined, fictional representation that refers to the thing. This occurs in the narrative’s tracing of the connective tissues between the two as its content builds upon the analogy’s foundations.

In her 1974 novel *The Dispossessed*,¹⁰ Ursula K. Le Guin uses the twinned worlds of Urras and Anarres to pit two radically opposing ways of life against each other, reflecting contemporaneous ideological conflicts between the West and the Eastern bloc. The novel engages with the discourse of the historical moment from a variety of angles and works to be critical of all its actors, institutions and individuals alike. One, Urras, is a world dominated by two superpowers—the capitalist plutocratic oligarchy of A-Io and the authoritarian Thu that claims to rule for the proletariat—that serve as scathing critiques of the Cold War era United States and Soviet Union, respectively. The other world, Anarres, is presented as a collectivist, stateless society that lacks class and gender hierarchies in the anarcho-syndicalist vein, taking the form of one possible pathway for state(less) socialism to develop along. Le Guin goes to great lengths to explore the means those in positions of authority in all systems (and on both worlds) use to silence individual expression that can in any way be perceived as threats to the stability of the established order, their authority figures citing the same ends-justify-the-means defenses for such methods that the real-world governments which inspired them presented in defense of their own oppressive methods of

¹⁰ I reach back *far* beyond the history of my graduate work and crib from a research paper of mine for these comments on *The Dispossessed*, one I produced for my senior seminar while working on my undergraduate at U.C. Berkeley. The seminar, on history and historiography, was led by Professor Donna V. Jones, who also taught the science fiction course (which I'd already taken) and was an expert in interwar literature, so there was no *not* taking it for me. The original paper is focused mainly on state surveillance, censorship, information control, and working around the boundary of Deleuzian "control societies." That isn't what I'm focused on here, but rather the analogous qualities of these conditions, which I feel are incredibly apt...not that I feel I need to defend my use of Le Guin's novel in this context, but *The Dispossessed's* critiques of Cold War politics and its contemporary value as a sort-of historical commentary on living through those times (seen through the imagination of a very political writer) is, far as I'm concerned, the perfect object of study for this present project. Still, one should never feel the need to excuse an engagement with Ursula K. Le Guin on either artistic or academic grounds, though, this being a thesis, I suppose I should be willing and able to defend everything.

censorship and repression.

The text's analogous elements work over the course of the narrative to draw connections between the fictionalized realities of the story's inter- and intraplanetary conflicts and the reader's experience of Cold War politics, collectivist ideologies, censorship, and civil unrest. This is observed when Shevek, the Anarresti physicist, discovers a microphone placed in his room by the Urrasti government to spy on him, recalling thoughts of undercover FBI stings, COINTELPRO, and the like within the reader's memory banks (*The Dispossessed* 287). This discovery follows Chifoilisk, a scientist from Thu, admitting to Shevek that every other scientist he has interacted with on Urras (including himself) is spying for their respective governments, and that the same can be said for every politician and businessman he has met—everyone is, in one way or another, complicit in the system's operations, and thus in the control it exerts over everyone beneath its influence (*The Dispossessed* 139). The scenario is not so alien that one cannot relate to its political paranoia, as the conditions of *The Dispossessed* are decidedly science fictional yet can be traced to the contemporary realities of the novel's composition. Indeed, during the novel's composition, more than four-hundred American journalists had “secretly carried out assignments for the Central Intelligence Agency ... There was cooperation, accommodation, and overlap. Journalists provided a full range of clandestine services—from simple intelligence gathering to serving as go-betweens with spies ... [in many instances] with the consent of the managements of America's leading news organizations” (Bernstein). These journalists, it was discovered, carried out propagandistic roles in enemy nations against these enemy governments for the CIA, propaganda which then often found its way back

into American publications. The truth of such events may not have been fully known at the time, yet the conditions of the historical moment were, at the very least, felt. The reader is meant to see these connections and follow them, to interrogate and synthesize meaning(s) from the ideas through the comparison taking place as it develops over space and time.

This developmental process can be observed in microform in the opening chapter of *The Human Calculus*, the first volume of *Second Exodus*. The novel begins in Morocco, specifically the semi-autonomous port territory of Ceuta, situated only fourteen kilometers away from the southern tip of Spain, so close that Gibraltar can actually be seen from the city's edge. Around Ceuta of 2067, there is a border wall cordoning the city off from the rest of the country, a

[...] thirty-foot high steel and concrete wall, topped with electric razor-wire and patrolled with armored vehicles, assault drones, all under satellite surveillance—with the land drying, crops and livestock dying, and water disappearing, territorial security had become the highest priority in the region, as Spain wanted to protect its valuable port and the Moroccan Crown wanted to focus its energy on developing its climate shock preparation initiatives rather than the never-ending diplomatic quagmire of territorial rights. (5)

Reading the passage in the contemporary historical context, the parallel with the situation along the US-Mexico border is, I believe, quite obvious, especially as it becomes clear that Ceuta's wall is under constant pressure from migrants struggling to escape the deadly conditions of their country and continent being rapidly eroded by unprecedented Sirocco winds, an exponentially expanding Sahara, agricultural collapse, and political upheaval. I build upon the analogy by taking the actual, literal, present Ceuta—an autonomous territory of Spain—and imagine it just a few decades from now, taking into consideration the present conditions and their possible ongoing

development. As such, the Ceuta of the novel has been given *mostly* back to Moroccan control in a deal that allows Spain to continue benefitting from the commercial value of the port while evading all accountability for the territory's inevitable collapse due to those aforementioned climate-related stresses. This is further complicated by the reality that the Ceuta border wall of my speculated future is not pure invention—there *is* a Ceuta border wall...or, rather, there is a fence. In fact, the fence, which protects the port territory from encroachment by unwanted migrants, is patrolled by Gendarmes and has faced many “attacks” over the years (*Reuters*). So many have participated in massive attempts to enter the European sovereign territory of Ceuta—in 2005, 2016, 2017, and 2018—that the fence, which was built in the 1990s at the Moroccan crown's objections, will have grown longer, higher, and thicker over the decades preceding the novel's opening sentence, when such acts of desperation will have only grown more frequent because of the world governments failing to address the substantive issues for so long.

The analogy works as part of a larger narrative system—that previous passage reveals the novel's present reality, but is also used to place it within the greater historical context, that being within the process of historical formation.

[...] Ceuta was, for the first time in centuries, majority Muslim, though this had only been achieved with the recent mass migration in the past eighty-four months, and it had happened against the wishes of the Moroccan Crown. The port and the surrounding area had been one of nine autonomous Spanish territories along the Moroccan and West Saharan coasts dating back to the early 20th Century. In the 1990s, against the objections of Moroccan leaders, the Spanish government constructed a six-kilometer-long border fence to protect the exclave from smugglers and migrants attempting to enter European sovereign territory. When it proved too easy to cross, a new fence was erected. When ten feet proved too short, they made it twice as tall. That did not stop people who wanted to reach the other side. In 2005, hundreds of migrants

assaulted the border-fence. More than a dozen died in the fighting that ensued. In 2016, a group of four-hundred migrants organized and breached the fence. In 2017, about six-hundred migrants, armed with blunt and edged weapons, penetrated security gates, and roughly half of them managed to enter the port and hide among the populace. In 2018, during a three-month period, over a thousand Moroccans stormed the fence using corrosive agents, urine, and excrement. In subsequent years, the border-fence was reconstructed again, replaced with a thirty-foot high steel and concrete wall, topped with electric razor-wire and patrolled with armored vehicles, assault drones, all under satellite surveillance—with the land drying, crops and livestock dying, and water disappearing, territorial security had become the highest priority in the region, as Spain wanted to protect its valuable port and the Moroccan Crown wanted to focus its energy on developing its climate shock preparation initiatives rather than the never-ending diplomatic quagmire of territorial rights. Then, seven years ago, the Larsen C ice sheet collapsed into the Antarctic. (5)

In the act of a literal historical tracing, past, present, and future are brought into dialogue to carry out the analogy's work. The analogy functions not so much as hyperbole as it does a speculation upon potential historical patterns in search of the connective tissues: with conditions as they are in the novel's future, the fence has become an actual wall, defended by an active military presence, drones, satellite imaging, and other future tech, in the service of keeping the migrants firmly out—people who have been massively displaced by drought, locust swarms, unlivable temperatures, and rising coastlines that have also pushed Ceuta's port backward. It is the Moroccan crown now that defends the walls from its own people, who are made outsiders within their own nation, a situation they are forced into to maintain relations with their closest European neighbor and brought about by long-running, cultivated geopolitical circumstances of economic exploitation, ecological catastrophe, and social unrest, all of which feed one another in a self-perpetuating cycle. In this arrangement, Spain has actually found a way to have it both ways, economically exploiting the territory while removing their own hard power, making it seem that, in the novel's

present, what is happening in the periphery is neither their fault nor within their power to affect—it is the Moroccans maintaining the border wall and exerting military force on their own citizens after all, and so, when the situation inevitably implodes and the migrants *do* overcome the wall and the strait and reach Spain, the events and the violence that follow will have been Morocco’s failure to “control” the situation, a convenient scapegoat for decades (and centuries) of colonial and geopolitical malfeasance that the government in Madrid can use to evade responsibility for its part in the deteriorating conditions of North Africa. That Spain has spearheaded the assignment Faye is on—putting together a report on the cultural divides in the region, with the stated intent of “becoming more informed on what might be done,” creates the image of a good faith effort to do what little they can, a half-measure no less pitiful than using massive swarms of ducks to eat the locust swarms rather than trying to find long-term systemic solutions to the region’s suffering (*Second Exodus* 3).¹¹ In the process of being constructed and constructing its greater meaning, the analogy speaks to the contemporary while also considering what is possible given that contemporary.

The analogous process—the *work* of the work—is built into the narrative, but not because Le Guin or I chose to make these stories into analogies...we did choose the specific analogy being undertaken, but the analogies themselves are, were, and

¹¹ Another defense: this “solution” is an actual strategy that has been discussed, loosely, in recent years, to combat uncontrollable rises in locust numbers in Pakistan, something the Chinese government actually did back in 2000 to deal with locusts in Xinjiang (Keane). General expert opinion is that this *isn’t* a viable strategy, despite whatever claims that’ve become viral regarding armies of engorged ducks marching off to “war.” That this has been actually considered to *any* extent seems absurd, but when few real solutions are available (meaning *none* whatsoever) absurd can be framed as necessary. That it has no chance to work—the ducks, ill-suited to the climate, either eat themselves to death within days or die off soon thereafter from dehydration—doesn’t enter into consideration. The situation is so desperate that any action might be seen as a legitimate attempt to deal with the situation.

always will be inherent in the narratives by their very nature, in that the narrative is constructed from the act of reimagining the world and is understood by the reader by relating something of their own experience to it. At all times in a narrative there is a comparison occurring between the world within and the world outside, worlds that may be very similar or very different, but always bear some connective tissue because we can only ever write from our conception of reality, however far we try to remove ourselves. The reader is positioned in precisely the same way, connected to the fiction on intellectual and emotional grounds relative to one's understanding of their own world, allowing the fictional reality to become affectively (and therefore, in some sense, effectively) real—a narrative positions the reader in the analogizing process, one in which they and the writer work through the tracing of connections together, though at different places in time, with different responsibilities within and toward the process. The human element is implicit in this work, in which we connect to the events of the narrative on an emotional level, in which the imagination is constantly being tested against the intellect. Even when the story violates reality as dictated by our experience, those violations will still be in relation to reality itself (being that we can only conceptualize non-reality relative to reality), meaning the act of comparison persists across the varying levels of “reality” as dictated by the relative verisimilitude of the narrative. For a work of science fiction, it might seem that the analogizing process is undermined by its extrapolative nature. A specific confusion often manifests here, that the purpose of science fiction is to extrapolate, which is to infer answers by extending known information, as if history worked in a predetermined sequence of predictable outcomes, a confusion that likely stems from the notion that science fiction must

necessarily strictly bind itself to scientific precision. However, science fiction—despite its “science”—rarely does. This does little to diminish the work, because fiction is not meant to be happening within the absolutely literal present world, even less so for one taking place in another time and place, *particularly* one that has not yet come into being. The inner-workings of such things are, then, only selectively significant.¹² The speculative lens, above all, is a framework to think through.

In an introduction she added to later editions of her 1969 novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin argues that science fiction is not simply extrapolative—it *is* extrapolative, but it is more than that (xi-xii). It is akin to a thought-experiment, lacking the “built-in dead end” of a work in, say, the realist tradition, which, though coming from the writer’s imagination, is meant to be taken as happening within the present, literal world, perhaps even just across the street, which offers little, if any, space in which to break free from the constraints of present physical reality. In the speculative space, “thought and intuition can move freely within bounds set only by the terms of the experiment, which may be very large indeed” (xiv). Misreading the speculation as extrapolation is to read the work as an exercise in taking the implied concreteness of that extrapolation and projecting it back onto the present as if it were a reliable,

¹² No real defense needed here, honestly, because even the most ardent Trekkie is forced to admit that the artificial gravity Starfleet ships use is bunk. There are many scientifically solid ideas implemented in its various shows and films, but to say *Star Trek*, which is widely hailed for its scientific rigor, actually holds up to that standard would be incorrect. If a story is built around the problems of its scientific principles, then accuracy becomes vital to its affective and effective capacity. Inversely, if a story is more interested in the philosophical complexities of, say...cloning—the potential of devaluing human life, or putting a heavy price on it because the technology will be locked out of access to all but the wealthiest individuals, etc.—the science of it might be rendered insignificant. Do we care how the USS *Enterprise* generates gravity without centrifugal force? Artificial gravity generators, synthetic gravity, whatever—what’s important is the philosophical quandary of the Prime Directive and its moral and ethical implications and applications.

totalized, universal truth. But speculative literature is not doing this—to speculate, after all, is thinking, it is meditating, it is reflecting, deliberating, questioning and wondering and imagining potentiality, possibility, the maybe, the large bounds of the ambiguously *what if*. Even to the degree such works *do* extrapolate, they do so as a jumping off point to imagine the possibilities of how present conditions may mutate and evolve and impact the world ongoing as part of the process of historical formation.

The purpose of a thought-experiment, as the term was used by Schrodinger and other physicists, is not to predict the future—indeed Schrodinger's most famous thought-experiment goes to show that the "future," on the quantum level, cannot be predicted—but to describe reality, the present world.

Science fiction is not predictive; it is descriptive. (xi-xii)

Considering *The Dispossessed*, its extrapolations revolve around the advancement of space-faring technology, using contemporaneous space-age technology as a foothold from which to infer how ongoing technological progress can proceed, yet its focus lies on her speculations (and descriptions of said speculations) of what impact these elements may have on us and our world—a thought experiment. These descriptions will necessarily trace backward to the present, the here and now, because of the nature of the speculation and extrapolation, which must begin here in order to move forward into the future. That is, science fiction, or narratives of the future—*future narratives*¹³—analogize the realities of the present world, the developments taking

¹³ Now here is where I truly begin getting into some original ideas and am forced to define terms I'll be playing around with. The term "future narrative" isn't itself special, nor original, as it has been used sporadically to describe "a narrative of the future," though I was unfamiliar with it prior to writing the original paper this selection comes from, and even before *now*, as I discuss my introduction and use of it—searching the internet for it just minutes ago, I've discovered that it predates my own use...which changes nothing and doesn't seem to be widely used, as there are only a handful of positive results and I, a "science fiction person", was ignorant of its existence prior to my own using of it a year ago at this point.

At any rate, I'm forced to have to specify the reference to *future narratives* as opposed to others because of the inherent broadness of the term *science fiction*, and *speculative fiction*, and *fantasy*, and

place today, informed by past developments, to speculate upon their possibilities and capacities for future development, the possibilities of how these technologies will be implemented and the impact of those implementations, metaphorizing the future so that we might critically examine the analogous present.¹⁴ The speculation taking place within the future narrative is, in every way, its work.

But are all analogies useful? What about analogies that are *wrong*?

3. The Vitality and Power of Imperfection

In mid-June of 2019, US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez made a series of

the endless subgenres within these fields, that the terms are often (incorrectly) used interchangeably. I specify *future narratives* because I'm most directly speaking to narratives about the future, though this isn't universally so—I will shift back and forth at times, between using the more academically-respectable term *speculative fiction* and the more exact *future narrative* when necessary, and when I make reference to the former, I'm doing so to mean the larger field, and when I refer to the latter, I mean to speak to the more precise type of narrative.

Note: I say *speculative fiction* is the “academically-respectable” term because I suppose it is, or at least has (or had?) been for a long time. I have no problem with the less-respectable term of *science fiction*, and personally embrace it, but for purposes of expedience I will pander to the academically respectable “specificity” demanded by the expected rigor of a critical piece such as this while giving a little impotent jab to the academy's stuffy, out-of-touch tastes within the periphery, for no real use or end except to imagine I'm taking a principled stand...despite the reality that the select few who will ever actually read this are incredibly open-minded people and are completely innocent of the “stuffy, out-of-touch” charge I levy at windmills here.

¹⁴ I've found myself thinking of the recapitulation as a rereading, an opportunity to reengage with something already believed to be understood with new information, new knowledge, new *feelings* attained from the passage of time and experience, and pull out greater meaning from something that itself has remained, on the surface, as it always was but whose meaning has been changed by an evolution within oneself. The change within, having happened, is what allows yourself, myself, ourselves, to recognize a truth within that we were previously unable to, that we didn't and perhaps couldn't have known was there because of a lack within ourselves, a lacking overcome by the work we put in to better understand, or perhaps understand anew. This is the kind of story that lasts, I believe. I lean on the late master Gene Wolfe for this, who wrote “My definition of a great story [...] is: *One that can be read with pleasure by a cultivated reader and reread with increasing pleasure*” (“From a Chain letter to George R. R. Martin and Greg Benford”). Thinking through my process in this way, it's not *so* hard to trace a connection between the act of rereading to engage with a story and its ideas to how one engages with history—the story we give to ourselves and our past—being the piling of the past's wreckage on the present, offering no shortage of rereadings and recapitulations to work with, an *understanding backwards* that continuously recontextualizes, reconsiders, and renews understanding(s) of how and why things have come to be as they are.

tweets comparing detention camps along the southern US border harboring migrants to concentration camps (Relman). A few days later, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum spoke out against the use of Holocaust analogies, referring to a previous statement released by the Museum that argued such analogies are “dangerous” and “sloppy,” an oversimplification of history (Friedberg). Historian Timothy Snyder, a specialist in European history and member of the Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Committee on Conscience, pushed back against this, publishing in response:

Analogizing is not some mysterious operation: It is how we think. Every time someone asks you for advice about a situation beyond your personal experience, or every time you are faced with an unfamiliar choice, your mind makes analogies with what you do know. Then you ask questions that allow you to clarify similarities and differences. At some point, you have understood and can act. “Never again” is nothing other than an invocation of that process. We start from what we know about the present and make our way back to the 1930s and 1940s. Once we understand something about the history of the Holocaust, we make our way forward again, seeing patterns we would have missed. If we notice a dangerous one, we should act. Without this effort, though, “never again” becomes its own opposite: “It can’t happen here.” (“It Can Happen Here”)

Simply put: no analogy, of any kind, can ever be ideal—nothing is ever exactly as something else. Analogy—the comparison of two *otherwise separate* things—is derived from the Greek word “analogia,” meaning “proportion,” which implies the similarity only needs to be *proportional* to the comparison being drawn, so it occupies a space of relativity. To hold an analogy to the impossible standard of perfection would be to render any and all analogies useless, and, by extension, history along with it, severing our capacity to utilize knowledge and empathy to learn and grow and change. That an analogy can get us to think about the comparison taking place is all we can meaningfully expect of it. The goal must be to trace the connections that are close enough to appear recognizable, and then to analyze their appropriateness critically.

From this point, the critically-minded individual can make use of those aspects that *do* connect, and work from there to synthesize understanding and knowledge.¹⁵ This does demand, it seems, some degree of imagination, to envision the connections that may not seem so clear on first glance but may exist outside the strictest possible interpretation. The connection may be wrong, may not exist at all in the end, but without the gaze to begin with there is no possibility of seeing.

Adorno wrote in “The Essay as Form” that “a blind natural interconnectedness, myth, perpetuates itself in culture. It is precisely this upon which the essay reflects: its proper theme is the relation of nature and culture” (*New German Critique* 167). There is a liminal space between the worlds of art and science, knowledge and imagination, the impersonal, proven truth and the ultimately inexplicable nature of experience that Adorno argues the form of the essay bridges. We are thinking and emotional beings, and we exist in these states simultaneously. However rational we may be in a given moment, we still have an emotional response that is vital to our understanding of that experience. Being both, we need something more to engage with it personally, to connect ourselves as individuals to the thing. Truth must have a relationship to an affect, otherwise the truth is merely intellectual and, as I see it, cannot hold the same meaning or power in the individual—in the philosophical abstract, it is more difficult to internalize and connect to on a human level. The abstract is made tangible in the

¹⁵ The danger, as I see it, is in disregarding any possibility of connection, any opportunity to trace historical patterns and learn from them. One might think of an analogy as a kind of pharmacological process, a *pharmakon*—a poison in the sense that it will fail and potentially hurt you if you don’t engage with it with adequate knowledge, critical-mindedness, and a willingness to examine its multitudinous nature, but a potential curative that can generate substantive historical insights (killing the infection of the “end of history”), if applied correctly, and taken in the proper “dosage.”

affect, something felt by the individual, *experienced* and shared through empathetic processes that render it knowable in an inexplicable yet subjectively recognizable way. Adorno was specific to the essay form in his piece, but his description of the essay's power to bridge the chasm between intellect and imagination strikes me as being the nature of art—the expression of the inexpressible, the attempt to connect the subjective with the objective, to make intellectual sense of the human. Certainly, there is a difference between the objectiveness of a work of scientific research (perhaps on the lifecycle of an artificial intelligence) and a narrative working to express that experience, but while the objective work must strive to resist the influence of the subjective, even if its conception is driven by such things, the subjective work (the narrative) must refer to the objective in order for its imaginings to make sense, an inescapable dynamic of creative expression. That is to say, I find no way to detach art from the intellect—the “bridge” is built into the very nature of the creative work. (Ursula) Le Guin gets at this when she wrote about the free movement within one's imagination, that “[in] reading [fiction] we have to know perfectly well that the whole thing is nonsense, and then, while reading, believe every word of it” (*The Left Hand of Darkness* xviii). This is particularly central to the future narrative that imagines what has not yet happened.

Let's look at violence as a concept...we can make a comprehensive intellectual argument to “prove” that violence is ethically and morally wrong, first by laying out the premises of our ethical and moral codes, then coldly laying out, point-by-point, how violence violates those codes, perhaps by denying a person's bodily autonomy, their sense of security, trust, and so forth, and though these points are accurate, they will lead to further questions—why is it wrong to violate another's bodily autonomy?—and

as we try to keep the discussion purely intellectual we will descend into an inescapable philosophical black hole that ignores the obvious: when violence is visited on another person, their reaction is not a philosophical one, but physical, psychic, *emotional*. It is experiential, an inherently intangible, unquantifiable thing that a purely intellectual exercise cannot quite get at.¹⁶ None of this is to discount the intellectual aspect—it is absolutely necessary to engage with such ideas empirically—but one cannot relate the experience of violence in a purely intellectual manner, certainly as it relates to the individual. No matter how thorough an explanation is for the complex neurochemical reactions that result from the fear of being violated in such a way, you must delve into the intangible, confusing, ambiguous, emotional uncertainty to make it “real,” or, at least, real enough, to connect to it on a human level. We also run into problems when

¹⁶ Turned back, eyes wide, mouth agape, wingless and unable to fly away, I guess it’s a part of a responsibility I feel toward the seriousness of my subject(s) that I work to avoid minimizing the horrible, violent *truths* of the conditions I seek to address. It’s a philosophy I follow that I write things to be as difficult and painful as I believe they must be for someone actually experiencing them—that is, as much as is within my capacity to approximate. War, as an example, is brutal, agonizing, uncomfortable, horrifying, traumatizing, disgusting, and I’ve labored to represent this in a novel of intergalactic war, immersing my reader (I hope) in those apocalyptic experiences to the best of my creative powers through the characters who suffer it. It’d be inadequate to seriously engage with a subject while being unwilling to look it in the eyes—the abyss cannot be understood without gazing into it. Not that this will ever expose the subject in total, because it cannot be recreated that way, but the power of the fictive imagination is one of immersion. Does it matter that the violence of Krasznahorkai’s *The Melancholy of Resistance* seems to emerge from a mysterious, perhaps mythological source, if it is used finally to comment on the very real and dangerous human follies of selfishness and social Darwinism?

The world, as Eszter established, consisted merely of ‘an indifferent power which offered disappointment at every turn’; its various concerns were incompatible and it was too full of noises of banging, screeching and crowing, noises that were simply the discordant and refracted sounds of struggle, and this was all there was to the world if we but realized it. (117)

I say this even as I’m the first person to espouse the relative worth of fun and entertaining “cartoonish” violence in a fictional setting, and I’ve engaged with that off and on throughout my works, but the work in question here, in this thesis, is not that story—here, I am not playing with violence, but working to show how it is enacted upon people and how damaging it is to life (literally and figuratively). I guess I’m giving myself a get-out-of-jail-free card on the issue, as I reserve the right to decide when and where to apply this type of engagement with subject matter...not that I’m apologizing for this. I’m the writer, it’s my “job”—my responsibility—as it were, to make these decisions, and whether they work or not is in part dependent on how well I achieve the effect and how much the reader is willing, or able, or drawn along by my efforts, to accept it.

considering violence as a concept because it is not just conceptual—violence, as a concept, describes a state of being, describes an act, describes a tangible thing that happens, so trying to look at it in a purely conceptual or philosophical manner can only get you so far before you must move into its personal, emotional, human manifestation.

So the truth of an analogy involves a working out of its placement between fact and fiction, empirical reality and imagination—a process of oscillating within the unquantifiable space between objective and subjective, pressing up against the membrane of literal reality but unable to ever fully cut through because of the inherently human psyche that is required to perceive it, particularly as it exists within the realm of a narrative. Our capacity and tendency to analogize the human experience places that experience in dialogue with the intellectual, and the process of working through the analogy is what forms what is known, what we feel is true. As Snyder points out in his response to the USHMM, analogies are how we think, how we understand. Though he is speaking directly to the value of Holocaust analogies, Snyder also provides enough rhetorical space for us to pull back and apply this argument more broadly.

Reading *The Dispossessed*, we cannot escape the fact that the novel is intended to be read in the context of the Cold War. Readers may stumble upon the text centuries from now, surviving in some environmentally sealed vault located in the drowned ruins of Old New York City, long ago swallowed by the Atlantic, but, having lost knowledge of 20th Century history, they will have to read it “blind” in a sense and may get something entirely unrelated to its purpose out of it. This potential does nothing to change the fact that the novel—its plot, story, characters, analogies, its very creation—

was a product of the conditions of its time and place, and is meant to be read as such. Despite this, however, we might even argue that it fails to accurately represent these conditions to those who *are* knowledgeable of them, because we run into the problem that neither Urras (and its analogous superpowers) nor Anarres are perfect analogies to America, the Soviet Union, or the real world that existed at the time of its conception and composition. In many ways, the US-like A-Io carries out its authoritarian policies overtly without the need to abstract, as the Soviet Union did, implementing its indoctrination into the foundation of their education, media, and social relations, while the USSR-like Thu and even the potential socialist utopia of Anarres must obfuscate their actions through covert, clandestine means in order to placate the masses, much in the way America's government had to operate, beneath the veneer of moral and ethical superiority. These relationships, however, are not meant to be perfect, as these contradictions are unavoidable but also useful in showing just how similarly these systems function, and allow for connections to be drawn across time and space.¹⁷

¹⁷ But, to be sure, all fiction writers benefit in their efforts from the fictional nature of...fiction. Delany refers to an "ideal model of reading": the reader, surrendering to the text, questions nothing until the entirety of the work is consumed and processed ("To Read *The Dispossessed*" 105). In this model, the reader must "balk at no twist or eccentricity an author sets us until the entire pattern that informs each microtrope has been apprehended." If the reader *does* break from the fictive illusion according to this model, there must be a fault somewhere within the process, either the work's or the reader's...yes? Delany quotes Willard Van Orman Quine in response to the question, that "No two of us learn our language alike" (106). The uniqueness of the individual perspective, perception, and expression cannot help but be a risk to that illusion, the affective capacity of the narrative, the strength of its analogous character (perhaps it could be seen as a threat but I rather like the more neutral *risk*). But I follow Delany's argument that the language (the expressive form that the narrative takes) can undergo some degree of instability—relative to the reader's reading of it—and still be, more or less, unchanged. Or, not unchanged so much...the narrative can be bothersome and still be understood as it is meant to be understood, believed as it is meant to be believed. It's important to accept the potential missteps of engaging with the diverse nature of our humanity (individual and collective), because the subjects of violence, war, of sexuality and identity, of cultural identity, of hate, these are as multifaceted and impossible to nail down as the human beings who experience them. The potential for a misstep is only compounded in a work of fiction because of its naturally speculative state. I say embrace this potential, because in failure we still, nevertheless, engage with it, and generate the possibility of change of some

Returning to the novel's analogous narrativizing of government surveillance, Shevek's discovery of the microphone in his room reads somewhat awkwardly in 2021. The microphone, perhaps a camera, even a spy hidden in the next room, these are the kinds of tools that constituted government surveillance in 1974—methods employed by COINTELPRO speak to this—but in the fifty years since computer technology has evolved so exponentially as to be unrecognizable. The novel's intermixing of now-dated computer technology with other, far more advanced space-faring technology, may create difficult barriers to the suspension of one's disbelief in the present, yet it is not *so* difficult as to be impossible to draw the (rather clear) analogous connections to the more contemporaneous contact points of Edward Snowden and government programs like PRISM that allow(ed) monitors to bypass encryption for private messages with the consent (and at times cooperation) of corporations like Microsoft, among other nefarious uses (Greenwald, et. al). A microphone in the room is no longer necessary, because a computer, cell phone, television, microwave, everything is networked, interconnected and open to infiltration by anyone with the tools to do so, so one recognizes that in the context of modern computer technology the A-Io government could have given Shevek a phone to communicate with, or a computer to work on, or *anything* with a computer chip, and they would have had access to everything without employing a single spy—no colluding scientists, no FBI or NKVD

kind, hopefully in a positive direction. As Delany writes: “[The ideal model] hopes to obstruct the philistine response: ‘This never happened to me. Therefore it couldn’t happen to anybody.’ But what it also obstructs is the frequently valid reaction: ‘This did happen to me. And it doesn’t happen that way’” (ibid). That fiction *does* risk itself in that uncomfortable space where truth is both near and distant, recognizable and incomprehensible, is precisely the work it does to affect its human character.

agents packed in the back of a windowless van down the street or the empty apartment across the way, no need for physical agents at all. In the context of the novel's Cold War analogies, Shevek has a far easier time overcoming the threat, so it does not quite work with modern conditions that are perhaps much worse, given that a microphone in a room that can be undermined with hushed voices, running water, or even simply leaving, while current computer technology renders Shevek's every move, key input, communication, capable of being "followed," his phone or computer or alarm clock a potential threat. Thus, the Watergate analogy is compromised by the fact that, had it occurred today, Bob Woodward could not have gone to an empty parking garage to speak with Deepthroat because something would have given him and his informant away—had he left the phone behind, his car would have been a perfectly acceptable replacement tool to track him, with onboard computers and GPS triangulation. The means of monitoring and controlling the populace have become ubiquitous and entirely unavoidable—nonconsensual and legal, these "tools" are fully integrated into our social organization. In this way, the horror and paranoia of Shevek having to run, go off the grid and elude oppressive state powers, recalling that of the cold war cloak-and-dagger of Woodward and Mark Felt, seems rather quaint in the modern context. The evolution of technology, and of associated surveillance techniques, has made such pursuits of truth and the expression thereof nigh impossible without exposure to the authority that seeks to silence—there is no "grid" to get off of anymore. And *yet*, the connections are capable of being made with just a little imagination.¹⁸ The point, in the

¹⁸ And, if the risk to the stability of the fictive illusion—and its affective capacity—is especially great in the future narrative, as I am arguing in the periphery, then I'm also arguing that the power it attains from the work of this risk is greater. The strength of the future narrative (as the coming pages will lay out in

end, is not to make totalizing comparisons, but to create a recognizable enough contact point in which to engage with the potentiality of connection(s).

Returning once more to the Ceuta border wall of *Second Exodus*, the immediate, most direct impact of the image may be lost upon reading it many years from now, when the US-Mexico border conflict is perhaps less of a cultural touchstone. It also suffers from the obvious reality that the border crisis in America today is not so much about environmental collapse but economic hardships resulting from political machinations that span the 20th Century, among many other factors. Neither are the conditions in North Africa, Morocco, Ceuta itself, quite so dire as to be on the actual apocalyptic cusp as they seem to be in my speculated 2067. As with the aforementioned issues of technological dating, none of these necessarily diminish the analogy's potential for synthesizing meaning. Faye, together with her fellow researcher, Dr. Javier Martinez, enter an encampment (resembling a shanty town) inside Ceuta's wall boundary, made up of Ceuta citizens who have been displaced by the eroding coastline of their port city, themselves being forced backward toward the wall as their homes are simultaneously "threatened" by migrants fighting to get in. The people of Ceuta live

in detritus. Paper soaked in sea water, urine, and goat droppings...rotten straw and shattered brick...burned wood piled and stinking...pits dug out and filled with water to defecate in until the high tide rolled in and washed it all together—a mulch of human waste. It was in the streets. It was on the sidewalks. It was pushed up into corners and packed in tightly. It was stomped down under the feet of almost two hundred thousand in a space suited for less than half that *and shrinking*. The houses on the isthmus's lower reach, beneath Monte Hacho, had adjoined the

all their metaphorical posturing...let me be a little generous with myself and say arguing instead) is its speculative, and therefore *undefinitive*, indefinite, unknown quantity, giving it an "infinite modulation, in which exploration can proceed in any direction, and within which any number of subtle points can be posited," as Delany puts it ("To Read *The Dispossessed*" 134). The speculation—the "new idea"—is an unknown until it comes into being, is "what justifies, supports, impels the breadth, complexity, daring, and richness of speculation in the first place" (ibid).

industrial port district at one time. Once the water had risen above the original jetties, they had been rebuilt, but those were temporary as the water rose further, pushing the marina back by in some years by meters on both sides of the isthmus. The water was overtaking the main roadway on the north and south ends, and the people living nearest had already been forced out. Their belongings were pulled from their homes and arranged into makeshift abodes along the inner streets outside other people's homes, who would eventually be drowned out as well. These outdoor "homes" blocked every thoroughfare in the district, and she watched as the people who had not yet been pushed back screamed at the hordes crowding their doorways and brought with their presence their noises and smells. Spanish, Arabic, Berber, and French curses flung downward and upward in different measures. When harsh language proved ineffective, the people indoors threw buckets of what she did not want to think down on the people below. (10)

Despite the extreme conditions in this scene, far worse than they currently are in truth, the situation in present-day Morocco is not exactly good: the last three decades have seen droughts lengthen, leading to worsening crop production, brought about by "rising world temperatures [that] will likely increase the dependence on large-scale and costly food imports" that are expected to exacerbate political turmoil in the region (National Intelligence Council 30-31). The speculation and extrapolation at work in my future Ceuta are possibilities that may not perfectly fit at all times, but the potential connections are, to varying degrees, recognizable.

Imagine a tree.¹⁹ It is an old tree. Like any tree, it has a basic form, from its

¹⁹ I feel obligated (and probably appropriately so, given the demands of an academic work) to defend my use of the tree metaphor, specifically because of the potential implications of linear progression—root to branch to leaf, growing from the ground skyward—whereas other potential models for this discussion of development might overcome this hindrance (a rhizome perhaps?) by suggesting a less linear, less seemingly orderly "growth." I don't deny the rhizome would *almost* completely suit the idea I'm working with as I conceive of it and perceive it to be, and, with a few tweaks to my intentionality and broader argument, it *would* completely fit. I emphasize *almost*, however, because of my aim of engaging with History and history in as close to a totalizing way as I possibly can no matter if the engagement can never be quite completed. When I refer to history, I refer to *all* of history, and all of History, in that there is a point where every individual experience and life begins, just as there is a point, fourteen billion years ago, when History—all that is—burst into being from beyond time and material existence, from far outside the bounds of conceivability. This singularity of possibility, experience, and History is the nexus of all that has ever been, and therefore the point toward which all things have grown from and continue to grow out of. The literally cosmic scale of History is what I'm interested in, the so-

deepest roots to its highest leaf. Looking at it as it stands, tall and lush...as it is, whole and complete...you cannot be blamed for seeing it as a tree—it is TREE—and simply being done with it. But move a little closer, and you begin to see the details of the trunk, the leaves as leaves...and closer, you see the leaves have grown from branches, and those branches from *other* branches. You trace these growths lower and lower along the whole, following what seems to be a wavering but generally singular route inward and down to where it all began. As it is, you know the tree has grown into what you are now looking at, but there is something in the waves of leaves and branches descending along toward the trunk that makes you wonder...so you imagine this tree, complete and whole, receding into its germinal state. First, the highest leaves shrink until they ball into nubs at the ends of their thinning stalks, then they slither silently back into their

called “Big History,” and its relationship with the small individual histories of individual people(s)—anything less would be to pull my proverbial punches.

No doubt, this presents greater levels of risk to the overall analogy, as I cannot possibly hope to ever achieve a fully realized engagement with a totalized History, even a hypothetical one, just as I’m psychically separated from every other individual history by virtue of being a single human being incapable of embodying another person—I can only ever truly *know* what is within myself, and even something like that can take a lifetime of work to begin to explicate. I believe I’ve already made something of a case for the value of playing in imperfect analogies, and it should be clear by the end of this section that the tree I imagine is, well, *imagined*—it does not exist, is *literally metaphorical* (I’ll make a quick return to this idea later), and so whatever potential flaws may exist within the idea I...I guess I don’t really care enough to back away from it, as I do believe the image of the tree containing that original point from which the entirety grows (and, in my non-literal tree, continues to grow forever) is useful in the manner I employ it. My defense of this usage, naturally, should be seen as everything that comes after this short section, but because of the incredible presumptuousness of some random nobody making a claim to speak on the macro and micro natures of all History, I admit I lack confidence in the willingness of others to go along with me...hence, my long-winded defense here. Also, I admit, I simply like the image of a tree, bearing symbol of that original singularity whose hidden roots beneath the ground grow outward in those rhizomic patterns that I see as tracings of the tree’s history *preceding* that initial burst into being. As such, it embodies all of History, and every individual history, and all that came before it, being the single *and collective* body of all that is, ever was, and will be.

Perhaps the tree is inadequate for some, but I accept that—I feel it works as intended, when all implications and connotations are taken into account, and if I was afraid of failing in the work of making the argument, I wouldn’t have devoted my life to the task I acknowledge is ultimately impossible. What would be the fun in keeping my imagination safely within the realms of possibility?

branches. Then the branches begin to shrink and shrivel, lowering from the sky little by little until they return to the larger branches they have grown from. And the larger branches do the same, leaves and stalks and all ungrowing, returning to their absolute point of origin before going out of existence, never having been, all the leaves and stalks and branches having been reduced to preexistence, and then the trunk recedes back into the earth, its roots pulling in, shrinking, contracted back to the singularity. Then it all bursts out, roots stretching, gripping to the world and trunk rising and expanding and its branches reaching farther and farther in all directions, grasping for the whole of the sky, and you watch, excited, eager, tracing every growth, every bend, every deviation, every formulation of “tree” this process takes, always wondering if the next branch will go this way or that way, if the next leaf will bend one way or the other, what shape the next stretch will take, never knowing *what* it will be beforehand but knowing it must be one way or another because you have seen the tree forming and you understand that it must, ultimately, take shape. Now imagine this tree will grow forever, always going in some unknowable but logically reasonable direction because its growth can be traced backward and grant you some measure of deduction. You watch the tree. A day passes, and it seems precisely the same. A week passes, and it is no different. A month passes, and new leaves are sprouting. A year passes, and new branches are forming. A century passes, and it has doubled in size, branches and leaves reaching farther than ever before. A millennium passes... As you have watched, the tree has grown—it has developed. Sometimes, the growth is as you expected it to be. Sometimes, the growth is as you believed it could be. Sometimes, it surprises you, reflecting nothing from your observation, perhaps because of some hidden mutation

within its genetic code. Yet, it *has* grown. And every growth comes out of what came before, in some way. After a thousand years, the highest leaf is separated from the deepest root by a million degrees, and, looking at the leaf, it appears as its own thing and there is no way to immediately visualize the millions of growths, of developments, that had to happen as they did in the precise way they did for that highest of leaves to be there as it is, in and of itself. But, despite that, it is unavoidably connected to that root, to everything that preceded it. The leaf—that very leaf—was never an inevitability, but it is the product. And all branches and leaves that follow will be, in some way, the product of the growths that made this leaf possible, that brought it to be. These growths, unpredictable but traceable as a developmental process in retrospect, is the storm we call progress. This tree is history—nonlinear but connected, all and one.

Turning to gaze back on Ocasio-Cortez, Snyder, the Holocaust, and camps along the US-Mexico border, it is obviously not accurate to say that what is happening in the US now is exactly what was happening in Nazi Germany in 1942.²⁰ Neither would it be accurate to say that what was happening in Nazi Germany in 1942 is exactly what was happening in Germany in 1935. Nothing is ever exactly as anything else.

²⁰ The angel of history within me...which I see as a celestial entity (me...or maybe it's better recognized as my work, my attempts at the subject) orbiting the thing, the subject, the idea. An orbit—elliptical journey around another thing—pulls one toward the greater entity, its gravity greater than yours such that you fall toward it, near enough to *almost* reach out and touch by not quite, only for your momentum to thrust you outward and away at the point you come closest to it, where your increasing distance makes you start to believe you've left it behind in its entirety to soar into new stretches of space, only for its gravity to begin pulling you back, falling back along the edge of its well to reach out again and try to grasp it before you're thrown away once more. This is me returning to AOC and Snyder and the Holocaust analogy, this is the use of my tree of history, this is the separation between the camps of 2019 and Nazi Germany, and between Germany of 1942 and Germany of 1935, and the US-Mexico border wall and the Ceuta border wall of my imagined 2067. It is turning back and pulling what is behind along with you, each time bringing the wreckage of the past into the present, into conversation and conflict, a persistent intersecting of here and now, then and there. The future narrative is positioned, then, as the outcome of this process, itself reaching back and pulling its own past (the present) forward toward it, tracing the formation of tomorrow's tomorrow.

There may, however, be traces. Indeed, there often are. When we are at Point A, it is near impossible and absurd to say that we will ever get to Point Z. It is too far removed to recognize the potential connection. We shrug it off. Then, when we get to Point B, it is still so far removed that Z remains a distant, impossible reality. Sure, we are at B, but Z is so far away it is ridiculous to say we will ever get to *that* point. Then we go, over time, from B to C, C to D...eventually, we get to Point K, and Z remains distant but K is now so far removed from A that we step back, look around, and wonder how we ever got here from A. The process of history is never inevitable, but nothing happens in a vacuum. Everything that *is* is a development from that which preceded it, the progression of past and present toward the future within a developmental process. This is history-as-process. Looking at the patterns of these developments allows us the potential, the capacity, to maybe contend with their tumors before they metastasize, or at least be better prepared for treatment when they do. Analogies—the tracing of these connections through the act of comparing and contrasting similarities and differences across time and space—allow us to do this very human work which we cannot help but do—as Snyder writes, it is precisely how we think. And this analogous work is vital, because once we reach Point K, there is no preventing K, because K is already happening. The camps along the US-Mexico border are *not* Nazi concentration camps, and certainly not extermination camps, but they do not need to be. The industrialization of mass murder did not emerge overnight—this, too, developed over time and space.²¹

²¹ We must keep in mind that the systematic mass murder of Europe's Jewish population was not the *initial* intention—or plan, rather—of the NSDAP. Antisemitism was always built into Germany's fascism, a significant element and driving force of its conception, but the process by which the Holocaust developed is one of incremental growth over time: the false flag Reichstag fire gave justification for the NSDAP's conspiratorial positions, giving them support to rescind civil liberties in order to protect the

The imperfect nature of the analogy, then, is less significant than its intent and the discourse that emerges from an engagement with that.

Such imperfections are also responsible for ambiguity that is written into the separations between real and imagined, which allows fictional narratives to be read at different times, under different conditions, with different kinds of knowledge, and remain useful to us. That is, the analogy exists in a state of constant development, evolving at all times and attaining new potential meaning as time—as history—passes.²² Observe as Faye and Javier enter the outer stretches of Ceuta and begin conducting interviews with the citizens for the report they have been cynically tasked

nation from its enemies; a year later, the Enabling Act was passed, allowing the party to disregard the constitution, effectively abolishing the republic's democratic foundations and legalizing dictatorship; civic institutions were then gradually taken over by party officials; the Night of Long Knives, wherein the socialist wing of the party was eliminated because it opposed the right-wing economics of Hitler's wing; Hitler then declared sole dictator of the state; anti-Semitic propaganda first blamed Jews for Germany's defeat in WWI; laws were passed to restrict Jewish access to jobs, then from civic positions, then owning guns, then their citizenship was revoked (rendering them stateless entities), then they were prohibited from marrying non-Jews; the Night of Broken Glass; Jews relocated into ghettos to physically alienate them from German society; then came the camps for further isolation and slave labor; then the Final Solution and death camps. These events took several years to develop, some having their roots in events decades earlier, each development made increasingly possible by previous developments and the evolving material conditions. At any point, the average German citizen could have been asked if they believed the Jews would be shipped off to camps to be worked to death, or shot en masse in the streets and buried in unmarked roadside ditches, or mass murdered in gas trucks, then chambers, or tortured and experimented on by actual mad scientists, and that average citizen would have likely thought the idea absurd, outside the realm of possibility. Would I have believed five years ago that, in America, the President and a handful of bootlicking, crony thugs would have the legal, political, and social authority to attack civilians by beating them to the ground, opening fire on them, arresting journalists, and using Blackhawk helicopters as a show of force against American citizens above the streets they are peacefully occupying, all the while threatening to do even more in full view of the world, just for exercising their First Amendment rights in protest against that exact abuse of power?

²² Considering the orbital and elliptical nature of the imperfection of knowledge and our narrativizing efforts to help make sense of that lack is a good way to bridge the speculated future history of the novel to the tree of history metaphor to the nuance of historical analogies back to the novel. As the tracing of the process of historical formation runs through each of these tissues, their gaining of context through their relationships is an attainment of greater and greater potential meaning. I'm working to gesture toward the macro-micro relationships (the "histories and History, people and peoples, then and there, here and now" as described in my Forethought(s)) that I view as maybe the most vital element of my work, whose capacity to engage with them is rendered by the future narrative's orbit of present, future, and past, the *oscillation* between near contact to distant abstraction and back again.

with putting together by the UN and Spanish government.

What was it about the situation that concerned them most? Did they believe the migrants were a greater threat, or the encroaching waterline? Had the Moroccan Crown addressed these fears? What about the Royal Gendarmerie—were they doing an adequate job protecting them? Providing assistance? Offering solutions for their displacement?

The migrants did not belong. We were here first, they said, for generations this was their home and they had every right to want them beyond the wall. Where would their family go when the water pushed them all the way back from the city, where the encampments now were? Did they not have every right to think about their families? They only cared about their families.

[...]

But what about the others living there, there were no migrants in this part of the city, at least none making camp, and yet the citizens looked to be fighting each other—did they not all have a right to be there?

This is my house, they said. This is my apartment. This is my porch. This is my sidewalk. This is my window. Not *theirs*. My family lives here. Why should food that is rightfully ours go to these people who don't belong here!? They come here and take our homes and take our water and take our houses, and they make crowds and shit in the street and bring their disease with them! Why should my family go hungry in my own home? Why should the ducks and the pests be the only things that eat well? They have all invaded my home! *You* should not be here! And I do not care that I say this. I'm only looking out for my family.

And the Royal Gendarmerie? Could they do nothing?

This drew cautious looks from the people, who noticed the officers escorting the Americans not far away, and Adil, moving back and forth between her and Javier and poking his head over their shoulders. They were careful with their words, often turning to speaking in broken English to say the wall should be protected, and nothing more. One man, a younger one who spoke Berber, must have seen the officers looking in his direction because he immediately began swearing and spitting past Faye at them. Adil rushed over to calm him, but he was pushed away and called horrible names before the officers came and grabbed the young man and threw him to the ground. Faye reached for the closest officer, but Adil snatched her arm, tugged it back, and urged her to move. (*Second Exodus* 10-11)

Gayatri Spivak, writing about the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, argued that the conflicts underlying the attacks in New York would remain unresolved regardless of how successful America's military response was to it, because brute-

forcing a solution would do nothing to solve the root issues and would probably do more harm to the potential for effecting positive change (“Terror: A Speech after 9-11”). Instead, she called for a focus on knowledge—using the methods and expertise of the humanities—to achieve the most positive outcome: “Unless we are trained into imagining the other, a necessary, impossible, and interminable task, nothing we do through politico-legal calculation will last” (83). A noble and worthy task, and one that immediate circumstances—pains, traumas, material needs—will push back against, despite what Édouard Glissant formulates in his discourse about the History and histories of the Caribbean. That is, an idea of subterranean convergence, the contact point(s) of the differing histories of the peoples (the Caribbean peoples specifically but open to broader applications). This occurs beneath the visible surface, a convergence happening all the times but just out of immediate view—in “the site of multiple converging paths,” the transversality of peoples with simultaneously shared and unique histories “relieves us of the linear, hierarchical vision of a single History” (“The Quarrel with History” 66). The connection is a unity that resists uniformity, a truly “cross-cultural relationship” that allows the person, their peoples, all peoples, to “[float] free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its network of branches” (67). Being conscious and conscientious of these not-so-obvious convergences of ourselves and each other, it is nevertheless a great challenge to overcome—the Moroccan citizens local to Ceuta and those from beyond the wall share ethnic and historical backgrounds, but they have also been alienated from one another, in part, via their common colonialist history, which has also contributed to the worsening of environmental and political conditions.

History, and the histories of peoples, are all shaped by their past. And this is true in the literal present (if in a less exaggerated state) which I mean to evoke in the reactionary attitudes of the Ceuta locals, seeing a possible extension of contemporary responses to the migrant crises in Europe and America, as the present state is not the final state. Speculating on these dynamics decades from now, in a future where institutional inaction and failure has produced desperate half-measures, mere band-aids on now gaping, festering wounds, it is not so hard to imagine the people of Ceuta identifying more with the “privileges” granted by their colonized history, as a means of separating themselves from other Moroccans despite their many shared experiences in order to protect themselves, and their loved ones, from the conditions that threaten all life around them. The task to overcome this is not an enviable one, because we must work to imagine ourselves as that fearful Other despite our natural resistance to it in order to begin the process of understanding how and why they are so fearful, to and *of* us (“Terror: A Speech after 9-11” 98). It seems to be a natural state of being, a fear of the Other—and every Other has its own *Other*—and, given the right conditions, that fear can manifest in intensely violent ways. The fiction, being the analogizing processes of the speculative *future* narrative, generates its own space to work out this cross-cultural transversal to attempt to achieve the imagining of oneself into the Other that would otherwise put the physical body of the individual at too great a risk. But whatever differences exist to potentially interrupt the work of the analogy being constructed here (and there are *many*), the gesture toward contact renders the capacity for meaning. That is, the analogous process inherent within a story generates the critical space in which to engage by stepping away from the precise thing and projecting our questions onto

another, similar thing that we are free to work with without concern for prematurely disrupting that original, actual thing *before* we have formed a clearer idea of how we might best do that. The analogy's imperfections are, indeed, a necessary part of the process of forging a deeper, more human connection to the truth of the imagined story. We might read *The Dispossessed* or (hopefully) *Second Exodus* in that postapocalyptic future Old New York and, without any awareness of the conditions in which they were created, be able to connect Le Guin's ideological conflicts to those of our warring tribes vying for hegemony over the limited resources of Waterworld through each tribe's cult-like practices of accepting hierarchical authority without question, believing that good is invariably realized through sublimation to the collective; or, in the concerns I attempt to examine, recognize in the conflicts within and without our tribes the ongoing struggles of the microcosmic histories of individuals against macrocosmic forces that impose themselves upon us. The speculation may become dated by the passage of time, threatening the analogy's literal accuracy, but because of separation between the representation and the actual thing being represented the narrative generates a space in which the contemporary reader can question the differences, and through that critical engagement come to recognize that because of that passage of time the like-threat, as it would manifest today, is potentially far greater—the analogy, being imperfect, unfinished, is free to undergo a never-ending growth, bearing the capacity to maintain its intellectual and affective force half a century later and beyond. Through this process, narratives are able to speak on multiple levels to any potential reader in many possible contexts, drawing an empathetic bond between the reader in their world and another world and reader outside of it. This persistent(ly) generative connection to history past,

present, and future can be seen as the spirit of analogy.

4. Temporal Oscillations in the Speculative Mode

These oscillations occurring within a narrative—between absolute and relative, known and unknown, objective and subjective, fact and fiction, truth and imagination—that characterize its analogous nature empower it to work toward a not-quite universal engagement with History and the individual histories that form it. The future narrative extends the oscillations even further, empowering its analogous processes to overcome the limitations of time itself. But as we have seen, the analogizing process is a messy, labyrinthine beast under what might be called normal circumstances, and is only more complicated in the speculative mode (read here: future narratives) because of the complex dimensions of speculating upon the possible future developments of present realities—the inherent instability of an imperfect analogy is intensified by the speculation because the attempt bears an even greater probability of being completely wrong and snapping the imperfect tissues that connect the original and the representation, undermining the entire effort. So, *why* future narratives?

The reason lies in the separations of time and place between speculative and non-speculative. Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, published in 1947, examines the rise of fascist thought and the moral and ethical decay of early 20th Century Germany framed as the biography of a (fictional) late composer, Adrian Leverkühn, written by his friend Serenus Zeitblom. Zeitblom begins the narrative by stating, "Life and experience can lend individual words a certain accent that estranges them entirely from their everyday meaning and lends them an aura of dread that no one who has not met

them in their most horrifying context can ever understand” (8). These words contradict his claims to objectivity toward the subject (being Leverkuhn’s friend) and, through the extension of the symbol, Germany. Though he states he is ideologically separate from the horrors of his time, Zeitblom admits here to a desire to tell it like it really was, how no one else but him could possibly understand it to be—he wants to set the record straight, to be accountable and give this history its proper context.²³ Yet Zeitblom betrays objectivity in practice by turning Leverkuhn into an metaphor, essentializing his friend as a symbol of the world around him—the metaphor far more affective than a straight-forward objective chronicle of events. Zeitblom is not alone in gesturing toward objectivity but ultimately returning to the process of narrativizing, as Mann is the one who has imagined Leverkuhn, Zeitblom, their stories, the purpose of the whole project. Published a couple years after the end of the Second World War, Mann began writing in 1943, the period when Operation Reinhard was underway, the murder campaign that killed nearly two million Jews in Poland, at a time when the death camps in Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka were in full operation (Stone). A straightforward account of this horror is valuable, of course, but so is a metaphorical story, which grants the narrative a capacity for openness. A purely factual document, powerful for its attempt at objectivity, speaks only for the specific subject it engages with. The power

²³ Upon first reading *Doctor Faustus*, I was keenly aware of the irony of my own project. . . I hadn’t begun writing *Second Exodus* yet, but had been planning it for years at that point, had completed a number of other works in the same vein (not to mention the other three prior novels making up the first nine volumes of the *Sophist* sequence), so the connection applies to maybe everything I’ve ever written, at least since my high school years. Both then and now, I find it a bit funny, not to mention interesting, to think about my own attempts to “give history its proper context”—if I’m being honest and as accurate as possible, what I believe I’m working to achieve is to provide a space in which to *speculate* upon how we decide what the proper context of history is (big and little H)—in relation to Leverkuhn’s fictional attempt to do the same for his corrupted friend, culture(?), and nation, while Mann, in imagining and writing the novel of Zeitblom’s efforts, carries out the same work himself.

of the fictional narrative is to be free to operate within the more ambiguous space of imagination, to be open to being read as a chronicle of the time as well as, potentially, another. It is as if Mann, through Zeitblom—the narrative’s teller, writer—is acknowledging the capacity for a semblance of universality of the analogy being worked out.

Following this allegorical process through the novel, Leverkühn grows ill, suffering from formerly asymptomatic syphilis, just as Germany loses the First World War. Later, seeking an otherwise unattainable musical genius, Leverkühn accepts a Faustian bargain by symbolically selling his soul to a mysterious figure. In the following years, he suffers from increasingly worse bouts of insanity as his artistic achievements tower but also gradually drive him into self-imposed exile in pursuit of his mad genius. Zeitblom directly states that, in his friend’s illness, there is “some objective connection or symbolic parallel” with “our national calamity” (360). He cannot possibly know this, but believes it to be true because he cannot help but understand his experience through the connections he is prone to tracing because it is appropriate (and useful) to the narrative he is composing around his friend and nation, and to Mann, who has imagined all of it, because this how human beings think, as we have seen Snyder point out. So when Leverkühn’s doctor begins to “assign more and more of the ailment’s symptoms to the brain,” the connection we are led to make is that the syphilitic madness doomed to follow is akin to the madness of the great German Empire losing the war (361). The tragic story of a friend’s life, which granted him the creative powers he desired but also a tortured existence of emotional isolation from his fellow man, is also the story of his nation. The rising up of Leverkühn is, thus, the rising

of Germanic nationalism, of fascism, and the fall of his health, madness, and death, is the Empire's stunning loss, is the loss of human dignity in the coming Third Reich, the impending loss of yet another great war. The metaphorical characteristics Zeitblom is quite consciously injecting into the record is his revision, a rhetorical shunting of responsibility for events in early 20th century Germany to a madness, a contracted illness, an external toxin that has found its way into his friend, into the German people—their nationalist fervor is reimagined as an outside force worming its way in and imposing its rot upon them, growing into their character, their national, imperial identity. The analogous quality of this prototypically Mann allegory speaks for itself, and is strong enough to utilize today within the conditions of rising ethnonationalism that has at times recalled the rhetoric and iconography of Nazi Germany.

Why, then, emphasize a speculated future narrative if all narratives can (and are) used to analogize their worlds with ours? What makes stories of a speculated future *vital*? An analogy works only insofar as it can be connected with the original thing it is meant to represent. With *Doctor Faustus*, the analogy is built around a metaphorical pursuit of greatness that demands blind, unwavering determination and sacrifice, an end which is justified by the means, representative of the rise and fall of Nazi Germany and, more broadly, the history of the German state and soul. In this sense, its attempted analogy works beautifully, yet it is very specifically about a singular historical moment with distinct historical markers. This can work as a limitation imposed by the additional psychic hurdle built into the increasing distance from the original thing as time continues to pass.

Yet another potential threat to consider is that *Doctor Faustus* is not even *non-*

speculative—the novel, a work of fiction, *is* speculative in that it emerged from Mann’s imagination, however informed it was by his actual experiences, and as such required the psychic work of its author thinking, meditating, reflecting, deliberating, questioning, wondering and imagining his way into the story. That it also contains what may arguably be considered supernatural elements in the Mephistopheles character (depending on how literally the metaphor is read) is, also, not to be completely ignored, if perhaps less significant to this argument. *Doctor Faustus* is not unique in this regard, as all works of fiction demand some amount of speculation, making all works of fiction, to some degree, speculative. The significance of this: the novel, not written as a “speculative” work, and not seen as one upon publication, and not generally considered one seventy-five years later, bares the label—the conceit—of being *non-speculative*, and thus bears the conceit of attempting to recreate the literal world to whatever degree that it does.

These two conditions act as threats to the usefulness of the analogy, not because it is in itself less useful—*Doctor Faustus* remains perfectly sound and powerful to this day, if read in the proper way—but because one can reject it due to the challenge imposed by the perceived distance, emphasized by the gesture toward a higher degree of literalness. It is read as taking place within some iteration of the literal world, either contemporaneously to readers in the late-1940s or in the past to readers in the 21st Century, and, being bound to its past historical context, the analogy runs the risk of being rendered immovable, incapable of growth. This results from how the narrative positions the reader—a work bound to a specific point in time in the past positions the reader at some point *after* it, where the realities of the representation and the

represented thing itself have already happened. And, limited by its conceit of literalness (whatever its accuracy), the analogy lacks the same freedom of movement to as easily speak to other times and places that grow ever-distant. The result is the analogy's distance is far more likely to be felt, its connective tissues seeming to have been severed by the passage of years and decades and centuries. One can always do the work of arguing for its contemporary relevance, but that is another, separate and external labor that must be carried out beyond the borders of the text.²⁴

To pull back, references to the horrors of the Second World War are still commonplace, but the resistance to historical analogies like those of the US-Mexico border camps would suggest that, seventy-five years later, at a time when the vast majority of people who had lived through the experiences have left us, no longer able to speak to the experience of that time and place, the work of tracing the psychic connections between then and now is not so easily trusted. The reader is given a potential out when trying to connect it to where we are today and where we may be going—*Doctor Faustus* is very much about the interwar years (while the framing narrative takes place during the course the Second World War's European theatre), about an era that is past, events which are over and “done” with. It is easy to read

²⁴ I've woven and rewoven this argument around *Doctor Faustus* (acting, unfairly, as a stand-in for all non-speculative literature) maybe a dozen times since I began formulating it for a previous paper, whose origins date back to my undergraduate work. It still feels, I believe, less effective than I want it to, because my intention is *not* to suggest that the non-speculative is somehow less valuable or powerful because it lacks the extra dimensions that I'm in the process of arguing the speculative mode literally embodies, particularly the form of the future narrative. It's a matter of having to continually pull back (which seems like back pedaling) to clarify that a literary work of any kind *can* maintain the same narrative capacities (or most of them) that future narratives do...but each form has its own strengths and its own weaknesses. It's merely the very particular strengths *and weaknesses* of the future narrative (working in dialogue) that animate my own very particular engagement with History and the world around me that I'm trying to emphasize in this dichotomy as I've framed it.

Mann's work and come away from it—while still recognizing the commentary on dangerous ideologies—with the feeling that WWII and Nazi Germany are no more, its bearing on the contemporary easily diminished or even dismissed.²⁵ Absurd, a 21st Century reader can say, now nearly a full century separated from the historical

²⁵ That said, a part of me *does*, actually, maybe, believe that future narratives are more relevant to the contemporary, but I would never argue that any literature not be read because it doesn't perfectly suit my own position of what "matters most" in this historical moment. To be clear, interwar literature is my favorite single period of work, a period of work that, taken as a collective, constitutes the most important work ever composed as I rate it. None of the work in this period that I appreciate comes anywhere close to being under the broad canvas of "speculative fiction" either, so I'd like to believe I'm not biasing my current appreciation for the speculative as a sci-fi nerd with a preference for escapist fantasies over "serious" literature. To further explain why I feel this way about the "speculative" versus the "non-speculative" (aside from my explanation in the body of this work about our immediate connection to that past eroding as generations pass), I turn to the modern conditions of information consumption in the digital archive, an insubstantial place with a theoretically infinite store of information from which knowledge can be synthesized, and its structures designed to train the individual for immediate and rapid engagement, no time for reflection, introspection, where substantive political engagement takes the form of a tweet of a couple hundred characters or a short form video (perhaps sixty seconds of a one-way "dialogue") or an actual article headlined with "2-minute read" so we know we don't have to devote ourselves *too long* to its content...because there's hardly any content to begin with.

The incredible speed at which the historical developments toward this moment have happened should concern. The printing press remained limited and expensive for centuries, limiting the reproduction of texts to a privileged few who could afford it and ostensibly read and understand it. The internet is less than forty years old, and has already lapped physical printing several times over in its effective reach and access, along with the expansion of its potential market, the largest single consumer base ever, encompassing just about every imaginable product, service, and communication outlet. Gone are the centuries or millennia to adapt as paper technology reached trade routes and only gradually became cross-culturally embedded with an acclimation to its broader social impacts. The development of the internet and its power to democratize access to information and knowledge is *good*—let me be clear—but unavoidably creates new problems that were not possible before, something humanity had no reason to prepare for before now. The central problem is this: the abbreviated timelines on these evolutions leave little time for people to adapt to the effects of the changes, rather than simply accepting them and moving forward at exponentially faster rates while struggling to keep up all the way. These changes happen so quickly that they have more in common with mutations, with all the implied dangers of being caught off-guard and the risk of failing to adapt before negative effects occur. Yet they aren't mutations, because the conditions they grow from are present, they just haven't been present long enough to be reconciled with the effect they have on us individually, collectively, on our concepts of justice, freedom, and responsibility.

Because of all this, our increasingly distant pasts—the historical analogies we have become used to utilizing—simply *feel* too distant, too irrelevant (though they actually aren't) to the modern reader who has been oriented to live, work, and socialize within a digital reality that is so vastly different from and moves so incredibly faster than that past that we are, I believe, on the verge of having a generation willing to dismiss any connection whatsoever. I acknowledge this is a gut feeling, and I may be completely wrong here, but the modern condition seems to have diminished the modern reader's capacity to engage with preexisting examples of History's analogizing processes. It's the future narrative, and its future historical tracings, that I hope to use to overcome this limitation, as I see it.

touchstone, That was then and this is now! The contemporary of the story is the reader's past, perhaps even the distant, ancient past (depending on when the text is being encountered), about things that have already happened, about which nothing can be done. This frames History as something wholly separate from history, being a time and place relegated to the past, then and there, not here and now, that which simply is, that which cannot be affected—History is positioned *apart* from human intervention in such a paradigm, the past and the present psychically isolated from one another in addition to the physical. It is quite true that the past cannot be affected by the present, but our History and its histories are more than the past—to think of History as incapable of being affected is to deny the capacity to impact historical formation. Such conditions generate something of an artificial conclusion to the historical process, seeming to render History into a narrative where all pieces come together and synthesize into a final reckoning.

The historical denouement created by this is the “end of history,” a mindset that affectively removes one from the process of historical formation, disallowing the capacity for growth beyond predetermined pathways, not potentialities but eventualities—if no deviation is possible, it might be said that, in these circumstances, there is *no* growth to speak of. This might be seen as implying that what is is meant to be, and by extension what has happened to bring that about was meant to have happened, that there was nothing anyone could have done to alter the straight line of progress, certainly that nothing can be done now to deviate from it. In such a condition, human agency is removed from the process and, indeed, human accountability. Leverkusen and Germany, operating apart from one another, will pursue their grand

ambitions of a nebulous “greatness,” and how can either be expected to do anything else? The state of things is how it was meant to be, the natural product of that past wreckage, rather than a set of developments influenced by the engagement of people throughout the process. How, then, can the officer operating the gas chambers in Auschwitz-Birkenau II be responsible for his actions when, after all, the single line of historical progress leads, unwaveringly, inevitably, to him flipping the switch to release the gas? No less dangerous is the idea—one that might be abstracted from these conditions—there is a social ideal that requires no further growth, that no growth is even possible because there is nothing more or better to progress toward. To do so is to believe that historical formation can be ceased. To believe this, and to believe such an ideal can be practically implemented, one must also believe in its universality. People, however, are inherently unique whatever similarities we share amongst each other, and no social “ideal” can ever be truly universal.²⁶ Any such ideal, then, requires perpetual enforcement to be realized. The future narrative, however, overcomes this challenge in its very nature.

The historical dimensions of the speculative are made clear in Csicsery-Ronay’s *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, particularly in the chapter on “Future Histories.” The argument here: because the concept of change is so central to the science fictional mode, all science fiction has a historical dimension. These changes take the form of alternative histories, new technology, social structures never before possible, the reorientation the “local” to the planetary scale, thinking through culture in terms of the

²⁶ As opposed to the “universal” I’m interested in, which does the work of tracing connections between the singular and the whole without the essentialization, maintaining a capacity for movement between states and along a spectrum of being.

macro-humanity (vs. an actual *alien* “other” that is literally inhuman), even the shift of the reader’s psychic space from the present to the future. Indeed, when the speculative mode positions one in the fictive future, the reader is made to recognize that their present exists in the past of that speculated moment—the present is placed *within* the process of history as opposed to being separate from it. That the present *is* history, then, imposes an urgency upon the science fictional story that it would otherwise lack. History is not something past in the future narrative, something out of our reach, but *in process*, happening here, now, all around us.

The surfacing of the historical process in the character of science fiction—and the future narrative in particular—also serves to deemphasize the *science* of it, because, while important, is rarely required to be rigorously presented and/or applied for the *fiction* of it all to function. Citing Karen Hellekson, Csicsery-Ronay presents the position that even when science fiction reimagines cosmic laws, it “does not tend to subvert [...] history and change: the movement from past to present, in terms of historical development” (*The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* 105). An alternate history, for instance, even one taking place in the future, “sometimes ponder[s] the material conditions of history [but is] much more interested in points where its intended, immanent aspects intersect with conscious intentions and open contests for power” (103). A future narrative, by removing the reader from the past and present to locate him or her in the possible, locates itself outside of perceived endings—rather than dealing with a world that *was*, the future narrative speaks to a world that *may be*, a world that is still possible instead of past. There is too much of an “out” when dealing with historical developments as points of finality, as if Nazi Germany, or Stalinist

Russia, or Iran-Contra, or the September 11th attacks, or Donald Trump were *the thing* rather than a development of innumerable preceding developments that, however they are dealt with, will inform further developments of perhaps infinite possibility. When the past, present, and future come into dialogue—and conflict—as in that previously evaluated early scene involving the Ceuta wall and its historical tracings, the reader is made to connect their place, their position in time, their history, as happening, as living, *within* History. The reader, who is us, the “We” of humanity, is put into direct and immediate dialogue with these long-term processes. The speculations, upon the potentiality of our present, engage directly with the historical process while also implicitly representing an urgent effort to address the questions being raised within because the process is *ongoing*—the present and everyone situated therein, living within it, has a role to play, is an actor (however seemingly inconsequential) with the capacity to affect it.

By displacing the reader in its particular way, the future narrative actively combats the end of history. As Csicsery-Ronay writes, science fiction and alternative histories exist “in an ideal space *to the side* of consensus reality, where they can be manipulated without the sense of urgency and implication that comes when the future is felt to be at stake” (*The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* 103). To take this even further, depicting the future puts the *present* at stake—whereas the future is “set” in such a narrative by the “present” of the plot, through the work of analogizing and being made to critically engage with the in-process nature of the actual, literal present, it is *this* present (being the reader’s, ours) that is positioned within potentiality for development, seen as having the capacity for alteration. The future narrative’s temporal

positionality resists History as past—the reader, their history(ies), is not advanced beyond the narrative’s time and place but exists within it. History is here, now, in motion, happening, in process, and capable of being affected. None of this is to say future narratives are immune to the potential threats of their analogies feeling “distant”—it still must, like any other narrative, overcome the potential perceived disconnect in the relationality of future and present, but being a narrative of the future, the thing(s) it analogizes and narrativizes are purposefully distanced. What the future narrative has that “present” or “past” narratives lack is that it falls firmly within the accepted boundaries of the speculative mode. Being recognized as speculative on its surface, it is freed from the burden of gesturing to the exacting literalness of what is considered non-speculative, capable of working its way through the narrow openings in the reader’s cognitive defenses which have been lowered by the lack of expectation for literal representation, all possible because the reality of the future narrative—its time and place—has not yet come into being.²⁷

The language of science fiction works to achieve this as well, being fundamental to the analogizing work being done. On a sentence and word level, science fiction is unique from what Samuel R. Delany calls naturalistic fiction: “The subjunctivity level for a series of words labeled naturalistic fiction is defined by: *could*

²⁷ Being consistent with Suvin’s idea of the cognitive “estrangement” in science fiction, in that the mode involves the speculation of ideas, experiences, and worlds beyond our time, that differ from our own empirical reality, but retain enough similarity that we (the reader) are able to imagine the possibility of living within its boundaries (*Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* 2). The consistency remains when we return to the tree of history metaphor and my explication of the form’s necessary (and vital) imperfections—the estrangement from our assumptions of what reality is or can be makes us critically aware of the separations between our perception of what is real and true, and that of others, the perceptions of those around us and those temporally beyond us alike.

have happened” (“About 5,750 Words” 10). That is, the language of non-speculative fiction is limited to ideas, constructions, and even words that make sense within what can be believed to have happened. A (very) simple example: *Sam drove the car down the road*. This is perfectly naturalistic in that it could have happened right outside your house at this moment. Another: *Sam drove the car down the road, fleeing from his shattering world*. Despite the fantastical nature of the second part, it can be believed to have happened because the naturalistic text does not present it literally, and the reader does not read it literally. Science fictional subjunctivity, however, is defined by “*has not happened*” (11). Delany cites specific words like “ray gun” and “spaceship” as words that become standard language in science fiction, but to give a more substantive example, he presents “winged dog.” This means nothing within naturalistic fiction—it makes no sense. Within science fiction, however,

one must momentarily consider, as one makes that visual correction, an entire track of evolution: whether the dog has forelegs or not. The visual correction must include modification of breastbone and musculature if the wings are to be functional, as well as a whole slew of other factors from hollow bones to heart rate, or if we subsequently learn as the series of words goes on that grafting was the cause, there are all the implications (to consider) of a technology capable of such an operation. (12-13)

The language of science fiction expands the possibilities of language by embodying possibility. And this quality does not restrict naturalistic language from science fiction, either. In fact, Delany states “I can think of no series of words that could appear in a piece of naturalistic fiction that could not also appear in the same order in a piece of speculative fiction. I can, however, think of many series of words that, while fine for speculative fiction, would be meaningless as naturalism” (12). So the language possibilities of speculative fiction grant great freedom to envision reality as a state in

process—the act of reading and understanding a speculative fiction sentence demands a critical engagement with the “whole range of the physically explainable universe,” which “throw[s] us worlds away, [and] specifies how we got there” (ibid). In fact, returning to that previous example—*Sam drove the car down the road, fleeing from his shattering world*—we see that the reorienting powers of the speculative mode gives even simple metaphors greater complexity than they could ever have outside of it. To read it naturalistically, we know that Sam is driving away from a life that has figuratively shattered, or fallen apart, and if we do not know precisely how we are invited to wonder why. However, within the speculative mode, we read it both figuratively *and* literally. Sam drives away from a life that has fallen apart, and perhaps his actual world—his planet—is crumbling...literally. We are invited not only to question what has happened in his life, but what has happened in the world around him, with the planet itself as a celestial body, and we are implicitly drawn beyond the personal and into the historical process that engulfs everyone and everything. There is, in the future narrative, a unique kind of intellectual vitality absent from other modes, freeing the narrative to speculate and develop its analogous capacities and meaning across time through language itself.

The temporal reorientation of these narrative functions do more than focus you on what must or should be changed here to create a better future—the work these processes carry out within the future narrative is, ultimately, about possibility, embodied by the speculations upon the material, moral, ethical, and emotional toll of historical conditions, and a hope for the realization of what *can* be. Because the positionality of future narratives deals in the ambiguities and the unknowable of past,

present, and future, the demand they place upon the reader is to critically engage with the connections and disconnections *and specificities* of each, what makes each thing being analogized unique, making one more capable of understanding how the analogy does and does not work, placing one in the role of historian and futurologist...a historian of the narrative and its ideas, and a futurologist thinking through how to apply the knowledge attained to build a path into that future. Timothy Snyder, commenting on recent events in the nation's capital, wrote

[...] greater knowledge of the past, fascist or otherwise, allows us to notice and conceptualize elements of the present that we might otherwise disregard and to think more broadly about future possibilities. It was clear to me in October that Trump's behavior presaged a coup, and I said so in print; this is not because the present repeats the past, but because the past enlightens the present. ("The American Abyss")

To take this further and into the speculative, the possibility of the future—in dialogue with its past, our present—invigorates our capacities for rendering movement into tomorrow. I can point to a few more examples of this: William and Margay's lives impacted by the violence of war and time dilation in *The Forever War*²⁸; Brother Francis', Thon Taddeo's, and Abbot Dom Jethras Zerchi's separate conflicts that result from the potential power in having access to the ancient pre-nuclear apocalypse technological writings in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*²⁹; Faye Le Guin's ethics and morals

²⁸ Exemplifying this speculative use of the historical process, I use Haldeman's novel here because it is one of the most obvious examples of commenting on present historical conditions within a "future narrative," a reimagination of the experience of the Vietnam War as an intergalactic one involving faster-than-light travel and time dilation. By estranging readers from the immediacy of the historical moment, which hardly lent itself to honest, critical introspection, *The Forever War* delved into questions of trauma and the personal cost of a war (not unlike the one America had just struggled to extricate itself from) without the baggage that came with referring directly to the experience of Vietnam, and it's all the more brilliant for it. It then allows the reader to work backward from the novel to connect themselves to the present conditions via the text's analogous and metaphorical nature.

²⁹ Similarly, Walter M. Miller's novel (and one of the best novels of the 20th Century as far as I'm concerned) deals directly with history as a process, charting the developments of the world over roughly 1000 years, from postapocalyptic dark age of the 26th century to the Renaissance-like 32nd Century to

tested for having to lead the UN committee to select the chosen to be saved aboard the ark, and Danny Flores' personal struggle to maintain his seemingly unbreakable optimism and hope while civilization literally crumbles around him and his family, both in my current work-in-progress.³⁰ Or, perhaps, it is more accurate to call it a work-in-process.³¹

the new nuclear and space age 38th on the verge of apocalyptic war once again. Through its three linked novellas—and the ambiguous gaps of time situated between them—the development(s) of the state/national territories in the narrative as technology becomes reintegrated into society allows for a critical approach to the impact technology has on a developing civilization (politically, ethically, economically, culturally, geographically). How does access to information and knowledge (a central idea in the novel) create the possibility for exponential civilizational growth? How does that growth rate affect the cultural and political realities of a people? History is shown as a state of perpetual change, formation—the present of any of the three stories is merely a point of development within that process, always evolving into what will come next.

³⁰ And the moment comes where I begin to wonder where my internal confidence bursts through *too* strongly? Because here is where the thesis shifts focus from the largely theoretical to a hyperfocus on my own work, I figured it was a good place to segue into, well...myself. Yet I realize I situate myself alongside Haldeman, Miller Jr., Glissant, Calvino, Le Guin, Ellison...I suppose I am *among* them in the loosest sense, but nevertheless...that is, we are part of that humanity-wide, collective work to speculate upon our world and histories (the work of the writer). I do, however, strive to remain quite cognizant that I'm nobody, and, more significantly, wherever my work goes, it will itself remain bigger and more important than me—I'd like it to, at least. Always, in my mind, the work takes primacy. I'm merely the one who *does* it. I guess what I'm getting at here is literature is important, expression is important, and these are important and serious workers in this space that I respect. As such, I have foolishly, quixotically dedicated myself to producing work I believe is also important. I have one life, however long that is, so why would I do anything less? I also endeavor to place *my work* here, alongside these other works, not *myself* (even though it is of me) because I believe the work, while necessarily bound to its creator and creation, should be strong enough to be read without knowledge of its author and maintain its power. I have no illusions, however. Obviously, if I ultimately *go nowhere* in the end (whatever the hell that or its opposite means) so too will the work remain static. But, in stasis, it will have remained bigger and more important, so...I got *that* going for me, I suppose?

³¹ Fn. 8 details my intentional reference to "process," but here we come to the final conflict zone between the conceptualization of *process* against that of *progress*, to consider the Benjaminian reference point. I've come to think of this project as a work-in-*process* (similar to my thoughts regarding history) as opposed to specifically a work-in-*progress*. It does progress, though—the work, that is. As does history...progress along a series of cumulative happenings, developments, mutations, which is understood as "progress" in retrospect, when one turns to gaze back at it. This isn't to say the movement was ever fully predetermined, and certainly not inevitable (as I've used the early stretches of this thesis to argue firmly against), but that the extant thing has come to its present point of *being* along a particular line of progress—at any point, any outside force can (and does) act upon it, affect it, contribute to making it what it becomes and continues to become. This tension between intention and chaos, purposefulness and happenstance, "[t]his storm," as Benjamin wrote, "is what we call progress" ("Theses on the Philosophy of History"). The progress does, at any rate, occur within the process I've explicated—it is a multivalent, exigent, and urgent, *happening*, suggestive of a present, continuous motion. I'm careful not to argue that "progress" is inapplicable here—the progress is also indicative of movement along the actual pathway of historical development. I think my reticence and thinking around this subject stem

5. How the Future Narrative Works (in-process)

I wanted to begin with an image of the sky, particularly the scorching sun, embodying the thing that both makes life possible and is the inescapable source of heat that is killing all life on Earth:

A flare from above flashed across Faye's eyes as she leaned her neck back to see the white sky. Her hand shot up, blotting out the light but exposing a slit of skin beneath her sleeve that slid just slightly down her wrist to a searing burn. There was a moment of tolerance, as the heat and pain built, followed by a hiss and curse, a jerking recoil of her arm and adjustment of her jacket sleeve, but instead of keeping her arm and face down and protected she raised her hand again, fully covered now, and gazed back up and into it through the pall of light and heat. The sun had peered through a break in a long, thin cloud that stretched several miles across—hidden again, she watched it burn silent and peaceful and innocent while the sweat rolled down her face, her neck, the wrap she had across her mouth and nose, soaking in the layers of clothing that shielded her skin from its stellar radiation. (*Second Exodus* 2)

Faye's plain, expository, matter-of-fact observations express no disappointment or disgust or even resistance to the conditions of her world. She recoils in momentary pain, but immediately returns her gaze to the object of life and death, not to lament its effects, but simply to see it as it is. Implied is a capitulation to the state of things, a lack of belief in the very concept of possibility and expectation—what *is* is what *is*, and that, as they say, is *that*. To underscore the sense of all-encompassing pessimism in the world as it stands in 2067, I had envisioned the narrative beginning in Africa as far back as when the basic plot formed in my thoughts thirteen years ago,³² originally

from a certain pressure I've felt within the "halls" of academia to shy away from progress as a descriptor because of its negative connotations—that things are happening along a linear pathway that must also be positive in some way. I see this, but I also don't view the term is such a narrow way.

³² Time spent (between working on other projects) progressing from conceiving, to planning, to outlining, to sketching, reading, putting in the work of attaining all the knowledge I will need to complete the actual composition of the narrative, moving incrementally from idea to story. In the process of *writing* the novel, I've taken all that work and have begun giving it form—Lukács refers to the novel as "the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality" ("A Historico-

seeing Faye Le Guin being in the “Cradle of Humankind” in Gauteng, South Africa—the beginnings of humanity and its endings brought together in a symbolic clash that fizzles out before ever rising to a proper conflict.³³ This changed in the final build up to writing the novel, as the first locale of the narrative, being our introduction to this future world, simply had to have a more immediate connection to the central issue of climate change, environmental degradation, and the sociopolitical and -economic impacts. That was when I discovered Ceuta completely by chance...an actual place, as I worked out in Section 2, which (in addition to all the potential visual connections to be traced) stands as a vestige of past and present colonialism, providing further possibilities for historical tracings. What binds its potential historical uses to its functionality in the structure of the future narrative, however, is its literal, physical positionality—Ceuta is the closest point between Africa and Europe, a port city at the very gate of the Strait of Gibraltar, near enough to Europe that it can be seen with the naked eye, the perfect locus of colonial, economic, cultural, environmental, and political impacts effecting mass migration. It might also be said that there was a time,

Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature” 186). The novel, being an antidote to “concrete totality,” exists in a state of “transcendental homelessness” while also reaching for an all-encompassing representation of its world, real and imagined...being, as I see it, the oscillations I’ve droned on about. This movement is occurring throughout the writing process, and occurred throughout the conceptual process as well, following along with the passage of time during those years as its world—and its influences—changed around it, a state that resists totality, always beginning and always ending.³³ Just as the whole *Sophist Chronicles* sequence (as I will eventually move into dialogue with) deals with beginnings as endings, and endings as beginnings, as a way to play with symbols of emergent possibility. Receding in our orbit around Lukács, his visage remains visible if further away in Michael McKeon’s reading of what the novel is, a narrative that “decenters historical movement by representing a broad diversity of personages and a vast range of social experience as they contribute to the gradual, incremental, and deeply contextual process of historical change” (*The Theory of the Novel* 181-182). History is shown in the narrative, and the novel, not as a clean progression but a network of multivalent developments, homological and divergent at once. The future narrative, the speculation of the *not yet*, complicates this exponentially by moving the reader into a time, place, and space that has not come into being but may, applying pressure upon the present histories that are possibly contributing to the speculated development(s).

long ago, that the city might have been considered the physical edge of the world—the *end of the world*. Ceuta was simply too powerful a symbol to pass over as the physical marker of the beginning of the end.³⁴ The novel quickly moves well beyond Morocco, but the representation I am constructing of the time and place (2067 Morocco...and primarily Ceuta) is itself be a useful case study in how the processes of speculating, analogizing, metaphorizing, and affective storytelling in the future narrative work in isolation.

Returning to the earlier engagement with the accuracy of Ceuta's representation, this imagining is different than other future narratives that depict a completely alien world with its own internal politics, cultures, and histories that exist solely within the imagination despite whatever real-world influence informs them, because this Ceuta—and the vast majority of the novel's other locations—are speculations on real-world places, with real-world politics, cultures, and histories. Because of this, the world of *Second Exodus* does demand a greater degree of rigor, and as such I am not as free to invent as I would otherwise be.³⁵ I am not, however,

³⁴ Or the end of the beginning? This may be a more appropriate framing, considering the thousands of years of future history that humanity shapes beyond Earth, going from Ceuta to Geneva to the Moon to San Francisco to Luxembourg to Russia to India to China and, eventually the borderless spaces of the ark, a massive O'Neill cylinder capable of housing millions of people at its peak, to dozens of populated worlds. Both are true, in the end—in the beginning, This moment is positioned by its historical context as the end of the beginning.

³⁵ I'm drawn back to my earlier problematics regarding the defining of "truth." I say I feel responsible for getting as close to "true" as I can before that work threatens the affective capacity of the narrative—that same responsibility I've already expounded on. I don't want to shape reality around an *untruth*, and work to resist doing as much, because I acknowledge that I may be wrong about the significance I perceive in the connections I work to trace, or another person may see these connections as being less significant than I do, perhaps even insignificant. But, working within the fictional mode, there is an implicit acknowledgment that I am not even bothering to fully replicate empirical reality, but to represent it in a meaningful way—I'm free from an obligation to the type of rigor expected of a historian (even though their work does necessitate a degree of narrativization) and certainly nothing like that of a biochemist...literature being an art, after all, *not* a science. Truth, then, is a contextual matter of interpretation of material reality, and I maintain the privilege to pursue it however I choose, being the

bound to absolute accuracy, an already impossible standard without the additional challenge of dealing in the extrapolations required of the imagined future. As stated before, the purpose is not to make a one-to-one parallel, but to reach for what is possible.³⁶ To this end, the Earth of *Second Exodus* must feel close enough to our own that it cannot so easily be dismissed as fantasy—it must be different to allow for the space between material and imagined to form while also *believed enough* that the reader feels an affective connection to it, regardless if that connection can be clearly explicated, alien *but* familiar. Like constructing the narrative and composing the novel, though, this is a process, and must begin by speculating upon the possible developments of our present, material world, that aforementioned reality of Earth as it is, in a manner

one who imagines the narrative into existence. The dozens of locations of *Second Exodus*, most which have a presence in our own world, existing in physical reality, with real people, real problems, real struggles with violence being imposed upon them—my speculation is limited to some degree by history, by present conditions, by literal reality, in other ways by my relative capacity to imagine myself into the life and experience of another, by my incapacity to actually *live* it myself. Perhaps it's more appropriate to say the Earth of the novel exists at an interstice of my imagination and physical reality. The freedom to speculate upon what this other Earth is must be taken advantage of, but only so far as to bend the implicit believability of the reimagined space before it snaps altogether. The responsibility is one I impose on myself, not as a universal rule but as one I choose to abide by for sake of the creative and intellectual integrity I expect/demand of myself.

³⁶ Which gets into the earlier questions of truth versus accuracy in fiction, and of what a work of fiction *should* be. What about fiction that is intended to be read as purposeful to the real world, with intentions to reflect it even within a fictional context? Maybe all fiction is *meant* to do this to some degree...were the narrative constructed around an absurd caricature of Future Earth, I'd have greater freedom to fuck around with its believability, but I'm not. This has me thinking of a work along the lines of *A Confederacy of Dunces* or *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, which wear their absurdity on their sleeves though clearly speak to wide-ranging truths within the real world, as opposed to, say, *Salvage the Bones*, which is meant to be read as straight as possible. I approach the question as one of accuracy vs. immersion: accuracy, being the degree of adherence to known, verifiable, objective fact; immersion, being how real/true the narrative feels. This will always depend upon the demands of the particular narrative (and, aside from the sequence of *Sophist* novels, I strive to write every individual work in its own way, stylistically and structurally unique even when there might be deeper shared philosophical concerns), though as the preceding note admits it is the *Sophist* novels and *this* one, the work-in-process, most specifically in my body of work that demand that aforementioned responsibility to *truth*—not accuracy, necessarily...though neither inaccuracy. It is a fact of the matter, at any rate, that absolute accuracy within fiction is impossible, as an achievement and certainly as a standard. I suppose that responsibility I give to myself means I must always reach for accuracy where possible or necessary, but immersion takes precedent above all, to be *true as possible* to the humanity of the narrative.

close enough to our own Earth that maintains contact with the imaginably tangible. As such, China has by the late 2060s near total economic—and therefore political—control of sub-Saharan Africa, while India is a member of the UN’s permanent security council, though coastal erosion and overpopulation has already led to a decade-long war with Pakistan, made worse by the loss of Saudi Arabia’s influence on both nations, having lost nearly all of its geopolitical power due to the territory becoming literally uninhabitable (average temperatures reaching more than 125 degrees Fahrenheit). Meanwhile, Egypt is on the verge of its own war with Ethiopia, as it takes in Saudi climate refugees but refuses those from its African “cousin” because of the impact of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Nile, a conflict which leaves Iran and Turkey as the major power brokers in the Middle East with a resurgent Russia dominated by the legacy of Putin hovering over them, though Turkey, having actually overcome the autocracy of Erdogan’s regime and its successors in recent years, is attempting to work within the feeble diplomatic framework of international law amid unstable, unreliable power relations and global social unrest, limiting its overall effectiveness. But these speculations are among the many others that come into play over the course of the entirety of the novel’s first volume, that will, if I manage to succeed, complicate each other in ways that interact and continually expand the possible pathways of inquiry.³⁷ They are not present, or rather they are not fully known

³⁷ What do I mean by “succeed”? What is a successful novel, narrative, work of fiction? Let me say it’s “successful” if done *well enough* to be believable, at least on an affective level—which is arbitrary—and if it suits the narrative intentions of the writer/story—also arbitrary, though perhaps less so. If the fiction makes its reader believe in its internal reality in some way, its composition was successful...to me. It cannot be a totalized success, I suppose, because of the fictional nature—of its characters, their experience(s), their world(s)—so it doesn’t have to achieve an absolute state. But the *lacking* at work here addresses what Lukács believes is both an aesthetic and ethical problem, “of whether inner reality

to the reader here in the opening chapter, though. Here, it is Ceuta that serves as the germinal subject of my collective speculations, setting the foundation for how they will work within the larger narrative.

The question becomes: does the speculation *work*? Is it appropriate? A speculation works in a process of thinking, meditating, reflecting, deliberating, questioning, wondering and imagining...the same way history, and analogies, and the narrative work as processes, like the pursuit of the kind-of human universality I have been gesturing toward here. Do I believe the situation in Ceuta will come to resemble precisely what I have written here? I do not know...probably not. It is possible. It is possible I am too optimistic, that it will be much worse by the 2060s.³⁸ The process of

is superior to outer reality or vice versa [...] the question whether the ability to imagine a better world can be ethically justified, and the question whether this ability can serve as the starting point for a life that is rounded in itself" ("A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature" 213). The experience of reading oneself *into* the experience of another (read: *an other*) to make one empathize, interrogate, and try to understand perspectives and ideas beyond ourselves is probably the most valuable quality of the medium. A work of fiction works to relate the reader to some real-world truth through the lens of the imaginary, and is capable of examining larger implications of that so-called truth that an otherwise totally "accurate" retelling of the events may not be able to touch upon because such ideas lie beyond the scope of what actually occurred. This is because fiction can only ever represent an approximation of the real world, a speculation. Always imagining the world and its people (to whatever degree it is, as this will differ work to work, writer to writer) and, because the imagination is inherent in the form, why shouldn't it also reach for something "better"? It won't actually realize that utopia Lukács speaks of, but it allows the writer and reader to engage with the possibilities of such a world, and to imagine ways we can reach for one in the actual, the real world. The failure—or outright inability—of fiction to achieve the recreation of that reality, or the creation of a better one, doesn't negate the value of the attempt. Indeed, because failure is a precondition, isn't the attempt all the more meaningful, because it embodies the struggle against impossibility (against the cosmos itself?) for something better?

³⁸ Yet, for all my work to "struggle against impossibility," this work-in-process is like so much of my larger body of work—that is, dug deeply into the bleak probabilities of tomorrow's developmental vector(s) even as the possibilities are always there to resist. How *successful* will this resistance be...if it truly can be thought of as that...resistance implies a conscious effort, or at least concerted, *I think*...at least if we're talking about *people* here? Writing for this novel began in May 2019. During the first week of that month: the Naxalit-Maoist insurgency claimed sixteen lives in India; Putin signed state censorship of the internet in Russia into law; Cyclone Fani made landfall in India; the Mississippi River flooded to near historic levels; an ISIS attack in Libya killed nine; North Korea test-fired short-range missiles; dozens of airstrikes in the Gaza Strip carried out by the Israeli Air Force ended up destroying a Turkish media building, followed up by retaliatory strikes by Hamas, which was answered with another deadly strike by Israel; Myanmar security forces fired into a crowd of nearly 300 detained Rakhine citizens; and Michael Behenna (convicted murderer of a prisoner in Iraq) was pardoned by Trump...all in that first

historical formation is of central concern to the work-in-process, above any concern for literal accuracy—the purpose is to form a perpetual dialogue with historical conditions past, present, and future, exemplified in my possible, believable, speculated Ceuta. And I can do this over the span of an eleven-thousand-word chapter, longer than an average short story, without reaching any great revelation or resolution. That Faye is suddenly picked up and taken from Ceuta at chapter's end, leaving it and her assignment permanently abandoned, unresolved (given that the novel never returns to Ceuta), is purposeful. Ceuta's place within the narrative is as much a microcosm as any individual

week. These kinds of things are *always* happening, of course, but in retrospect the tracing of these developments from past to present to possible futures, we're able to contextualize and recognize the historical growth patterns of these happenings. We must actually do the *work* of tracing them, however.

Consider, in *just* the period of this novel's composition so far (ignoring its conceptual stages): the breaking of the Iran Nuclear Deal (which the new administration is now going have to work extremely hard to repair), undermining decades of diplomacy and normalizing relations that had the potential to help turn a whole generation away from the far right theocratic elements in the government there, and the assassination of Soleimani, further undermining international relationships that have taken decades and *wars* to build, and the betrayal of the Kurds in Syria, all of which have assisted in the rebuilding of ISIS, and far right resistance to the nebulous specter of "globalism" even though we've lived within an undeniable globalist structure since the end of World War II (and arguably before, if we are counting the interwar years where America actively ignored the forming global order and its potential threats), and the pressure test of the 2020 election, insurrection, tens of millions of supporters in favor of an attempted coup, the moving of the Overton window such that fascism has become mainstreamed, with elected officials now operating with explicit contempt for the concept of liberal democracy. In the process of writing the novel, and because the work deals in speculations upon the literal reality I, and we, currently inhabit, I've found myself taking these developments in real time and speculating outward three or four steps to search for interesting narrative threads to explore, only for my speculations to be rendered too contemporary in just a few days' time, not reaching far enough—*my own pessimism isn't even pessimistic enough*. So, I ask, are people actively resisting, or wallowing in the abyss (or, even, just choosing apathy, which is far more likely to result in the same outcome as the abyss than its opposite)? Sure, some resist. Many of us are. But is it enough? Are most people resistant to these developments, willing to do the work of tracing these processes? If sixty out of one hundred people do, is that enough to stop the decomposition from spreading? At what point have we reached a herd immunity from what Judith Butler calls a rejection of the discourse of dehumanization, a refusal to engage that only serves to empower dehumanizing processes? It is an unwillingness to even consider the humanity in the other in the way that Butler says "shore[s] up a nationalism based on its military aims and practices [and] suppresses any internal dissent that would expose the concrete, human effects of its violence" ("Violence, Mourning, Politics" 26). Probability and possibility always apply pressure on each other, but both require input from their actors. No product of the equation is guaranteed, because this is not actually math we are dealing in here, but the capacity for one to win-out over the other *is* correlated to that work being put into it, which demands that we actively turn back to return to that past that is not past.

character's story. It is a *chapter*, contributing ideas, complications, and questions to the novel that may be interesting on their own, but have no essential conclusion—in the context of the whole work, however, Ceuta and its unresolved complications speak to larger complications, and in dialogue gain far greater meaning, helping to round out the circumstances of the world to ground and build up the speculations I must make regarding the process.³⁹ That no answer is or can be given is significant because the

³⁹ There *are* returns in some sense over the course of the novel's first volume, though we never "see" Ceuta again. These are references embedded in momentary news reports running in the background as Arjun Khanna—the man who conceived, initiated, and is essentially in charge of the ark project—reflects on the first public leaks of the ark's existence, and the existence of a "seed population" list (*Second Exodus* 197). Sandwiched between one report—a discussion between two pundits, about the lack of transparency for the list and its question of accountability—and another—what is worded to seem like a single speaker, perhaps a podcaster or live streamer, speaking to his audience about how the ark population actually needs to be carefully selected and eugenics is a good thing—is a report on yet another attempt to breach the Ceuta border wall. A couple pages later, another report about the events in Ceuta is buried between other reports about the geopolitical posturing of the superpowers contending with ongoing tensions between each other as they also ostensibly work together to overcome the exposure of their ark project: "...the Commandant of the gendarmerie responsible for the defense of the Ceuta border cited as saying he did not regret opening fire on the invaders, and would do so again if they threatened the integrity of the territorial boundaries established by the Moroccan crown..." (199). Another report appears much later (about four months in the narrative), this time buried between updates on the recent assassination of the Spanish head-of-state, another attack on the wall, this time by 9000 people as a brutal sandstorm struck the area, and a short note that a mysterious flu has emerged in the region (278).

Oscillating back to the aforementioned concept of recapitulations, the returnings to Ceuta in these seemingly tangential moments are my attempts to do the work of contributing new layers of meaning to the idea (Ceuta, in this instance), to further complicate it in the larger context of the narrative(s). When we spend almost the entirety of the first chapter in Ceuta with Faye, it is supposed to feel urgent, immediate, the weight of the events happening there (bearing the cost of human life) as great as any struggle on Earth. Yet when we first "return," it's something hardly being listened to, not urgent because even bigger macro problems are happening, the weight unfelt, literally in the background—Ceuta, a microcosm of the conditions of my 2067 Earth, is recontextualized as individually insignificant in the grand scheme. When we return again, however, its juxtaposition with the political violence in Europe is the work of further complicating it, tracing a connection from its previously established seriousness and perceived peripherality with the *now* immediate threats in the "First World"—the migrants outside the wall are the other, they are "invaders" threatening those within, reflective of what Faye witnessed there in the first chapter, the same way the eugenicist pundit likely views them, the same as what we are witnessing, experiencing here and now in Europe and the US resulting primarily from the conflict in Syria and the economic situation in Central America respectively, this idea that the other is truly *other*, perhaps not even human, and certainly not worthy of the same empathetic respect. Ceuta is a footnote, an easily ignorable history within History, because of its perceived peripherality, a view that allows one to ignore that people are there, and they are suffering because of the larger problems that seem more important if one also ignores that their suffering is largely caused *by* those problems. This is gestured at during a short, blink-and-you'll-miss-it sequence where Colonel Mathias (who I will get to) considers the nations and cities the UN (and, by extension, the governmental powers) has utterly failed

lack of resolution necessitates one ask *why* that is—the reader must think of it in terms of the questions it generates rather than waiting to be told definitive solutions by the characters, which would only serve to restrict this dialogue. If the narrative process is what gives me the capacity to do this, it is future narrative more precisely that makes these speculations simultaneously and uniquely possible and necessary within a larger, ongoing and *speculative* futurological context.

Tracing a connection from the present migrant crisis and its discourse to my future Ceuta is, I believe, a useful way to imagine how what we are seeing happen now—the rise of extremist agitation, xenophobia, politics of division, media sensationalism, mis- and disinformation filling the digital archive, social media activism, the mainstreaming of fascistic rhetoric—is not relegated to present, temporary conditions, but have developed along a network of prior historical growths, and are the symptoms of much larger, far- and wide-reaching metastases that can spread farther if left untreated. The perspectives of the actors responsible for this treatment becomes a significant element now, because these are people, like any one of us, who will create their future through the actions they take within their present, which are influenced by their experiences in their world. The widespread powerlessness of the larger systems, embodied in what Faye Le Guin represents, and in her cold, distant, highly observant and aware but emotionally neutral cynicism, is juxtaposed to the

(207). I hope this does some replicating of the condition in the reader's mind space, or I'm working to make it do so—this thesis actually contains more mentions of “Ceuta” than the novel itself so far, and I will keep it this way, as Ceuta, being a single point in a much larger canvas, becomes less singularly significant almost immediately in the narrative. It is, in fact, quite normal within the novel's time and place...unremarkable, as Faye would see it. That such a sad and desperate situation has been rendered normal is the point, the nexus from which the tracings back through history and speculations onward emerge.

character of Danny Flores, introduced just a few pages later:

The void was big and dark and cold, so cold, and it *seemed* empty but that was only because looking at it all from the perspective of Earth, where everything and everyone was so close they could see and hear and smell and taste and touch everyone and everything else, and to be honest it was unfair to call the cosmos a void—it wasn't a void, it was filled with stars and planetoids and wayfaring asteroids, comets, meteors, galaxies and supermassive black holes, quasars and pulsars and blazars, galaxy filaments and the superclusters that populated them. And it wasn't dead, either, because there was so much life in it...maybe not life in the strictest sense, but a different kind of life, a life that pulsed in its connective tissues, nebulae giving birth to stars giving birth to systems of planets giving birth to...*to us*. That familial relationship, from the atomic particles given and the material attraction of those particles to others, the interconnection was obvious, it was fundamental, a foundational necessity for any of it to be. That meant something—Danny was sure of it. (*Second Exodus* 7)

We see in these opening pages both characters “looking out” and exposing their perspectives: Faye, looking to the sun, the sky, the people and institutions and environment of the world, sees no future, no possibility, just death, just a thing that she must contend with but cannot actually overcome; Danny, looking to the cosmos, sees possibility, potential, connections to make, something to aspire to and work for, a hope for the future. She sees endings, he sees beginnings. The turning back happening here—as we also suddenly depart the world Faye is living within to ascend into Danny's, the first a closed-in view from distant narrative orbit, the second a distant view of what will quickly reveal itself to be a perspective in near orbit—offers a reading of each character and world side-by-side, but becomes a rereading of each when read and understood in dialogue,⁴⁰ generating greater potential meaning to be synthesized from their

⁴⁰ In much the same way, these footnotes offer a returning, or “rereading,” of their own—or maybe it's more accurately a sequence of rereadings—of the texts I'm engaging with, those being the theoretical works, the novels, my own novel-in-process, the novel sequence, this very thesis. The commentary and work of recapitulations they provide, that is, return one back to the idea that was just engaged with, oftentimes one that has been worked toward over several pages, through several texts, synthesized into what would seem to be a singular point of contact, yet the unpacking that takes place in my working out

relationship, being the conflicts and contradictions and challenges that ultimately bind them together.⁴¹

Constructing such a wide difference in perspective between the two central characters about this situation, aside from the purpose of making them two individual characters, illustrates not just the common perspective of people in a hopeless state seen in Faye, but the uniqueness of someone like Danny, who, struggling to survive as an institutionally insignificant statistic, still manages to somehow hold onto a sense of hope and expectation. The canvas upon which to explore the vast multitudes of the human experience is laid down by Glissant's foregrounding of little-h history in the

of the thesis's ideas in its body that lead into concise claims also burst open once again from the work taking place in the periphery, an oscillation that turns back to what preceded it, gave birth to it, yet may also diverge in an unexpected way as it moves forward in its critical work. Being read again, with the knowledge of the past reading being brought to bear, new potential readings of the text(s) are opened—the footnotes, a text within a text (texts within texts), evolve in the time and space of the reading and its critical engagement, recapitulations that, like the process of historical formation, turn back to attain new, potentially larger insights into what has already happened, is happening, and creates the space to speculate on what may yet be.

⁴¹ The rereadings—embodied here by these footnotes—engender a growth of space for meaning to be synthesized within, a creative process itself embodied by the evolution of the thesis's paratextual structure, occurring symbiotically with the body's development. I stated in the very first of these footnotes, the Forethought(s) of the paratexts, that my intention is to render them as “a running dialogue, to comment on, clarify, and narrativize my creative process [...] playing around in a liminal space between what I intend either one to achieve and where I feel that I failed at achieving it, but using that space of ‘failure’ as a point of generative discourse.” And, while this may be more explicit in some areas than others, what is left unseen in the work before you now are the oscillations of the creative process itself, that growing from one state of incompleteness (maybe failure?) to another, as I have composed these dialogues, commentaries, clarifications, and critical narrative interventions alongside its body text, as I have rewritten them, and shifted them around, and created *new* interventions in the empty spaces between some and upon the wreckage of others, a discursive tracing from body to periphery, fictional work to critical work, and back again. Like the rereading that happens when I position Faye's and Danny's perspectives in tension and dialogue with one another, the footnotes (and their composition) represent an act and product of rereading, being the manifestation of my “writing about writing,” and, in many ways, the writing *about* writing about writing. Their dialogistic qualities, brought to life by the process of composing them as a narrative of my thinking through the thesis, grow even now as I write this, the very *last* of my interventions to be formulated for this work, by doing the work of “affect[ing], connot[ing], allud[ing] to, and embody[ing] the very purpose of the whole enterprise.” The novel (the work-in-process), its larger sequence of texts, the critical works I bring into discussion, the compositional and creative decisions I'm making to bring them into contact, conflict, these connections and disconnects and the dialogue that emerges occur in the people who read and experience and live them, real and imagined, binding them in a living dialogue.

confrontation(s) with big-H History. “One cannot be a historian unwittingly,” he writes, “or work on language, and yet isolate oneself from the drama of the relationship that the poet Segalen clearly identified when he tried to contrast the diversity of the world to the spread of a dominant sameness” (“History and Literature” 70). Glissant broke this down in his perception of the Caribbean as a development of its History and histories, its micro and macro conditions, people, peoples...that is, though sharing common ethnic and historical conditions, the Caribbean people have been alienated from one another via the process of the division of colonization between European powers over the centuries, dividing the peoples from one another where even geography may not have kept them apart had the presence of colonizing powers not been there—of course, without the presence of colonizing powers, the Caribbean would not exist as it currently is, many of its peoples instead having a history in other homelands far away from the island region. This leads to a division between cultures and identities and a depersonalization—the people of the Caribbean (Martinique, Haiti, etc.) identify more with their colonized background than that of their true origins, being of indigenous descent as well as African, brought over for slave labor. There is an internal conflict between the French, Indigenous, and African identities, but Glissant sees this as a place of productive discourse and synthesis, because in truth a French Caribbean individual is not merely French or merely of Indigenous or African ancestry, but a merging of them (“Introductions” 4-5). The two central characters of my present novel-in-process have fundamental differences: Faye is a renowned social scientist with vast amounts of education and a degree of social privilege that comes with it, as well as a lifetime of experience on the frontlines of Earth’s civilizational collapse, yet

she is one among the billions of “lost souls” who have lost all ability to recognize possibility, whereas Danny, an uneducated, working class Filipino-American who can barely afford to help his wife provide their home with breathable air and drinkable water, a home that is constantly threatened by the San Francisco Bay’s storm surges, with extended family living in the Philippines being ravaged by endless tropical storms and earthquakes without the means to help them, is the one who holds a naïve positivity.⁴² They are, however, both of American nationality, protected by the geographic and geopolitical conditions of the US (even as they rapidly erode), so even as they are separate from one another individually there also a separation between the two of them as belonging to the same group (being the “American” collective) and the people of Morocco being killed by their environment and kept in that suffering by their fellow Moroccans, just as there is an even further separation between Moroccans native to Ceuta and those outside the city’s border wall. This brings us back to the interviews with the Ceuta civilians and their hostility toward the refugees, many of whom are not Moroccan, but many who are. No distinction is made in their rhetoric, as everyone outside their wall—that which protects (or projects the illusion of protecting) the city, the port, the gateway to Europe, that so-close-yet-so-far visualized idea of escape from their dying nation, continent, world—exists to them as *Other*. The divisions they claim

⁴² The dialogistic character of these characters (of all my characters...and the novel itself) can also be explained in theoretical terms by *heteroglossia* as defined by Bakhtin in “From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse,” in which he comments on how language is used in the novel, as a genre—“the problem of internal differentiation, the stratification characteristic of any national language” (337). That is, the necessary obstacle of separations between individual perspectives, even within one’s own group. If we think through this further, it’s a very useful to consider the scale of the work, particularly how the macro- and micronarrative threads function alongside one another as two distinct lenses, with distinct attentions to distinct kinds of details, and each narrative thread containing within multiple perspectives that exponentially complicate the macro- and micro- lenses.

are not solely imposed by the wall's metaphoric qualities, however, because Ceuta is very much its own entity within Morocco, just as Morocco is its own within North Africa, and North Africa from sub-Saharan Africa...

For a short while [in the years following exponential sea level rise], there was a relative calm, with the M'diq migrants slowly being permitted to move from the camps outside the border wall to the camps within. This had not necessarily been ideal to the citizens already living within Ceuta—they were a Spanish Catholic majority, who primarily spoke Spanish, who followed largely Spanish traditions. After two-and-a-half years, a nearly seventy-percent Christian majority became a sixty-one-percent Muslim majority, the population doubling, and the citizens, already being pushed back from the centuries old port by rising sea levels, found their receding city growing into the shanty town at its rear fringes. With the situation within the wall volatile but (relatively) stabilized for the moment, the situation beyond the wall began to deteriorate, as other peoples across the western and southern reaches of the kingdom became inspired by news of the M'diq citizens and had begun their own trek for access to the strait and the European mainland only fourteen kilometers away, which then inspired others—Western Sahara, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, even from parts of Algeria, people had begun to move. One thousand troops guarding the border wall became two thousand became three thousand became five thousand. Even that was not enough, wall or no wall. Five thousand to patrol the two-hundred-thousand people within, in a shrinking, sinking area meant for less than half that, and however many hundreds of thousands without, pressing the defenses every day. (*Second Exodus* 6-7)

The myriad differences between these people and peoples had drawn the line(s) separating them long before the events of the novel. However, at some time, for some time, it is possible to set aside or perhaps even overcome these differences for the sake of cooperation, or at least a condition of live and let live. Conflicts will always emerge, as they do, but the potential for non-conflict is never negated by difference, merely pressured, challenged, put at risk. It is the exponential accumulation of these pressures—these traumas—in such a seemingly hopeless historical moment, though,

that affectively and effectively increase that space of division by degrees.⁴³ The question of trauma—personal, social, historical—as perhaps *the* motivating force in these intra- and cross-cultural relationships, emerges in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Great Derangement*, especially in the context of climate change and its apocalyptic impacts in the Anthropocene, the modern era, a time when “highly improbable occurrences are overwhelmingly, urgently, astoundingly real” (27). He cites from Dipesh Chakrabarty’s essay “The Climate of History,” to preface his case that historians must reimagine “fundamental assumptions and procedures” to understand ourselves in our present time because this is a paradigm in which the advancement of technology, married to the structures of colonialism and imperialism (economic and cultural), has made humans into ““geological agents, changing the most basic physical processes of the earth”” (9). That humanity has the capacity to alter nature itself through our technological interventions, which then effects downstream impacts on the peoples of the world far beyond the individual’s power to resist, is such an immense shifting of

⁴³ The literary, narrativizing process embraces the heteroglossia of language, of perspective, of reading a multivalent world and reality. It generates a consciousness “on the border between two languages, one literary, one extraliterary, each of which now knows heteroglossia, also senses itself on the border of time: it is extraordinarily sensitive to time in language, it senses time’s shifts, the aging and renewing of language, the past and the future—and all in language” (Bakhtin 337-338). Reading language here as one’s mode of expression and the medium through which such expression generates knowledge and understanding of time and place, the dialogic (rather than dialectic) does more than provide different, even conflicting perspectives on a single world. It’s quite possible that none of these perspectives are even *wrong*, given the unique experiences that inform them. The narrative—my novel—is about *people*, after all, subjects rather than objects, which I have tried (and believe am trying) to compose as representative of human beings as possible, however imagined they might be within the literal body of the text. I don’t mean that every iota of human perception is accurate—a character who denies the scientific reality of climate change is not as correct as a character who doesn’t deny it, but that denial is still true to the character, and works in dialogue with the world they inhabit to speak to other truths of their experience, being their educational background, their familial and cultural influences, access to information, and so on, working to render their individual truth (as I’ve defined it). No, what I mean is the separation between people *and* their connectivity (and that they exist in both spaces, or conditions, simultaneously) is the dialogical I find most fruitful to play with.

possibility from any preceding period, and achieved in such a relatively short expanse of time, it seems quite simple to dismiss its truth because we may have yet to fully reckon with its reality, certainly as a development of our own actions within recent history. The burden to challenge this, Ghosh states, lies not only on the shoulders of “leaders and politicians of this time for their failure to address the climate crisis” but also “artists and writers [who are] equally culpable—for the imagining of possibilities is not, after all, the job of politicians and bureaucrats” (135). In this interplaying of literature, history, and politics, I am writing my intervention into this external and internal conflict, seeking to become that witting historian that Glissant demands we be if we are to confront the diversities between and within ourselves as a place of potential transversal. Yet, as the people of my future Ceuta represent, the temporal order of “progress” is being reversed, such that “those at the margins are now the first to experience the future that awaits all of us; it is they who confront most directly what Thoreau called ‘vast, Titanic, inhuman nature’” (Ghosh 62-63). The stakes, then, are raised well beyond what I believe can be achieved by mere contemporary representation, and demand a future speculation where I meet the seemingly “highly improbable occurrences” in their potentiality—the point at which they have developed beyond the already threatening present—an acknowledgement of the “forces of unthinkable magnitude” that may allow myself, and my reader, to recognize circumstances as they currently are and to begin the work of altering course from that speculated, improbably but very possible future, “creat[ing] unbearably intimate connections over vast gaps in time and space” (63). To work at this transversal of people and peoples, the narrativizing efforts I carry out must trace possible connections

through the difficult analogization operating in oft-hidden spaces beneath the surface of the places and bodies at risk.

I see the connections as a shared trauma, a social vulnerability we have toward one another, as physical bodies within a social order that is constantly acting on us and being acted upon by us (to then turn back on ourselves and others). Judith Butler makes the case that because we are politically constituted through this vulnerability, we (being humanity) share in a *kind-of* universal condition, a shared human experience of living within our world—we share in the possibilities of the world and its traumas despite there being differing degrees to that vulnerability (“Violence, Mourning, Politics”). It is through the recognition of that condition (of our human bodies and humanity itself, a non-totalizing semblance of universality) that we can engage in the capacity to mourn the other just as we would those we deem to be “our own,” and generate a more empathetic relationship among peoples. The process is necessarily complicated, not the least by the fact that we simply cannot ever truly embody another person’s experience, but also in that recognizing and working to expose one’s vulnerabilities (bodily, economic, social, political), particularly those of others who may not be as protected from harm as oneself, we also expose that shared humanity in the O/other. Because this other is capable of being exposed in such a way, the same way as oneself, one’s own vulnerabilities open affective pathways to the analogous state of that other—if oneself is human and the other is as vulnerable, or even *more* vulnerable, that must mean they, too, are human, and worthy of empathetic consideration. Using this recognition of the humanity in those we imagine as existing separate from us, Butler proposes a process of critical engagement that works to undermine the current geopolitical paradigm, the

calculus of dehumanization that renders exploitation easier to justify and cope with and strengthens it against resistance. With all that in mind, can the Ceuta citizens truly be blamed for their otherizing of their fellow Moroccans? Perhaps in some ways, perhaps in many ways, but they are suffering within the same hopeless conditions as well—in full view of the visual metaphor of salvation that is Europe, the lives of their families just as at risk as anyone else's, just as otherwise hopeless, they project their fears onto another, *the Other*, a threat that is tangible rather than abstract, easily identified and pointed to for scrutiny. But because I am working to allow that space of difference a measure of its positive transversal potentiality, the delineation of these separations—particularly those that emerge between Faye and Danny—becomes the space of critical engagement.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ The discursive, unstable nexus in the space between *the Self* and *the Other*—and *ourselves* and *them*—might be the most important element of my project and its attempts to examine the historical process. As the novelist, I find myself “risk[ing] the Earth,” to do this, as Glissant puts it, “dar[ing] to explore its forbidden or misunderstood impulses” (“From This Discourse On A Discourse” 4). Not that I believe I, singularly, am especially suited to this task, nor that I’m alone in doing this, given the number of fiction writers in the world, *nor* that this effort can or will, on its own, have such monumental import as to put the world “at risk” to potentially, I don’t know, save it or something...I do believe, however, that it’s a collective effort on the part of every writer, to do the work of risking failure in the attempt to reach for that distant possibility. Even the greatest, most “successful” writers in this regard, I feel, will fail because the ambiguity of the separations within humanity and its (our) experience is the unavoidable reality. It is important to do the work, either way, because “[t]he history of all peoples is the ultimate point of our imaginative unconscious.”

I have no desire—and I’m not attempting—to totalize any individual, individuals, or peoples, but to imagine many possibilities yet to fully emerge. The work of the future narrative is to bridge the individual and collective, the microcosmic and the macrocosmic, as a means of challenging known History with an awareness of histories and their possible evolutions on we move forward in time—the inevitable failure to fully realize this is irrelevant in the light of the opening, willingness, and work of trying. That uncomfortable, vast nexus is what must be contended with because it’s what speaks to the actual conditions of affected peoples who exist within history. There is possibility to do *some* good in these efforts...isn’t there? Even in failure, can we not learn something? Can’t we begin to bridge the disconnections between each other, even though we all know our inherent diversities render us unique and a total human “unification” impossible, to become more empathetic beings... Still, it isn’t enough to just understand the perspective of another, of *the other*. Human life is far too dialogistic for that, far too multivalent. There’s no panacea for this condition. If nothing else, our effort to seek a greater empathetic recognition of each other must be worth that work and failure.

The seed I am trying to plant here is not of a tree that sprouts fruits of blame, though there is plenty to go around, but that, once the conditions have reached the point they have at the opening of the narrative, nothing can actually be done to change the impacts that have occurred. That there is no turning the clock back and changing what has come before puts greater weight on the present moment—that is, on history-in-process. Because these people and peoples exist within the systems of the world (political, cultural, social, economic) that have produced the conditions whose branches have grown beyond the point of no return, the rot already set in, the social and bodily trauma (in its infinitely branching degrees) must be so overwhelming and all-encompassing, as if it were part of the natural order of the world, that it becomes easy to accept that no solutions exist, people now incapable of imagining alternatives to the paradigm. And perhaps no solutions *do* exist...there is no future for humanity because the cancer has spread too far, poisoned too many organs, and all that remains is a series of treatments for symptoms that buy time but offer no expectation of survival.⁴⁵ This reality is something I want to make explicitly clear that Faye accepts implicitly—it is

⁴⁵ The pharmakon the people of *Second Exodus* pursue is the Ark *Titan*, a symbol of possibility to begin the world over again, of the privileging of a select few above many others, of the lie that *Earth* is what needs to be overcome—it is remedy, poison, and scapegoat, as formulated by Derrida (“Plato’s Pharmacy”). Clear to someone like Faye, the problems lie within humanity, not the planet—the “end of the world” the characters are striving to resist is not truly the end of *the world* but the end of humanity, civilization, the world as it currently is. At humanity’s end, people and civilization will die but Earth will go on, probably better off, breaking down over time every last sign of our existence, until eventually nothing is left, as if humanity were never here. We must also remember that Earth will eventually disappear itself, swallowed by the expanding star as it dies out billions of years from now, no trace of this planet left in the universe, and no one to tell its story, to hold onto its memory, the microcosm of Earth just as insignificant in the macrocosm of the cosmos as humanity was to Earth. The threat of that reveal, of humanity’s cosmic insignificance, is what the ark represents to people, even if they don’t realize it. Faye, having no faith that humanity will make use of the possibility embodied in the ark, struggles to accept it but slowly, over time, begins to pursue potentiality. Danny, having that faith despite having no reason to maintain it, comes at it from the opposing direction and has his unearned optimism slowly eroded until, at some point, their perspectives meet and they serve as refractions of one another, of either side, and the possibilities inherent that burst through that transversal.

a part of her very identity as the macrocosmic anchor. In fact, she had been on the verge of turning the Ceuta assignment down before the UN officials make it clear to her that they do not actually expect her to find answers, just to serve as a quick and easy band-aid for the public's benefit, as is revealed when events at the end of a long, violent day in the port city lead her to reflect on her decision to accept the assignment in the first place.

[...] she let them complain that the day's events had cost them valuable time and may have hindered their ability to come away with an actionable plan by the target date.

Actionable? She narrowly stopped herself from laughing. Actionable...meaning something to be done about the situation below, a solution...Our people are concerned and they need to know something is being done about this crisis, the chairman told her. She had not known how to answer, so she started to leave. Before she had reached the door, he said, They're afraid, terrified, but they have their own problems to worry about at home, and the problems elsewhere, well, we simply can't solve every problem. Stopped, intrigued, she had asked what that meant, precisely. We have to show that we're doing *something*, the chairman said, So long as everyone sees that we've tried, they'll know we're watching over, they can rest easy, so long as they *see*. And Ceuta, she asked. It's a terrible crisis, he said, Horrible, an impossible...you'll go, and we will speak to our people, and...who can expect much else? (*Second Exodus* 18)

Only upon realizing the officials share her total hopelessness did she accept: to go there, observe, record, report and analyze at great physical risk to herself...only if those she is providing this to also understand there's nothing they can do. The conditions can be analyzed and understood, but they cannot be undone. To Faye, it would be beneath her—a contemptable position—to have to do this work of sociological research and analysis for people who were naïve enough to believe what is happening (meaning that which has already happened) could be fixed in some way. She would have laughed in their faces and walked out, just as she fights back a chuckle at two of the other researchers sent along with her who try to mask their helplessness by blaming her for

their inability to “come away with an actionable plan.” That plan, of course, being the report they are putting together for the Spanish government and UNESCO, a bad faith effort made to appear in the best faith possible. She does not sympathize with the report’s cynical intent, but, as a person with a cynical perception of humanity, knows her work’s only value is in its capacity to describe—prescribing potential remedies in the world with no future is a waste of time, energy, and a foolish enterprise doomed to utter failure. My assessment of her attitude can be easily explained by Kierkegaard’s idea that life can only be lived forward and understood backward. Bound to her time and place, she is also implicitly aware of her inability—humanity’s inability—to do anything about the past that has brought these conditions about. To her, really, the people responsible for such things are precisely the people who are unable to recognize this, who lack the capacity (or willingness) to know that their decisions and actions have such weight that the consequences of what they do reverberate through time. Again, my interest is not so much in blame because, while accountability is and always will be important, blame deals with the past, that which cannot be changed, while my engagement is with the process while existing *within* it. Building upon my previous historical tracing of Ceuta (from Section 2), Faye and Dr. Martinez navigate the port town and she finds herself surrounded by its historical remainders—the scars of history. The landmarks from the past centuries that remain behind—the 12th Century Arab Baths, the Royal Walls that date back to the 10th Century, the 13th Century Marinid Walls—mark the past and the passage and destruction of time (12-13). Any and all observation and analysis of these artifacts will speak to that past, and will help one understand it, and, being present, one might even be said to be forging some connection

to that past, yet for all the “understanding” one is capable of, there is no using that understanding, the potential knowledge attained, to change any of it. Decisions are made, actions are taken, and what happens cannot be taken back, cannot be undone. The same can be said about the environmental degradation taking place, occurring on the micro and macro scales, but zooming out widens that scope to view the globalized reality of the present and future world and see that decisions and actions, in such a paradigm, have the capacity to impact the whole planet ongoing—from the present moment and into all future days—and the greater the capacity, the greater the potential power, the greater the responsibility, and can the stakes of these processes get any higher than the future of life on Earth? This becomes more clearly drawn once Faye and her “decision committee” come together (e.g., a Chinese environment economist, a South African cultural psychologist, an Indian population geographer, etc.), each of whom must contend with their own political, cultural, ethical, and moral obligations and biases in the process of deciding who among the human species is “worth” selecting for the ark.

This narrative thread runs through the first volume of the novel (roughly the first third of the total book) while the second volume covers the ongoing consequences of their actions over the following forty years aboard the ark. My engagement, then, is acknowledging the powerlessness Faye and the masses feel, but as *one* understanding of reality, however ubiquitous it may be, so that I might break down the divisions within that separate those who fall into that collective, tracing the process of how such knowledge was formed (historically, epistemologically, affectively), finding points where alternative growths might be able to deviate from the anticipated pathways and

offer a possible freedom, to then speculate my way toward a potential realization of it.⁴⁶ This is always possible because what is done here and now matters—it is the seed of what comes next. The future is forged in the present, and the consequence(s) of action *are* history. What each and every one of us does here and now is history.

Faye's story in the opening chapter takes up the vast majority of its 11,500 words, though it is actually Danny who emerges from these opening pages, and the whole of the first section of the novel, as the more *exposed* character of the two—Faye is something of a cipher here, reserving her emotional responses in favor of the task she has taken on, and for much of *Act X: The Human Calculus* she withholds a great deal from the page...which itself is part of who she is at this stage in her life, and a part of her journey through Act X and into Act XI, when most of the narrative's (surviving) characters, after having endured the events that bridge the vastly differing sections of the story, are so fundamentally impacted that they have largely flipped to their inverse and must either try to find a way back to some reconciliation between their past and present selves, give in to who they have become, or surrender to the despair of never

⁴⁶ Turning back upon Benjamin:

The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. ("Theses on the Philosophy of History")

Faye, being who she is, is uniquely capable of standing at Point K and knowing the ten degrees of separation from Point A, and even tracing how those developments occurred to be able to speculate upon what shape L, and M, and N, and Z could potentially take based on the patterns she sees. Being only human, however, she cannot alter the past, and must contend with its leftover wreckage. But embedded in Faye's pessimism and cynicism is a flickering of conscientiousness—the uncritical ignorance necessary to believe that the problems of Ceuta (and the world) can be fixed with a little bit more "understanding" distracts from that present opportunity to recognize that, within that wreckage, the process and progress of historical formation can be influenced ongoing. That slightest hint of possibility in Faye's perspective is hardly perceptible now, without having knowledge of where she ultimately goes in the narrative several hundred pages from this point, up to and through the novel's second volume, but it is there, if presently overburdened by that very Benjaminian pessimism.

being able to “find their way” out of the darkness. Faye is not without personality, however, but as the macrocosmic anchor of the narrative, she represents the all-encompassing cynicism of the masses, even though she, arguably, is more calculated about it than most. Incredibly personal circumstances, along with the global conditions, have brought her to this place, but that loss of hope is the common state of being across many segments of 2067 Earth as I speculate it to be—worldwide conditions influence personal struggles, which, on the macro scale, metamorphose into a shared, universal experience. Her initial dominance of the opening chapter sets the stage for understanding the general hopelessness of the world, while the rare, distant light of aspiration (in the guise of Danny) barely peers through the overwhelming darkness—it *does* emerge, though, and is central to how the future narrative functions.

Returning to the previously cited passage I introduce Danny with—“The void was big and dark and cold [...] That meant something—Danny was sure of it.”—we see that it opens a new section of the chapter, labeled as taking place elsewhere from Faye’s Semi-Autonomous Ceuta, specifically aboard “Waste Retrieval Rig-7, Outside Cometica Orbital Station” (7). Using a kind of elevated language that waxes philosophical about the limitless potential inherent in the cosmos, it feels vastly different from anything that preceded it. Here is clearly a new perspective that feels wondrous, playful, very personable, capable of a breathless passion, all absent from the world Faye exists within. By the end of the paragraph, it is made explicitly clear we are inside a very different perspective—that of Danny, someone capable of dreaming. I make this distinction most clearly in the final sentence: “That meant something—Danny was sure of it” (ibid). This character, so different from Faye, actually believes

in something, in some nebulous cosmic possibility that cannot quite be pinpointed or clearly expressed. So how does he know this? What makes him so certain?⁴⁷

Let us remind ourselves of Adorno, the intellect and emotion, the inexplicable yet recognizable nature of experience,⁴⁸ and then focus on the sentence: “That meant something—Danny was sure of it.” *That*, being the infinite possibility of the cosmos, holds a significance Danny professes to *know* exists. How *does* he know this? There’s a certainty to this statement, similar to the kind that Faye has toward the decaying of the world, but one the second half of the sentence seems to insist upon. It seems to needlessly reiterate what has just been implied in “That meant something,” making the

⁴⁷ Stepping back just a moment, the so-called “elevated” language of the opening observation is meant to create the sense of what he is thinking and feeling, but not necessarily his *exact* thoughts. There are direct thoughts, clearly delineated from everything else by italics, but every word is, in its own way, the character’s thought. This is significant because I’ve crafted (or at least have made decades’ long attempts to craft) a “three-layered” voice for the *Sophist* sequence, giving these particular novels a stylistic consistency. In it, the narration has three “perspectives” working in tandem at all times. The first, most obvious, is the not-quite objective third-person limited perspective, a neutral-esque perspective of events. The second is the personality and emotional condition of the perspective character at any given time (being Danny in this scene). The third is the actual thoughts of the perspective character. As such, the story is told from a limited-third person that adopts the persona and emotional state of the current POV character and also delves, at times, into the precise thoughts of that character—imagine the perspective character narrating their experience to you in the third-person so that their personality oozes through the spaces between the letters and words and sentences. It is the subconscious constantly applying pressure on the conscious mind.

Part of my intent is to allow me to feel more freedom to jump back and forth between different characters (as, while Faye and Danny are the two central figures, the novel as a whole follows roughly twenty significant and conflicting perspectives). First-person would make this much more complicated and overall less interesting, having to label every shift with the character name and so forth instead of being able to craft characters to the point that the reader can tell who is being followed at any given time based on the personality, perspective, voice, etc., before ever having to say “Danny,” or “Faye,” or whomever. More significantly, this makes it possible to generate a much closer, deeper emotional resonance between reader and character, as you are never too far from the character’s experience. This opening paragraph is both Danny’s perspective and not at once—Danny, lacking a robust formal education, would never voice or write about his feelings using these words in this way. He isn’t unintelligent, this simply isn’t how his conscious mind operates. It is, however, how he *feels*. These are his inexpressible feelings being expressed. This makes the reader (I hope) feel how Danny perceives the cosmos without having to state in a boring manner “Danny thought the cosmos held limitless potential.” I believe this style lets me compose a story that the reader becomes engulfed in rather than a story the reader is told, which is, to me, too passive and dismissing of the power of the imagination.

⁴⁸ Turning back to Section 3, pp. 27-28.

reader (I hope) question why that is, why I chose to make the character effectively repeat himself, as if the very assertive “That meant something” needed further buttressing to be rendered definitive. That implied act of questioning should, in theory, drive the reader to wonder if that certainty is perhaps less stable than it appears on the surface. The conclusion must be reached in retrospect, because we know little about Danny personally at the end of this paragraph aside from him being different from Faye and everyone we have encountered thus far. Reading on, we learn that he is a working-class guy, not well-educated but well-experienced. He is a family man in a system that no longer has a working class—he works long, hard hours and overtime and can barely afford the bills along with wife’s pay as a school counselor, constantly fearing the impending automation of his industry and on the verge of being unable to afford his house’s monthly filtered water and air rations. Yet, he is a friendly, kind-hearted, easy going person...optimistic to a fault, in fact. He is not unaware of the impending doom in his personal life, or in the world around him, or of the near total lack of potential for things to get better, but he still believes, and here lie the seeds for the greater narrative. Reading further, page by page, chapter by chapter, Danny Flores is gradually revealed and the answer to how he “knows” that which he knows becomes obvious: he knows because he simply believes it to be true. Several chapters and about six months later, while Earthside between work rotations, Danny confronts a neighbor, Jesse, who has shown increasingly erratic behavior since the delivery business he and his wife ran went under in the middle of worsening financial problems created by a plague outbreak on the outside of San Francisco’s sea wall. Jesse, in the dead of night, wanders zombie-like around another of their neighbor’s homes, a neighbor who has recently installed

an expensive moisture collector system that allows them to better manage the rising monthly costs of clean water. Danny gathers him, deescalates a potential confrontation, and brings him back down the block where their own houses are situated. Then Danny goes to work:

Danny nodded. “Things are real rough, huh?”

Jesse blinked slowly, felt like he’d shrugged with his eyes.

“I tell you, friend,” Danny said, “I’m having a hell of a time of it, myself. A *hell* of a time.”

“What is it you do?”

“I mean, I work and focus myself on stuff I can get done. And there’s always my family. They’re a damn good...anchor, I guess? Thinking about Emilia, and hanging with Jaco, when he was still young and dumb enough to think hanging with his dad was cool. They’re the ones that make it all worth it, am I right? In the end, nothing else really matters.”

Jesse exhaled slowly, looking away from him. “I mean *about* it...”

“Oh, well...that’s...” Danny scratched his upper lip through his mask—Jesse was facing him again. “You do whatever you need to. Right? Whatever needs to be done.”

His friend’s brow slid down, then he lowered his head, turned, and started wandering toward his front door.

“Hey? Jess?”

The guy stopped, real slow. He turned around.

“You’re okay. You got to be. You’re still here. That means you have a chance, don’t it? Even...even if it’s not *this*, it’s something.”

No answer.

Danny started leaving, too. He stopped at the lip of the street and checked. Jesse was at the front step. The door was open. Maribeth was there.

He raised a hand in a wave, but she didn’t react. Maybe she didn’t see—it was dark in the street.

Walking to his house, Danny noticed the moon in the sky, unseeable stars beyond.

(*Second Exodus* 164-165)

Jesse, completely taken by his growing dread (which will burst into a fit of rage, murder, and suicide in a future, not-yet-written chapter), offers no further response or even reaction to Danny once he gets an answer to his question—the question of how

Danny copes with the dreadful hopelessness of their living conditions—because he does not believe there to be possibility, however remote. For Jesse, and the billions like him around the world, there is no longer any reason to believe, no evidence of a potential improvement, no escape. Whereas people of Ceuta and the broader “Third World” might still grasp onto the imagined hope of fleeing their dying homelands, Jesse lives in what is, relative to my 2067 North Africa, the highest, most secure reaches of society, or close enough to it that there is no longer anywhere else to escape to—Jesse might be able to see the skyline of the high buildings on the “safe” side of the sea wall, but knowing he will never move his family there, it exists as an impossibility. Danny, however, does believe, and even after witnessing the physical manifestation of hopelessness, he can still look up at the night sky, where the light pollution of the city and the thick, rust-colored fog blots out the stars, and *still* know they are there.⁴⁹ So the mere fact that there is some imaginable but inexpressibly powerful interconnectedness inherent and necessary in the fabric of the cosmos that renders it all possible, that any of it even *is* in the first place...*that* means something. What does it actually mean? He cannot say, not even subconsciously. It does mean something, though, because it is a “fundamental, a foundational necessity” for existence to even be. And he is sure of this because that is who he is, how he thinks. He does not quite know what the significance of all this is, which is why his thought process never tries to justify it further. The fact that it *is* in the first place is significant in and of itself, and therefore must mean something important—his faith in what the limitless possibility the cosmos represents

⁴⁹ I feel Glissant pressing against the fabric of my creation here: this inexplicable connection of universe and individual, in Danny’s eyes and mind, is the subterranean convergence of all things made manifest, not obscured by the dancing water’s surface but by the multidimensional fabric of the cosmos.

has convinced him that at some point in the future, unforeseeable but bearing the capacity for it, something different and potentially good can happen. Taking all this together, I believe the paragraph manages to introduce the dreamer aspect of Danny's personality while inspiring questions about the kind of person who thinks and feels this way, as well as beginning to position the reader within his own unique internal logic, offering that singular hint of light engulfed by the overwhelming abyss of Faye's narrative thread.

What is significant about this as it regards the future narrative is its orienting capacities, of time and place, time and space, and language.⁵⁰ Language is never detached from content and meaning, and these projects within the larger project are conceived and constructed using the language of science fiction as laid out by Delany. To remain on that single paragraph for just another moment, Danny's observations of Earth from his garbage collection rig in orbit and of the "stars and planetoids and wayfaring asteroids, comets, meteors, galaxies and supermassive black holes, quasars and pulsars and blazars, galaxy filaments and the superclusters that populated them" are "science fictional" not because they deal with space things, but because they depend upon a futurological context to make sense (*Second Exodus* 7). Though the

⁵⁰ I'm freed by the canvas to place this seed here and leave it be, to let it germinate and grow in the reader's subconscious without having to quickly clear up any uncertainty of character within the next few hundred or thousand words, just as I can lay the bleak seeds of skepticism in Faye's narrative and allow those to develop without the need to pose immensely complex questions and immediately answer them, questions that, frankly, no intellectually honest person would claim to truly *know* the answers to. In this way, I am able to craft a text that lets the diverse and often conflicting perspectives of many people from many backgrounds expand upon themselves, interact, and challenge one another, in the process complicating and deepening the complexity of the possibility of people and peoples—it's a reaching for a sense of universal diversity, possible to freely explore without immediate consequence only in the great expanse of the fictional space, expanded further by the boundaries of the speculative experiment of the future narrative.

contemporary world exists within a kind of space age, the act of actually leaving the Earth's atmosphere is one of incredible rarity. So few people have been into space that the idea still might be said to bear a mythical or mystical quality to the average person, of an experience far off because the technology required to make it possible, let alone practical, remains far removed, something to speculate about but not yet realize. Yet the cosmic connection Danny perceives is a physical one in direct contact with him on an atomic level, as if the universe were itself a living organism whose "connective tissues" pulse with blood, populated with these celestial bodies and nebulae that literally give birth to stars from the same atomic particles that human beings are made up of. Certainly, there is a hint of mysticism, or spirituality rather, to the way Danny sees these things and their relationship to him, but they are undeniably tied to a specific tangibility that could not so easily apply to the average person today, and even less so to a 16th Century priest praying for a connection to the Christian God. Moreover, this wonder is reserved for the cosmos as a whole, at the idea of going beyond his present moment, itself already a future moment to us—Danny's mundane is our incredible. All said, the cosmos is a physical entity to Danny, one he can reach out for and touch, because he exists at a point that the universe is the next step as opposed to the many, many miles beyond it is to the reader in the present day. Implicit is his familiarity with space beyond Earth's atmosphere, having spent half of his life leaving Earth's surface the same way a number cruncher spends half their life commuting to a square, fluorescent office cubical.

This can be observed pretty clearly in the passage that immediately follows the one I have been droning on about:

The horn sounded, the red light overhead turned blue, and a dull, clambering pound of machinery beneath the deck signaled that the waste disposal capsule was emptied. Danny cleared the job in the computer—Capsule C-27—as the magnetic arms extended out to return the capsule to its compartment in the side of the station. Once the capsule slid in and locked in place, the magnetic arms detached and began retracting. The blue light turned green, and Danny pulled the craft from the station’s synchronous revolution before he heard Marcus call from the arm control chamber for him to get a move on, they were hitting up close to lunch time and still had another deck to finish. It was a slight adjustment on the controls to pilot the craft to the next capsule, a swift kick and nudge with the counter thrusters, then a soft tap to level off, using the numbers in the computer to match speed, trajectory, and orbital descent, locking them into the station’s precise rotation. Connecting to the station’s security network, he punched in clearance and accessed the system to secure the disposal conduit inside and release the capsule’s locks.

Danny adjusted himself in his seat while Marcus worked the magnetic arm and tugged at his harness to stretch his back and neck—a pen floated out of his pocket, and he reached out, grabbed it, and stuffed it back into his jumpsuit. He settled in again and waited as the arm extended, locked on, pulled the capsule back, bent at the hinges, connected it to the vacuum seal at the craft’s underside, and the waste material was siphoned into the compartment belowdecks. The horn sounded, the red light turned blue, and the siphon tube resealed itself with a hearty mechanical pound. Then the arm extended again, replaced the capsule, released, and retracted. The blue light turned green, and Danny shifted the craft over to the next capsule.

Delicate thrusts synced them with the station, then the security clearance, capsule retrieval, content collection, and capsule replacement. Red to blue to green.

Another capsule. With a green light, the craft moved to the last one on this deck.

Moving up along the side of the station required only a minor difference in control, guiding the craft on the opposing axis rather than laterally against the rotation. Then he synched them, cleared security, and watched the arm retrieve the capsule and return it after it was emptied. Red, blue, green. Then the next one.

(Second Exodus 7-8)

The task of acquainting the reader with the job Danny does and the inescapable tedium of it by manipulating the voice and tone, turning to more plainly descriptive, unemotional sentences, putting the reader through the same repetitive paces that Danny’s job and existence put him through, is very much in-line with what could be done within the naturalistic mode that Delany identifies. But, being within the

speculative, these same otherwise “relatable” sentences attain greater meaning. The reader can’t make sense of vacuum seals and orbital descents and counter thrusters on opposing axes and “Danny pull[ing] the craft from the station’s synchronous revolution” in a wholly naturalistic way, because for a (space) station to revolve, it requires a zero gravity environment, and the act of revolution itself is what generates the centrifugal force of the gravity within. This realization places the demand on the reader to consider the time in which the story’s events are occurring, the time the reader lives within, and how one gets from Point A in the present to the narrative’s Point Z...a thought process that blossoms outward to the realization that the process by which these things happened extend beyond both the reader’s present and the narrative’s present, because the here and now isn’t the beginning of events by which the station and Danny’s rig came to be, and the narrative isn’t the end, so the reader is placed at, say, Point K, and the narrative at Point P. Now the realization bursts into the wind, the reader oriented in such a way that the present is not a beginning or end of anything, but somewhere *within* the process—the present is not outside of history, but within it, placing a greater consequential weight on what is *happening*, bridging the happened, happening, and not yet happened into a discursive dialogue such that the language of science fiction cannot be divorced from the historical process. It is a multigenerational language that enlarges the reader’s understanding of their place within the process by embodying the urgency of historical formation, that the present, existing within history, being a part of it, is the creative force of the future, whatever it does develop into.

This thinking through the process is expanded further in the long paragraph spanning pages 8 and 9, as Danny’s thoughts fall onto the immediate material concerns

of his life and livelihood—his job, as an orbital garbage man, is on the verge of obsolescence, if it isn't already there. The possibility of being replaced by an AI piloting program hovers over every moment of his working day, something many other companies in orbital waste management have already begun, but his own, Chinese-owned, company has yet to do so simply because it doesn't have enough money to retrofit the collection rigs (a minor but thematically significant subplot that plays out over the course of the first fifteen or so chapters). Again, we see the loss of possibility, as no new rig operators have been hired in a long time, so he has had no one to potentially train, and, because the company is struggling and can barely afford to pay its workers, let alone keep the collection rigs maintained, it's on the individual operator crews to desperately carry out constant duct tape style repairs on their craft to prevent the company from exploiting the opportunity to shitcan them and shed payroll. And what else are these people to do? They cannot simply pick themselves up by their bootstraps and pursue a new career. Danny begins the novel in his mid-forties, having done this job for two decades, a working-class person through-and-through. Is he to go back to school and get a degree while his house is filling with unbreathable air and lead and sewage-contaminated water pours from his faucets? Most importantly, I end this paragraph on the main point that, I hope, poses a significant question. "Bossman wasn't *so* bad, though—he paid, at least. People, that was" (9). Despite everything, Danny is capable of seeing the good in the guy. In part, this is a testament to his optimistic, empathetic nature. More significant to the language of science fiction is the act of having to point out that the guy is okay *because* he paid for labor "at least." That this is noteworthy at all implies larger problems with the nature of one's work, employment,

and ability to earn a living, particularly in the conditions described, in which a working class is effectively extinct. This culminates in the final gut punch clarification that the boss, indeed, pays *people* for their work. People, as opposed to machines, or perhaps the companies that build, maintain, and/or license the machines. That *this* needs to be pointed out raises the questions and concerns in the mind of the reader to think through what has happened between now and then to make it so, a completely understandable condition that is consistent with the naturalistic perspective, but depends upon the rhetorical and temporal oscillations of the future narrative to be fully realized. There are still workers, but there are fewer and fewer of them, and they simply do not earn enough to keep a roof over their heads, competing with computer programs to earn that living, programs that do not have to work to survive. More so, there are no *new* workers. Once people like Danny are finally brushed aside, that will be that. These conditions *do* exist presently, if in less extreme terms (perhaps just as extreme if we look beyond the borders of the “First World”) but the point stands that in the richest and most powerful nation in history, poverty remains a widespread issue, a constant threat that puts the lives of hard-working people at risk. That this sentence and all it evokes can speak to fears in a contemporary context is revealing enough, but as a sentence in a future narrative where it speaks not just to the fear of something not yet happened but to what is in the process of happening—both possibility and reality—the idea becomes urgent, the connection back to the present no longer hyperbolic but prescient, in that the reader is given to recognize a painful familiarity and closeness to the speculated, not-yet realized future by tracing backward the evolutionary (or de-evolutionary?) stages of historical formation, from not yet happened to happening to already happened.

Akin to historical and historiographical inquiry, the dialogic processes of science fictional language—the questions and connections it generates—work over the space and time of the narrative. Compare Danny’s introductory scene with a passage from a later chapter, where we follow his son Jaco for the first time. Here, Jaco roams the deteriorating streets of South San Francisco and San Bruno, observing the incredible disparity of mega wealthy and impoverished as if it were the worst parts of Mumbai, with the average citizens living in near shanty towns and the few remaining technocrats safely behind their newly constructed and patrolled seawalls that protect them from the worsening storm surges and rising sea level. He reaches the waterline and takes an improvised boat—a few wooden boards tied together—just outside the former location of SFO, now five feet underwater and abandoned.

Jaco let his legs hang out over the edge of the raft. The water was warm. He looked out past the airport, deep into the San Bruno streets where he could just barely make out the outline of the sea wall and the lines of towers that rose above it. Dark specks moved between them, delivery drones and other aerals, traveling in the safety of the towers. The wall extended beyond where the water reached, covering the streets around Tanforan and west along the edge of Golden Gate National Cemetery, just above where his parents’ house was. Everywhere he looked, there were people who lived right below, security forces watching them from checkpoints, eyes watching them, secure far above. They’d see what the people had to do, going to horrible lengths just to survive to the end of the day, fighting for every inch of space like animals, whose struggles were easily disregarded under any other circumstance except when they were needed to be blamed for something. A public nuisance. An eyesore. A drain on the system. Dangerous. And they were, because they were made to be that way. And that they struggled so desperately against that truth made them worse than the animals the people above believed they were. (*Second Exodus* 52)

Jaco directs his nihilism and contempt at everyone—the people living in the towers for hiding behind their seawall, and the people below it with him who have not completely given up, who struggle to survive, who fight with the PMCs that protect the wall, who

go to school and work as if it will get them anywhere, because that inkling of hope is, to him, worthless, pathetic even, and so they *are* what the people behind the wall treat them as...they are like animals, too stupid to recognize there's no hope, no future. This goes beyond Faye's hopeless apathy even, positioning Jaco and his generation of "roamers" as the future of humanity—young people, some adolescent, some older, who leave school and home and devote their remaining days to just roaming their crumbling, dying cities because the only experience to be had in the few miserable years ahead of them is a slow, withering death spiral. That is, there is *no* future.⁵¹ Time once again plays a role here, as Danny, in his early- to mid-forties at the start of the novel, is part of the older generation who has lived through parts of the early 21st Century and maintain memories of when the world was in a slightly better place. His college-aged son, on the other hand, is part of the younger generation whose only experience is with a world in the current state, where there is no reason to hope, left to be completely

⁵¹ I might say Jaco is the bleakest of all perspectives throughout the novel's first volume. His is also probably (if I'm being honest) closest to myself...I am not him, and he is not me, because he has abandoned all possibility, whereas I, obviously (I think?), work to resist despair. I also work very hard to avoid writing myself into my characters—if a character feels too much like me, as if I too closely recognize their exact response to things as reflecting my own, I will rewrite the character in total...but this current work-in-process seems to have emerged more urgently than others, and I believe more of me has slipped into them than I prefer, for better or worse. For Jaco, his perspective is most accurately described in relation to myself as an exaggeration of my position on these matters—I have yet to "devolve" to the point of blaming people suffering under the macro conditions, which they have no immediate influence over, *for* their suffering. That would be cruel, given my own position within those same conditions, a rejection of the sense of empathy I truly feel I'm working to generate. Jaco, however, being a fellow sufferer in those speculated conditions, which are far worse than my own—and being an *imaginary* person—is freer to do this otherwise despicable thing, which I am making him do, what may be a despicable act of my own that allows me to pose questions about the nature of such feelings. I don't believe *he* truly believes these things, though...he believes he believes it, but his growth over the course of the novel, from a terrified young man (basically a kid) without a reason to believe in a future for himself, to a mature and determined man covering the social unrest of the ark's first decades as a journalist, shows that he wasn't lost, just as most people like him probably aren't truly lost...they just need some recognizable light to work toward, and a sense that they have agency over that work, however bleak it appears to be.

apathetic, cynical. Danny's generation, though full of similarly hopeless people like Faye, is still capable of some semblance of belief, optimism, and a capacity to hope because they have that experience—the older generation is now the one capable of being “dreamers,” whereas the younger generation is jaded, defeated, beaten down by life. Because how else is a college-aged person going to turn out, being unable to pursue any perceived higher calling because the world around him is figuratively and literally crumbling, drowning, dying, with no individual ability to contribute positive change and no institution capable of stopping the collapse? Jaco has grown up in one of the world's most prosperous cities (read: “prosperous”), in a situation where, despite his lack of opportunities and his parents' financial struggles, he has a home to go to at night if he chose to stay there, yet the reality is where there is no expectation for one's struggle to bear fruit, what reason is he given to even try? The only logical response to the conditions of life in San Francisco, the United States, the world, is disdain for anyone who is pathetic enough to do so.⁵²

⁵² To bring back into dialogue my reasons for purposely seeking to write myself into the abyss and not hold back (fn. 16), the pessimism of the characters and world of this narrative (its first volume in particular, which all of these passages come from) can be easily characterized as an abyssal despair. And if I am using something of myself within this work, then part of this character comes from my own feelings that, despite our best efforts to affirm that “things get better,” they never really do. The further we move in our lives, the more weight we carry, the more baggage we collect, the more burdens we take on, until we're just too weak to continue carrying it all and our bodies, minds, and souls (whatever that intangible essence of ourselves is, since I don't believe in souls) simply cease...

Am I being extreme? Sure, I recognize that. But entertain this tangent (it'll get somewhere eventually)...I just spent three hours (quite literally three whole hours), beginning at 4:30AM, fighting with a backed up toilet, one that has been giving me trouble ever since moving into my current (temporary) residence, which I helped my father move into after his previous landlord lost the house we'd been renting for nearly fifteen years in a messy divorce...after having been lied to about the urgency of the situation, then being given four days to pack up a three bedroom home, find a new place to live, and move everything in, this as I was beginning a quarter of graduate school a hundred miles away. Back to the toilet in question—wait, this toilet comes *after* having spent eight hours earlier in the day dealing with far-right conspiracy theories and literal Nazi content (working in social media, I'm paid to watch, listen, discuss, and debate this stuff, which never ends), then hours of reading and working on *this* thing. Then, finally, as I am prepared to consider lying down, the toilet decides, “No.” This toilet, mind you,

That said, the work-in-process is very much an attempt to compose a literature that imagines humanity outside the present sociopolitical paradigm, to borrow from Gayatri Spivak's desire to overcome the arbitrary divisions of peoples by "bounded nations" and "located cities" and reach a kind of all-inclusive collectivity of peoples (*Death of a Discipline* 93). This is rendered most clearly in the conditions of the narrative, as the survivors who are forced to abandon Earth will inevitably outgrow its imposed micro and macro connections over the course of generations, eventually reaching a point where Earth and its national and cultural divisions are lost to the void of cosmic History. And, while these survivors will maintain these connections in the immediate future, they are nevertheless being removed materially from their conditions and moving irreversibly farther and farther away, never to return. This idea is developed at length throughout the narrative, as the novel's first volume covers plot

will plug up at times if you flush an empty bowl. If you think negative thoughts, it'll give you a hard time. Forget looking cross at it—it'll just overflow on you. Which it did this time. Twice. So I plunge it, for three straight hours, before finally getting to a time late (early?) enough that I can call a plumber to come and do the work, then staying up another hour waiting for him, so I get to writing *this*, and, not going to lie, there was a lot of splashing, sloshing...so even with clean clothes on now, my body isn't clean, and I'll have to take a shower, but *can't* because the plumber isn't here yet, and I can't shower until I clean the bathroom thoroughly...twice over, to be on the safe side... All this, as I contemplate how much I hate my life and write these words, a footnote (a tangent of a tangent) in my Master's thesis, in literature, something I am paying for, and going into debt for...don't get me wrong, literature is my passion, and its relationship with history and our (meaning humanity's) empathetic relationship with each other is maybe the most important thing in the world to me, but, really, *who* cares!? Outside of me, no one cares about this, any of this, not really, because it doesn't matter, does it? *Now*, writing more on this the following day, as I have begun to settle down from this absurdity, bad news from a doctor, not something I'm unused to—the last ten years have been a steady stream of bad news from doctors for me, my friends, my family, loved ones, it's now just a thing one deals with at my age, not that I'm old in my mid-thirties, but I'm not exactly that young anymore, and not getting any younger.

I'm well aware that my problems, and how they make me feel, how beaten down I often am, are not *real* problems, not the way I see *a problem*. A problem is one that requires us to ask "the questions that truly matter," not a select anecdote of the unrelenting inconvenience of living in historically relative convenience. What stands out is that if my minor, personal, cosmically insignificant inconveniences can beat me down, make me feel like nothing will ever "get better," and I consider myself someone who copes rather well with the tragedies of my life, then what must the *real* problems do to people who suffer them? People die every day, their lives at risk all the time...life is serious, and its real difficulties demand serious engagement. I suppose this is my way of respecting that seriousness.

threads on every continent and in about two dozen cities scattered across a dozen countries in the process of tracing connections between seemingly random events only to shift in the second volume entirely aboard the ark where no nations exist, but is made most explicit (so far) in a conversation between Zhou Li Zhong, the lead engineer of the Ark *Titan*, and his assistant engineer Li Qiang. The two of them sneak off while working aboard the ark, away from their more statist colleagues, to share their thoughts on rising tensions between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, as India has recently announced an orbital skyhook project that requires the territory's bauxite (a clay used in making aluminum), pulling Russia, China, Turkey, and the US into an additional geopolitical conflict none of them need as they are already struggling to coordinate the final stages of the secret ark project. Reflecting on his own powerlessness to affect the situation, Zhou begins to consider this current conflict in the context of the "world" the ark promises to its future generations of people.

On *Titan*, there was no China—there would be no China. There would be Chinese, but there would be American, Indian, Russian...those who were selected would emigrate here, and would always be that, however far they went. One generation later, however... What would people, like his own Chinese, who had lived under the rule of the state, do once they were detached from the institutions that imposed such rules? *Titan* would have laws—*strict laws*—yet it was not home to these first people, fortunate enough to have been selected, in the way the nations they were leaving behind were. People who had been ordered to have no more children before, would they use their newfound liberty to do what they could not, to test the power of the new world's institutions, because they could? How would people such as the First-ranked Vice Premier assert their control over this world without the implicit threat of the state behind them? (*Second Exodus* 179)

Dealing with the challenges of rebuilding civilization, society, and history outside of the paradigm of Earth's "drawn" surface, he tries to meditate upon, if not imagine (I do not believe he is capable of *imagining* in anything but an abstract, unanswered,

unanswerable question), the potentiality the future paradigm holds. The future of humanity aboard *Titan* is left completely open in this regard, as opposed to the future of life in ways that it will resemble that of life on Earth, because only a page earlier Zhou could very easily imagine and speculate how the physical space would develop.

Zhou hummed at his Assistant Engineer, concentrated on the spaces he had indicated and seeing the forms of new buildings erect themselves across the expanse of the zone below them, and out along the cylinder's left wall twenty kilometers from where they stood, and further out to the right, approximately forty kilometers away and slightly hidden in a mist, the other two preliminary Residential Zones, each capable of accommodating three-thousand individuals at the start and expandable to, dependent on how each individually engineered itself after the initial point of occupation, potentially hundreds of thousands. These initial three zones were being designed with certain uniformities in mind to affect as little individualism between each as possible—the cylinder's interior, incredibly fragile, could not endure divisions and separatism among its seed population. Future generations would become what they would beyond what structural controls that could be placed on them here in the present, outside of establishing strong foundational traditions to be passed down to them, at which point certain degrees of divergence *would* be tolerable. He was quite curious, in fact, imagining the intermingling of limitations imposed by *Titan's* conditions with those of the specific composition of selected individuals in each zone that would influence how each expanded, and what it would expand into. What the dozens of other, unutilized spaces predesignated for future urban development would become, was a dream he had no time for. (178)

He admits (at least to himself) that he simply does not have the luxury of imagining what form the future would take, the future that has finally, firmly broken from the “traditions” of Earth. Despite this, he does seem aware of the capacity of humanity and the ark to do this, at some point, in some way. Given Zhou's internal struggle between the authoritarian conformity of his national allegiance and identity, and his emotional drive to break free and pursue an individual greatness, I feel it makes sense that he cannot find it within himself to form an image of what a non-Earth reality looks like—he actively resists thinking about it—while representing the challenge of doing so

beyond the individual case, considering those same external factors work on everyone else. Danny Flores may not be affected with a learned adherence to absolute state authority, being American, but he is nevertheless influenced by the interconnected experience(s) of living in the same human, nation-bounded conditions. That he is capable of imagining *more* of that post-Earth future, even if it is less politically inclined and more spiritual in nature, is a testament to his unique personal drive to resist the dominant cynical nihilism of that shared History rather than a dismissal of its overarching power, considering how society around him, even his own family, have long given up the pretense of resistance, if they ever truly held it at all. I am trying to use Earth here in the way Spivak refers it, as “a [big] concept-metaphor” to achieve this reorientation, which she refers to as a *planetarity*—the whole planet as one’s city, nation, birthplace, and all humanity as one’s people (*Death of a Discipline* 93). In offering this perspective, Spivak adopts what I see as a futurological stance, not only writing for a future reader she believes will be in position to understand the present strangeness of her proposal, but laying the theoretical foundation for building toward that future moment.⁵³

⁵³ Do I need to admit to a bitter skepticism of humanity ever reaching such a point? Obviously not. Yet I do know, somewhere within, that I must put *some* stock into the act of imagining the possibility, but to what extent should I expect, well...*anything* to come of it? A realization I’ve gradually come to over recent years: I write fiction (in part) to convince myself that *because* the possibility exists in some abstract, that we can do “right” in the here and now to forge a better future, then there must also be, by definition, a chance for good to be done. I don’t actually believe that possibility *will* be realized, but the possibility does exist nevertheless, and that makes it worth struggling to realize however unrealizable it may ultimately be. If we did nothing, we’d atrophy and rot away, eliminating any opportunity to do right, however small—even if we can’t make the world perfect, that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t do the good that’s within our power to do. If the abyss exists, its presence doesn’t just embody absence, because that absence signals an absence of *something*, the capacity and possibility of that something to exist, whose affective power generates something else within those impacted by it...a thing that can be engaged and, through that engagement, be affected—and possibly effected—itsself. I’m far from a “poetry guy” (whatever that might mean), but I *do* think of a couple lines from Rilke here: “Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror. / Just keep going. No feeling is final” (“Go to the Limits of Your Longing”).

With this in mind, Spivak thinks through the attempt of working toward the future in terms of the imagination, using Aristotle and Derrida to formulate her idea of what *telepoiesis* (“tele” being the Greek prefix of “far off” and poiesis being “imaginative making”) can be realized as (*Death of a Discipline* 72). Acknowledging the Sisyphean task of achieving the ideal, she gives not a template for the attempt but a method to *imagine* that condition into being—she speculates her way into that possible future, and what is the future narrative if not a mode to question, wonder, and imagine possibility, containing the characteristics and intentions Spivak unpacks here in its bones? Adopting a similar audaciousness (if I may, and I do), this work-in-process also pursues that ideal of imagining a universal humanity that allows for the addressing of shared traumas.⁵⁴ This is the work of reinvigorating Faye’s belief in effecting change

⁵⁴ I admit it’s very difficult for me, having to acknowledge the capacity and possibility to “fix” some aspect of the world and, I guess, myself, ourselves, through literature, through the imagination while also doubting the probability of ever being able to fully realize that capacity, possibility. The seriousness I refer to in this is what keeps me going, and to be clear I don’t mean serious in a straight-faced, humorless sense—to take a couple earlier texts I brought up, *A Confederacy of Dunces* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* are very serious works to me, whatever playful absurdity they employ. Seriousness is sincerity. The sincerity an engagement with a shared *human* trauma seems to demand is, admittedly, great, because it is a gesturing toward totalization and must be reeled in just short of that to allow for the unique individuality of persons to exist within a collective Humanity (as I read in Glissant). The greater the claim, however, the greater the burden of proof, and maybe this is another part of why I tend to the bleakest of scenarios, the most hopeless of circumstances.

Consider: a story I wrote a few years ago imagines a scientist who repeatedly clones his recently deceased project partner and wife. He is searching for a solution to a fatal flaw in the cloning process they developed together which gives the clones compromised memory and incredibly short lifespans that end in torturous cellular liquification. Though told from his own skewed perspective, I challenge the motivations that drive him to continue putting her through horrible, agonizing deaths. He loves her, but does he love her *too* much? Is that possible? Can the suffering he keeps putting her through be a symbol of his love, or is it selfishness? At what point is it no longer about saving her, and about him preserving something of himself, *for* himself? Is it romantic, or vile, or both? I know how *I* feel, what I think, but is that really the answer? What about you? Is *your* answer *the* answer? Because it must be more complicated than any immediate gut-level response, or even the idea(s) one forms after having sat with it, individually, for however long it might take. It is the moral, ethical, and philosophical implications (about love, empathy, bodily autonomy and consent, medical rights...) that underly that response, that inform the critical thought that follows, and the consequences produced by the positions one assumes and enacts on their world that grow from that idea. I seek this: for my reader to come away from reading a story or novel of mine having their concept of the central idea flipped on its head and back again so

by granting her the power to actually choose who shapes that future (in the form of the seed population list), of pressuring Danny's almost ignorant optimism to the point it must either wither and die or burst into a piercing flame, of trying to overcome the hopelessness Jaco feels being entrapped in the conditions of Earth's geopolitical order, of giving voice to Zhou's stunted capacity to imagine a different kind of future, work that is embodied in the future narrative's capacities to position one in multiple times and places simultaneously, metamorphosing into a positionality within the *passing* of time.

6. Microcosms and Macrocosms

The work of the future narrative to occupy a state of infinite potential historical vitality, in which it is capable of oscillating between future, past, and present at all times, is a freedom it engenders to step back and gaze out at the world to work at seeing the connective tissues that bind the whole of realized History with its incalculable singular histories, the collective Humanity with its separate, unique, individual human beings.

That movement of time and space in the relationship between the whole and the singular, the personal and the universal, is put to use in the work-in-process's central

that, after they've left my work behind, they continue to think and question and work through the conflicting multitudes consciously, conscientiously.

Recognize: nothing is finished at the end of this standalone story, just as nothing will be finished at the end of *Second Exodus*...no final reconciliation is made, no ultimate solution to these struggles. Many people suffer and die, most for no good reason, and the society aboard the ark will continue to struggle, just as the worlds that will develop over the following centuries will—that is, develop, struggle, and suffer, always working toward their own future. But, in that future—that which has not yet happened—isn't there the capacity for the cycle to break? Even if it never does, the potential is always there. But that lies with *us*—within us. And if we cannot seriously, sincerely work with these ideas within a fictional framework, how do we expect to contend with them in the real world where actual lives are at stake?

question (and problem)—how do we value human life?⁵⁵ At the heart of *Second Exodus*, and particularly its first volume, *Act X: The Human Calculus*, the question is drawn out of the conflict taking place both within and between each and every person...in the narrative, and in the world. This could not be more obvious than with the ark's selection committee, they who must carry out this calculation that is necessary for the ark to function and survive beyond its initial emigrant population. Francisco, Faye's ex-husband and the U.S. representative on the committee, poses the question to the others after sitting through weeks of deliberations over the first of their names (a Norwegian soil scientist), most of that time spent arguing over differences in political and moral foundations rather than the "candidacy" of the scientist.⁵⁶

"Would I select myself?"

The humor of the question was deadened by the silence that followed.

"It's a question I haven't been able to stop asking myself these past..." Francisco sat forward. "I'll step back from myself. I'm not in this room as Francisco Basilone—he is out there, going on with his life. He's never heard of the ark *Titan*. He doesn't know there's a list

⁵⁵ As opposed to *what is* the value of human life—the focus here is precisely *how* we, as people, go about calculating the worth of a human being, because the answer lies directly in the problems the question implies.

⁵⁶ This being the first time I spend a significant chunk of time with the selection committee together, just them, doing the *work* of selecting, I wanted to dive headfirst into deliberation of *how*, to give the reader a comprehensive view of what actually goes into the team's "human calculus," to form a psychic framework to consider each time I critically engage with ideas related to the task at hand over the course of the novel's first volume and speculate on its impacts as the decades pass in the second. My own calculation—to spend so much space and time (for the reader and in-universe) deliberating over a single name—was dictated by my desire to make the reader feel the incredible amount of labor, stress, and conflict in having to decide the relative value of a human life, and, ending as it does with the soil scientist being considered unsuitable for the time being as his file put off to the side, I believe it further emphasizes the inherently tragic nature of having gotten to the point where weighing innocent human lives against each other is the only available option to preserve some future for the species. This was also, obviously, a natural point to get into the heads of each team member and form their characters independent of one another through their approaches to the philosophical challenges of the decision-making process. Once more, it's all about planting seeds of tension and mystery, as each has their separate and often conflicting personal, political, and philosophical interests, just as each is backed by an interested party (read: government) with its own separate and often conflicting political, philosophical, and economic investments in the Ark project—this will, if I don't fail too much, form the overall basis for the Faye's macronarrative thread.

being put together by people like us, who've been given the power to decide who among the human race has the privilege to survive, start again. Who I am now is one of *those* people, and that name is shown before us: Francisco Basilone. Remember, this list represents what will remain of mankind once the population down here has deteriorated to dust. The list is the chosen ones who'll form the future of all people that come after us. There will be nothing before these ten thousand names—history begins right there, at the beginning. Now I have to look at this Francisco Basilone...but how do I know if deserves to live on? Is my decision personal, pragmatic, political...does it matter, and because I can ask that question irrespective of the answer, does that make it arbitrary? What does that say about *any* of this if it is? The decisions we're making here *cannot* be minimized. We're safe. Our families, loved ones, those closest to us, they're are safe, and of course we'll take that. Kenji will protect his family if given the opportunity, just like all of us would, and are. We're the privileged few—the privilege that comes with power. The responsibility that comes with that...for every person we choose, we're leaving one million behind. That's our sacrifice. One we don't have to pay ourselves. So I ask this question because I don't believe we can afford to ignore it. It should be present in our minds *every* second we have the responsibility to select, to *decide*." He could not help but smile because of how sick it made him. "Would I select myself?" (119)

No one, not those among them who presented themselves as moral, not those who had posed as the most objectively pragmatic, has an answer for him, because they recognize the question needs no answer—it is a question whose answers are the questions it generates. Who deserves moral consideration? How does one decide this? What does that math look like? Why is the selection of *oneself* so significant? Every name chosen is a sacrifice of one million others, one million lives, histories and experiences and relationships and struggles and dreams, who will not be saved because one other was deemed more viable for the ark's purposes, those deemed valuable to *future* humanity.⁵⁷ Their task on the committee is to make these difficult decisions despite its

⁵⁷ The tensions and mysteries of the selection committee members in the process of selecting play out in differing ways: Vladislav Nikolaev, the Russian representative, is shown to be relaying inside information of the deliberations and his fellow committee members to his handler in the Foreign Intelligence Service; Liu Xifeng, the Chinese representative, who is spying for the CCP, is reluctantly followed by Kenji Hasegawa, the Japanese representative, through Luxembourg City only to be confronted by Nikolaev, who had already been following her (*Second Exodus* 114 and 294-296).

impossibility—each of them, though guaranteed the protection of the ark because of their roles in its formation, is also human, and would otherwise be just as open to sacrifice as the million names they exclude from the future by every *one* they choose as worthy of inclusion.⁵⁸ The question, of whether they would have been chosen themselves, brings them (and us) to the simple truth that it's far easier to disregard that which does not register as human to begin with.⁵⁹

The calculus of trauma and defining human worth (in the conflict between self and other) is complicated to even greater degrees in the future narrative, which expands the boundaries of these questions—growing from considerations of the other sharing one's world into sharing the world with others outside of one's time...not just the other of the past, but the lives of those who have not yet happened. How does one quantify the life of future generations, whose time will have developed from the conditions you, here and now, have contributed to making, upon whose bodies and minds your traumas will reverberate across time and space? US Army Colonel Mathias, operating under the auspices of NATO and the UN, is a particularly bitter and cynical man that at first seems to mirror Faye—having devoted his life to, in his mind, defend the innocent

Everyone on the committee is compromised on some way, by their personal and political allegiances, the institutions they've aligned themselves with, the ideals they want to pursue and those they are obligated to. The differences, however, underscore a shared state of being, a responsibility thrust upon them to select names—people—to save, the few of humanity “worth” the effort of the ark, the last and only escape from the decaying conditions on Earth, at the cost of one million lives per decision they make.

⁵⁸ As members of the *Titan* selection committee, they've been granted a “place” among the seed population as payment for their work and discretion, which also includes the right to bring their immediate family with them, bypassing all protocols of the selection process (a detail that Danny will later latch onto once he becomes a member of the *Titan* crew and has to convince his wife and estranged son to come with him). The weight of such an incentive does, I believe, speak for itself.

⁵⁹ The vulnerability the eight committee members share, whatever divisions exist and grow between them over the course of their task, is privilege and burden, a mutual trauma imposed upon them by their social, political, human circumstances, that binds them in an understanding that weaves through their other divisions that remain impossible to bridge.

masses, he has come to recognize the “death” of this promise, questioning if it was ever sincere to begin with, which I work out in his contemplation over the nature of war in the 21st Century, defined not by conflict between nations, but an armed force against some iteration of “insurgents,” which can mean whatever the institution(s) of the armed force wants it to (*Second Exodus* 290-291).⁶⁰ However, the greatest indicator of his world turned upside down is the antipathy, perhaps apathy, displayed in the attempts of humanity and its governing institutions to avoid responsibility for the product of their greed, hatred, ignorance, and destructiveness. After the existence of *Titan* and the list are exposed to the global public and every extant geopolitical conflict becomes magnified, Mathias is sent to oversee security during the convening of the UN General Assembly in Geneva. He meditates upon the people making such decisions for

⁶⁰ *Insurgence*: “the action of rising against authority; a rising, revolt” (Oxford). *Insurgency*: “the quality or state of being insurgent” (ibid). Also, “an occasion when a group of people attempt to take control of their country by force” or “the violent struggle of a group of people who refuse to accept their government’s power” (Cambridge). My feelings toward these terms are just that—a feeling. The term seems to have fallen into common use post-9/11 and appears, to me, to have evolved in the time since, if not academically then colloquially. Regarding how language is used on a moment-to-moment, day-to-day basis, the affective nature of a word is far more significant, to my mind. Implied in the terms is the violence of the act, as well as the justifiable nature of that violence—the insurgent, the rebel, is assumed to be a lawful combatant. Except when they aren’t, that is. The subtle differences in how these terms are defined become more complicated after events such as September 11, 2001, and the Syrian civil war, and Libya, the Arab Spring, the events in Benghazi...the meaning(s) of the words depend so heavily on context that these other mitigating factors only serve to generate greater rhetorical range for them to be deployed within. This isn’t necessarily bad—a complicated language is a *good* one—but it does place demands upon one’s willingness and capacity for critical engagement.

If I turn to the science fictional subjunctivity of language as *I* am deploying it, the issue at hand with “insurgent” forty-five years from now is the issue of the things it refers to (objects and subjects) having evolved over time. Tracing the increasingly detached nature of military conflict—direct combat between troops being exceedingly rare, replaced by drones controlled by operators sometimes thousands of miles away—I am comfortable mapping my speculations of “combatant,” or “insurgent,” along the same developmental tissues. If the enemy is already *other*, then a nebulous “insurgent” (who may be rebel or villain but is always *violent*) is more easily otherized, rendered into something separate and hostile. As my speculations are trying to consider, in a future state where nations no longer war with each other, and instead there are only “armed forces” and “insurgents,” the conditions for taking up arms against an unjust authority are completely undermined. The state no longer holds a monopoly on violence, it owns the *right* to violence absolutely *in total*. Tracing backward through time, returning to our present, we might recognize the saplings of these potential growths around us. *Insurgent*, as defined by my speculated future, carries the weight of history past, present, and future.

whatever future humanity may or may not have, and sees

[...] the lawn in front, lined with the flags of every member nation. Secure on these grounds, the safety of those proudly swaying flags was assured. It had nothing to do with the Captain's security force patrolling within the compound's boundaries and being watched over by a battalion of his own troops distributed along the streets that encircled them. It was the lake, not a thousand feet from where he stood, that rose slowly, not encroaching on the lives of the people living here. It was well-fed, well-clothed camps to the north, where people maintained a way of life. It was the breathable mountain air. It was the still thriving economy, providing jobs. It was the *absence* of a reason for people to collect, riot, storm the barricades, military defenses...no lives would be risked here. The Ark *Titan* was a curiosity, something to discuss with the family at the end of a gentle day of work. (206)

The recognition is of the fundamental social separation that exists—that has been manufactured—between the people in positions of power and the institutions they perpetuate and the whole of humanity who exist—live—within their spheres of influence.⁶¹ The UN General Assembly is not safe because of the militarized security

⁶¹ I'm using Mathias, a military commander, to examine this question of mine for a number of reasons. The first, mostly surface level reason, is my desire to make the "villain" of the story—if it can be said to have an embodied villain, which it really kind of doesn't—more interesting. I've worked very hard, for quite a number of years, to build my villains in complex ways, to give them empathetic if not sympathetic struggles and goals, even if I am leaning in on the strong-willed military guy as villain trope here, at least upon first glance. To resist this, it's Mathias who thinks, painfully, about the lives of the people whose oppression he has helped to enact, who may be categorized as "insurgents," hostile actors, and his job—his duty—being to "[guard] a fence from people who just wanted to get through, who needed a drink of water, a bite of food, who had nowhere to return to. Their city was underwater. Their village was fifty-five degrees Celsius and a fire had burned it down. Their livestock was dead. The crops were dry. The groundwater was toxic," people with nowhere else to go but *toward* the oppressive force threatening them at gunpoint (291). Yet there are times when the "bad guys" really are unequivocally bad—some *insurgents*, as it were, do bad things. Counter-insurgency, as military conflict is so often whitewashed as being by the media (emphasizing the necessity of its violence) "used to be called war," but that was back when

a nation went to war [emphasis added]. Sometimes with itself. Not anymore—not nations. Not in his lifetime. An armed force was sent to combat an insurgency, insurgents bent on rebelling, overthrowing, slaughtering. They might have even had good reasons to want that, be it a dictator that withheld clean water to instill obedience and gassed those who refused to bend their knee and bow their head, or a regime propped up by a foreign power designed to reign in and anesthetize the locals to the exploitation of their natural resources. That didn't justify them dragging families of loyalists out of their homes, beheading the fathers, raping the wives and daughters, and tossing the bloody pulps that were their bodies onto a fire, nor the bombing of businesses or schools, nor even the assassination of those horrible leaders that threw their homeland into bloody civil conflict, but it *did* complicate matters. It made it such that he understood why they did what they did—why they believed they had to do what they had to

patrolling the grounds, but because the status of the governments the flags represent and their literal location, in a city only marginally impacted by effects of climate and climate-related collapse, a place for these figures to make sweeping decisions for the whole world possible because of a freedom of movement most on Earth lack. This follows an earlier acknowledgment by Kenji Hasegawa, a tech development and human-computer interaction expert and the Japanese member of Faye's selection committee, who says as they begin deliberation on the list's first candidate:

"Does anyone else feel odd to be involved in these discussions, making these decisions, in a room like this?" Kenji asked.

Francisco's smirk was naturally playful and curious. "What with the room?"

"Air-conditioned, dry, *safe*...this must be one of the last comfortable places on Earth. We've been provided for by the project with housing, sustenance, travel autonomy, the resources of every university, think tank, governmental organization, *non-governmental*

do—and made it easier for him to explain why he had to do what he had been sent to do. (290-291)

I believe that moments such as these—where Mathias offers an honest, good faith assessment of the kinds of people he's helped oppress, if not always directly then by proxy, through the power structure of the armed forces and their governing institutions and ideologies—give a human face to the historical systems of oppression. This is important, I feel, because though we often otherize the villains of the real world by framing them as "monsters," the truth is that tyrants are people, human beings, who have chosen to do wrong for whatever reason it is they (likely) believe justifies themselves. More than that, their tyrannical systems don't simply rise out of the ether—they require *other* people to help conceive them, birth them, nurture and propagate them. Mathias' tracing of the "history" of war, at least a modern and, at last, speculated futurological state of war, interplays with the history of national boundaries, national armies, sovereign governing bodies, a state of the world prior to the absolute interconnectness of the global future (not in an anti-globalist way...I am *not* anti-globalist at all, I merely mean it as a matter-of-fact). This *act* of tracing is also my work to show the so-called villain trying to resist his status, to push back against his place within the systems he represents, even as he has no meaningful capacity to undo them. In this way, he is like most of the characters in Faye's macronarrative—Mathias, in fact, mirrors Faye almost completely *except* his own cynicism extends just a little further, just beyond the precipice that she teeters on for most of the novel's first volume. Planted firmly *in* the abyss, Mathias' desire to hold humanity accountable for its failures of empathy leads him to see only the worst qualities in people—greed, hatred, ignorance, destructiveness—and in *Titan* a last-ditch attempt to avoid responsibility for our present conditions, a way to elude justice for our crimes. It can be said that Mathias serves as the villain of the novel's *plot*, being representative of someone wholly unaccepting of the possibility people like Danny inherently believes in and what people like Faye strive to believe in again. The *story*, however, has no true antagonist—Mathias may be a physical obstacle to material and spiritual gains for (some) of the other characters, but the *thing* everyone is truly in conflict with is immaterial, internal to themselves, to humanity, the truest obstacle(s) being the tendencies, fears, and limitations of people, the lack of imagination...even the *excess* of imagination, from a certain perspective.

organization, from here to the moon.” Kenji tilted his head. “It’s interesting.”

“No more interesting than you make it.” Xifeng said. (97)

The selection committee, housed in a chamber beneath a UN compound in Luxembourg City, is, like the collected representatives of humanity, granted the privilege of being protected from the immediate and, to *some* degree, long-term impacts of the decisions they make, a privilege given by the power of their national identities and allegiances. Liu Xifeng’s dismissal of the significance of the observation—herself an environmental economist and a loyal member of the CCP serving as China’s representative on the committee—speaks to her own bounded identity and political alignments that disallow her to recognize the internal contradictions of the situation. In turning toward the past, the narrative fixedly interrogates the products of these historical processes, as Mathias, overseeing security in Geneva, feels a spot of sweat and warmth and is immediately transported to North Africa, where he had been deployed only a few days earlier.

Moisture formed along the line of his beret. The afternoon was warm, with a breeze. At the Egyptian-Sudanese border, at the Hala’ib, the heat was so intense headgear was limited to active patrols only. Water was aeriased from a filtration center eighty miles away to each of the twenty-six outposts along the line throughout the day. Each and every day. When the dust storms were too strong, it was trucked. Breathing was a dangerous act. There was a woman—Eritrean, he believed. She had started her journey with thirty members of her family. Only she and her baby had made it to the border region. Those were her pleas. She held her baby out as she cried. Water—she needed water. Her face was sunken into itself, her eyes deep and dark. Her breasts had shriveled, dried, cracked, unable to feed her baby, whose bones protruded, whose skin was stained white. He gave her his water. He ordered his troops to do the same. There were thousands of migrants, too many to help. He was there to keep them from crossing. The stability of the region depended on Egypt retaining control of its limited resources—they were incapable of providing for the refugees coming from the south, even those from across the Red Sea, but arrangements had been made with Saudi institutions that still had power to mediate beyond their borders. That woman drank that day, and ate, and her child... He had no solution for her

the next day. Not the one that followed, either. He last saw that woman weeks earlier. She could not still be alive. Neither would the baby. What else could he have done? (206-207)

Trace backward, forward, inside and out, the connections between this and the conditions in the Ukraine, now fully reintegrated into Russia, where a hundred thousand people have been forced to make their homes in the collapsed ruins of a space tether, living

as though they were of a distant village. They came from their homes to toss pots from the past night. They cooked from other pots with vegetables some had managed to grow in the hard Earth, fertilized with their own biological material. They walked down to the creek to wash their bodies and clothes. They led sheep, goats, what could be tamed, to dry patches of pasture to graze them for the moment they were able to find food. They walked their village road, straight down from their own homes along those of others. They traded precious mushrooms, potatoes, and other roots, for wood, metal fiber, wool, perhaps news from the outside. They came together at the end of the day, seated with their families, to eat their hard-earned stew. They slept, so they would do it again the following day. (166)

The tether had been a state project undertaken a couple decades earlier, meant to establish Russia's preeminence in aerospace technology alongside China. It failed when the tether broke up during construction, sending the six-hundred miles of completed cable crashing down, destroying farmland, cities, and poisoning the ecosystem. Largely because of the state's insistence to make the project solely *Russian*, it had opted against undertaking the tether's base in equatorial Brazil, a longtime geopolitical ally, instead using Ukrainian territory to do so. The result: the exponentially increased tension on the cable, being so far away from the equator, causing the tether to snap.⁶² This failure has fed into animus between Russia and India,

⁶² I imagine my own internal conflicts are manifesting here, with my own moral and ethical foundations, principles. Though I don't characterize myself as a deontologist, as a purely deontological perspective is prone to self-defeat in the face of urgent matters that require immediate engagement, I do think such a mindset is best in *some* cases, and I think the overriding philosophy of my fiction is that we should stand on principle whenever possible, but to question if, at some point, that becomes no longer tenable.

who have only recently announced the Shiva Skyhook, which is similar to a tether but does not extend fully to the Earth's surface, working like a slingshot to send materials into space. Less ambitious than Russia's project, success would nevertheless represent something materially and optically greater than the failed tether, and could be achieved without imposing visible damage to their own people *despite* the project threatening to escalate conflict with Pakistan further, which would draw the other superpowers into its inescapable gravitational well as they simultaneously work to complete the ark and escape from Earth themselves.

At what point does holding onto one's moral and ethical purity actually begin to *hurt* wellbeing? At what point is it no longer worth it—when is it justified to compromise one's moral and ethical axioms in order to address an urgent issue that requires one to compromise in *some* way, and how is that calculus carried out? Neither am I a consequentialist, as I don't believe the ends justify the means, at least certainly not in most instances, though of course there are degrees to consider—if one tells their partner a white lie to make them want to go a particular restaurant that they both like but isn't at the moment preferable to the partner, the end might be that they both enjoy their meal even if it was achieved in a morally dubious manner. Of course, this immoral act really doesn't matter in isolation, in the grand scheme of things, and I wouldn't discuss the situation any further beyond saying, "Well, okay." But as with power—the greater the power the greater the responsibility—the larger the problem, the more lives put at substantial risk, the higher the degree of morality and ethics (as I see them) must come into play. This is where my interest lies, the aforementioned "questions that truly matter."

What I'm saying, I think, is that the ambiguous space between these two positions fascinates me, and I want my characters to occupy that space *uncomfortably*, such that the other characters (and the reader) truly don't know how to feel and must contend with the uncertainty of right and wrong, utilitarianism and deontology, to expose within themselves the inner conflicts (and contradictions) of morality and ethics we, as people, engage with. In one scene or chapter Mathias will appear to be a clear villain, doing wrong for what might even be argued are the "right" reasons, while in another he may be unmistakably the one in the right, at some points for the wrong reasons. The same can be said for Vladislav Nikolaev, whose arrogant posture gives a body to my future Russia, which has continued its Putin-esque ways in the decades after his demise. Yet, being purely devoted to his country and people, it can also be said that Vladislav truly does devote himself to *Russia* and *Russians*—he works for the state for the sake of his people and the land they call home, but isn't ideologically bound to the state itself. His internal calculus has determined that the state is working in the interest of these two things, and, being a cold and calculating individual, Vladislav undertakes the machinations of the Kremlin because he believes they further the wellbeing of Russia and Russians...until, later, when events have shifted to life aboard the ark, where Russia no longer exists except within the few people who made it (as earlier speculated by Zhou), his calculations begin to produce different results. This isn't to handwave away any horrible actors who would carry out the kind of actions Mathias eventually does, because even if Mathias only undertakes truly heinous acts 5% of the time, those acts are so heinous, so detrimental to life, that their "villainy" cannot be dismissed. The purpose is to impose the condition of having to interrogate the complex processes that lead us to such thought, action, and self-justification and, hopefully, bear some witness to the humanity within.

The conflicts of peoples, identities, ideologies, returns one to the question: “Would I select myself?” Implicit is the recognized humanity of the self and the possible inhumanity of the other, but also the awareness of the mutual threats to the body imposed by one’s environmental conditions, those which are dictated by our bounded political positionality, common to all peoples. Overcoming the othering process to be able to address that on a macro scale (for all humanity and the world), especially in the most extreme of circumstances as those these characters live in, is the ultimate challenge being posed. It is important to note that the “candidates” for selection are termed “names” by the committee. The first candidate, the first name, they deliberate over, is given an identity in the opening sentence of the chapter: “The name was Karl Fredrik Ullmann” (95). The deliberation, which spans four weeks, is covered over an extensive fifteen thousand words that bounce between the perspectives of all eight committee members, and at no point is his name mentioned again—not spoken, not thought. And, after Francisco challenges the others with the question they never bother answering,

[...] the decision was made to not include him in the Ark *Titan*’s seed population at this time. He was a promising candidate, one who brought much to the table, but the calculations amongst them simply did not come out to enough. It was painful to admit, and accept, that selection had to be so absolutely precise that he did not qualify. But there were more names—many more names. Enough to populate a whole world.

Francisco eliminated the candidate from the consideration pool with a tap of the finger and a new case was fed to him.

“Next name—” (120-121)

The reality of their roles on the committee dictates that they *not* overcome, even as they gradually come to acknowledge over the course of the narrative just how central the process of othering was to the degradation of conditions on Earth, the very roots of the

causes that made the ark and its list possible and, sadly, necessary.

The significance, at any rate, is that the encounter taking place between the human and Humanity at the contact point of this shared vulnerability, however they manifest and differ, necessitates one recognize a sense of a shared humanity, inherent in our very being. The characters of *Second Exodus*—Faye, Danny, Jaco, Mathias, Zhou, Kenji Hasegawa, Liu Xifeng, all the others—come from their own walks of life, with their own experiences and pressures, and many never interact with each other or even know of the other’s existence.⁶³ To Faye, a space garbageman like Danny is just a random worker who she has no reason to interact with, who she would believe has no interest in interacting with *her* either. He is a person to her, in that he is a human being, but not necessarily as a part of the same collective...perhaps Faye, being a social scientist, is more attuned than others to recognize his place alongside her in a collective humanity, but that will likely be on an intellectual level rather than emotional. Butler writes on the reporting for deaths of enemy combatants being reduced to numbers rather

⁶³ Bearing witness to all of these shared histories, the novel’s two central figures, Faye and Danny, only meet twice in person. Once in *The Human Calculus*, a few chapters ahead of the point I’m at in writing, where they end up sharing a drink and a conversation about the Ark (after Danny has become a crew member in training), though neither knows who the other is, not that they have a reason to know. They meet again in *Second Exodus* (being Act XI, the novel’s second volume), about fifteen years later when Danny has moved high up the ranks of the Ark’s crew by necessity—though they are aware of the one other at that time because of their notoriety in *Titan*’s small population, so much time will have passed and they will have changed so much over the years that they don’t remember having met that first time. Both meetings, each planned to take an entire chapter to cover, are monumental happenings in their respective narratives, the first where they are pitted against a perspective so diametrically opposed to their own and must confront their internal contradictions, and the second where the change that has occurred within is made clear and the conditions of its development are brought to bear upon the actions they will have to take separately in the coming years, as the following generations must take up where they will, eventually, be forced to leave off—my reason for titling these chapters “Faiths” and “Fates,” respectively. A chance, serendipitous crisscrossing of lives and worlds occurs between them, the micro and the macro weaving into and out of each other’s pathways, running their own way but always pulled back into contact by the gravity of shared humanity and history, inexplicably but undeniably feeding and growing from that relationship.

than names: “If 200,000 Iraqi children were killed during the Gulf War [...] [i]s there a story we might find about those deaths in the media? Are there names attached to those children? [...] If there were to be an obituary, there would have had to have been a life, a life worth noting, a life worth valuing and preserving, a life that qualifies for recognition” (“Violence, Mourning, Politics” 22-23). Mathias, in his past, fought and killed “insurgents,” bodies that existed separate from him, an “other” even if there was some intellectual acknowledgment of a mutual membership within humanity—the understanding remains in the abstract. The other is a semi-faceless husk, whose presence and/or absence on Earth we might completely lack regard for because there is no true empathetic connection between us and them. It is the experience of being with them up-close, sharing in their concerns, interests, consciences, their human vulnerabilities, that we grapple with the fact of the diverse universal, referring back to Glissant’s understanding of one’s multitudinous, multivalent, intersecting identities, realities, experiences. I see, in this, a microcosm of the world, where the national, cultural, political dividing lines exist, and denote and connote any number of diversities that speak to the reality of those differences, while also sharing in a collective of histories that have occurred and is occurring between them.⁶⁴ The narrative’s working

⁶⁴ Note that in Danny’s narrative thread, we also follow Emilia (his wife), Jaco, and at times his friend Marcus, his neighbors the Grahams, and eventually Zhou, but with Faye we also follow Francisco, Khanna, each of the other committee members (Osman, Vladislav, Xifeng, Kenji, Pratima, and Benitha), as well as Zhou and Mathias. Also note that the characters in focus in Danny’s thread are (mostly) closely related in space and experience, whereas Faye’s fellow travelers represent a far wider diversity of background and lived experience, not to mention their individual political engagements that span countries and continents that also play significant roles in the half of the story she anchors. That so many characters rise to the fore of Faye’s narrative thread is my design—the macronarrative would hardly be *macro* if it wasn’t larger in scope, zoomed out from the micro issues of the individual while it also grasps for the smaller threads of its many characters. Inversely, Danny’s thread keeps its focus generally on those smaller, personal threads even as it’s impacted by gestures of the larger narrative beyond them.

toward universal diversity acknowledges, I believe, both truths of the dialogue, a diversity that Glissant defines as a “striving for a cross-cultural relationship, without universalist transcendence” (“Cross-Cultural Poetics” 98).⁶⁵ The relationship—the shared human vulnerability—is the social event that undermines the bounded divisions of politics, nationality, culture, and economics, as if it tests the individual’s capacity for empathy, asking “who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, *what makes for a grievable life?*” (Butler 10).⁶⁶

The parallel but communicating narrative threads—the macro anchored by Faye, and the micro anchored by Danny—are doing more work than just orienting the reader to each perspective, because to achieve the synthesis there must be a space in

I’m pulled back to Delany’s citation of Quine: “‘No two of us learn our language alike’” (“To Read *The Dispossessed*” 106). *Our language* may refer to a shared, literal national language, but I can see how this can be used beyond the ‘in-group’, beyond language even, as the ideas of a narrative work in the same manner, in that the human element of a story (a parent dying, facing death) is a shared human experience, so the connections and disconnects (the discrepancies, as Delany calls them) work to illuminate themselves in dialogue with one another, generating a reading—an understanding—that strives to reach across the chasm of separation without totalizing the experience or its expression. That it remains untotaled allows it to do this work.

⁶⁵ Working through the processes of speculating myself into these very different characters’ lives, experiences, conditions, ideologies...well, they aren’t simple processes (and they shouldn’t be), and each character will demand their own degree of work, but this is true for all fiction. What renders the unique challenge of this work-in-process—as a future narrative—is its future history. A speculation upon present history, its ties to real world peoples, events, and traumas despite its imagined nature imposes, as far as I’m concerned, an immense responsibility to undertake *my* speculations in as intellectually honest a way as possible (which I’ve already elaborated on in Fn. 35 and 36). How do I work my way into the diversities of these people and their world? I find myself preemptively defending myself against the idea that a story “is not mine to tell.” But...I’m not trying to tell someone else’s story. I’m telling my own, as I see it, and putting the work in to make it as universal as it can be. Others’ stories? They still exist. I want them to be written. I have no intention to “overwrite” or speak over those stories. These stories—these histories—should all be written, and work in dialogue, providing greater insight in that active convergence. If I am wrong somewhere, let’s speak and I can continue working to do better. Hold the work accountable. Hold *me* accountable. I want this. But if I were to shy away from engaging with “the other” experience, I couldn’t do the work of understanding—trying to understand—that which is outside of myself. If I’m only ever within myself, if all of us were only ever within ourselves, given in to the unbridgeable divisions between each other, what world will we make? What future are we working toward? What possibility *can* there be? This would be, as Butler calls it, a rejection of the *discourse* of dehumanization, a refusal to even attempt to empathize (referring back to fn. 38). The Work (big-W) is a collective effort, after all. The point, as always, is to try.

⁶⁶ Looking back upon the name the selection committee deliberates over during the course of Chapter 9.

which the possibility of an encounter exists. Faye sees the migrants in Ceuta and projects outward (extrapolates and speculates) to the larger systemic conditions, the macro; Danny, gazing out upon the cosmos, pulls inward toward its relationship with the individual, the micro. The difference is one of positioning, where the macro and micro are acting upon one another at all times in multitudes of ways, one nonexistent without the other. The narrative, placing the characters and their struggles in a time and place away from the reader's, renders the space between the speculated and the actual, the imagined and the real, them and us, where we come into contact and must contend with the separations and connections occurring within, an encounter that carries the potential for recognition, understanding, empathy. There is a moment when Jaco joins clashes at a San Francisco seawall checkpoint between people who live outside and the police forces who provide security for those within—he is there more to observe than participate, as he has begun to question his previous nihilism in light of having walked out to the collapsed, drowned ruins of the Millennium Tower and spent time living among the thousands of people living there in a zombie-like state, alive but barely aware of their surroundings, shambling aimlessly as if they are only waiting to wither away and die. The protest quickly escalates to resemble a warzone, and is juxtaposed with news coverage of combat taking place in Egypt being overseen by Mathias.

The girl screamed. The soldiers suited in black armor and black-shielded helmets grabbed her, pulled her by her limbs, by her hair. Their black weapons pointed down at her, at the lines of people across the street from them. They pulled her mask off. She pulled back, dragged her feet, but they carried her away with them. They pulled so hard her pants started coming off. They kept carrying her. SHE DIDN'T DO NOTHING! Words from somewhere—gunshots rang out, somewhere else. She screamed but didn't have the strength to break free.

“...now responding to the cooperation of outside agents in Aswan and other cities along the Nile with fury, calling for al-Busiri to recall his army from enforcing martial law on

their own countrymen and for the UN to deny the administration all support until they cease their authoritarian tactics. The organizations have also cited the government's inability to position its people in a favorable position to benefit from the ark project, blaming its failures to sustain the country's geopolitical value as the major factor in..."

The power was down. Fires and lights along the top of the wall and at the checkpoint gate were the only illumination. Wireless networks were shut down through the whole subdivision. The soldiers used this, sectioning off groupings of people by driving through them with armored vehicles, kept them from forming larger numbers, communicating, organizing their actions. Soldiers sprayed gas and chemical irritant into the people. The people bent back in a wave. (*Second Exodus* 292-293)

The immediate realities of life in a steadily drowning San Francisco could not be as imminently dire as those in North Africa, but to return to the process of analogizing, it is never meant to replicate it perfectly, merely to speak to it, to press up against, to interact and work toward the connections.

"...anti-government and anti-UN movements threatening to totally destabilize the territory, and their actions have made Egypt's southern border less defensible and is increasing the possibility every passing day that a wave of migrants will overtake the peacekeeping forces stationed there..."

A tank emerged from the checkpoint gate. A sonic cannon was mounted atop it.⁶⁷ It

⁶⁷ Looking back upon the armored vehicle with the sonic cannon that was introduced a little earlier, when Emilia watches an armed patrol in her neighborhood (257-258). Its appearance, alongside other troops and surveillance drones, are part of an effort to ensure lockdown during an outbreak of bubonic plague outside the seawalls that, after months, has now begun to threaten to spread to the *other* side of the wall, at which point efforts to clamp down escalated significantly. The scene ends with an elderly couple hit by a sonic burst, sending them to the ground (one in what appears to be cardiac arrest) and Emilia badly hurt by it as she tries to urge the kids across the street back into their house. This acts as a speculation on how present conditions may develop, evolve, possibly escalate—we will recall that, last May, National Guard patrols fired at citizens with paint balls who were just standing on their own porch (Sullivan). That situation came to be from protests of the death of George Floyd, but it's not difficult to imagine how these crises can be used to the benefit of individuals and institutions who favor strong-arm tactics. In *Second Exodus*, the plague outbreak is a convenient excuse for the city of San Francisco and the rich technocrats who live behind the seawall to clamp down on an increasing number of protests at the wall checkpoints (note that this happens in the months following the public exposure of the Ark *Titan* and its mysterious "selection list"). It should also be noted that the BLM protests have been happening in the midst of a pandemic, offering opposition to the demonstrations a powerful scapegoat to decry them with.

The speculations involve more than these immediate historical parallels, however—the idea of a plague outbreak and lockdown is a very real potential development of climate change (worse living conditions, dirty water, unbreathable air, unhealthy food, less access to health care, more people packed closer together, temperatures impacting the ability for viruses to thrive, making viral outbreaks more

drove into the streets, through smoke and debris. The burst of sound struck a group—the people collapsed, seized up, flailed and foamed. It fired again. Too dark to see what happened to the ones already on the ground. Blood dripping from their ears? It moved, the cannon rotated toward another grouping. Bodies covered the street. More bodies emerged from the smoke behind the tank—people. They overran it, the soldiers hanging off the side, pulled the ones inside out from the hatchway. The cannon kept turning under their control. Soldiers at the checkpoint scrambled. The cannon fired at them. They fell over, protected from the worst of it by their helmets. The people howled, cheered, shouted to fire again! Djap was there in the street, stepping away from one of the soldiers they pulled out, throwing his fist up in the air.

“...must recognize that whatever good they believe they are doing, standing up for the rights of the few, they are endangering the lives of all people of Egypt, North Africa, and their allies to the north. It is imperative that they come to the realization that resisting necessary measures can only lead to the necessary force the state needs to exert in order to maintain order...”

The tank burst, metal and smoke and flame, a sudden flare of light—people fell all through the street. The rocket had come from the shadows atop the wall. Djap was there as the cloud blew out, face down, blackened and reddened. Angela screamed seeing this, spun and grabbed hold and held tight to him, curling, trembling in Jaco’s arms. She felt so small. He held her, turned her away from it. Bradley, Rina...they were somewhere out there...

“...insurgents have been located and confirmed to be part of the plot to stir up anti-government sentiments as a means to undermine President al-Busiri and the military’s ability to control the situation. Fighting broke out four days ago and has yet to let up for a significant length of time. No confirmation has been made about what role the UN’s forces in the city have in the combat...” (293-294)

The process of exposing oneself and recognizing that exposure in others, particularly those you do not know or trust, is difficult, and painful, and may come at a cost, but to

common and worsening as time passes), so the introduction of a plague outbreak into the novel was something I’d planned out years ago and only through the probability of such a development in such conditions as we find ourselves in does it appear to be particularly inspired. What I *have* been presently inspired by is the response to COVID-19 from the people affected by it and the institutions charged with finding systemic solutions. I’ve found myself having to continuously adapt by original speculations throughout the writing process—as I stated in fn. 38, “my speculations [are] rendered too contemporary in just a few days’ time, not reaching far enough—*my own pessimism isn’t even pessimistic enough.*” So it’s important to see this not as an example of the future narrative’s supposed predictive powers, but that speculation has the capacity to move us along pathways of potential connection, and, should those connections occur, to arrive at them more prepared and considered than we would having never considered the potential connections in the first.

try allows for the possibility of success. It is a pursuit of a non-totalizing sense of universality, where the individual exists as a single human within a collective humanity, both informed and informing, the microcosm that cannot embody the whole but nevertheless represents some aspect of that whole. At the same time, individual histories cannot embody the whole of History, nor can History make explicable the character (or truth?) of one's personal history...yet their relationship and its tensions are generative nevertheless—this happens in the encounter, at the point of dialogue, tension, conflict.

Humanity, or, more accurately, the individual people that constitute humanity, are confronted, at all times in all places, by the consequences of the systems at work, each individual bound to their positionality within nationality as they are to their positionality within time, their historical moment, which is the present, active growth of all that has come to pass and what is currently passing. This might bring us back to Zhou's questions about, and inability to envision, a future beyond this paradigm, the dominant, all-encompassing reality of human social order. It is a future in which its actors see no future of their own as they struggle to imagine their way out of the end of history (when they even bother to struggle against it), as Mathias sees the ark for what it is—an escape route that allows those with its privilege to avoid dealing with the internal problems that have brought about their living moment—so “[w]hile this non-solution was settled on, he had the time and space to think over what the truth meant for the Hala'ib, Ceuta, New York, Beijing, Hong Kong, Jakarta, San Francisco, Moscow, Mumbai, Islamabad... The breeze hit his face. It dried his forehead” (207). But because the work-in-process is itself an envisioned future, one at the interstice of

these collective histories as they are occurring, the so-called “end” is being resisted at all times. The resistance manifests in its temporal oscillations, locating alien but recognizable realities separate and *in front* of us to then be traced backward, forward, along patterns of growth, uniting all people in all times in that interaction of individual and collective action and the developments that emerge from them, the macro turning back upon the micro, and the micro, working individually and collectively, reaching out and applying pressure on the macro. This diverse universal, challenging national, cultural, and political paradigms by generating the capacity for speculation beyond the here and now, gives space to the multitudes of potential futures and sanctions the critical engagement with the often otherwise inexplicable and contradictory truths at work between you and me, us and them, here and now, then and there.

The micro- and macrocosmic dialogue in the future narrative’s structure, language, and temporality extend well beyond the boundary of the work-in-question, as well. The individual novels within *The Sophist Chronicles* sequence, composed to stand on their own as independent stories that simultaneously work in dialogue with the greater narrative universe (its History), each gain layers of meaning when read as part of the whole.⁶⁸ With each successive text, the previously established History of its preceding novels is laid bare in all its confusing, problematic complexity. The third

⁶⁸ I return us to the eighth footnote: “‘the process’ evokes a state of development, of happening, of coming into being.” This isn’t relegated to the works’ composition, as the heteroglossia of each individual novel and its place within the larger sequence is a dialogue that takes place throughout the reading of it...at least that’s my intent. For *Second Exodus*, the macro and micronarratives speak, deliberate, inform each other, while the novel as a whole exists as macrocosm of those individual narratives *and* microcosm of the sequence simultaneously. The tension of these various narrative threads, large and small, individual and collective, generates the *polyglossia* of the histories and History they are trying to represent—the individual but interwoven narrative threads are the stories of people that form the stories of peoples that form the Story of People.

novel, *Babel's Trespass*, tells the story of the events surrounding the formation of the interplanetary government that exists in the first and second novels. However, having knowledge the first two novels, you are meant to already know that somehow, someway, the events of the third novel will lead to the establishment of that government. To see how *the what* is deemphasized in favor of *the why* in the work-in-process, consider that *Second Exodus* is the fourth in the sequence, meaning I am composing it with the expectation that the reader is familiar with the stories of the preceding three novels. None of the other three novels deal directly with the events or characters of *Second Exodus*, but share in a fictive History (and histories, I suppose) that is in the process of formation. Being formed as I write it—and, in a hypothetical, as the reader reads it—their awareness of the previous novels means there is a built-in knowledge that the Ark *Titan* does, in fact, bring people away from Earth to far reaches of the galaxy where dozens of worlds will end up being populated over the following fifteen-hundred years. The granular details of these events are unknown, a History so distant that most of it is lost by the time of the first three novels, but the reader is aware of the broad strokes, that the ark *will* leave Earth, and, when that happens at the end of the *Second Exodus*' first volume, they also know that, at some point, the survivors will find and populate the worlds they are familiar with. The reducing of narrative tension involving *the what* allows the more mysterious *why* and *how* to take precedence, because even if we know to some extent that *Titan* will “succeed” in its mission, we have no idea how it will, or even why it was made in the first place.⁶⁹ In these two

⁶⁹ Each of the novels maintain affective power because they don't rely upon the others in their immediate narrative. Read in isolation without any knowledge of the sequence and its macronarrative, they can feel just as immersive and mysterious as if *the what* were of primary concern. Yet, going backward through

questions lies the questioning of historical processes—the intent *is* the process.⁷⁰

I am working to expand upon the future narrative's temporal reorientations to include one's critical engagement with time and place. I want to challenge what is *known* and put the burden on the very process by which History comes together, made by those who exercise the power to affect its formation. To do this, I am trying to use the form of the sequence as fully as I do its content, constructing a narrative mobius strip on which history moves eternally onward,⁷¹ and just as the pathway along the strip never crosses a boundary—perhaps an *open* mobius strip—so is the narrative throughout sequence free to move along its psychic space in either direction at any time, at all times, because the narrative exists in all positions simultaneously. The purpose is to unravel the realities of History by piling context as one oscillates forward

time, back *into* the wreckage we had been ignorant of, along an accelerating expanse of time, that immediate narrative gains the power to grow beyond its presumed boundaries. The reorientation being attempted here simply puts the bulk of the weight on the process by which History and histories come together, focused on the gradual development of the process itself and the critical engagement that it generates—because History inevitably gets things wrong, what we “know” from previous novels in the sequence is constantly being challenged despite being generally known (emerging from the tension in *the how* and *the why*), each novel gaining context and complexity by virtue of its presence in the sequence's greater dialogue. Above all, my purpose is to write into the work a capacity to self-produce layers of context, potential meaning, and significance by the very processes of its micro- and macronarrativization.

⁷⁰ Lukács remarks that the novel “has been described as only half an art by many who equate having a problematic with being problematic” (“A Historico-Philosophical Essay” 180). The problematics I've engaged with through this thesis, the defining of “truth” in fiction and the speculative mode, the uneasy relationship between accuracy and immersion, the capacity for me to speculate upon the real world and imagine my way into stories that are not “my own” in broad and strict terms...the form of the novel, of *these* novels in-sequence, deals in the potentiality for dissonance and its uncertain range of possible expressions, engagements, actualizations. This is the power of the novel, of the speculative mode, of the future narrative, reorienting time and space on a scale and scope that gestures to the cosmic. Do these problematics make it more difficult to “conclude” or “nail down” the work in some sense of finality? Of course. They also demand greater critical attention, and impose deeper, farther reaching speculations upon their reader they might never have undertaken otherwise. The problematic of dissonance necessarily complicates the work, at all times reshaping and remaking itself in the very nature of its being, a work of potentially infinite creation—what could be more *art* than that?

⁷¹ I'm thinking of an open mobius strip, boundaryless and upon which all lines can extend indefinitely, infinitely, in either direction.

and back, synthesizing knowledge from the complications produced by these movements. When reading through the sequence (*in sequence*),⁷² one moves backward in narrative time, into a past which remains the reader's future—each novel embodies a past, present, and future temporality. Further, whereas a standard chronological order would lead each subsequent novel to reveal how events, decisions, and action have developed over time (a cause to effect), the reversed chronology of the *Sophist* novels enlighten the history of the future development (effect to cause), moving from the product to its germinal state and perhaps beyond, to the germinal state's conception and even past *that*. I am trying to apply pressure on the perception of linear time, not that the narratives in themselves feel disjointed, but in their psychic orientation, the reader oscillating between past, present, and future in the tracing of the micro- and macronarratives' History and histories, following potential connections in every direction—past, present, and future mutually informed and informing, occurring at

⁷² Another indefinite “problematic,” the *sequence* of novels can be thought of a number of ways. A book series...a novel cycle...a pentalogy...a *roman-fleuve*...the novels that make up *The Sophist Chronicles* can be labeled each of these (and more) I suppose, from a technical aspect, and considering these terms/labels have casual meanings in addition to their exacting ones. A novel series is an easy way to think of it, since the series is a common entity within the “speculative mode,” so it seems *almost* appropriate to leave it at that—a set of interconnected works, sharing an internal narrative universe with common thematic concerns that grow from novel to novel. That the individual novels can exist almost entirely independent from one another, with only the first and second sharing any common characters (only separated by a few decades of time), does little to make this condition untenable. *Yet*, I have come to refer to *The Sophist Chronicles* as a *sequence*. “Series” is, while accurate, too general. A “novel cycle” works well, I think, conjuring a sense of the orbiting and oscillating I’m interested in, but doesn’t quite get at my purposes. It is (or will be) a pentalogy, a set of five novels, though that is spread across thirteen volumes, or *Acts* as I’ve titled them, which confuses the matter—in an ideal world, the novels would be published as five whole novels, as the volumes are intended as narrative dividing lines *within* each novel rather than to denote distinct texts, but the practicality of printing such massive works isn’t lost on me, as even a few of the individual volumes are themselves likely too long to be printed in single parts. The *roman-fleuve* implies, in the name, a river, a steady flow of narrative that, existing in motion, and bears a dynamic aspect that seems to maybe get close to what I’m doing. Still, *sequence* is most apt, because it seems, to me, to suggest the purposeful sequencing—the reverse chronology and the intention of reading of the work(s) *in sequence*—that demands the reader begin at the first, which takes place at the end of the narrative’s timeline, and end with the final novel that takes place at its beginning.

once at all times. Note one particularly unsavory figure in the second novel, Clay Duncan, who slithers his way back into political relevancy after having been ousted in disgrace (prior to the start of the novel) and basks in overheard attempts to compare him to a respected historical figure:

The honesty of the SSC was a heartwarming thing to witness for the people. For them to have spent their time, resources, and reputation, at all costs, to show the public the true Divinity Project, the true Spiritualist movement, and warn them of the dangers of overzealousness, there could be no way they were manipulating the situation. To have built a campaign of support for a year, only to show their supporters what could happen if they were to lose sight of themselves, they could not have been a more selfless organization, and that the Vectra had endorsed the SSC's efforts, it was plainly clear to the people the heart of Clay Duncan rested with them. Some disembodied voices suggested he may be the second coming of Jeremiah Huffman, the architect of the secular galaxy. No, the less enthused said, perhaps not, but he was definitely reborn, not the man he had been when the Legislature had run him out of the Forum years before. (*The Sophist Chronicles: The Sacred and the Damned* 207-208)

Much, much later on, after the end of a massive war—about fourteen years of narrative time and four long volumes—one of the novel's (several dozen) characters takes his son to a museum.

Casper led him to the framed copy of the ITO Agreement, one of the original copies given to each of the allied worlds. Right there with it were life-size statues of some of the signees. He read the description but Zach barely looked alive.

"Aren't you learning about this stuff in school?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"Who's he then, smart guy?"

"Jerry...Jerry..."

"Jeremiah Huffman?"

"Yeah."

"And what'd he do?"

"...he came up with the idea of the ITO?"

"He did. Imagine that, having something just come to you one day that changes the

whole galaxy.” (1704)⁷³

Obviously, Jeremiah Huffman is not actually believed to have just “thought up” an entire structure of interplanetary governance one morning in the shower, but I feel this reflects the kind of simplifying typically done with history—think of Thomas Jefferson being considered the architect of the Constitution (yes, he drafted it and was a major figure in its formation, but the idea gestures to a reality where the US Constitution was *not* the product of the influence of dozens, perhaps hundreds of people), or perhaps George Washington being “the father of the nation,” or that the terrorist attacks on

⁷³ Like its sequencing, scale and scope are intentional. Note that these two passages from *The Sacred and the Damned* (the first from its first volume, *Act IV: The Arbiters*; the second, from its fourth and final volume, *Act VII: Age of Innocents*) are separated by a vast gulf of space...at least in terms of the number of pages. The novel as a whole is, as previously mentioned, four volumes long—the first two building up the personal and political stakes of the galaxy until the tension bursts into war, the third volume (and by far the longest) detailing that war from the perspectives of about fifty people, and the fourth volume being a kind of extended coda that follows the remaining characters in the years immediately after as they try and fail to move on. Each novel in the sequence works this way, following a large number of characters across immense expanses of time and space, and its only appropriate that I give myself a properly massive canvas upon which to do so. I’ve hinted at the scale of these works several times, but it must be stated explicitly that there is genuine purpose to this, a method to the madness not just of the works’ philosophical concerns and form, but the literal size of it all as well.

There are no rules to this process of writing a narrative—a work needs to be only as long as it needs to be, a line impossible to draw but perhaps something one feels upon falling into it. Proust could have written *In Search of Lost Time* in half the number of volumes, or even a single volume, and gotten a similar idea across, but it wouldn’t have been the *same* idea, in the same way, with the same impact he intended. In short, it wouldn’t have been *In Search of Lost Time*. Inversely, Lispector could have expanded *Água Viva* by 500 pages and gone even deeper into her mystical meditations on life and time...and it probably would have been well worth a read but it wouldn’t have been *Água Viva*, and arguably not Lispector. Still, I admit to an insecurity regarding the nature of the sequence, largely stemming from its size. I find myself preemptively defending it with appeals to the necessity of the length (as I see it), and with assurances that I am more than capable of writing less unwieldy work—I don’t only write massive tomes, as I write short stories and novellas (a favorite form of mine), and have completed several other “standard length” novels, the most recent non-*Sophist* novel being a comparatively slim 72k words. I *do*, however, appreciate the “long novel” as a distinct form. Reading through one of the novels in sequence, say *Second Exodus*, I want it to affect the narrative’s physical, intellectual, and emotional exhaustion in the reader—the reader should feel that they’ve been through so much that they are as weary as the characters, having experienced their struggles and challenges in some approximate way. It is a *novel*, after all, and a long one, and isn’t intended to be read in a single sitting. The act—the process—of reading through it is akin to a devotion of oneself to a task over a span of time. Spending that time in the work’s world(s), you will have affectively experienced *something of* the expenditure and passage of time and effort that the characters have, even if it can’t be fully realized. The expansiveness of the long novel, as I’ve taken up, allow it to embody the cosmic concerns I’m working to write into it. That is, History itself across all of time, space, and consciousness. If the work fails, and it will in whatever ways that it does, it will do so on its own terms, uncompromised.

September 11, 2001, resulted purely from the ineptitude of Bush's intelligence apparatus, ignoring the decades of geopolitical meddling across the Middle East that had contributed, bit-by-bit, to the historical developments that produced the attack. There may be truth to these sorts of simplifications, but they remain simplifications, reductive of larger, significant truths. This is challenged in the third novel, *Babel's Trespass*, taking place roughly five hundred years prior, as Huffman appears as a significant figure in the narrative, though it does not follow him.⁷⁴ He is shown to be not the singular genius History presents him as, and in fact is far more of a radical activist than the calculating reformer he is made out to be, and neither was the ITO his conception—in truth, the framework for the ITO is the brainchild of several people, and given over to Huffman to essentially bear the torch for at the novel's conclusion because they, the novel's central figures, have made themselves so politically toxic that

⁷⁴ I will not be directly citing any passages from *Babel's Trespass* here (quite fortunate for you, dear reader). My reasoning for this—beside the fact I don't think it's absolutely necessary to make my point here—is the novel, as is, lies dead. The draft/manuscript of the novel's two volumes require such extensive rewrites that it will hardly be the same book when I eventually get around to doing it. Whereas the first two novels in the sequence, despite having been originally composed in my late teens and early twenties (respectively), have since been rewritten two full times each—that is, rewritten word-for-word, so that they resemble something close to readable, cohesive, worthwhile narratives, even as they each require roughly six months of additional dedicated rewrites to be considered “done.” *Babel's Trespass*, the third novel, was written in my mid-twenties and I've yet to return to it. Consider that the novel is the project of examining the development of an interplanetary government (the one that exists in the first two novels), taken on by myself at a time in my life when I lacked an adequate understanding exactly how a single planetary government would function in its highly technical ways, let alone an interplanetary one... This problem never affected the first two novels because, while they dealt heavily in the political machinations of the narrative's universe (especially the second, upon which roughly a third of its story hyper-focuses) their interest lied in the policy making and social impacts of government, as opposed to the technical mechanics of constructing a governing body, a far different beast. It hardly bears mentioning that the task was beyond me at the time, and I have no more to say about *that* installment until it's in a state worthy of consideration. In time...I'm thinking roughly four to five years from now, when I've completed this work-in-process and taken some time away from the sequence to work on a few short stories, a few novellas, maybe that baseball novel I'd been set to do before the immediacy of *Second Exodus* drew me into the massive project through sheer gravitational force, I will rewrite *Babel's Trespass* as a total recreation, maintaining thematic, character, and plot elements, but as a remaking of everything else...aside from maybe the final paragraph. I quite like that “ending.”

they have been banned from holding public office and, in the main character's case, exiled from the capital world he helped to build into the heart of the secular galaxy.⁷⁵ The difference in what is known in the second novel's "future" and what is here, in the third novel's "present," is not so dramatically different as to be an outright, malicious lie—Huffman is, if not the actual Great Man future generations depict him to be, still a very significant figure and important in the stabilization of relations between the splintered colonized worlds humanity spread across in the centuries after the events of *Second Exodus*—but it is wrong, nonetheless, a misrepresentation of truth that promotes a very specific narrative and understanding of how History has come into being, unbothered by the complex networks of connections that are actually working, at all times, to make the present what it is and tomorrow what it will be.

The sequence, as a whole work, engages in a questioning of History through this exploration of individual histories by reaching backward through time to complicate the surviving narratives in a kind-of future retrospect. Simultaneously positioned as past, present, and future, each novel's internal history allows me to more a/effectively zoom outward, using the novel as a microcosm of the sequence's macro, just as the sequence is a microcosm of the macro body of work I gesture toward. Consider the first novel, *Genesis Star*, in which many of the characters are haunted by

⁷⁵ Not to waste time, but for context (seeing as how I'm avoiding having to bring examples of this text into the thesis here, or anywhere) the central characters of *Babel's Trespass* find themselves allied and working with the political body that end up being the novel's villains in a collective effort to unite the isolated colonized worlds (the planets the Ark *Titan* survivors spread across over a thousand years) into an interplanetary union. Blinded by idealism, the "heroes" of the novel are made complicit in all the villains' actions—leveraging political influence for access to state secrets, data harvesting, monopolizing control of media, in an effort to achieve total information centralization—such that, even if they were ignorant of much of it early on and, as it is made increasingly clear to them who the bad actors are, these "heroes" begin to work against them, they are sadly, undeniably responsible for contributing to these efforts.

the effects of a major intergalactic war (between the secular and religious halves of the galaxy) that came to an end roughly a decade before the narrative's opening, either in its generational impacts or from personal first-hand experience.⁷⁶ It is a conflict that is never explicated in depth, but remains a trauma that lingers in the background of the novel's universe, something that cannot be reconciled because History has moved on. The second novel, *The Sacred and the Damned*, is the story of that war: the years that led up to its outbreak, the nearly two decades of death and destruction, and the immediate years afterward as those who survived attempt to return to "normalcy" not quite understanding how or why it happened, even though they were its actors.⁷⁷ It is

⁷⁶ I hadn't the language to explain this in a truly substantive way until a few months ago, when I discovered Avery Gordon's analysis of Morrison's *Beloved* using the concept of "hauntings": the haunting of the present by the past seems to emphasize that which has disappeared or been lost, but the lingering affects of that past may be viewed as having a presence in social memory, "rememory" as Morrison utilizes it in her novel, a social relation "prepared in advance and...linger[ing] well beyond our individual time, creating that shadowy basis for the production of material life" (*Ghostly Matters* 166). The memory haunts the present in the way *Beloved's* ghosts haunt its characters, the experiences and traumas of their past pulsing with an intangible heartbeat from beyond the boundaries of time and space, whose affects in the present renders it tangible. For the people of *Genesis Star*, and all the *Sophist* novels, their histories are constantly applying pressure on their present—the past cannot be altered or be corrected, because it's already happened—whose effects must be contended with at all times, working in often subtle, almost ghostly ways, as if they weren't there at all, contributing to the future its sufferers will go on to shape.

⁷⁷ The idea of the second novel occurred to me early one morning, at about five o'clock, maybe a year after completing work on *Genesis Star*. That first novel (at the time, a standalone work) focused on a core group of characters on a quest within a massive galactic backdrop, the micronarratives brought fully to the surface and the macronarrative left firmly beneath. What was clear was that these characters, while they all had their own unique and interrelated arcs that come to a sense of a resolution, what remained mysterious was that each of them, one way or another, had been affected by a massive war that had ended about a decade before the events of the novel. I'd never fully explained the substance of that war—not an oversight, but a conscious decision. I avoided giving too much detail about "the war" because what was significant in *Genesis Star* was the lingering effects of the war, a conflict that no one quite understood (an inability of them to explain it, make sense of it, was a reason I wanted to be unable to do so as well). I knew a basic outline: an intergalactic war between the secular democracy of united planets on one half of occupied space (the Intergalactic Treaty Organization, or ITO) and the fundamentally religious half (the Soran Foundation); the parents of *Genesis Star's* main character, a couple of scientists, had been intimately involved with the cause of the war somehow and it had gotten them killed; that the war had ended, but as to *who* had won, no one quite knew how to answer. Both the ITO and the Foundation existed in the first book, so neither side had been wiped out by the conflict, but that was as far as detailed knowledge of the events went. The characters of the first novel—some old, who'd fought in the war, and some young, too young to really remember what had happened—feel the cultural impacts

when we get to the third novel, taking place five hundred years before the second, that we come to realize that the culturally embedded animosities that made the war possible had been growing and festering over the centuries in part because of the compromises and divisions enacted in the process of unifying the secular worlds against what eventually becomes the theocratic ones, and that the war of the second novel was the eruption of these ongoing historical tensions which had only needed a few precise pin pricks in rapid succession to burst.⁷⁸ Reaching even further backward, the fourth novel and current work-in-process details the abandonment of Earth in the futile attempt to escape its calamities, whose narrative is working to expose the reality that those

and influences of the fallout, so much that no matter whose perspective we inhabit, it feels like they are experiencing an ongoing *loss* regardless of which side they identify with. But both sides couldn't have lost...could they? So why was this? This incredible weight in the hearts and minds of both societies is such a burden that it births the conflict at the heart of *Genesis Star*, and throughout the novel there is a bitterness at the center of its actors, a trauma that, whatever its truth, haunts them.

What piqued my initial thought process to seek the macronarrative more directly was, funnily enough, this most surface-level question: "Who won?" But were it *so* simple, I'd never have pursued it...I don't think. What truly drove me about that question was that there was a history that could be told behind it, not to explain so much, or even to answer it, because I understood even then that what was important wasn't what had happened but how it had happened at all, and why that was. How had these people's lives become so poisoned by their history? Why did it have to happen? The ambiguity beating at the heart of the first novel was the space of uncertainty that generated a psychic space for my imagination to work, and work it has, *backward* through time, the present which becomes future, into the past which is also rendered into present, a future that is history.

⁷⁸ History, it seems by my explorations of the subject in this thesis, is formed largely by such subterranean convergences. The transversality of people and peoples, and their History and histories, is actualized in the seeming absence of that which affects and effects. I might say this applies to the work I (read: we...whatever it is we as people and *a* people produce) am doing here. It is easy to focus on the end result, the product, the art in its final form. As one looks at the tree of history and may only see *a tree*, one tends to see a work of art as that singular, immutable product, when the final work is, always, a representation of its conceptual, creative, and evolutionary processes. As the writer of these works-in-question, there is always, even upon "completion," an oscillation between my appreciation for the end result and the process—here, I've discussed *Second Exodus* and the sequence as a whole as if it were, right now, whole, as if it were complete, as if it were ever final. I know I must do this to engage with it as an object of analysis, but these are texts that exist in perpetual development, just as the thesis is a text that underwent dozens upon dozens of developments, mutations, purposeful, intentional, accidental, mistaken growths that bring it into the form it currently exists in (whatever form it is...at what point did I conceive of this particular idea, passage, entry?), but it *does* exist, beneath the surface of tangible, material reality within my imagination, as an entity in unresolved tension with its various influences and states and possibilities, always evolving, the form I *do* impose upon it an embodiment of the process of imagination, creation.

calamities exist not in Earth or any other geographic location, but within the psychic space of humanity, at the contact points of its many divisions which we struggle to overcome for decidedly *human* reasons.⁷⁹ Ultimately, the fifth and final novel will detail the birth of the universe billions of years ago, being a prose poem to the capacity for potential, possibility, and (dare I say?) implicit hope in the time, place, and space of existence and life. If humanity fails to fully realize this potential, as we will have seen over the span of the sequence, it is because we are fallible, forced to contend uphill with the impacts of our individual and collective pasts as we also work to form better futures from those failures.⁸⁰ The attempt is always worthwhile because of that inherent potential and capacity to realize, however unreachable it seems to be, however impossible it truly is.

My structuring of the sequence also works as another admission on my part of its inability to fully grasp the History I am working toward, because each contains a

⁷⁹ Which returns us, one final time, to Calvino. The work of the writer, while technical in many ways, is not a science, and cannot be expected to adhere to the same guiding principles of mathematical precision. Writing is art, and storytelling even more so. Because this work is creative, it will necessarily pass through realms of uncertainty—it's from uncertainty, a questioning, that the creation comes. These same subjective spaces are where people perceive, interact, feel...it's here that we have access to each other, where we might open ourselves to our empathetic possibilities. As I've mentioned, with one life, and one chance to do *something*...this work is my passion, not just what I find creatively satisfying and intellectually stimulating, but what I believe is genuinely worthwhile. It is bigger than myself, and I am striving to contribute to it...whatever *it* is.

⁸⁰ Recalling Kierkegaard, we cannot help but fail to understand our lives, experiences, histories, and History itself, as we live them, because in the process of their happening we must perpetually continue forward. When we turn back to view the wreckage piling up in our wake we are always still being propelled into the next moment, never truly at rest to reflect. The future narrative, generating a location upon which I can imagine a halting, a resting point, for myself, allows *me* to stop and reflect and maybe try to understand. The world within the narratives, its peoples, *they* cannot come to rest, because it is their lives that continue in motion, but within the future narrative I do not exist, and if I had I'd already likely be dead and buried, no longer moving but at a metaphorical rest, and I have the capacity to do the work focus solely on tracing those connections backward through time, space, history, without the hindrance of having to move forward from there. Through this work, I am seeking to better understand myself, and my world, here and now, as I *do* move on into tomorrow and beyond.

chronicle of a specific moment (itself constituted by a series of smaller moments) within the lifespan of the cosmos, filtered (almost entirely) through its relationship with humanity, which resists true totalization. As the whole, absolute truth cannot be attained, because it is far too grandiose in scale and multitudinous in nature, my own grandiose (in its own way) project seeks to pursue the impossible on a scale and in a scope that inches toward the actual whole, a sequence of microcosms within microcosms from which the macrocosm is meant to be affectively experienced in a finally inexplicable way. Indeed, the fact that a true whole *cannot* be formed gives life to realization of what the impossibility of totalization means to the parts that are believed to constitute it, and the value their diversity brings to questions of universal truths. The reader will progress through the novel and its multivalent narrative threads, through the sequence in its starts and stops, beginnings and endings melting into a state of happening, because nothing finite emerges, and as the reader experiences another part of the whole, which illuminates connections between past, present, and future and layers meaning over top of History, but never with any finality, as if infinite histories and their connections can be introduced into the process to reveal more to us, to make us more knowledgeable and feel more connected to the whole, yet we would remain just as separated from an actual totalization.⁸¹ It is the nuances of the micro that,

⁸¹ A story's ending is like a goodbye—we leave its world and are never able to go back into it from where we left, incapable of returning to check-in on how things are doing...we can reexperience the story, and perhaps learn something new from it that we'd missed out on before, but the story will be the same, its world unchanged from any previous venture into it. Yet this isn't a final departure either, because the world of the narrative went on long before we ever got there, and will continue going on long after we've left and been "forgotten" by it. The ending is one of ourselves, in ourselves—any *feeling* of change will exist within ourselves, but not *it*. Like living a life, like history, we understand the story as we've experienced it, turning back upon it, but must live through that experience forward, and once that experience has happened, it is past. But, also like history, it continues impact us at its end, when we depart—its impacts, implications and insights linger, grow, and change us as we go on in our own world.

isolated from the whole, remain incomprehensible, just as the macro, perceived only as the final product, remains opaque. In dialogue, they render meaning capable of transcending psychic limitations, forming branches that reach across the chasm(s) of time, space, and place, individuals and peoples.

Speaking to the novel as a form but apt for what I am working through in terms of scale and scope, Elif Batuman writes that one reflects back after reading the entirety of a work, having “looked for x, and [finding] a, b, c, g, q, r, and w,” recognizing that the extraneous, unplanned, seemingly excessive “irrelevant garbage” of the narrative is synthesized into a meaningful whole, the garbage possibly redeemed and “integrate[d] it into Life Itself [...] redraw[ing] the boundaries of Life Itself” (“Short Story & Novel”). I see this when, at the end I have envisioned for *Second Exodus*, Danny’s son Jaco stands beside his father to view their arrival at the first habitable world they discover four decades after leaving Earth behind. Jaco, who will then be older than his father was when the ark first departed all those pages before, will watch as his own adult child—his daughter, Danny’s granddaughter—floats outside the ark’s outer shell in the blue and green glow of the world before them. Faye, elsewhere, will pass away in bed as the imagination of those pitiful, impossible speculations are shown to be what powered the possibility of this moment. Thrust then into the eyes of Danny’s granddaughter, we will see this new world from within the vastness of space, gazing into this future overwhelmed by the infinite possibilities of the beautiful world, an uncertain future but one that now exists within reach, where the world before had

Like the “endings” of each of the novels in my *Sophist* sequence, an ending—any ending—is only provisional in nature, a bridge from present into future that turns back to the past.

embodied no possibility, no future, where the dark shroud of nihilism was, like the universe, omnipresent. In the new world's guiding light will lie the physical manifestation of the capacity for hope, change, the future, any future—we will know, having worked through this novel, that the problems humanity escaped from on Earth did not, in fact, get left behind, because the problems were always within, in humanity, which were only transported from Earth to the Ark *Titan*, and so the forty years aboard the ark have been even worse than the conditions on Earth. We will also know that, from the preceding three novels, the possibility these people (*we*) see in the world to be named Luna will never be truly realized, because of the ongoing conflicts that commence within their narratives, on their pages, so it seems on its surface to be a dreadful affair, a project composed about and of a bitter pessimism that rejects any consideration of potential renewal, rejuvenation... Yet, because we will have traced this history backward, from the future toward the past and into the present, we will also see that, while these developments occurred and cannot be changed after they have taken place, the possibility for something else to have developed was always there—at each time, at all times in history, the branches could have grown any other way, if we had made different decisions, taken different actions, that we could have followed through and realized this potential, that because we effected what did happen, we contain the capacity to effect it any other way.⁸² *Not* that their arrival at this new,

⁸² This is the work of “wallowing” in pessimism, dread, nihilism, cynicism—to approach the edge and dive in to experience and *know*, however inexplicable, and still be able to grab hold of the seemingly singular protruding rock and try to climb back out, to know *then* that such possibility (facing the insurmountable, the impossible, the helpless, the hopeless) exists, and that the capacity to do so lies within. This is to me, the ultimate hope. Not faith. Not belief. Not even trust. Just hope, the capacity to overcome.

vibrant, living world is their salvation, because in the four decades since leaving Earth—simultaneously long, spanning whole generations, and short, the mere blink of a cosmic eye—humanity will have managed to drive themselves, and their manmade world, to the brink of complete destruction once more. Pulsing beneath the fabric of this new world, though, is the creative spark of a vast canvas upon which humanity is free to lay down whatever colors they choose, however they choose. The capacity for another failed work is, as it always has been, present, an inescapable reality, but so is the capacity for beauty, perhaps even a masterwork. These capacities lie within the beating center of each person, and no matter how greatly they have failed in their acts of creation—individually and collectively—they will have, nevertheless, endured through those failures, having found their way here, to this world across the impossible expanse of the universe. Having lived these experiences, and having done the tracing of their past, the work they do here will be the future, will be History.

From the start, it will have only been that single sprout of light peeking through the void in the form of Danny's waking dreams and through, as the narrative develops, Faye's persistence in fighting for it. But that singular beam, however miniscule, will have cut through the void, filling it, killing it, giving light to the whole of the cosmos. It may be difficult to recognize this potential from behind that blinding shroud, but, however distant, it travels as fast as the elemental particles bursting into material form at the first moment. That little light, powerful enough to overcome the cosmos, guides the way, the darkness made visible. All the histories in the narrative, all divergent narrative branches growing in and out of one another's space, coming into what seems

to be a final contact here.⁸³ Yet reading through these works in reverse chronological order, reaching back farther each time, only to be propelled forward, inch by inch, within each narrative, never fully reconnecting with that past narrative—the present narrative’s future—separated each time by longer stretches of time, larger chasms of history, we will know that the boundless promise of that light will not be realized. Still, in our knowledge is this: at all times, at every point, that possibility is there, here with us *now*. The branches will continue to grow, infinitely, as we know from having experienced those future narratives, all points in time beginning and ending and being *in process*, always inescapably hindering and inexplicably vitalizing. So the process will go—the never-ending work, a never-ending ending—itself capable of being rendered because of its fictional form, because of the immensity of the multitudes of histories within History, because of the speculative possibility of the imagination that allows us a vantage to trace what was, is, and draw a new path toward what can be.⁸⁴

⁸³ Here is where I believe my conceptualization of the work as “work” is fully realized. By emphasizing the immense, impossible task of trying to compose a literary philosophy that engages with the indefinable gap between human beings across experience, space, and time, and marrying that with the enormity of my own project (and lifelong body of work, because I do want to be clear that this novel sequence, while massive, accounts for only a selection of my total work, which spans nearly three decades now) I have, I hope, explicated just how much of a struggle it is, one that I don’t expect to succeed at overcoming. That it is such a struggle is...kind of the point? It’s in the struggling—reaching, grappling, slipping, trying again—that the most productive discourse and potential realizations occur. The hope of ever achieving a true, whole, empathetic connection to another human being outside of oneself is already a difficult task, and only increases in its challenge if we think of others far outside of ourselves—not family, not friends, not acquaintances, but the actual, total *O/other*, from somewhere else, from *sometime* not our own. But the work is always, *always* worth the struggle, and failure, because any good that comes of it brings us all a little closer together. And as I’ve argued ad nauseum that it’s impossible to complete the “bridging” of our differences, nothing is really lost in the attempt, so what is there to lose in trying? It’s impossibility actually renders its worth, I believe, because it doesn’t offer us a false, naïve expectation that will inevitably be disappointed—to do good, to try to do good, for the sake of trying to do good...when we try, and fail, but in the process learn something about each other, and feel a little more connected, a little more appreciative of what makes us unique, haven’t we succeeded? To do nothing would be to give in to the entropic forces of fear, anger, hate, and dehumanization of the other, the utter *lack* of empathy.

⁸⁴ I suppose this is why I have pursued this work so...resolutely? At any given time, I have between one major novelistic project (which may span multiple volumes) and multiple smaller ones on my proverbial

docket, in addition to any number of short stories and novellas I may be in the process of planning, writing, or rewriting. I'd be lying if I said I *enjoyed* giving myself to these massive commitments, that of large-scale novels...I don't hate writing, per se, but I can *probably* honestly say that I hate writing novels—the *writing of* novels. It's my central form, and one that I personally hold as the preeminent, most powerful *textual* narrative form, but I don't enjoy having to do it. *Have* to do it? No one's holding a gun to my head, obviously. Except myself—figuratively, that is...so far. It's a compulsion, one that sucks my life up and restricts me from doing anything else outside of this infinite, fucked up place inside. I actually love writing stories and novellas (and I'm fortunate to harbor a passion for speculative work, one of the last bastions of literature that still champions the novella). I tend to work on shorter stuff between large novel projects (usually in 2-3 year periods) to allow my brain to regenerate from the stress of the previous novel. It helps, I guess, that gestation is a key part of my process (one I just don't have the time or space to fully integrate into this statement), in which I plan work out years in advance. I mentioned my current novel was being planned for twelve years? A story I wrote a couple years ago was about ten years in planning, the previous novel about five years, and the novel I *was* going to write before realizing the fourth *Sophist* book needed to be done now (it could not wait, given the historical developments of the past few years), that's been in the works for roughly fifteen. I let the idea gestate, fester, evolve, and sometimes it whittles out and dies, sometimes it grows stronger. Because of this, I know exactly at what point I can stop writing on this exhausting scale—it's after a certain, final one I've been planning for a long time, assuming that one, too, doesn't fade away. It truly does feel like novel writing takes so much out of me that, sometimes, I think it's killing me, bodily, emotionally... I do believe, based on my temperament, that I'm particularly able to deal with the toll of such stresses, but it's probably not possible to maintain an absolute defense indefinitely when working within and around *failure*, no matter how expected it is. There's only so much I can fail—and have those failures further solidified by the...let's say *confirmations* of the responses (read: rejections) I get from others—before it catches up with me. At some point, it has to. Sometimes, it feels like it is. If I'm able to...I guess *hold out* long enough, I'll retire from the novel form, having (within myself) mastered what I am capable of in it, and will dedicate my writing solely to shorter works, almost like they are little creative treats I will have earned for giving so much of myself, my life, (and the lives of my characters) to the work of “pry[ing] open the scars of history,” insofar as I am capable. It's worth it, I believe, to reach for that contact point where all things past, present, and future meet even if I can't ever actually get it fully within my grasp, because it's how I hope to better *be* within the world we've made, and better give to the world we are making. Succeed or fail, this is my work. And I believe this is okay—okay to me, in my own estimation for the standards I choose to hold myself to—because in this speculated, not-yet-happened future, the work I will have already done will carry on, I hope, in the readings and rereadings of others, in their reflections, deliberations, questions and wonderings and imaginations. This is the work that doesn't end, the work of infinite creation. I hope.

At any rate, it should be far more fun to write and demand less of my body, mind, and whatever else there may be within that a very different, spiritually inclined person might recognize as a “soul.”

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