Friends and Followers:
Character and New Media in the Contemporary Global Novel

Anastatia Malloy Curley
New Haven, Connecticut

B.A., Yale University, 2007

A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia
in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

University of Virginia
June, 2017

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements....3
Introduction: Novel Characters and the Risk and Thrill of Transparency....5
Chapter 1: Flat Characters, New Media, and Contesting Realisms in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* 36
- Facebook and the Novel as Technologies of Self-Formation 39
- The Limits of the Realist Novel....44
- New Textual Media: Blogging as a Space of Community....49
- Who is SapphicDerrida? Flat Characters in New Media Contexts....56
- Conclusion: The Limits of Media....68

Chapter 2: Charismatic Characters in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* and Teju Cole's *Open City*....80
- Why Charisma?....82
- Teju Cole: The Limitations of Mediated Empathy....93
- Open City: Dispassionate Encounter and the Problem of Scale....102
- A Tale for the Time Being: The Charismatic Character as Conduit 107
- Conclusion: Partial Commitments....121

Chapter 3: Collaborative Character in Rachel Cusk's *Outline* and Sheila Heti's *How Should a Person Be?* 137
- Autofiction and Realism....139
- The Gesture vs. the Object: Prizing Conversation....144
- Social Media Displaces the Novel....150
- How Might a Person Collaborate?....154
- The Limits of Conversation....158
- Conclusion: Embodiment Over Mediation....165

Conclusion: Risking Virtual Intimacy....171
Works Cited and Consulted....176

Acknowledgements

What follows can be only a partial list of the many people whose engagement, affection, and support made it possible for me to complete this dissertation.

First and foremost I would like to thank Mrinalini Chakravorty, who let me take my own path without ever abandoning me on it. I am grateful for the depth and breadth of her knowledge, for her intellectual rigor, for her interest in my odd vocabulary, and for her grace in taking on this project at a late date. Victor Luftig offered skepticism and enthusiasm in equal measure: the combination, along with his careful attention to my prose, has made him an invaluable reader of my work. I could not have done without Steve Arata's knowledge of the history and theory of the novel, nor without his calm demeanor and dry wit.

I wrote this project in many different cities, but throughout my travels I was always buoyed by the community of graduate students in the University of Virginia English department. Lindsay Turner, Casey Ireland, Jap Makkar, Sophie Abramowitz, and Stephanie Bernhard read my work, but perhaps more crucially fielded many, many text messages and emails about matters mundane and important; conversations with them brought me through crises and triumphs both academic and personal. To Annie Galvin and Jesse Bordwin, my companions in global contemporaneity, I especially owe thanks. Carol Guarnieri read more drafts of these pages than I like to think about: I cannot thank her enough for being an excellent editor and a true friend. At the University of Chicago, working alongside Emma Mackinnon, Natasha Piano, and Hannah Eisler Burnett carried me through what could otherwise have been a lonely year. Kate Monaghan has refuted my self-deprecation for many years, offering hospitality and intellectual stimulation along the way. Last but not at all least, I have to thank the brilliant, loving, complicated, and constant women who have long been my chosen community. Maggie Doherty, Ming-Qi Chu,

Rachel Mannheimer, and Rachel Criswell: not only this project but much else in my life would be impossible without your companionship.

Completing this project would have been a great deal more difficult without the generous support and the interdisciplinary intellectual home that the Yale Sustainable Food Project provided me at a late stage. I thank everyone there, perhaps especially Vivian Munno for coming along at the right time. Some of the material in Chapter 3 was published as "Smaller and Less Beautiful: Refusal Aesthetics in the Contemporary Novel" at *Politics/Letters*; my thanks to Bruce Robbins for his curiosity about my work and his perspicacity.

Daniel Luban has thought alongside and in conversation with me since before I began this dissertation. I cannot imagine my life without his presence, whether mediated or embodied, at a distance or at close quarters. I have been very lucky in him and in my families: my sister Oona Curley is thoughtful, careful, and passionate in her work and her life in ways that I can only hope to be, and Rachel Luban is also a model of curiosity and care. I am grateful to have both of them in my life. Judy Lichtenberg and David Luban have encouraged me through every stage of this project; I thank them for that and for all of the ways they have welcomed me into their family. Finally, I owe more thanks than I can possibly express to my parents, Mark and Mary Ellen Curley. They have been unfailingly generous throughout my life, no matter how quixotic my pursuits, and they have modeled for me ways of balancing care for others with taking one's own path. My late grandmother, M. Louise Curley, is someone I think of often; although she hated the idea of being a role model, she remains mine in many ways. I dedicate this dissertation to the three of them: without them none of it would have been possible.

Introduction: Novel Characters and the Risk and Thrill of Transparency

"My God, … It's heaven," opens Dave Eggers's *The Circle* (2013). The novel unfolds almost entirely in free indirect discourse, focalizing its third-person narration through its protagonist, Mae: it begins with her rapture as she enters the campus of the Circle, the novel's eponymous Google/Facebook hybrid, on her first day of work there. The close of the novel offers a darker image of the Circle, though: Mae sits by the bedside of her friend Annie, who began the novel as the Circle's golden girl but by its end has collapsed into a coma whose cause is "a subject of some debate… but most likely…stress, or shock, or simple exhaustion" (495). As Mae watches the monitors keeping Annie alive, she wonders what Annie is thinking:

> It was exasperating, really, Mae thought, not knowing. It was an affront, a deprivation, to herself and the world. She would bring this up with Stenton and Bailey, with the Gang of 40, at the earliest opportunity…. Why shouldn't they know [the thoughts Annie was thinking]? The world deserved nothing less and would not wait. (497)

The reader knows that Annie collapsed at least in part because Mae divulged details of Annie's private life on the Circle's online social network, making her current desire to know what is happening in Annie's comatose brain even more chilling. Eggers imagines the near future as hellish rather than heavenly, even if Mae refuses to see it as such; the character is excellent at cloaking her most ruthless and self-serving behavior (such as posting those details of Annie's life) in the language of care or the discourse of human rights. Mae, despite moments of uncertainty earlier in the novel, has by the end fully aligned herself with the Circle's commitment to transparency and sharing as universal and unquestionable social goods.

As Mae puts it, "Most people would trade everything they know, every*one* they know—they'd trade it all to know they've been seen, and acknowledged, that they might even be

remembered" (490). Eggers's own pessimism about the mores of social media companies is clear from the opening pages of the novel, which dryly chronicles the inspirational (or Orwellian) imperatives chiseled into the walls of the Circle: "Dream," "Participate," "Breathe" (2). *The Circle* chronicles a warped version of the New Sincerity with which Eggers aligned himself earlier in his career;[1] with a few key exceptions, the people who work at the company are motivated by excitement about new technology and commitment to social improvement rather than by a profit motive. Under the Circle's influence, Mae comes to believe that exposing the people in her life to public scrutiny (sharing her sick father's email address with her millions of followers so that he can receive messages of support, seeking out her ex-boyfriend with drones when he attempts to escape into the wilderness) is a form of support: "Suffering is only suffering if it's done in silence, in solitude," she thinks. "Pain experienced in public, in view of loving millions, was no longer pain. It was communion" (445). All of the characters who believe in the Circle share this committed yet thoughtless alignment of transparency and social good: "Sharing is Caring/Privacy is Theft," proclaims one of the company's founders (305).

While Eggers clearly fears living in a society committed to transparency at all costs, he also understands how seductive transparency can be. He knows that people love to share details about their lives and know details about the lives of others.[2] The novel understands that being completely known is simultaneously extremely desirable and only accomplished through death:[3] the fear at the heart of the novel is that the commitment to transparency it aligns with social media will create a world in which individual humans seek to become fully visible beings and also seek to fully know each other. What *The Circle* fears, in other words, is that social media will turn human beings into literary characters.

I make this claim on the basis of a central tenet of character theory: that the key difference between a reader's relationship with a literary character and that with another human being is that readers have total knowledge of characters—what Frances Ferguson calls "overknowing" (527)—while people can only have partial knowledge of each other. As E.M. Forster writes in *Aspects of the Novel*,

> People in a novel can be understood completely by the reader, if the novelist wishes; their inner as well as their outer life can be exposed. And this is why they often seem more definite than characters in history, or even our own friends; we have been told all about them that can be told; even if they are imperfect or unreal they do not contain any secrets, whereas our friends do and must, mutual secrecy being one of the conditions of life upon this globe. (57)

While Forster takes "mutual secrecy" for granted in 1927, it no longer seems to be an accepted condition of "life upon this globe" in the twenty-first century.[4] The erosion of various forms of privacy is a fact of life; citizens' data and behaviors are visible to their governments in ways that Forster could not have imagined, but people also make both mundane and extraordinary aspects of their lives visible to their social circles in ways he would have marveled at (and might have found distasteful.) While he might not have been able to imagine these aspects of twenty-first century social life, however, Forster can understand their seductions: "[the fact that we can fully know a literary character] is why novels, even when they are about wicked people, can solace us; they suggest a more comprehensible and thus more manageable human race" (70). Forster's "manageable" seems to describe the relationship of one individual to another; privacy advocates (and certainly *The Circle*) might claim that a more transparent society is indeed a more

"manageable" one but mean it in terms of Foucault's discipline society or Gilles Deleuze's control society.

Like Forster, Ferguson thinks that novels might encourage readers to envision a manageable world: she writes of free indirect style that it "allows us to be such effective spies on many literary characters that we can imagine that we know them as we could not know persons in ordinary life and then perhaps encourages us to imagine that we do know or ought to know other people just that thoroughly" (526). If Ferguson and Forster describe the seductions of full knowledge, philosopher Candace Vogler stringently critiques those seductions. "I will be making an *ethical mistake*," she writes, "if I take myself to have the kind of grasp of a person that fiction makes available to me in my engagements with imaginary people. I will make an ethical mistake if I think that I should *strive* for such understanding" (15). She goes on to align full knowledge with murder: to understand a human being (whom she names "Jane") in the way one can understand Henry James' Maggie Verver, one would have "not only to stalk, eavesdrop upon, and interview Jane repeatedly…. But, having finally acquired and archived all available evidence on Jane, … will have to see to it that her life ends" so that knowledge of Jane will not be falsified by new experiences or changes of heart or mind on her part (15).[5]

Eggers's novel depicts a world in which most people are making Vogler's "*ethical mistake*"—but also pays attention to how many people make this mistake every day: *The Circle* (like Forster, Ferguson, and Vogler) knows how much people *want* both to know and to share. As Tung-Hui Hu puts it, arguing for the ways that the cloud inaugurates new forms of political sovereignty rather than abolishing them, "the sovereignty of data is activated by our desire; we supply the data, the free labor, and the participation" (147).[6] Eggers's novel concurs, suggesting that social media offers both complete understanding of others and complete self-revelation—

and also that the culture of Silicon Valley, and the language it uses to describe its technologies, turns Vogler's claim on its head. Rather than depicting striving for total understanding as an ethical mistake, this language describes it as a positive good: refusing to share "comes from a bad place… when you deprive your friends…. you're depriving them of something they have a right to. Knowledge is a basic human right. Equal access to all possible human experiences is a basic human right" (Eggers, *Circle* 303). Many of the characters in the novel borrow the discourse of human rights (as Mae did in its closing paragraph), often out of real enthusiasm for the Circle's commitment to transparency. If they borrow it to lend their business practices gravitas, however, over the course of the novel such language comes to seem utterly voided of any political or ethical content. The degree of separation between this discourse and the experiences it describes can seem absurd—but it is not far off of the techno-utopian language of the Silicon Valley entrepreneurs Eggers satirizes. In *The Facebook Effect*, David Kirkpatrick quotes Mark Zuckerberg: "The days of you having a different image for your work friends or co-workers and for the other people you know are probably coming to an end pretty quickly… Having two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity" (199). Hypocritically or not,[7] Facebook is constructed to demand what Zuckerberg calls "integrity" from its users: Eggers's novel depicts the ways that the logical conclusion of this commitment to personal transparency is a carelessness with and for human life that amounts to a drive towards the annihilation of actual people. It is also a drive towards homogeneity: *The Circle*'s imaginary people do not simply convert themselves into fully knowable fictional characters, but into characters that are not particularly interesting. The more they commit to transparency, the more similar they become: presented with dialogue from the novel taken out of context, the reader would be hard pressed to tell who was talking.

Eggers's novel draws a connection between social media's commitment to transparency and the dangers of a human being's understanding themselves as a character. But the novel offers a dichotomy that is too simple, too binary. Both novel characters and mediated relationships are more complex than *The Circle* allows. The seductiveness and danger of transparency that are at the heart of the novel do, however, offer a compelling connection between fictional character and social media. This project explores that connection and considers how, by flickering between text and person, novel characters make possible critiques of contemporary network society and offer forms of engagement that their creators contrast with those the network offers.

By highlighting the ways contemporary novels represent character, this project attempts to renovate character as a site of formal experiment in the contemporary novel. As well as offering a vocabulary for describing and acknowledging the complexity of character, though, it argues that this vocabulary can also illuminate the infrastructure and operations of the contemporary media environment. Attention to the way literary characters are, to borrow Mieke Bal's language, "paper people" (115)—in other words, made of text but suggestive of humanity—can help us better understand a historical moment in which our encounters with what one might call other "flesh people" are increasingly mediated. We are more likely to encounter others over media; further, media theorists have argued that social media platforms borrow many of the techniques of novelistic characterization. If social media encourages people to fashion themselves into characters, attention to the mechanics of literary character can illuminate everyday life in the twenty-first century as well as to make visible a formal aspect of the contemporary Anglophone novel.

In my belief that understanding formal strategies can lead to an understanding of social life, I join a number of scholars who emphasize the social capacities of form, including

Shameem Black, Marta Figlerowicz, John Frow, Caroline Levine, and David Palumbo-Liu. These scholars consider literary and social forms as interpenetrating: "[a]n attention to both aesthetic and social forms," as Levine reminds us, "returns us to the very heterogeneity at the heart of form's conceptual history." "Literary formalists," she continues, "have precisely the tools to grasp [the] formal complexity [of the contemporary world] and, with them, to begin to imagine workable, progressive, thoughtful relations among forms—including … sprawling, connective networks of power" (*Forms* xiii). Or as Figlerowicz puts it, "I take for granted the notion that the novel can be treated not merely as a symptom of, but as a critical engagement with, the social and material conditions of the real world" (*Flat* 5). John Frow suggests that understanding literary character in particular might help us understand how "social personhood works as a kind of fiction: that is, as a model shaped by particular social practices and institutions (legal and religious frameworks, for instance) but also by the schemata that underpin fictional personhood" (Frow vii).

Many scholars who consider the social aspects of form, particularly those who do so with reference to the twenty-first century novel, also argue that the ethical or political power of the novel as a genre rests on its capacity to circulate difference. In an exemplary claim, David Palumbo-Liu calls this "modern literature's valorization of difference" and argues that literature's aim "is precisely to deliver to us 'others' with lives unlike our own" (1). Character is central to this conception of the novel's ethical potential, for it is characters that are the vessels and vectors of difference: they are the manifestations of alterity. But character is an unloved and under-considered aspect of the novel in contemporary scholarship on novel form (Palumbo-Liu, for instance, turns towards systems of discourse to explain how contemporary literature copes with otherness), and the lack of attention to techniques of characterization means that scholars

who understand fictional figures as bearers of alterity tend to predicate this understanding on a version of characters as "particular others" (Haley 107). Or as Dorothy Hale puts it, "[t]he author who must more or less use a character for his or her expressive ends is felt to be exploitive" (903). There are good reasons for scholars' commitment to particularity, as Hale makes clear, but insisting on the particular means that scholars of the contemporary novel tend to position the encounter between reader and character as one "autonomous" being encountering another—in other words, as very similar to the way that they imagine an ethical encounter taking place between two human beings. I am sympathetic to the idea that asking characters to be representative of whole communities does representational violence to both character and community; I explore this issue in detail in chapter 2, but it is implicit in many of the questions I ask and claims I make in this project as a whole. Yet I think scholars need to move past this focus on the particular in order to take better account of the ways that characters are hybrid beings, neither simply imaginary individual people nor textual constructs. Some recent scholarship attempts to do so: Alex Woloch's *The One vs. the Many* considers how novels fit characters into a larger structure and Figlerowicz's *Flat Protagonists* argues that the flatness rather than the roundness of certain novel protagonists offers a fruitful model for interpersonal relationships. Yet Woloch and Figlerowicz situate their work primarily in nineteenth-century studies. Scholars of the twenty-first century novel tend to argue that the form of the contemporary novel reflects and intervenes in debates about globalization and personhood, but not to read techniques of character as an aspect of literary form; I attempt to use the insights of scholars like Woloch and Figlerowicz to understand how these techniques are central to the ethical and political work the contemporary Anglophone novel might do.[8]

As such, this project turns attention to the techniques of character certain contemporary novels employ. Its intervention lies in its commitment to showing the formal complexity of novelistic representations of character in the contemporary moment—and to showing how these techniques of character presentation demand particular modes of relation between character and reader. By situating these modes of relation alongside (and sometimes against) those offered to readers by social media, I show how the two can be formally similar while also being different in crucial ways. Paying attention to the similarity and the difference allows me to show that a central concern of the contemporary novel is to map the relationship between mediation and feeling for others (especially faraway others), and that these novels make clear the limitations of mediated connections while also imagining ways they might enrich readers' lives.

First, though: how have literary scholars understood what a fictional character is and what place it has in a reader's life? There is a long history of subordinating character to other aspects of the novel in particular but also to narrative art more generally—whether those aspects be plot or linguistic complexity. This tradition dates back to Aristotle's *Poetics*, which explicitly subordinates character to plot: "Tragedy is not an imitation of persons, but of action and of life…. character is included along with and on account of the actions. So the events, i.e. the plot, are what tragedy is there for, and that is the most important thing of all" (11). Plato continues the denigration of character, although along different lines: he is concerned, among other things, about the occasional depiction of gods and heroes acting in ways that do not become them, suggesting for instance that depictions of the "lamentations of famous men" undermine their efficacy as role models for citizens: "we'll ask Homer and the other poets not to represent Achilles, the son of a goddess…. weeping and lamenting as he does in Homer" (1025).

The disdain for character that marks Aristotle's work, and the concerns about it that mark Plato's, inaugurate two themes in character theory that continue to dominate it. John Frow describes these two approaches as the "structural" and the "ethical": one sees character as a textual construct, just a collection of words, and the other as something like a human being (vi). Neither, as Frow goes on to say, "deals satisfactorily with the theoretical problem" of what a character actually is: each approaches the ontological problem of character but does not satisfactorily engage with it (vi). I concur with Frow's claim that the problem remains an open one and would also suggest that each camp is animated by a kind of nervousness about characters' ontological instability. This nervousness is perhaps more evident in the "ethical" camp, which is made up in part by critics who, like Plato, are very concerned about readers mistaking characters for people and thus making questionable moral choices. Yet there is also a sense in which those who insist on character as merely a collection of traits or texts, or as a function of plot, protest too much. In addition, this body of criticism also seems to fail to fully grapple with what Catherine Gallagher calls the novel's "ambivale[nce] toward its fictionality" (337): the novel, in Gallagher's terms, "at once invent[s] [fictionality] as an ontological ground and place[s] severe constraints upon it" (337). Taking Gallagher's claim seriously, as I think scholars of novel form ought to do, means attempting to stitch together the claims of the structural and ethical camps. The first tells us something about the novel's insistence upon fictionality as an ontological ground and the second makes visible the constraints the novel places on it.

Critics who take up Plato's concerns about character seem to think readers of fiction rather unintelligent and character (perhaps especially realist depictions of character) a bit embarrassing as an interest. W.H. Harvey articulates this distaste in 1965, arguing that the

modernist novel's retreat from character parallels literary critics' sense that an interest in character is somehow immature (191). One could convincingly argue (as Harvey does) that literary modernism is the moment of retreat from character into consciousness, but concerns about reading for character, and thus telling oneself the story of one's own life as though one were a character, arise with the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century. They arise in large part because the novel is the genre that focuses attention on protagonists that are ordinary yet made-up people.[9] The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are marked by widespread concern about novel-reading, especially for women (walking in Plato's footsteps, Mary Wollstonecraft bemoans "how foolishly and ridiculously [novels] caricature[e] human nature" in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and what poor models they thus present to indifferently educated women (204)). This concern in turn becomes the subject of novels: while Don Quixote is a very early and perhaps the most emblematic example of a character in a novel who mistakes himself for a character in a novel, a throng of others soon join him. Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817) offers a young woman who reads her realist interactions through the lens of the Gothic novels she loves; Austen's novel suggests that this habit is immature and laughable—but also that it may tell the character more about the world she lives in than those around her allow. Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) offers a tragic version of Austen's comic story: the titular character's misreading of the plot of her life results in misery and early death.

The attitude that characters seem to be human beings and thus run the risk of confusing readers is perhaps most splenetically communicated in the sneering title question of L.C. Knights' 1933 essay "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" Knight goes on not to answer his titular question but to lampoon anyone who might ask it; he, like F.R. Leavis and T.S. Eliot, argues that literary criticism ought to pay attention to literature's structure and themes rather than

its characters. Structuralist critics like Vladimir Propp and A. J. Greimas work in this vein, considering characters as functions of plot. Because Propp and Greimas primarily consider folk tales (which tend to be populated by stock figures) rather than novels, their work is perhaps more useful for considering the minor or flat characters of fiction—but Northrup Frye insists that even more lifelike characters "owe their consistency to the appropriateness of the stock type which belongs to their dramatic function. The stock type is not the character but it is as necessary to the character as a skeleton is to the actor who plays it" (172). I will return to the stock type, or what E.M. Forster calls the flat character, in my first chapter, to argue that Frye's claim might describe a situation that is rife with possibility rather than one that stereotypes and dismisses.

E.M. Forster describes another risk of characters that are too much like human beings: turning to Moll Flanders, he claims that "she fills the book that bears her name, or rather stands alone in it, like a tree in a park" (64). There is nowhere to turn in *Moll Flanders* without being confronted by Moll: Forster goes on to say that "the form of the book progresses naturally out of her character" (64) and contrasts it to the intricate and architectural plots of a writer like Henry Fielding. Forster clearly has a deep affection for Moll, but his description of the way that she takes up her novel makes clear that he sees plot and character as operating in a kind of tug-of-war: there is a finite amount of space in a novel, and it can be taken up either by plot or by character.[10]

If Propp and Greimas resolve this tension by declaring character a function of plot, Roland Barthes makes a different structuralist claim in *S/Z* (1970): that

> from a classic viewpoint, Sarrasine [the Balzac character Barthes uses as his central example] is the sum, the point of convergence, of [a set of semes]. What gives the illusion that the sum is supplemented by a precious remainder (something like

> *individuality*, in that, qualitative and ineffable, it may escape the vulgar bookkeeping compositional characters) is the Proper Name… the proper name enables the person to exist outside the semes, whose sum nonetheless constitutes it entirely (*S/Z* 191, italics in original).

For Barthes, the name of a character is a magnet that draws semes, or units of semantic meaning, towards it, and the sum of these units "constitutes [the character] entirely" even as he notes that fictional texts give an "illusion" that there is something more than the collection of characteristics or concepts that are gathered into a character.[11] Intriguingly, though, even as he insists that character is merely a collection of semes, Barthes flips Aristotle's plot/character binary on its head; character becomes "what is proper to narrative" rather than action:

> As soon as a Name exists… to flow toward and fasten onto, the semes become predicates… and the Name becomes a subject: we can say that what is proper to narrative is not action but the character as Proper Name: the semic raw material… *completes* what is proper to being, *fills* the name with adjectives (*S/Z* 191, italics in original).

According to Barthes, it is the floating semes, attaching to one name or another, that are the real stuff of narrative. If *S/Z* elevates character, though, it does so at the expense of seeing character only as text rather than as a being that one might imagine as another human. Barthes makes this move in an attempt to unmask the bourgeois ideology he sees operating in the nineteenth-century novel—we might, in other words, understand his interest in character as amounting to a screed against characters. Seeing other human beings the way that Barthes sees fictional characters, as a collection of traits gathered around a proper name, could of course be politically useful: coming to such a realization might encourage readers to slough off their false consciousness by making clear the limitations of their own sense of human plenitude. Marta Figlerowicz's *Flat*

Protagonists makes a claim along these lines, arguing that by depicting certain novel protagonists as flat, limited, and typical, novels might "[reveal], rather than inducing, a dimension of their readers' subjective self-regard that a harsh critic might describe as narrow-minded or 'stupid'" (170). Yet I think Figlerowicz's work departs from the structural camp of which Barthes is a prominent member, both in its compassion for limited characters and readers and in its interest in the ways characters resemble humans. I do not think that the shortcomings of Barthes' work are that he suggests that, like literary characters, we humans are less interesting and less robustly individual than we might think—rather, I think its limitation is the insistently textual nature of his analysis. To borrow Frow's formulation again, I think that the "structural" camp takes something like Derrida's "il n'y a pas de hors-texte" both too seriously and too literally.

And yet, of course, the ethical camp runs the risk of not paying quite enough attention to the ways that characters are creatures made of text. Scholars interested in the ethical work that the novel might do tend to ground that import in novels' capacity to arouse and encourage sympathy for others. Yet in order for novels to do so, Nancy Armstrong argues, readers must recognize characters as people; they must be, in Armstrong's terms, "norm-bearing individuals" with whom a reader can have a "person-to-person relationship" (443). Armstrong outlines the limitations of this political project in terms of the limitations on who a reader might acknowledge as a person—but not in terms of a character's difference from a person. Joseph Slaughter, arguing for the relationship between human rights and novel form, suggests that the *bildungsroman* is a form in which "historically marginalized subjects" can appropriate and rearticulate "the egalitarian imaginary" of human rights and the public sphere (91). Again, though, Slaughter speaks in terms of "subjects" rather than characters. For both of these scholars,

as for others concerned with the ethics and politics of novel form, characters are collapsed into the person or population they are understood to represent. The concern of this group of scholars is how strange a character can be before that character no longer resembles a person closely enough to draw a reader's sympathy—but they represent this strangeness in terms of a character's personal traits rather than in terms of a writer's formal choices: the unsympathetic character is the party guest who drinks too much and says impolite things, smells badly, has marred facial features or limbs, or otherwise does not follow the social conventions of his or her host. Or as the novelist Margaret Atwood describes the realist novel, "variations on the desirable norms… take the form, not of vampires or space aliens, but of people with character defects or strange noses" (517). A recent turn in novel criticism towards the cognitive-scientific does take account of characters' fictionality in order to investigate readers' sympathy for characters, usefully asking why readers care so much about fictional people.[12] I share these critics' curiosity about why readers care so deeply about fictional beings whose lives they must imagine as full and robust, but think that answers might be found in the forms of those beings as well as in the cognitive effects of reading about them.

In this commitment I follow recent formalist criticism that attempts to stitch together Frow's structural and ethical camps: like Figlerowicz's, Alex Woloch's work pays attention to the psychological motivation one would associate with the ethical camp and the focus on textual space that seems aligned with the structural one. He claims that characters battle for space in a novel and that minor characters are shaped by needing to fit into small and subordinate spots. My project does something similar but turns its attention to readers' engagement with characters. I am interested in the ways that readers cathect onto characters, and the novelists I read are as well, but they turn that knowledge back towards the formal choices they make in their novels. I

concur with Catherine Gallagher's claim that readers "attach themselves to characters because of, not despite, their fictionality… the fictional framework establishe[s] a protected affective enclosure that encourage[s] risk-free emotional investment" (351).[13] If the structuralist critics refuse to believe that readers do not confuse characters for real people, the ethical critics do not do enough to consider the construction of the "affective enclosure" Gallager describes. Turning towards the novels themselves allows me to read novelists' attention to what these enclosures contain, what they shut out, and how they entice readers in.

Understanding the ways that characters court readers requires paying attention to the world in which a given novel is read. As John Frow argues,

> The question of the affective binding-in of readers to texts is inseparable from that of the historically shifting regimes that govern our identification with or against fictional characters or avatars: learning how to read character is directly bound up with the practice of the self, of recognition of other selves, and of forming an emotional bond with fictional "selves," and these practices work in distinctively different ways in different genres and in different historical and cultural formations. (54)

I follow Frow in his insistence that modes of identification with character are as historically situated as they are continuous, which is one reason I turn my attention not simply to the structure of character in the contemporary novel but also to the structure of social media, which is a crucial aspect of the "practice of the self" and "recognition of other selves" in the twenty-first century.

Because the media I consider are so new, this is not a well-plowed field, but scholars have begun to consider the relationship between the novel and new media. I resist the notion, particularly prevalent among Marxist-influenced critics, that the social or moral function of the

novel has declined or is meaningless in the face of late capitalist modernity's steamrolling of traditional social roles and relationships. Similarly, I do not think that social media has displaced the novel or made it a meaningless social text, as John Carlos Rowe argues:

> the everyday practices of countless people around the world confirm that they find in such social media their best means of asserting their identities, shaping and sharing their own characters, and in many other ways doing the work *once done by the novel.* (463, emphasis mine).

Such claims rest on the conviction that by reading novels, readers learn to shape their own characters: that is one thing that reading novels might offer, but I question whether "the work… done by the novel" has ever been quite so singular or consistent. Ato Quayson also aligns social media and the novel: he argues that the novel operates by what he calls "the efficacy of audience identification"—identification by readers, that is, with someone or something other than themselves ("I Can"). As for Rowe, for Quayson social media replaces novels: users "no longer have to necessarily identify with fictional others in stories, novels, films or on TV, but have all the tools at their disposal to insert themselves into the circuits of spectatoriality for others to look at" (Quayson, "I Can"). It is not surprising that social media would operate in the tradition of the novel: as Richard Bolter and Jay Grusin argue, a new medium often operates by imitating an older one, even as the new media positions itself as an improvement. Bolter and Grusin suggest that this path-dependent act of imitation and improvement can be more or less aggressive: "the new medium can remediate by trying to absorb the older medium entirely, so that the discontinuities between the two are minimized" (47). Rowe and Quayson seem to subscribe to this extreme version of remediation in their discussions of the relationship between social media and the novel. I want to turn attention to this connection between novel and new media because I

think the two are more entangled than these critics suggest: the new media has not simply displaced the old. Like Rowe and Quayson—indeed, like the "ethical camp" of character criticism I mention above—I am interested in the social work that novels do; but I also think that the affective relationships that readers have to characters are complex and odd, and the work that the novel does might be something other than that of the self-development Rowe and Quayson describe.

While this project rests on scholarship on the history of the novel as a form and considers the relationship of that form to social life, the shape and meaning of the networks that underpin our lived experience of the digital landscape are also central to my claims. To consider how readers connect with literary characters through, alongside, or against their mediated connections to real others, I take note of the scholars who attempt to describe the networks through which contemporary readers move and the kinds of affective and political connections these networks make possible. I will turn to their work in greater detail in the chapters that follow, but it is worth a brief sketch of the recent history of media scholarship on the politics of networks here.

Early users and thinkers of the internet, as media critics often note, often believed in the possibilities more or less summed up by Peter Steiner's famous 1993 *New Yorker* cartoon in which one dog says to another, "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog" (Steiner 61). Because of the disembodied connections it offered, the Internet seemed to hold out the possibility of allowing its users to transcend categories of race, gender, class, and educational level. While the recent rise and current ubiquity of the internet in fact has to a large degree "radically decentraliz[ed] the positions of speech, publishing, film-making… in short the apparatuses of cultural production" (Poster 267), scholars of the "digital divide" have also showed how access to the internet can be uneven and unequal in ways that often map directly

onto the categories that earlier critics had argued it could transcend.[14] Greater empirical attention to the unevenness of access, along with growing awareness of the power of corporations like Google and Facebook and their role in the postfordist economy, has meant that media scholars today tend to take a somewhat dim view of the network's possibilities. Moments like the Arab Spring, often dubbed the "Twitter uprising" or the "Facebook revolution" did offer (if briefly) more optimistic visions of what the internet and the corporations on whose platforms users access it might offer. But while it is indisputable that these technologies make certain forms of assembly possible in ways they had not been—and also make the gatherings they call together visible to a global audience in a way that is new—the emancipatory possibilities of asynchronous and non-place-based user-to-user connections have not been realized.

In contrast, the possibilities for surveillance and manipulation that the internet offers have certainly been realized—as I write, the most obvious example of this development is the Cambridge Analytica scandal, in which Cambridge Analytica gained access to (the digital equivalent of) reams of Facebook users' data, ostensibly for academic research; while the details of the case are still unfolding, Facebook alleges that one of Cambridge Analytica's researchers created a data-collecting app on Facebook and sold the data he collected to the 2016 Trump presidential campaign. The notion that data shared by users as a way of building online personal connections could be used to influence elections is troubling to many users even though, as companies point out, platforms' user agreements make these possibilities clear. Meanwhile, not only social but also professional life has become increasingly dependent on platforms like Facebook and Twitter, such that the choice to opt out is an increasingly self-isolating one. Engagement with such platforms follows the pattern of "network power" that David Singh Grewal describes as central to globalization:

> Prominent elements of globalization can be understood as the rise to dominance of shared forms of social coordination…. coordinating standards are more valuable when greater numbers of people use them, and … this dynamic—which I describe as a form of power—can lead to the progressive elimination of the alternatives over which otherwise free choice can effectively be exercised. (3-4)

Grewal's point is that free individual choice has not been eliminated under network power, but that the more individuals choose one particular option, the fewer options there are; consent accretes and as it does so the opportunities for free choice narrow. In other words, one can choose to delete Facebook—but that may simply be deciding between submitting to surveillance or experiencing social isolation, which is not much of a choice.

Alexander Galloway situates engagement with social networking sites within the half-century-long philosophy and psychology of liberation movements: "the cultural studies and identity politics movements of the 1980s and 1990s…. [were built on] the 1960s mould [*sic*], in which the liberation of desire (and thus affective identities of various kinds) was considered a politically progressive project to undertake" ("Whatever" 111). Galloway argues, with reference to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, that theories of social liberation have located oppression in the erasure of the possibility of speech: liberation thus would involve making it possible for excluded figures to speak. Yet as Nancy Fraser (among others) argues, "utopian desires found a second life as feeling currents that legitimated the transition to a new form of capitalism: post-Fordist, transnational, neoliberal" ("Feminism" 97). Or as Galloway puts it, what we are living with in the present moment is "not so much a politics of exclusion, as a politics of subsumption" ("Whatever" 116). The social and political movements of the second half of the 20th century made space for a wide range of voices and desires—but these desires have been folded into the

postfordist economy. Thus, discovering and speaking one's desire cannot be a way to free oneself. Speaking one's desire is one of the central promises of the internet. It is the other side of the coin, as it were, of "nobody knows you're a dog"—that one might broadcast oneself without having to submit to the traditional gatekeepers of the publishing industry; this notion may be particularly compelling when one feels unseen by the community in which one lives yet unwilling to risk censure by making oneself visible. Yet Fraser's point is that such speech acts are neutered of their political possibility, and as Jodi Dean argues, the constant conversation offered by the internet has "itself become a barrier against acts as action is perpetually postponed" (*Blog* 110). *The Circle* dramatizes the substitution Dean theorizes: when Mae receives a petition asking her to "denounce the Central Guatemalan Security Forces," she

> hesitated briefly, knowing the gravity of what she was about to do—to come out against these rapists and murders—but she needed to take a stand. She pushed the button. An autoresponse thanked her, noting that she was … the 19,282nd to send a frown to the paramilitaries. (243)

The notion that Mae is taking a principled stand is absurd, but it is also potentially harmful in ways that are not encompassed by Mae's conviction that she has "possibly made a group of powerful enemies in Guatemala" (243). Teju Cole calls the sum of such actions "The White Savior Industrial Complex": "fresh-faced young Americans using the power of YouTube, Facebook, and pure enthusiasm to change the world" do not take account of "the patterns of power behind the isolated 'disasters'" ("The White-Savior Industrial Complex"). The failure to understand patterns of power can mean that online social justice movements with an international reach can do more harm than good—if they have any effect at all, which Dean's discussion of internet activism calls into question.

I lay out the arc of this history because while digital media theorists like Dean and Galloway take a dim view of the internet's emancipatory possibilities, there is still the sense that platforms like Facebook make new forms of community possible, or at least make old ones less subject to the changes usually wrought by distance and time.[15] This range of responses arises in part from the omnipresence of digital media in contemporary life: as Patrick Jagoda shows, networks are "practically ubiquitous as both literal infrastructures and figurative tropes" even as they are "accessible only at the edge of our sensibilities" (*Network* 4, 3). Jagoda's *Network Aesthetics* attempts to map this tricky territory, while my project considers how novels attempt to bring what is "at the edge of our sensibilities" a little closer to the center of them. Because I read a range of novels with a range of attempts, a consistent picture of these infrastructures does not emerge. I am more interested in this inconsistency than I am in mapping the infrastructure, and I tend to use the term "the digital media landscape" to refer to both the infrastructure itself and the range of beliefs about how it has influenced twenty-first century lives and relationships. Both the infrastructure and the beliefs people hold about it hover in the background of lived experience and yet also condition what is possible within it, and so I find the metaphor of landscape useful for describing its relationship to both users and literary characters. Different chapters offer more specific terminology that arises from the novels themselves—chapter one, for instance, sometimes offers the "digital public sphere" because that phrase best describes Chimamanda Adichie's depiction of the media landscape, while chapter three lingers on the "regime of mediated capitalism" because Sheila Heti and Rachel Cusk take a much dimmer view of what the network might offer the novel. I hope that the plasticity of this terminology is useful rather than vague: it is an attempt to render the range of interpretations the novels offer.

Because of my curiosity about how the infrastructure of the internet has influenced the representation of novel characters, this project reads many texts in which relationships to social media are buried. Many of them elide the new technology, even as they seem to position themselves against it. There is a set of novels this project could have read that take digital media as central to their plots, but these novels (like *The Circle*) tend to imagine a simplistically dystopian future for a human race entrapped by its devices and networks.[16] They leave a critic (or, for that matter, any reader) little room to maneuver. Amy Hungerford, in *Making Literature Now*, notes that one of the difficulties for a scholar of contemporary literature is the necessity of deciding not only what to say about a text, but which texts to take up, since a canon has not yet formed. Following her injunction to explicitly develop a principle of selection, I have turned to texts that offer versions of character that I think operate in response to the digital landscape and that do so in unexpected ways that make it possible to see the novel, digital media, and social life differently, rather than offering a taxonomy or a set of readings of novels that explicitly represent the digital media landscape. As David Palumbo-Liu suggests, literature is

> already inflected internally in its language by a new language of the Web and the social forms it connects and produces…. but also, and critically for me, the *modes of reading* through and in which we put together data, text, and aesthetic forms have changed" (185).

My project attempts to chart how the social forms of what Palumbo-Liu calls "the Web" have inflected character, and I open with Eggers's novel because it dramatizes the seduction and the threat of becoming a literary character by giving oneself over to social media. It offers a starting point for my project by drawing the connection between literary character and social media and by dramatizing the intensity of affect that both carry, but its reading of disclosure and

transparency is almost purely negative. The novels I turn to in the chapters that follow offer responses that I think are both stranger and more useful.

Each of my chapters takes on a term that describes both a technique of character and an imagined affective response. I consider flatness, charisma, and collaboration as techniques of character presentation that imply or require certain modes of engagement from readers. My first chapter examines flatness: while flat characters are traditionally associated with stereotypes, I argue that flatness can instead offer novels a way to shuttle between the particulars of personal experience and the social structures that underpin it but are often not quite visible in novels that attempt to hew to the representation of the particular. Seen in this way, flat characters—characters defined by a particular set of traits—need not prompt flat responses. Instead, they offer a point of departure that makes it possible for them to surprise the reader precisely because they have been entirely defined by their social position. I make this argument with particular reference to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), which represents the internet, and blogging in particular, as a new public sphere where flat characters meet and prompt engagement. Adichie's work tweaks the pieties of the high literary global novel establishment; making her camp among romance novels and beauty blogs, she shows how flat characters flourish in such settings but also how such cultural forms might be less reductive and more liberating than critics tend to think. Her novel suggests that the increasing mediatization of contemporary life does reduce the roundness of the contemporary character—but the novel also imagines an interplay between flatness and roundness that takes characters' social positions into account while allowing them to surprise themselves, each other, and the reader.

My second chapter considers how characters mediate between readers and other populations. Asking a character to represent a particular population is not particularly satisfying

(aesthetically, emotionally, or politically) and the tendency of scholars to depend on sympathy to explain this relationship between reader, character, and imagined population can fail to take into account the ways novels often try to bind readers to the world they represent. Sympathy also falls short in the face of the scale of the global novel, which often attempts to think through how affect might operate over distance and respond not just to individuals but to larger populations. In order to make these aspects of the novel more visible, I consider charisma as a way of explaining the lure and the danger of both fictional characters and online landscapes. Charisma offers a model for how fictional characters might route readers' attention to faraway others. In the works I consider in this chapter, mediation and distance operate to make faraway people both more present and less real, amplifying or muting affective response. I read Teju Cole's novel *Open City* (2011) and his Twitter project "Seven Short Stories about Drones" (2013) as simultaneously prompting and showing the limitations of affective connection with a fictional character as a goad to political action. I also consider Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013); like Cole's Twitter project, this novel examines the strong affective draw of a single character, but suggests that such a character might prompt a reader's engagement with others rather than forestalling it. The vision of mediation and agency that these writers offer is an ambivalent one, in large part because of their awareness of the scale at which global networks operate and the uneven allotment of attention (mediated or otherwise) to contemporary tragedies. Yet the figure of the charismatic character does make possible connection with faraway others—while it does so in ways that are rife with pitfalls, neither of these writers simply jettison it.

In chapter three, I turn towards texts that seem to want to escape mediation and representation altogether and argue that they put forth a collaborative version of literary character. Here I consider Rachel Cusk's *Outline* (2014) and Sheila Heti's *How Should a Person*

Be? (2010) as autofictional texts that position themselves against the realist novel: these novelists denounce fiction as fake, embarrassing, and tiresome, and deride the use of fabricated characters and plots. I argue that their novels offer a deliberately conversational aesthetic as a way of refusing the polished performances of self they align with visual media—and that in doing so, they illuminate the ways that social media has co-opted techniques of literary realism. Examining the demand to perform ourselves on new media platforms, these novels prioritize a collaborative mode of characterization and narration as an alternative to the round protagonist and the well-plotted novel.

Taken together, these chapters argue that techniques of character imply modes of relation, inviting different responses from readers and mediating between a reader and an imagined or represented person (or group of people) in different ways. Further, though, these chapters attempt to make clear how these modes of relation position themselves against or alongside those offered by digital media. As Patrick Jagoda writes, E.M. Forster's "Only connect!" "seems a perfectly innocent moral imperative" in the early twentieth century but that it "no longer makes sense… to formulate connection as an aspiration. In an early twenty-first century world saturated increasingly by always-on computing, pervasive social media, and pervasive virtual worlds, connection is less an imperative than the infrastructural basis of everyday life" (*Network* 1). Despite the ways that connection can overwhelm, I remain compelled by Forster's dictum, and this project is in some sense an attempt to get past that desperate "only" and think through *how* one might navigate mediated connection. By mapping some of the connections that the novel and the network offer in the early twenty-first century, I show the formal complexity of character in the contemporary novel and also suggest that attention to that formal complexity might offer strategies for traversing the networks of everyday life through which we move.

Notes

1. Lee Konstatinou argues that Eggers's version of the New Sincerity (in contrast to David Foster Wallace's) was an attempt to build alternative institutions: "[p]ut schematically, Wallace sought to defeat bad institutions that give rise to toxic incredulity by constructing a characterological model committed to belief rather than constructing a characterological model committed to challenging (let alone seizing) power... he did not focus on transforming postmodern institutions. Eggers, by contrast, seems to have understood the importance of constructing alternative institutions" (215). Eggers's commitment to community and to the building of alternative institutions offers one lens through which to read *The Circle*, whose narrative is that of sincerely-constructed alternative institutions turned toxic. This novel reads like the story told by someone whose attempts at collective making have been dwarfed by new media companies—not simply rendered meaningless or supplanted but turned towards evil ends.

2. Diana Tamir and Jason Mitchell's paper, "Intrinsic Value of Self-Disclosure" made the case for its title using fMRI scans that showed that sharing information about themselves activated the "neural and cognitive mechanisms associated with reward" in people's brains.

3. While Mae comes to adopt the language and values of the Circle, other characters are quite literally destroyed by it: Annie ends the novel in a coma, Mae's ex-boyfriend Mercer is hounded to death by drones, and Ty, who created the technology that made the Circle possible, comes to see it as "the fucking shark that ate the world" (484)—and is swiftly dispatched to an unnamed but surely unpleasant fate when he attempts to turn Mae against the Circle.

4. Read in light of Forster's queerness, the claim that "mutual secrecy" is a baseline condition of everyday life comes, perhaps, to seem more personal than general—or to seem a

personal necessity that has become so normalized for Forster that it seems to him to be a shared social condition. Yet I do not think that Forster's queerness, and his secrecy around that queerness, needs to govern a reading of this passage. Forster prefaces and follows this remark with examples of pieces of information that can either never fully be remembered (such as birth) or described (such as death) as well as aspects of life that are so banal as to escape attention, indicating that he sees "mutual secrecy" as basic to human existence. It is in fact the basis for social life: the approximate knowledge that we have of other human beings, he writes, "serve[s] well enough for society and even for intimacy" (57). If there is a touch of wistfulness about his "well enough," it explains Forster's interest in and commitment to the novel, the form that *does* allow for complete knowledge. According to his argument, the opportunity to have complete knowledge of another being is part of why novels are so seductive, but he never suggests that readers might try to seek it in their daily lives.

5. As I mentioned earlier, Eggers's novel aligns transparency with death (see endnote 3). But as Vogler shows, this relationship between total knowledge and death is a feature of the history of the novel. A very early example is suggestive: in *Tristram Shandy* (1759), our narrator Tristram wants to describe his Uncle Toby but comes up against the fact that "our minds shine not through the body, but we are wrapt up here in a dark covering of uncrystallized flesh and blood; so that, if we would come to the specific characters of them, we must go some other way to work" (Sterne 75-6). This moment hints at the bloodthirstiness that Vogler unpacks, although Tristram's "other way to work" is not to attempt to vivisect his uncle but instead to describe him by explaining his particular obsessions.

6. While Hu's language of sovereignty develops his particular argument, his notion that transparency and sociality are always already intertwined in the culture of the Internet and that

this entanglement makes a particular set of demands on the contemporary individual is one that is largely shared by scholars of media. See, for example, Galloway and Thacker, *The Exploit*; Dean, *Blog Theory*; Grewal, *Network Power*; and Van Dijick, *The Culture of Connectivity*. (These scholars all paint this set of demands as troubling; for an example of a more cheerful reading of the neoliberal structure of social media, see Rainie and Wellman, *Networked: The New Social Operating System*.)

7. Recent history has made clear that Facebook's commitment to users' transparency is not one the company applies to its own dealings. As danah boyd wrote in 2010, the concept of "radical transparency," central to Facebook's user interface, benefits "Facebook's purse strings" as much as (likely far more than) it benefits society more broadly. Moreover, it is a sham: Facebook's user interface deliberately obscures which populations see what information (boyd, "Facebook and 'radical transparency (a rant)"). The Cambridge Analytics scandal that followed on the 2016 US presidential election made very clear that Facebook's commitment to radical transparency is both partial (the company is willing to sell user's data but not admit to having done so) and beneficial to its bottom line.

8. There has been some recent work in the field of American literature that pays attention to character: Lee Konstantinou's *Cool Characters* (2016) offers a model for thinking about the relationship between what he calls "characterological models" (5) and social and political relations they imply. It is not, however, invested in questions of global circulation, as critics of Anglophone (as opposed to American) fiction tend to be.

9. While there are some dissenters, scholars of the eighteenth century overwhelming tend to argue that one of the things that marks the emergence of the novel as a form is a focus on ordinary people rather than the aristocratic heroes and heroines of the medieval romance. (See

Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (1957); Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (1987); J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels* (1990); Catherine Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality" (2006)).

10. Alex Woloch's work takes this competition—although he sees it as operating between characters rather than between plot and character—as the basis of his *The One vs. the Many*.

11. Narratology, itself a structuralist way of reading novels and other narratives, has a similar conception of character: as Mieke Bal writes, "the character is an effect that makes us believe in the human nature of a creature that is constantly resisting that humanity, in favour of other important insights it has to offer" (119). Bal argues that by understanding characters as versions of human beings readers perform what she calls "psychological criticism [which] is clearly not adequate to account for the literary or cinematic qualities of the text" (114). In other words, it is by endowing characters with humanlike qualities that we paradoxically flatten them. Bal argues that we ought to "[restrict] our investigation to only those facts that are presented to us in the actual words of the text" (114) in order to avoid flattening character and better understand what literary texts have to say about individuality and human relationships.

12. For work in this vein, see Lisa Zunshine's *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel*, Blakey Vermeule's *Why Do We Care About Literary Characters*, Suzanne Keen's *Empathy and the Novel*, and Elaine Auyoung, "The Sense of Something More in Art and Experience."

13. Gallagher argues that this was true as early as the eighteenth century; Deirdre Lynch, for instance, has shown that even eighteenth-century writers marked themselves as fictional.

14. For examples of this wave of criticism, see Van Dijck's *The Deepening Divide: Inequality and the Information Society* (2006), Lisa Servon's *Bridging the Digital Divide* (2002), Renata Mack's *The Digital Divide* (2001).

15. The 2016 US presidential election and its aftermath—including but not limited to the Cambridge Analytica scandal—have somewhat dampened this general enthusiasm. But opinion pieces like "I Can't Jump Ship from Facebook," in which the mother of an autistic child makes the case that Facebook has brought her into a community of parents of autistic children that has been invaluable not only in terms of emotional support but also in terms of concrete help, abound. This piece speaks to the problem of subsumption that Grewal and Galloway describe, in that the author cannot even imagine a way to recreate the group dynamic she has found on Facebook but also wishes she could disentangle herself from the company.

16. I am thinking, for instance, of Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) and Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010), both of which imagine in a future in which all contact with others comes through devices and position this future in a narrative of decline. There are also modes of reading for the internet that would situate this project in the realm of science fiction, but I am particularly interested in realist techniques of character, in part because debates about realism have been central to debates about the ethics and politics of the novel, and in part because my interest in character as a collection of formal choices that are not always understood as such runs in parallel to my interest in making the operations of realism, which is often thought of as less invested in form and less formally interesting than modernist or postmodern fiction, visible as formal choices.

Chapter 1: Flat Characters, New Media, and Contesting Realisms in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*

In a conversation with Zadie Smith at the Schomburg Center, Chimamanda Adichie refers to *Americanah* (2013) as her "fuck-you novel" – and goes on to say that the novel is "a fuck you to another version" of herself (Smith 16:35), the one who is a "dutiful daughter" of literature, and particularly of African literature. Encouraged to some degree by Adichie's own language about the book, scholars have tended to agree with her, reading her earlier novels, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and *Half of a Yellow* Sun (2006) as ones that conform to what Ulka Anjaria calls the "institutionalized" aesthetics of the postcolonial novel (283). Overwhelmingly, these scholars concur that *Americanah* is something different: first, it follows the plot and conventions of a romance novel.[1] Second, it brings its central character from Nigeria to America, but eventually returns her to Nigeria—not "under any kind of compulsion," as Yogita Goyal puts it, but "just because she wants to be in Lagos" (XII).[2] Third, the novel eschews the lyrical prose that marked her earlier novels, offering instead the hectoring and brash style of a new media form, Ifemelu's blog. Critical attention has clustered around these three formal choices because they do seem to be a kind of "fuck you" to the pieties not just of the postcolonial novel but the global literary establishment. Adichie's interest in the popular form of the romance novel (often pigeonholed as a socially conservative genre), her insistence that Lagos is a node in a global cultural network, and her engagement with a particularly of-the-moment new media form and the language of its users set *Americanah* apart not only from the postcolonial novel but from the burgeoning genre of the global novel.

There is much to say about the brashness of Adichie's novel and of its central character, Ifemelu. While I concur with the scholars who argue that Adichie's formal choices are in some

ways a shot across the bow, I want instead to show what those choices, and especially the centrality of Ifemelu's blog, make possible for the novel in terms of character. Scholars who argue that *Americanah* carves out a new path for the global novel and circulates a view of Africa and of women's fiction that is also new have tended to pay attention to Adichie's formal choices (the way excerpts from the blog interrupt the novel) or the workings of its plot (the movements of Obinze and Ifemelu away from and back to Nigeria, the romantic wish-fulfillment of their return to each other), but I want to turn attention to the ways that the internet in this novel is first and foremost a space of character development. What Adichie finds in the blog form is an intensification of the novel's ability to offer characters who are not fully (or perhaps not simply) person-like beings—and her work suggests that these flatter or more typed characters can provoke ethical engagement in ways that rounded characters (characters who more clearly resemble people in the world) might not.

This chapter makes two linked arguments about media and character: first, that *Americanah* can be used to think through a debate about media, self-presentation, and social knowledge because the novel proliferates with old and new media that characters explicitly use to know themselves and others—and that it suggests that textual forms of media (books and blogs) are more effective than visual ones (Facebook). Second, that as *Americanah* commits to text-based media forms it also commits to flat characters as offering opportunities for an engagement with difference. What holds these two claims together is a broader one about the realist novel and alterity: that Adichie's novel allows us to rethink the ways that the realist novel circulates difference in a global context—indeed, that Adichie's refusal in this novel to be a "dutiful daughter of literature" demands such a rethinking. Adichie, I will argue, uses her protagonist's blog to expand the contours of the realist novel by introducing flat characters that

are catalysts for engagement rather than static stereotypes. *Americanah* acknowledges the limits of this project by showing the ways that lived experience and online conversations do not always intersect—but the way that the novel refuses to subordinate its flat characters to its round ones is tantalizing and suggestive.

Americanah follows the trajectory of its central character, Ifemelu: she grows up in Nigeria, where she meets her first love Obinze. The two begin college in Nigeria, but Ifemelu leaves to study in the US after lecturers' strikes become so common that their university is often closed. After a traumatic sexual episode in the US leads Ifemelu to cut off contact with Obinze, she becomes involved with a wealthy white man, Curt, and later a Black American professor, Blaine. In the US Ifemelu becomes a successful blogger, writing primarily about race in America, and builds a career based on her blog. Despite her success and her romance with Blaine, she finds herself drawn back to Nigeria and eventually returns to Lagos, where she begins another blog called "The Small Redemptions of Lagos" and a new romance with the now-married Obinze. As this sketch of its plot suggests, *Americanah* is indisputably a realist novel inflected by a romance plot: as Jennifer Leetsch writes, "it conforms to the structures of what we expect of a 'proper' love story: love at first sight, being star-crossed…, and the happy end" (Leetsch 5). The novel also follows a chronological trajectory in which we recognize the outlines of the *Bildungsroman*,[3] and its central characters are all bourgeois heterosexual Nigerians and Americans. Further, as Katherine Hallemeier notes, "Ifemelu's relatively blithe [achievement of] prosperity" does not take into account the global economic crisis of 2008; the novel does not challenge the structures of late capitalism but shows Ifemelu navigating them with relative ease even as it does, as Hallemeier argues, show "the high personal and public costs of a particularly American manifestation of capitalism in which material prosperity offers no freedom from the

absolutism of a racist society" ("The Country" 236-7). All of this is to say that, its critique of American racism aside, the novel could be used to bolster a common claim about realist fiction: that it is a "representation of preestablished realities" rather than a genre that can imagine new ones (G. Levine 11).[4] Like Caroline Levine, however, I think that *Americanah*'s realism disrupts habits of perception rather than reaffirming them—and like Yogita Goyal, I think considering the novel's "realism as a craft, and not simply as a given" (Levine "Strange," Goyal XIII) makes this disruption more visible. Zadie Smith notes that "Adichie's writing seems so real that there seems to be nothing between the characters and the reader" (qtd. in Goyal XIII), and yet part of what makes the novel give readers the sense of "how actual life [was] lived" in the historical moment of its publication is how much time the characters spend engaging with various forms of media (Goyal XIII). Adichie's realism pays close attention to other media's ways of being realistic, of reflecting and recording the real. In doing so it suggests that some contemporary media make the workings of social life (what Caroline Levine calls "infrastructures" ("Strange" 587)) visible, while others efface those workings and operate to alienate users or readers from themselves.

Facebook and the Novel as Technologies of Self-Formation

A recurring motif in *Americanah* is that of different media's differing abilities to give a sense of the real, which often surfaces around moments of characters' engagement with social media. Characters continually look at profiles on Facebook and feel alienated from their lived experience, concerned that others elsewhere are living "real" lives. In the opening pages of the novel, this sense of estrangement motivates Ifemelu to leave the US, where she has built a successful life, and to return to Nigeria. Living in the US, despite a successful career as a blogger, "a fellowship at Princeton and a relationship with Blaine" (5), Ifemelu battles a depression that

> over the months melded into a piercing homesickness. She scoured Nigerian websites, Nigerian profiles on Facebook, Nigerian blogs, and each click brought yet another story of a young person who had recently moved back home, clothed in American or British degrees.... She looked at photographs of these men and women and felt the dull ache of loss, as though they had prised open her hand and taken something of hers. They were living her life.... Nigeria became where she was supposed to be. (6)

Looking at photographs of old friends on Facebook and at the stories they have constructed of their lives leaves Ifemelu feeling as though something has been taken from her. Facebook's capacity to make visible the lives of those at a distance has the effect of making the viewer of these lives feel alienated, lost, robbed. The version of Nigerian life that Ifemelu sees via Facebook profiles and blogs impinges on her life in the US such that Nigeria "[becomes] where she was supposed to be" (6). The use of "became" is important: Nigeria is not self-evidently where Ifemelu is supposed to be, nor does she realize from looking at these blogs and Facebook profiles that Nigeria was always where she is supposed to be. Instead, the blogs and Facebook profiles work on Ifemelu to make Nigeria "where she was supposed to be" (6).[5]

Much later in the novel, Ifemelu's first love Obinze is also discomfited by the gap between lived experience and its representation on Facebook. Where Ifemelu is seduced by her engagement with Facebook, using it to see herself in a new life and to see that life as one that had always been hers, Obinze is troubled by the medium.

> He had at first been excited by Facebook, ghosts of old friends suddenly morphing to life with wives and husbands and children, and photos trailed by comments. But he began to be appalled by the air of unreality, the careful manipulation of images to create a parallel life, pictures that people had taken with Facebook in mind. (369)

Again, Facebook's capacity to connect those at a distance—here, "old friends"—quickly gives way to an "air of unreality." If looking at Facebook makes Ifemelu uncertain about where her "real" life is located, it makes Obinze troubled by the way the platform makes its users stage their reality in a particular way. In both cases, the platform is a source of anxiety for the characters, making them less able to locate themselves and others; it taps into their longing for a sense of an authentic lived experience and authentic connections with other people. Perhaps such lives and such connections were never possible, but Facebook both seems to make them visible or possible and marks its own failure to provide them. And it does so at a volume that is unprecedented: it is as though users are invited to a daily high school reunion.

The novel's engagement with the generic demands of Facebook partakes of what Fredric Jameson pinpoints as a challenge for contemporary practitioners of realist fiction:

> the vocation of any realism [is] to explore the hitherto unsaid and unexpressed, and to bring figuration to what has always been excluded from public representation... Unfortunately, in postmodernity, the informational and the communicational is itself a kind of universal virus, colonizing whatever has remained unconscious or unformulated and translating it at once into forms and tropes which are long since catalogued and codified in advance. ("A Note" 270)

Jameson's argument helps us see how a platform like Facebook has its own codes and does the work of "bring[ing] figuration" to life before fiction can, but that it does that work on its own terms. The anxiety that arises from the sense of experience becoming media in ways that distort it and give rise to a vague sense of unease, disconnect, and disorientation is one that permeates the novel. This confusion between experience and the stories of it speaks to a problem that

Wayne Booth notes in his call for an ethical criticism. For Booth, such criticism is necessary because life and the narration of it are not as separate as they might seem:

> Even the life we think of as primary experience—that is, events like birth, copulation, death, plowing and planting, getting and spending—is rarely experienced without some sort of mediation in narrative; one of the chief arguments for an ethical criticism of narrative is that narratives make and remake what in realist views are considered more primary experiences—and thus make and remake ourselves. (W. Booth 14)

Booth is arguing that narration needs to be made more evident via analysis, because the fact of its being narration—of everyday life being necessarily mediated by the expectation that it conform to certain narrative conventions—is not obvious: he goes on to say that "[t]he transition of what we think of as more primary (because "real") to the experience of stories about it is so automatic and frequent that we risk losing our sense of just how astonishing our story worlds are, in their power to add 'life' upon 'life'—for good or ill" (W. Booth 14). In other words, the transition from real life to stories, for Booth, obscures the fact that stories are made up, and the excitement and astonishment that such knowledge can (and for Booth, should) provoke. Yet the problem that Adichie poses is that, given the range of new media available to the average citizen (from Facebook to blogs to message boards, almost all of her characters present themselves on the internet, or are presented with versions of others on the internet, in some way), this movement from mediation to reality and back again has reached a dizzying frequency. Booth's call for an ethical criticism still rings true, and Adichie's novel echoes it—but for the opposite reason. Whereas for Booth, real life threatens to normalize fiction and obscure its oddities, Adichie presents a world in which virtual self-presentation threatens to obscure the oddities of lived experience or render that experience somehow moot or alienated.

This sense of unreality is in marked contrast to the work that books do in *Americanah.* When Ifemelu feels lost and confused in the US, Obinze suggests that "she read American books, novels and histories and biographies" (136). Ifemelu follows his advice and finds that the books she reads make America comprehensible to her: "as she read, America's mythologies began to take on meaning, America's tribalisms—race, ideology, and region—became clear" (137). It is the reading about rather than the immersion in the culture that helps her understand it. The immersion itself is too chaotic; experience does not coalesce into narrative or even into useful information. Reading the texts of a culture (fictional as well as non-fictional) is a way of decoding a culture and learning how to intervene in it. Joseph Slaughter points out that such scenes of reading are "a topos of the *bildung* that remains remarkably consistent from the eighteenth century to the present, from Germany to Ghana…[we see] a scene of reading, in which we read of the *bildungheld*'s reading of other *bildungsromane*" (31). Ifemelu's process of education by reading, though, differs slightly from Slaughter's account, which he borrows from Benedict Anderson. In Slaughter's and Anderson's description, the *bildungheld* reads other *bildungsromane* and sees himself; this moment of recognition that builds to a global canon of *Bildungsromane*. But this topos relies on and enacts an identification process. Adichie's novel offers a different experience of reading: Ifemelu does research in order to understand a world that is wholly strange to her and in which she does not particularly wish to place herself. She does not find herself in these American books; she finds information about America. She can begin to see the outlines of American life and its myths and preoccupations.

That books explain American life while Facebook renders Nigerian life simultaneously appealing and alien would seem to suggest that new forms of media trouble *Americanah* while print media operates as we might expect it to as readers of *bildungsromane*; the novels and

biographies Ifemelu reads when she first comes to the US operate as keys to the culture while Facebook leaves Obinze feeling alienated from his friends who display their lives there. This would imply, though, that the novel stages a kind of competition between print and digital media, coming down on the side of print. Yogita Goyal argues that it does, claiming that "the novel's clever comparison between the two genres [of blog and novel] and what they make possible ends up rendering the novel triumphant over the blog" (Goyal XIV). Yet this reading considers only the novel and the blog: *Americanah* offers a much larger matrix of old and new media forms and the virtual and lived community formations they make possible. In the interaction between Facebook and "novels, histories, and biographies" (*Americanah* 136), we see that these different forms of realism position lived experience within larger frameworks of social life in ways that can explain the relationship between the two—or that can simply conform to the demands of a genre in ways that alienate the reader or viewer. I will return to the blog later in this chapter to argue that it offers more than Goyal's argument acknowledges. I think her reading, in which the novel triumphs, is more true of the competition the novel stages between the novel and Facebook than between the novel and the blog. As I will argue, I think it is more fruitful to see the contrast as one between textual and visual media than one between old and new media. The media forms that fail its characters are primarily visual ones (magazines as well as Facebook) while textual media like books and blogs offer sites of community and self-formation.[6]

The Limits of the Realist Novel

In its engagement with these different kinds of realist accounts and in the global map it draws, *Americanah* speaks to a contemporary critical problematic about the expansiveness of the realist novel. If, as ethical critics like Wayne Booth and Martha Nussbaum argue—and as Adichie herself has argued, most notably and explicitly in her TED talk "The Dangers of a

Single Story"—literature has an ethical project in that it makes readers into better (more compassionate, more aware) people and citizens by making the lives of others visible, real, and meaningful, just how much (how much of the world, how much difference) can this project expand to include? This question is particularly pressing in the contemporary moment in which we are ever more aware that our actions can have consequences for people who live very far away and very differently than we do. New communications technologies and the accelerating pace of travel make faraway places less so, while also making otherness present and visible in formerly more homogenous communities. As Anna-Leena Toivanen argues in reference to Adichie's novel and other contemporary African fiction, we tend to think about immigration as the mode of mobility in postcolonial novels in particular, but we must also consider the "imaginative, virtual, and communicative forms of travel" (135) that mark these texts. Toivanen argues that these novels point out that communications technologies entangle the local and global, but cannot fully bridge the space between the two: there is often a "communication gap" (138) as well as a connection between places that are distant from each other.

Toivanen's argument that a communication gap is a thematic of recent African fiction rests on the belief that novels can sketch a community, although it seems to upend the relationship between novel-reading and community formation that Benedict Anderson most influentially theorizes. That is, the novels Toivanen describes chronicle the failure of the community to stretch globally, the ways that travel opens up unbridgeable gaps between characters who make their lives on different continents. This question of distance and what constitutes a community is a central problem for critics of the twenty-first century novel, because many contend that the work of the novel is to make us better aware of the lives of others so that we might live more ethically in our communities; this belief is often implicit in the work of

critics who do not actively espouse it. But what happens when we must think of those communities as far-flung ones, and our actions as having consequences for people very far away whose lives are very different from ours? For that matter, who are "we" are who are "we" reading about? As Bruce Robbins puts it,

> Through most of human history, both habitual knowledge of others and habitual opportunities to affect others' lives were very limited in scope. But as both social organizations and technologies of communication and transportation have expanded, so too has culture, in the sense of shared habits of connection, mutual responsibility, mutual recognition. (*Feeling Global* 19).

Literature has work to do in such a context; as Robbins claim implies, "mutual recognition" now must operate across longer distances than it traditionally has. Or as Robbins puts it in a later essay, "it is unclear that one can be even a half-decent citizen of a nation like the United States if one does not make some effort to be more than a US citizen" ("Information and Emotion" 94). David Palumbo-Liu notes that literature is often understood to generate circuits of mutual responsibility and recognition, but also warns of the difficulties of such a project:

> the notion that literature should mobilize (or even instantiate) empathy for others and enhance our ethical capabilities is rooted in the early modern period, wherein 'otherness'…was not nearly as immediately, insistently, and intensely pressing itself into the here and now of everyday social, cultural, and political life. (2)

In the contemporary moment of global circulation and immigration, we find ourselves confronted with the need to incorporate hitherto unimagined forms of otherness: but as Palumbo-Liu asks, "where do we set the limit of *how much* otherness is required, as opposed to how much is excessive, disruptive, disturbing, in ways that damage us, rather than enhance our lives?" (2).

Palumbo-Liu is interested in the “delivery systems” that bring “otherness” into our lives and into our novels, and his work thus makes clear that these questions of otherness are ones in which lived experience and form are intertwined. They are, in other words, questions of politics, but they are also questions of realism, the literary form with which most ethical critics contend. Such critics often draw on the image of Adam Smith’s disinterested spectator and his ability to sympathize: realism, the argument goes, makes us into more ethical readers and people because it extends our sympathy to characters. I will return to the limits of sympathy as a framework in chapter two; for now I am interested in the ways that sympathy might be stretched. Nancy Armstrong argues that it can only stretch so far, because in order for Smith’s circuit of sympathy to operate, readers need to recognize characters as people. They need them, in other words, to be “norm-bearing individuals,” to use Armstrong’s term. As she puts it, the realist novel puts the reader in a “person-to-person relationship” with such individuals, but the very language of “person-to-person” indicates the limits of sympathy. Armstrong sums it up as follows: “At stake… is a rather basic political question: at what extension of our personhood does our imagination reach the limit of identification and, no longer recognizing ourselves in others, lose its capacity to feel for them?” (443). How different from a reader does a character have to be for the reader to refuse to understand that character as a potential person? I think that collapsing character into person fails to take into account the specifically literary aspects of character, and thus would revise this question to ask what techniques of character make readers more or less able to identify with the creatures on the page. Yet Armstrong’s answer, that we arrive at the limits of identification fairly quickly, is as applicable to formal choices as it is to people.

Like Armstrong, Joseph Slaughter, in his work on human rights and the *bildungsroman*, concludes that the realist novel can only accommodate so much difference. He argues that the

form "reproduces, conventionalizes, circulates the liberal public sphere's social norms" (156) and that while "historically marginalized subjects" can appropriate and rearticulate "the egalitarian imaginary" of human rights and the public sphere via the *Bildungsroman* form, these appropriations must come more or less on the terms of those already understood as subjects or persons (91). In other words, realism is a reformist genre rather than a revolutionary or utopian one; it is interested in the incremental expansion of what counts as a person and resistant to those who question the outlines of personhood. Slaughter's work focuses more narrowly on the relationship between human rights law and the form of the *Bildungsroman*, but Fredric Jameson makes a similar argument about realism more generally, taking as a given that it "requires... an aesthetic need to avoid recognition of deep structural social change as such and of the deeper currents and contradictory tendencies within the social order" ("A Note" 263). Jameson calls this realism's "structural bias" ("A Note" 263)—to use Palumbo-Liu's terms, the realist novel can only deliver so much otherness; too much will break the delivery system. I think, though, that Adichie's novel attempts to refuse the exclusions of the realist novel while retaining a commitment to realism as a form that can register and communicate experience. Rather than using formalist play in a modernist or postmodern vein to register her novel's expansiveness, she offers a realist account in which traditional characters form relationships with less obviously "norm-bearing persons" via internet-based communities.

Americanah embraces a paradox: it marks and respects the need for roots and a sense that one's lived reality matches up with the way one thinks about oneself but refuses the constraints of authenticity. As Ifemelu wishes she could say to her rigid boyfriend Blaine, "people lie." The novel balances this belief in the need to sometimes lie—to be multiple, to hold back on full honesty, to make things up—with a belief in the value of authenticity and roots, and it does so by

suggesting that internet communities offer a fluidity of self-presentation that refuses the limitations of being a consistent type or person. In Adichie's novel, these are delivery systems that accommodate difference rather than demanding consistency. Ifemelu's work as a blogger makes her part of an asynchronous, non-place-based community; her blog and its commenters are not simply another version of the more traditional communities of the university, political activism, or print magazines through which the novel also moves, but challenge their limitations and revise what counts as political speech and who counts as a political speaker.

New Textual Media: Blogging as a Space of Community

The blogs and internet-based community forums through which the novel moves are almost all engaged with questions of identity: Ifemelu's focuses primarily on being a non-American black in the US, but the other posting boards and forums in which she participates are also concerned with questions of roots. The internet offers a way of maintaining an active sense of a place-based identity at a distance for the Nigerian immigrants to the US who post on the first text-based internet forum we see in the novel, a chatroom called "Nigerian Village." Ifemelu's aunt's unpleasant boyfriend posts there as "Igbo Massachusetts accountant," a screen name that indexes, with its reference to his ethnic identity but also to his current location (and trans-national occupation) in the US, the way that the internet forum helps users bridge their American and Nigerian lives. But the man's posts are strident, insisting on the maintenance of Nigerian traditions by the diaspora, clinging to a version of home that he sees as rooted in Nigeria but that Ifemelu recognizes as being in many ways born of his immigrant status. Discussing the posters on "Nigerian Village," she talks about the ways that they are no longer at home in Nigeria but not yet at home in the US: "they would return to America to fight on the Internet over their mythologies of home, because home was now a blurred place between here and there, and at

least online they could ignore the awareness of how inconsequential they had become" (118). Interestingly, the internet forum does not seem to connect the US and Nigeria as such a forum might; instead it creates a kind of Little Nigeria among immigrants. Although it is explicitly about a sense of membership in a Nigerian community, of belonging to a "village," the online community serves only to alienate its users from the US in which they live and work, and the Nigeria that they visit. Home is "blurred" and the community that the forum offers its members is a defensive one and an escape from a sense of being "inconsequential," disconnected, unimportant. Like the Facebook posts that so trouble Obinze, this is a virtual space that attempts to reify a lived one rather than interacting with it, and it causes a similar sense of unease.

This vision of an identitarian internet community seems alienating rather than affirming, but it bears a certain resemblance to Ifemelu's own first foray into an internet community, "HappilyKinkyNappy.com" (214). Her friend Wambui introduces her to this website when she stops straightening her hair, and the forum offers Ifemelu concrete advice on how to manage her natural hair and also a community that celebrates it. On this website, "[these women] sculpted for themselves a virtual world where their coily, kinky, nappy, woolly hair was normal. And Ifemelu fell into this world with a tumbling gratitude. Women with hair as short as hers had a name for it: TWA, Teeny Weeny Afro" (214). As with the Nigerian Village website, HappilyKinkyNappy.com offers a forum for those who feel marginalized. HappilyKinkyNappy.com's users make their own world: in Adichie's words, they "sculpt" this virtual world, and Ifemelu is able to joyfully tumble into it like Dorothy into Oz.

Ifemelu carries the sense of self she gains in this virtual world into her face-to-face interactions: she almost decides to change her hair when a man on the street mumbles "you ever

wonder why he likes you looking all jungle like that?" (214) to her as she walks with her boyfriend. She changes her mind, though, as she looks at weaves, remembering

> a post by Jamila…. And she left the store, eager to get back and log on and post on the boards about it. She wrote, *Jamila's words made me remember that there is nothing more beautiful than what God gave me*…. She had never talked about God so much. Posting on the website was like giving testimony in church; the echoing roar of approval revived her. (215)

In contrast to the effect of their internet community on the posters on "Nigerian Village," then, Ifemelu's time in the "virtual world" of HappilyKinkyNappy.com "revives" her rather than blurring her vision. But it does so in part because it gives her room to maneuver: as the narrator notes, "she had never talked about God so much" (215). The Ifemelu who posts "there is nothing more beautiful than what God gave me" (215) does not sound like the Ifemelu readers of the novel have come to know; that Ifemelu tends to offer more caustic comments and is suspicious of religion. Here she adopts a persona that she has borrowed from the other users of the blog, trying on an identity in the context of an online community based on the idea of authenticity. She moves into this space because it helps her to feel good about her hair: being (virtually) among other Black women with the same marker of racial identity helps her navigate her own embodied experience. Yet because the community is a mediated one, she can put on the voice of that community, a voice that is not quite hers, without being challenged about it. Identity, here, is simultaneously rooted and fluid. It is also textual rather than image-based, allowing for different performances of identity than Facebook does.

While Ifemelu first ventures into an internet community when she posts on "HappilyKinkyNappy.com," it is her own blog, "Raceteenth or Curious Observations by a Non-

American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America" that is at the center of the novel. Blogging gives Ifemelu a career for which she is well compensated, a platform from which to speak, and a romance with Blaine, a handsome professor. Adichie offers blogging as a new profession that can open the public sphere to previously marginalized voices, while acknowledging some of the limitations of the blog as a model of a new and more inclusive public sphere.

Readers learn about the beginning of the blog fairly late in the novel, long after becoming accustomed to reading Ifemelu's posts scattered throughout the text. The scene in which she starts the blog shows what it does for the novel: the description of its inception is embedded within two frame narratives of failed face-to-face conversations about politics, relationships, and racial equality. The first is an argument with her white boyfriend Curt. Ifemelu is frustrated by the silences in their relationship: "it was not that Curt pretended that being black and being white were the same in America; he knew they were not." (293). Instead, it is that "there were, simply, times when he saw and times that he was unable to see" (296). Ifemelu brings the things he does not see to the surface when Curt asks whether her copy of *Essence* isn't "kind of racially skewed" (297): she pulls Curt into a bookstore, gathers all of the women's magazines available, and points out that there are "three black women in maybe two thousand pages of women's magazines.... Do you see why a magazine like *Essence* even exists?" (297). After this conversation with Curt, Ifemelu writes a "long email to [her friend] Wambui" about the conversation and about the "things she didn't tell Curt, things unsaid and unfinished" (298). Wambui responds, "This is so raw and true. More people should read this. You should start a blog" (298).

The conversation with Curt does not offer a satisfying resolution: his response is "Okay, babe, okay, I didn't mean for it to be such a big deal" (298). Over email Wambui validates Ifemelu's frustration and the truth of her experience and encourages her to make this experience visible to others, and Ifemelu decides to do just that. The blog is an attempt to break her own silence, but also to discover the conditions of silence in the United States. "How many other people chose silence? How many other people had become black in America?" (298)

The scene between Ifemelu and Curt, though, is nested within another scene of in-person disagreement. Ifemelu describes an argument at a dinner party held "the day after Obama became the Democratic Party's candidate for President of the United States, surrounded by guests, all fervent Obama supporters" (292). At the party, a "stylish poet from Haiti... her Afro bigger than Ifemelu's... said she had dated a white man for three years in California and race was never an issue for them" (292). Ifemelu cannot restrain herself from responding, "That's a lie" and ruining the party by arguing, at length, that such statements are demanded by context rather than true: "...we don't say any of this stuff. We let it pile up inside our heads and when we come to nice liberal dinners like this, we say that race doesn't matter because that's what we're supposed to say, to keep our nice liberal friends comfortable" (293). Ifemelu's outburst is met with shocked silence but also with curiosity: the other guests listen "as though she was about to give up a salacious secret that would both titillate and implicate them" (293). After she tells the story about Curt and about the beginning of her blog, only her hostess responds: "'Oh! What a wonderful story!' the French host said, her palm placed dramatically on her chest, looking around the table, as though to seek a response. But everyone else remained silent, their eyes averted and unsure" (298). Ifemelu, uncompromising as always, refuses the self-congratulatory atmosphere of the dinner party to attempt to say something "raw and true" about race in

America. While the other guests listen, they have no idea how to respond; even the non-American host looks at the other guests only "*as though* to seek a response" (298).

The raw honesty of Ifemelu's blog posts is the smallest Russian doll in these two stories. Curt cannot hear and respond to Ifemelu's frustrations, and the dinner table full of Obama supporters cannot engage in a conversation about the ways that issues of race remain omnipresent and yet unspeakable in American social life. Ifemelu's blog emerges into these scenes of blocked and failed communication, attempting to carve out a space where her rude truths are appropriate speech that can provoke conversation rather than shutting it down. And Ifemelu's blog does create that space for its readers. As a commenter writes when she closes it, "You've used your irreverent, hectoring, funny and thought-provoking voice to create a space for real conversations about an important subject" (5). Ifemelu, here, is something between muckraking journalist (that "hectoring voice") and ideal teacher or therapist (one who provokes "real conversations").[7] While a hectoring voice is unwelcome at a dinner party, it makes engagement possible on the blog. If Facebook alienated Obinze because its users molded their lives to be more attractive, refusing to acknowledge the gaps between their lived experience and their presentation of that experience, the blog operates in explicit contrast to such a space: it values a kind of honesty that is not available to Ifemelu at a dinner party—or if available closes down conversation rather than opening it up.

The disembodied space of the internet thus allows for more wide-ranging and truthful conversation—but it is worth noting that these conversations happen on a blog, the most textual of social media (and for that matter, a blog within a novel). And it is in making these conversations possible in the space of the blog that Adichie's novel seems to move beyond the realm of realism. John Plotz argues that

> … science fiction after the so-called Golden Age (ca. 1940-55) has struggled in fascinating ways with fiction's quintessential cognitive conundrum: surface differences between persons, coupled with the disruptive fact of underlying commensurability. The underlying thesis of that work remains simple: *Alien? Shmalien!* Visible surfaces may change, but stories are a nonarbitrary marker of the possibility of conceptual commonality. (In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, it is telling that the only truly sympathetic listener to the creature's tale of woe is the blind old man who hears the monster's tale without having to see his hideous visage.) *If you can read this, you're one of us*. (433)

Plotz's claim is that science fiction approaches the universalist claims of realist fiction by this belief in storytelling as a shared human practice, so that characters and readers in one of the texts he describes know that a character is "human" (in the sense of being a potential interlocutor and something like an equal; many of these characters are aliens or androids) because that character can make a claim by telling a story. Adichie's novel embraces the text-based realms of the internet as realist ones in which this science fiction scenario can play out, and deliberately contrasts them to the moments in the novel in which embodied characters speak with each other. In doing so, she sketches both the potential and the limits of a form that is disembodied and text-based; it pares away the aspects of characters that might lead them to ignore each other's contributions, but no matter what they learn about engagement across difference in this space, characters cannot bring that knowledge into embodied social spaces. Yet these limitations do not render the space of dialogue meaningless. Plotz argues that the speculative fiction of writers like Ursula LeGuin, Doris Lessing, and Sylvia Townsend Warner "may mark not realism's failure but its productive transfiguration" (434). I would suggest that Adichie's novel does similar work,

transfiguring the ways that readers might imagine the global and multiracial public sphere. The blind old man of *Frankenstein* is a possible figure for the reader of a blog because the blog is a textual form on which the writer need not appear in person. In this it is very different from Facebook, which demands photographs as part of the narrative it asks users to offer.

Who is SapphicDerrida? Flat Characters in New Media Contexts

The blog emerges into the novel as a site with the potential for radical honesty, where Ifemelu's hectoring is seen as welcoming rather than alienating and starts conversations rather than shutting them down. It is not that Ifemelu's readers are tougher-minded than her in-person interlocutors, though: the blog can function as an honest space for "real conversations" precisely because of its limits. Ifemelu never reveals her own identity on the blog, nor does she refer to any of her romantic partners or friends by name. Curt becomes "The Hot White Ex" while Blaine, her next boyfriend, is "Professor Hunk." She herself remains the "Non-American Black." This is a particular degree of anonymity: she is clearly positioned both geographically (in America but not of it) and racially (as a Black observer). Like "Igbo Massachusetts Accountant," the name her aunt's boyfriend chose for his comments on the Nigerian Village blog, this name makes clear its bearer's status as globally mobile, suggesting the traversal of wide swaths of geographical space and a specific kind of knowledge that results from that movement. Yet unlike "Igbo Massachusetts Accountant," the "Non-American Black" is neither ethnically specific nor regionally located; when writing a blog post about her encounter with an Ethiopian cab driver she was "careful not to let on whether she was African or Caribbean, because her readers did not know which she was" (208). The blog deals in types, incomplete collections of traits that stand in for interlocutors, while still being engaged with roots and the specificity of racial identity.

Ifemelu's interlocutors on the blog are similarly abstracted; the only one we hear speak is the poster "SapphicDerrida." This name also positions the speaker without fully defining her; calling herself "SapphicDerrida" positions her as an academic, a feminist, a person interested in French thought. Yet the name is transgendered, transcultural, both ancient and modern. We know something about this person from her writing; she "reels off statistics and uses words like 'reify' in her comments" (5), furthering the reader's sense that she is some kind of academic. But we know nothing about her race or even her gender, really; I have been calling her "her" mostly because of the "Sapphic" in her chosen screenname. In the space the blog generates, then, character operates slightly differently from the way it operates in the novel as a whole and in the realist novel more generally. These characters are reduced to certain component parts rather than fleshed out.

Jodi Dean, in 2001, described online forums as "a form of computer-mediated discussion, of communication among persons linked not by proximity, tradition, or ethnicity, but by an ability to use and an interest in networked interaction" ("Cybersalons" 244). What was important for Dean, then, seems aligned with Ifemelu's sense that her blog should open up a space for conversations that anyone with an internet connection could join. Crucially, the internet salon in this context is a community that does not demand that its members share the same traditions or proximity. I think that such a vision of discussion can also allow for new interlocutors, a version of character slightly at an angle to the typical one offered by the realist novel.

To consider SapphicDerrida alongside a character like Obinze is to see that the blog form offers a different way of delivering characters to the reader. If these characters are norm-bearing beings, they are so only in the most skeletal way. Perhaps the correct way to put it is to say that these characters bear nothing *but* norms; they have no other characteristics. The positions of

these characters, however, are the mechanism by which Adichie's novel can deliver the kind of "otherness" that critics of the realist novel question its ability to convey. By refusing all outlines of character other than ones like race, gender, geographic location, or intellectual role model, the blog starkly confronts and then refuses stereotypes about how certain types of people behave. It allows Ifemelu to play out an ethics of encounter and openness of which she is otherwise incapable, and suggests that flat characters might actually have more potential than round ones for expanding the boundaries of the novel and the social world.

These flat characters are marked by characteristics like race, gender, occupation, and geographical location ("Igbo Massachusetts Accountant"), but they also can name themselves in idiosyncratic ways ("SapphicDerrida"). The screen name as an intersection of public and private selves ties it to E.M. Forster's flat characters but also to Georg Lukács's notion of the type. In his discussion of realism in the European novel, Lukács argues that "[t]he central category and criterion of realist literature is the type, a peculiar synthesis which organically binds together the general and the particular both in characters and situations" (*Studies* 6). If many novels show only the private or personal aspects of everyday life, that is because bourgeois society has separated life into a private and a public sphere. For Lukács, "this division of the complete human personality into a public and a private sector was a mutilation of the essence of man" (*Studies* 9). Fredric Jameson picks up the division in his 1986 essay on third-world literature in ways that ramify in criticism of the global novel: he argues that "we [those of us who live in what Jameson calls the first world] have been trained in the deep cultural conviction that the lived experience of our private existences is somehow incommensurable with the abstractions of economic science and politics" ("Third" 70). But Jameson claims that the relationship between the personal and the political is "wholly different in third-world culture"—in that context, he

argues, "*the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*" ("Third" 70, italics in the original). Jameson's reading of all third-world literature as national allegory is problematically constraining, and much scholarship on postcolonial and global literature has worked to show that such texts are more formally and representationally complex than his argument acknowledges.

But perhaps types need not be merely confining. Sianne Ngai acknowledges that playing to type, or occupying a type, mean very different things depending on one's social role. "Although there remains an irreducible difference between types and stereotypes," she writes, "this difference becomes especially uneasy when it involves certain social roles that have been drastically limited in ways that others have not" (108). Ngai is drawing on Stanley Cavell's work, which makes a similar point:

> Until recently, types of black human beings were not created in film: black people were stereotypes—mammies, shiftless servants, loyal retainers, entertainers. We were not given, and were not in a position to be given, individualities that projected particular *ways* of inhabiting a social role; we recognized only the role. (Cavell 74)

Ngai and Cavell make clear the dangers of aligning with a view like Jameson's: typed characters, or allegorical characters, mean something very different when it is only the less-powerful or the already-stereotyped who are being represented by such characters. Yet Ngai and Cavell also recognize the ways that typing can offer moments of possibility or emergence: Ngai writes of the television show the PJs that its use of stereotype does not close off possibilities but reminds us that "there can be ways of inhabiting a social role that actually distort its boundaries, changing the status of 'role' from that which confines or constricts to the site at which new possibilities for human agency might be explored" (Ngai 117). Ngai sees the socially imposed role as an

opportunity for a distortion of that role that makes exploration possible. Cavell suggests that the very lack of black "individualities" on television meant that when "the humanity behind the role manifest[ed] itself [in a particular performance]… the result was a revelation not of a human individuality, but of an entire realm of humanity becoming visible" (Cavell 74). In Cavell's formulation, a Black actor occupying a stereotypical role in an idiosyncratic way not only reveals that the particular individual is slightly different from the type, but also suggests that there might be a whole world of individuals who also do not conform to type. This form of representativeness is less confining than Jameson's; it does not ask the individual to stand in for that larger group. Rather, the individual's personal peculiarities suggest that a whole realm of similarly particular individuals might be out there.

I think that Adichie's flat characters perform the kinds of social work that Ngai and Cavell imagine typed characters as making possible. The flat characters offer a sense of possibility, a mode of self-presentation on a new media form that might change the social formations to which their names allude. Raymond Williams makes the point that while

> [i]n most drama and fiction the characters are already pre-formed […] [and] '[c]reation' of characters is then an effect of tagging…. [t]here can be new formations of 'character' and 'relationship' … Many of these articulations and formations become, in their turn, models. But while they are being formed they are creative in the emergent sense. (Williams 209)

Williams's, Cavell's, and Ngai's arguments show how the relationship of a character to a type offers more wiggle room than might be initially apparent—Williams suggests that new forms of character models can emerge and can be shaped as they emerge, while Cavell and Ngai show

how even seemingly rigid character types can be occupied in ways that open up new possibilities rather than closing them off.

Katherine Hallemeier argues that *Americanah* resonates with but departs from Jameson's account of third-world literature: its Nigerian characters are aware of the ways that context governs individual choices, but they are also aware of the multiple constituencies of which they are a part ("The Country" 241). As I discussed with reference to Ifemelu's willingness to take on the voice of her interlocutors on HappilyKinkyNappy.com while still using the space to come to an authentic sense of herself as a Black woman, the novels' thematics of rootedness is also a thematics of multiple constituencies. Characters do not have to be fully consistent or completely defined by their social position. Positioned in such a novel, flat or typed characters become sites of possibility rather than reductive stereotypes. Their mere presence suggests such possibility, but Ifemelu's encounters with them confirm it.

These encounters suggest that ethical engagement might be prompted not through individuals acknowledging each other as individuals, but through individuals being prompted to see others (and thus themselves) as types, or flat characters. Here I am modifying E.M. Forster's famous distinction, in *Aspects of the Novel*, between "flat" and "round" characters: in Forster's formulation, "[t]he really flat character can be expressed in one sentence" (Forster 104). (His primary example is Mrs. Micawber's "I will never desert Mr. Micawber.") As Forster puts it, "The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, if is flat. If it does not convince, it is flat pretending to be round." (Forster 118). Adichie's flat characters are different from Forster's in two crucial ways: first, because the sentence that sums up their identity is not one of action but one of position: "I am a non-American Black" as opposed to "I will never desert Mr. Micawber." In this they resemble

Jameson's allegorical figures but also, as I have argued, depart from them. They also depart from Forster's flat characters because they can in fact surprise us (as they surprise our stand-in, Ifemelu) in convincing ways. If the space of the blog allows for the representation of abstractions and types, the need to write the blog prods Ifemelu to encounter strangers as flat characters, and then to realize how incomplete flat characterization is.

An early interaction between Ifemelu and a man who becomes the subject of one of her blog posts makes the operation of this ethics clear. She meets

> the man from Ohio... squeezed next to her on a flight. A middle manager, she was sure, from his boxy suit and contrast collar. He wanted to know what she meant by 'lifestyle blog,' and she told him, expecting him to become reserved.... But he said, 'Ever write about adoption?... He told her that he and his wife had adopted a black child and their neighbors looked at them as though they had chosen to become martyrs for a dubious cause. (4-5)

Ifemelu titles this blog post "Badly-Dressed White Middle Managers from Ohio are Not Always What You Think" (5). This, like another post called "Not All Dreadlocked White Guys Are Down" (4), reduces its central character to a type, but only to show the ways that seeing him as an example of such a type misses the ways that typing breaks down. Writing the blog forces Ifemelu to seek out and talk with people she otherwise might not, and it allows them to surprise her. This moment, among others like it, suggests the way that her writing allows Ifemelu to live out an ethics of encounter in which the potential to be surprised is key, and which opens up the novel to characters that would otherwise be unavailable to it. The blog allows her to be the kind of reader of people—voracious, curious, wide-ranging—that resembles the reader of books that Adichie extols in her well-known TED talk "The Dangers of a Single Story."[8] Paradoxically, this

kind of openness to others relies on slotting them into types. Typing would seem to explain characters; describing someone as a "Badly Dressed Middle Manager from Ohio" calls up a set of expectations about this character's economic status, race, and even politics, and also makes him easy to dismiss. But as Ngai and Cavell suggest, the result of this typing can be the opposite of dismissal; considering such a character as a type opens up a conversation for the ways that he does not fully conform to this type.

If this ethics of encounter paradoxically relies on slotting characters into types, it also emphasizes observation, a horizontal engagement rather than a hierarchical one. This emphasis becomes most clear when Ifemelu's blog bumps up against her boyfriend Blaine's academic ethos. A young Yale professor, Blaine is both academic and activist, and both roles begin to influence her blog when they start living together. We even see Ifemelu use Blaine's knowledge in her blog posts more than once: for instance, she appends a post in which she tells the story of an interaction between Blaine and his student in which they discuss white privilege with "PS—Professor Hunk [Ifemelu's name for Blaine] just suggested I post this, a test for White Privilege, copyright a pretty cool woman called Peggy McIntosh" (347). Ifemelu's use of Blaine's experience is not unusual for her blog, as she tends both to work from personal experience and to borrow the personal experiences of others freely; it is the addition of the Peggy McIntosh quiz that shows Blaine's hand. The addition certainly places Ifemelu's observations in a wider context; it has all the marks of the good graduate student Blaine must have been, as it makes clear to Ifemelu's readers that her observations are part of a larger conversation and puts them in the context of an abstract critical framework. But Ifemelu eventually resists Blaine's involvement in the blog: when he edits her, "her posts sound too academic" (313). When he

suggests she add “details about government policy and redistricting” to “a post about inner cities” she refuses, saying “‘I don’t want to explain, I want to observe’” (313).

Where Blaine’s expertise, and role as educator, put him in the position of having to explain, Ifemelu argues for observation over explanation. Observation is key to what she does on the blog: that she is observing rather than explaining tempers the hectoring tone of some of her posts, but more importantly for my argument, observing others allows her to overturn her initial expectations of them. Her types seem to explain, but because observation allows Ifemelu to interrogate the ways that these characters do not conform to the expectations associated with that type, reversals of expectation are always possible. The blog constantly revises its own theses, and does so by putting an emphasis on lived experience rather than on the systems that constrain or mold this experience. Certainly Ifemelu (not to mention Adichie) is aware that “government policy and redistricting” have a lot to do with where African-Americans live; her blog posts and her narrative voice are alive with the awareness of the systemic nature of racism and prejudice. But Ifemelu’s brief, as blogger, is to chronicle what she sees rather than to mae an academic argument about it.

When Blaine admonishes her, saying “Remember people are not reading you as entertainment, they’re reading you as cultural commentary” (313) then, he misunderstands the form of the blog. Ifemelu is not a commentator but a chronicler of encounters between individuals—or, as she puts it, an observer. Her job is to use observation to spark conversation. Her brief is to show the ways that such encounters might slip through the cracks of the explanations that Blaine has to offer. The novel does not question that Blaine is an excellent teacher, nor does it suggest that the activist work he does as corollary to his teaching is ineffective. Neither does it question that the blog and the classroom might intersect; Blaine’s ex-

girlfriend Paula even uses Ifemelu's posts in the classroom. But the blog is not subservient to the academy; instead, it is a context in which different kinds of voices and experiences can intersect on a level playing field. The novel makes clear that there are hierarchies inherent in the academic context: Paula's commitment to "push[ing] her students out of their comfort zone" (326) is one example, but Blaine also often calls his students "lazy" (313) rather than imagining other reasons their work for his class might be subpar. This refusal on Paula's and Blaine's parts to attempt to understand their students' positions tinges Blaine and Ifemelu's relationship as well; Ifemelu sometimes feels like Blaine's "apprentice" (313) rather than his partner. "Explaining" is aligned with hierarchy in the novel; it implies that one understands how things work, that one has knowledge to be communicated, and that one's interlocutors should accept that knowledge. "Observing" refuses that hierarchy.

While Adichie gently satirizes academia and academics, the conversational context of the blog does not displace the kind of learning that happens in a classroom or suggest that the work Paula and Blaine do as academics and activists is obsolete. Instead, the novel is interested in the different contexts in which conversations about race and privilege take place. The blog offers a horizontal encounter that opens out into possibility, and encourages the questioning of categories. This space is categorically different from the face-to-face contexts narrated in the novel, in which communication breaks down as soon as difficult subjects come up—this is true at the Obama supporters' dinner party, and while it may not be true in Blaine's and Paula's classroom, that is precisely because part of a teacher's job is to bring students out of their comfort zones, as Paula puts it. It is true even at talks and workshops that explicitly take race as their subject. As Ifemelu's blog garners readers, she begins to be asked to speak in public on issues of race and diversity. Ifemelu finds very quickly—during her very first "diversity talk"—

that "the point of diversity workshops, or multicultural talks, was not to inspire any real change but to leave people feeling good about themselves. They did not want the content of her ideas; they merely wanted the gesture of her presence" (307). Unlike the "real conversations" (5) that SapphicDerrida claims the blog inspires, these are not exchanges of ideas: merely "the gesture of [Ifemelu's] presence" is required. This conversational context is inert, emptied out. Ifemelu continues to be invited to give such talks, and continues to give them, but her role as professional public speaker quickly divides from her role as blogger:

> she began to say what they wanted to hear… During her talks, she said: "America has made great progress for which we should be very proud." In her blog she wrote, *Racism should never have happened and so you don't get a cookie for reducing it.*" (307)

As a blogger, in other words, Ifemelu can tell truths about the culture in which she lives; as a public speaker, she is reduced to platitudes. The novel does not, however, ask us to understand these two roles along a public/private divide: rather than stifling her personal beliefs for her professional success, Ifemelu is depicted as having two separate and mutually reinforcing professional roles.

Americanah, in other words, presents a range of more-or-less public spaces through which its characters move, and in which different modes of engagement are possible. In the context of the medium of the blog, new forms of character become possible, as do new forms of encounter, for Ifemelu and for her readers. What the blog delivers is a conversation about questions of identity without the baggage of identity. Ifemelu's readers know that she is a "Non-American black" but know nothing else about her; she gives them only these two markers of her identity. Other characters can enter the blog with similarly vague and (crucially) *chosen* markers of identity; the nature of the space enables conversations that cannot play out elsewhere, in face-

to-face conversations where identity markers like race or gender are inescapable. Via the blog, then, the novel offers these half-characters and types alongside the realist characters we are used to, opening up a space for difference without refusing or fracturing the contours of the realist novel. By presenting these characters and asking that readers consider the difference between observation and explanation, Adichie opens the novel to these characters and also argues for a mode of reading and writing that is horizontally oriented, that ducks interpellation and interpretation.

This commitment to observation, which I have argued is anti-hierarchical, also places Ifemelu on the same plane as the flat characters she encounters. This equality between the fleshed-out central character and the flat peripheral character runs counter to the convincing explanation of character Alex Woloch gives in *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel.* As the "vs." in his title implies, Woloch argues that novels are a competition among characters for narrative space and readers' attention. As such, the protagonist's identity "rests on a narrative centrality that always threatens to take the form of wrath" (Woloch 7). Woloch shows how minor characters are violently exiled from their novels or pressed into spaces too small to comfortably fit them. What I find intriguing about the flat characters in *Americanah* is that Ifemelu is actively interested in them and interested in their becoming more complex than they initially appeared to be. Their very flatness makes this possible: in Woloch's terms, the narrative need not take the space to establish them as complex and interesting beings because they are named as small collections of traits. Yet this form of naming means that they can expand through their interaction with the protagonist—because they were never in competition for the narrative's full attention. These characters are never going to graduate from being flat to being round, and yet they do not seem like second-class citizens. A

different novel, for example, might use the blog to spark a friendship between Ifemelu and SapphicDerrida that eventually led to their meeting in real life.[9] This novel does not need to do so, and as such does not suggest that moving from being a collection of traits to a more fully-fleshed out character would be an elevation. Tellingly, the character Ifemelu does meet in person through her blog, Blaine, becomes flatter as the novel progresses; Yogita Goyal considers him "perhaps too much of a caricature" (XIII). I would argue that his lack of complexity helps the reader to see how Woloch's character hierarchy does not quite operate in this novel. Of course, Ifemelu tends to have the ultimate say over the character-space (to use Woloch's term) that flat characters can take up: they generally remain within the context of her blog—in other words, her first-person narrative. Yet the blog narratives open up the characters rather than reducing them. In doing so, they perform similar work to that which Marta Figlerowicz describes certain flat protagonists doing: she argues that "[b]y highlighting the flatness of their major characters, novels can undercut the ease with which we might come to treat our first-person experience as a sufficient measure of the vastness of the world around us" (*Flat* 5).[10] *Americanah* does not conform to Figlerowicz's model—Ifemelu is not herself a flat protagonist—and yet its protagonist's engagement with flat characters widens the novel's field of vision in a way similar to that which Figlerowicz describes. While Figlerowicz argues that the limitations of flat characters help readers see their own limitations, the function of *Americanah*'s flat characters is not so much to remind us that we are all less plentiful than we think we are, but that those we see as flat are in fact more plentiful even if they do not emerge as such in our own life narrative.

Conclusion: The Limits of Media

Despite the way that Facebook operates to alienate, then, I have painted a fairly sunny picture of what digital social media offers *Americanah*—and by implication, offers to the realist

novel as a form that can represent global heterogeneity. But "Raceteenth," while it exposes some of the limitations of other conversational contexts, bumps up against its own limits as well. To return to SapphicDerrida's comment, then, we should also note the ways that the language the commenter uses seems to suggest that it's offered some form of what Seyla Benhabib, in her discussion of alternative political spheres, calls "a space of sociability in which… unusual individuals… c[an] find a 'space' of visibility and self-expression" (17). As Benhabib's discussion of this space makes clear, there are limits to the political effects that such a "civic and associational" formation can have (20)—limits that become clear within Adichie's novel, and that become a source of frustration for Ifemelu.

When Barack Obama runs for president and Ifemelu becomes a fervent supporter of his campaign, she begins to traverse the world of anti-Obama chatrooms. She finds that

> The chat rooms made her blog feel inconsequential, a comedy of manners, a mild satire about a world that was anything but mild. She did not blog about the vileness that seemed to have multiplied each morning she logged on, more chat rooms springing up, more vitriol flourishing, because to do so would be to spread the words of people who abhorred not the man that Barack Obama was, but the idea of him as president. (355)

Ifemelu's blog may have opened up a new space, in other words, and yet other new spaces are opening as well: here again, the language is explicitly spatial even if metaphorically so, as "more chat rooms [spring] up" (355). In these new spaces, "vileness" flourishes like a weed, and in the face of such flourishing Ifemelu feels that her contribution has been "inconsequential." Because the spaces that open up are virtual ones, they can proliferate endlessly: this is space without spatial constraints. Confronted with the conundrum that the community space that she has created by embracing the role of blogger is matched and perhaps dwarfed by a similarly-

motivated space, Ifemelu can only turn away. Instead of attempting to engage or debate the members of these anti-Obama chatrooms, she responds with silence; blogging in response to them would only “spread the[ir] words” (355) even more. Further, though, the space of her blog and the space of these chat rooms can never overlap: Ifemelu, understandably, does not wish to give these voices more air time, and so refuses to blog about them. Nor does she enter the chat rooms herself to join in the conversations happening there. The “blogosphere” extolled by SapphicDerrida as a space for “real conversations” is, if anything, more balkanized than the world in which these characters live and have face-to-face interactions. Ifemelu has created a new space for necessary conversations, and opened up a safety valve for those who need to have those conversations, but how does this space impinge on, or open onto, the culture at large?

As well as a failure of encounter, the hostile chatrooms give rise to a failure of imagination. Those who post on the chatrooms are, like SapphicDerrida, beings that almost emerge into the novel as characters. Like SapphicDerrida these characters have what Ifemelu calls “monikers,” names like “SuburbanMom231” and “NormanRockwellRocks” (354). As Ifemelu does with the people she blogs about, she “trie[s] to imagine the people who write these posts” (354), but her ability to imagine what they are like and what motivates them breaks down at the limits of her blog, or more precisely at the gap between their internet and hers. The fact that Ifemelu’s blog expresses only a small range of the spectrum of political opinions out in the world feels to her like a failure, a sign of the blog’s smallness and, in Adichie’s language, a failure of genre; “a comedy of manners, a mild satire about a world that was anything but mild” (355).

This generic language aligns the failure of the blog with the alienating aspects of Facebook I discussed earlier in this chapter. Suddenly, the blog fails to reflect the real world; it is

simply “a comedy of manners” or “a mild satire” rather than a realistic depiction of the larger social world. And yet, of course, despite the “vitriol” of these corners of the internet, Barack Obama does become president. In the speech that Ifemelu and her friends watch on election night, Obama collects together the disparate pieces, saying in his victory speech,

> “Young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled, Americans have sent a message to the world that we have never been just a collection of red states and blue states. We have been and always will be the United States of America.” (361)

Listening to this speech, Ifemelu is “mesmerized. And there was, at that moment, nothing that was more beautiful to her than America” (361). The figure of Barack Obama is able, in this moment, to gather together a range of different identity groups, but also to transform the “collection of red states and blue states” into a whole. These “red states and blue states” look something like the different pieces of the internet that we see with Ifemelu’s blog and the anti-Obama chatrooms that counter it; in the moment of Obama’s speech, it seems to Ifemelu that these disparate pieces can be made into a whole that acknowledges difference while making unity of it in a way that Ifemelu finds beautiful.

The novel’s turn to the figure of Obama as a way of solving the factionalism that Ifemelu’s blog makes visible suggests that, while the multiplicity of communications media in the novel open up ways of viewing the other, these modes of delivery cannot heal divisions on their own. These limitations speak to the concerns that Walter Benn Michaels poses in his discussion of “Neoliberal Aesthetics”; while Michaels is discussing the ways that theory, from the 1930s to the 1970s, has been preoccupied with the idea of seeing correctly in order to produce social justice, and is concerned with the ways that making visible the lives of women

and people of color has not helped make the economic inequities that result from capitalism any more clear, his point stands in this context as well. As Michaels puts it,

> It's this denial of class that we see embodied in the critique of "hierarchies of vision." Which is not to say, of course, that class can't be seen; it's to say instead that it isn't produced by how we see and that its inequalities cannot be ameliorated by our seeing differently. ("Neoliberal Aesthetics")[11]

Adichie's novel makes the strength of Michaels's argument clear: while it valorizes Ifemelu's blog as a project that puts forward an ethics of encounter and engagement and thinks about the possibility of delivering the other through a disembodied mode of community, it also acknowledges the limitations of its project. "Seeing differently" can only take us so far because, as Michaels trenchantly puts it, inequality is not always, or not fully, produced by how we see. Adichie's is ultimately an optimistic vision; while Michaels insists on the limitations of seeing, Adichie offers Obama as a political figure who can (at least rhetorically) draw together blue states and red states, and in doing so can make Ifemelu see America as "beautiful," if only for a moment. And by placing the rise of Ifemelu's blog and Obama's successful candidacy for US president in parallel, Adichie correlates the expansion of conversation with the political change.[12] Boubacar, an African academic at Yale Ifemelu meets through Blaine, underscores the relationship between the two kinds of expansion. He encourages Ifemelu to apply for a fellowship at Princeton. When Ifemelu expresses reservations ("I don't even have a graduate degree"), Boubacar brushes them away. "You must apply," he says, "and please use me as a reference. We need to get into these places, you know. It is the only way to change the conversation" (341). Here Ifemelu's blog, the site of "real conversations" (5) gains her entrée into an elite academic context in which other "conversation[s]" are happening. Certainly

Boubacar's remark partakes of the kind of theory of visibility that Michaels decries as limited by implying that what needs to be changed is "the conversation" rather than any more material structure. Yet that conversation is happening at Princeton, and in acknowledging that (and forcing Ifemelu to do the same) Boubacar acknowledges these material structures. Boubacar's remark recognizes that some conversations intersect with structures of power while others happen outside of those structures. While the novel valorizes the blog's ability to generate a certain kind of conversation through a certain kind of encounter, it also recognizes that remaining extra-institutional means that this conversation will go on unheard by many—that it risks falling into the realm of chat rooms Ifemelu encounters, which proliferate endlessly and never overlap.

Katherine Hallemeier describes *Americanah* as "admittedly utopic, and perhaps reductive" but insists that it is not unselfconsciously so ("The Country" 241). I would suggest that the novel's use of flat characters to expand the contours and shift the hierarchies of the realist novel is a mark of its utopianism, and that its acknowledgement of the limitations of online communities a mark of its self-awareness. By considering the different forms of engagement, social knowledge, and development and representation of self that social media, blogs, and books offer, the novel positions each as a site of community that makes certain demands of its characters but also makes certain forms of association possible. The blog is one in which flat characters and round characters can engage with each other and in which flat characters can prompt an understanding of difference that runs counter to our usual understanding of how types function to perpetuate stereotype. While these different platforms offer more or less satisfying depictions of experience, they all seem to operate on a similar emotional plane, and to be more or less continuous with the affective landscape through which

the characters move when they are not online. The novel's embrace of horizontality encompasses the different media platforms through which it moves as well as the relationships among its characters. In the next chapter, I will turn to novels that depict online landscapes as ones that mute or amplify affect, and whose characters help readers navigate such strange and dangerous spaces.

Adichie's vision in *Americanah* is fundamentally a comic one; the work is optimistic about the internet as a community space. The novel also celebrates the internet as a space of professional self-realization that values marginalized forms of expertise. Ifemelu's blogs find a readership without having to pander to an imagined audience or to financial backers; by contrast, the novel represents magazines and the commercial publishing industry as hamstrung by their relationships to such constituencies. The world of blogging even escapes academia's commitment to hierarchy while being politically and intellectually incisive in ways that the academics in the novel recognize and admire. Adichie's commitment to the proliferation of stories and the kinds of conversations that the internet has to offer may seem naïve or overly optimistic, and certainly places her in a particular historical moment. But it is also of a piece with her novel's insistence on the cultural value of popular forms that are classed low and gendered female. Flat characters flourish in such settings; Adichie's novel shows how such settings might foment engagement rather than becoming echo chambers. In the next chapter I turn to novels that are more ambivalent about the possibilities of online forums as sites of encounter, and to the representational strategies they offer.

Notes

1. See Jennifer Leetsch, Erica Edwards, Nora Berning.

2. Goyal is not the only critic to comment on Ifemelu's return to Nigeria; Ulka Anjaria, Nora Berning, and Katherine Hallemeier consider the novel's return to Nigeria to be key to the ways that *Americanah* departs from the conventions of the postcolonial or immigrant novel.

3. While the novel does jump between present and past, it does so in a way that is clearly demarcated and not at all disorienting. As such I do not consider it a major departure from a purely linear plot chronology. Further, as Joseph Slaughter argues, the plot of the *bildungsroman* is one in which the central character becomes what we have always known him to be, and so this toggling back and forth in time is an instance of the "dynamic unity" that Bakhtin says characterizes the bildungsroman protagonist (*Dialogic* 331).

4. Scholars are generally in agreement that *Americanah* fits easily into a realist tradition: Ian Baucom argues that its attention to "finely observed, psychologically arresting scenes of the everyday" belongs squarely in the tradition of the nineteenth century realist novel ("A Study"). Ulka Anjaria argues that Adichie's novel is marked by what she calls "the realist impulse… [which] entails a new textual engagement with the contemporary world, as evident in gestures such as stories set in the present rather than the past and the trimming of modernist, metaphorical, and metafictional language for a more stripped-down and less ostensibly self-conscious aesthetic" (Anjaria 278). Caroline Levine and Yogita Goyal also take Adichie's realism as a given in their arguments. Yet each of these scholars draws different conclusions about the political import of the novel's realist commitments—and as Levine and Anjaria both note, throughout the twentieth century literary scholars have disagreed about whether realist

fiction is a socially conservative form or one that can prompt critique of social structures. I am more sympathetic to the latter view than the former, but also think that claims about the politics of realism are almost always less convincing than claims about the politics of particular realist novels as they respond to the conventions of realism. My third chapter will return to these questions in reference to the autofictional trend in contemporary fiction.

5. That the desire to return to Nigeria grows out of looking at social media posts of friends who also left Nigeria and ultimately went back is another way that the novel refuses to regard Ifemelu's return as nostalgic. Like the friends whose posts she sees, she returns as a successful professional and continues to pursue the same professional life in Lagos.

6. This distinction between visual and textual media will return in chapter 3.

7. That Adichie calls this poster "SapphicDerrida" and that Ifemelu feels inadequate in comparison to her because she "reel[s] off statistics and use[s] words like 'reify' in her comments" (5) aligns the commenter with the academics in Ifemelu's offline life. Academics who are also activists proliferate in Adichie's work. In Adichie's Nigerian contexts academics are often an endangered class; again and again in her novels professors worry about whether their salaries will be paid, or go without salaries when classes are interrupted by government shifts or student strikes. While the activism that results has a real political edge, it never fully emerges into the foreground of Adichie's novels. If academic activism forms a kind of background, this activism needs to be at least supplemented and perhaps supplanted by outsider figures—Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus*, Ugwu in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Ifemelu in *Americanah*. Adichie seems unwilling to concede that education as such is a panacea for social ills; instead, she puts forward alternative forms of knowledge as necessary supplements. In *Americanah*, the supplement is one of media or form as well as of content. Ugwu's "text" within *Half of a Yellow*

Sun is ostensibly a print book like the novel in which it sits; what *Americanah* attempts to offer is a new media, the blog.

8. Here I borrow Nirvana Tanoukhi's reading of Adichie's TED talk. She argues that Adichie claims in this speech that it is readers, not writers, who are responsible for amassing multiple stories of a place in order to understand it ("Movement" 669). What Adichie's talk illuminates most clearly, for Tanoukhi, is the way that "literary history, certainly from the viewpoint of the periphery, is the story of how places are specified, how depictions of particular places are made" ("Movement" 671). Tanoukhi calls our attention to the ways that any writer of a particular place is constrained by the depictions of that place that came before him or her; she argues that this is especially true, however, for writers from the periphery. If *Things Fall Apart* begins to revise the image of Africa offered by *Heart of Darkness*, it, in turn, must be open to revision. Tanoukhi's reading highlights Adichie's impatience with the position this puts her in as a writer from Nigeria. Tanoukhi also points out the way that Adichie's talk acknowledges the power of reading only to shrug off any argument that writers have to shoulder some responsibility for this power. Tanoukhi parses Adichie's argument as follows: "readers should prevent stereotypes by reading more—*but only so that the writer may be freed to engage in the production of specificity*" ("Movement" 670, italics in the original).

9. I recognize that using the phrase "real life" to refer to the experiences of a fictional character may seem to imply that I see characters as versions of human beings or that I see things that happen online as not a part of one's real life. Neither is the case. However, the structure of Adichie's novel demands some way of describing the differences between Ifemelu's life online and her life elsewhere; I am using "real life" as a way to describe the second.

10. Figlerowicz's larger argument is that certain novels (she considers those of Thomas Hardy and Marcel Proust, among others) become less complex over the course of their novels rather than more so: "given their limited capacities, [these protagonists] seem to have been given too much narrative space" (3). Yet this reduction of complexity, for Figlerowicz, performs important ethical and political work: "I redescribe the necessarily narrow mimetic bounds of their genre [of the novel] not as wishful metonymies of the much larger world our lives relate to, but as extreme reminders of how small a segment of reality we might be willing to mistake for all of it, and how much else there is in the world around us that we never come to know or care about. The novels I examine suggest that some of their genre's most important insights lie in its capacity to confront us with the vastness of indifference that we inevitably bear toward most of the world and that most of this world bears toward us" (171). Flat characters, in Figlerowicz's terms, can make readers aware of their own self-regard, and of the ways that they may not be as round a protagonist as they think, thus turning readers towards the world in a different way than the traditional narrative of sympathy or empathy for a character that one can come to see as having the same kind of roundness that a reader feels him- or herself to have.

11. Michaels's impatience with the notion that seeing is in itself ameliorative is particularly useful in the context of literary criticism (including this dissertation), which often uses metaphors of vision to describe its work. In the context of this chapter, I would suggest that seeing differently might be a first step to acting differently in relation to the kinds of systemic injustice he describes. Chapter 2 returns to the problems of taking seeing as a political good in its consideration of internet activism and its concerns about sympathy as a mode of engagement with either literary characters or other people.

12. Joseph Slaughter, in his discussion of the *Bildungsroman* and human rights law, discusses the way that this form often places in parallel the development of its protagonist and a larger national narrative, as Adichie does with Ifemelu and Obama here. As he puts it, "[t]he social function of this promising novelistic form nonetheless seems to become salient whenever there are similar sociopolitical crises over the constituency of the state and of the historical universal. The genre of demarginalization tends to emerge as a particularly vital form when the terms, mechanics, and scope of the rights franchise are under contest" (135). In terms of *Americanah*, we seem to see this operating in the American section of the book; via the blog, and with the parallel national drama of Obama's election, there's a concomitant shaping of Ifemelu and of the U.S. But that promise doesn't seem to be realized-- we're reminded of the ways that neither Obama nor Ifemelu are accorded the status of the universal person. Blaine's sister reminds us that Ifemelu's blog only works because of her status as outsider; Ifemelu and we are reminded that Obama's success also depends on his status as a "non-American Black." Further, though, this correlation fails to satisfy Ifemelu and seemingly also Adichie; it leaves Ifemelu feeling exposed rather than integrated and prompts her return to Nigeria. It is not that the integration/incorporation (as Slaughter has it) plot fails as that it doesn't seem to interest or satisfy Adichie because it might imply that America is where Ifemelu and people like Ifemelu belong. Instead, the novel suggests that the US is one of many possible places that Ifemelu might live, and not even the most satisfying one.

Chapter 2: Charismatic Characters in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* and Teju Cole's *Open City*

In a description (which doubles as a scathing critique) of what he calls the "White-Savior Industrial Complex," Teju Cole writes that the "White Savior" believes that "[t]he world is nothing but a problem to be solved by enthusiasm…. The White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege" (@tejucole "The banality," "The White Savior"). Cole is describing a particular form of activism in the contemporary moment in which a privileged person (in Cole's work, almost always an American) sees evidence of injustice or violence in some other part of the world (often via some form of media platform, whether it be Twitter or television news) and embarks on a quixotic attempt to right wrongs that have resulted in pain and suffering. Cole argues that this would-be "White Savior" responds to a particular atrocity as though it happened in a vacuum, failing to see the larger global system in which it played out. Often what he or she fails to see is the American government's complicity in global inequality. Further, though, he highlights the gap between an outsider's perspective and that of a person living in the national context in which the atrocity happened. Cole's indictment of the "White-Savior Industrial Complex" offers one window onto a set of problems to which his work constantly returns, and which this chapter also attempts to probe. Cole's work across media suggests that the combination of a commitment to global citizenship as a responsibility, a media feed that constantly trumpets new tragedies, and the belief that narrative can circulate otherness and emotion in ways that might lead to a more just world results in some very misguided—and often actively dangerous—attempts to make the world a better place.

This chapter will turn towards the operations of this system of globality, media, emotion, and justice and will suggest that the understanding of novels as developing our sympathy for others—a version of the genre that is central to ethical criticism—might cause readers to make the same kinds of mistakes as the ones Cole critiques. Turning towards Teju Cole's body of work (both his 2012 novel *Open City* and his Twitter projects) and to Ruth Ozeki's 2013 novel *A Tale for the Time Being*, I will show how each attempts to navigate a media landscape that these writers see as overwhelming in its global scale. This confusion of scale has consequences for both affect and politics. For these writers, the affective landscape of the internet is not coextensive with that of lived experience (as in many ways it was for Adichie's characters); it is warped and sharp-edged and provokes operatic emotions or mutes emotion entirely. How, in such a landscape, might readers be asked to feel for fictional characters—and how might those feelings turn readers towards what Suzanne Keen calls "prosocial action" in ways that do not fall into the trap of white saviorism (99)?

As I discussed in my introduction, central to much ethical criticism of the twenty-first century novel is the refusal to ask characters to stand in for larger populations because doing so enacts a kind of representational violence on both character and population. Cole and Ozeki seem to share this view, yet also remain interested in the ways that novels and networks make it possible to access faraway people—and curious about the ways that such access might allow individuals to redress large-scale suffering. In this chapter, I will argue that they attempt to do so through the use of what I will call charismatic characters, characters who draw readers' attention in order to route that attention towards other populations without asking the character to stand in for those populations. Key to this operation of character is that the implied reader is not a member of the population towards which the character turns attention.[1]

Also at stake is the charisma of fictional characters. The central thrust of my argument in this chapter is that sympathy does not offer the best vocabulary for understanding the ways that Cole's and Ozeki's characters operate. Drawing on Weber's theory of the charismatic leader, I propose that we substitute charisma for sympathy in order to think about how readers might feel for characters and how those feelings might be routed towards other people. I do so in order to describe Cole and Ozeki's work, but also to show the limitations of the concept of sympathy more generally. Both charisma and sympathy are terms of affect that are also key terms for political and social theory (the first drawing primarily on the work of Max Weber, the second on that of Adam Smith); they are also terms that describe mediated relationships or modes of relation. In what follows I will argue that while sympathy has been the dominant term in arguments for the novel's prompting of social action, charisma more aptly describes the relationship between media, globality, and feeling that Cole's Tweets present and that media scholars argue is the mode of online engagement.

I will also suggest that using a vocabulary of charisma makes clear the ways Cole and Ozeki use character. Cole borrows canonical charismatic characters on Twitter while holding charisma at bay in his 2012 novel *Open City*, making the limitations of affective political engagements clear. Ozeki's 2013 novel *A Tale for the Time Being* shows how mediated encounters (between readers and fictional characters, between people who meet each other online, and between the perpetrators and victims of violence conducted at a distance and over media) are flashpoints for both care and cruelty—and relies on a central charismatic character to draw other characters, and readers, into the landscape of the novel and the concerns about mediation, responsibility, and care that it traverses.

Why Charisma?

Before turning more attentively to Weber's theory of charisma, I would like to dwell on the more quotidian use of the word, because it inflects my use of the phrase "charismatic characters." Vincent Lloyd, in his defense of charisma, bemoans its decline from a word that connoted nobility and a connection with the divine to something that is simply "instrumental" (2) and merely associated with fame: Oprah is his example of the ways we now understand charisma. While I am sympathetic to Lloyd's attempt to renovate charisma on other terms, and will return to it, I am less troubled than he is by the contemporary quotidian use of "charismatic" to describe people who are personally compelling, because I see it as descriptive rather than normative. The characters I describe as "charismatic" are ones that draw affect to them—they captivate and make emotional demands of their readers. These are the kinds of characters that enthusiastic readers tend to describe as "leaping off the page"—they seem intensely real and they trouble the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. This does not at all mean that readers confuse the characters for real people, or that the emotional engagement they prompt somehow overcomes readers' ability to distinguish between fiction and non-fiction. It simply means that readers become attached to such characters, and sometimes see this attachment as belonging among their attachments to real beings.

The history of fiction abounds with such characters, figures that have commanded outpourings of emotion and have exceeded the boundaries of the books that seem constructed to contain them. Samuel Richardson's Pamela—and the way she morphs into Henry Fielding's Shamela precisely because readers were so captivated by her—is one example; another is the oft-told story of American readers storming British ships and asking sailors, who might have read the next installment of Dickens' serially published *The Old Curiosity Shop* in England before it was available in the US, whether Little Nell was still alive. Pamela and Nell are beloved figures,

but their charisma also coincides with transitional media moments; Pamela with the print and literacy boom of the mid-eighteenth century, and Nell with the vogue for serialization that arises from the form of the nineteenth-century newspaper. Pamela's status as fictional character is called into question by the newness of the novel form as well as by *Pamela*'s epistolary structure. But clearly the attachment to Pamela does not arise simply because, in the period in which *Pamela* was written and published, the novel's status as fiction was only shakily established. Readers continue to care about fictional characters: Little Nell does not prompt ontological debate but does provoke similar kinds of emotional attachment in readers, an attachment that seems excessive given her status as obviously fictional. And yet if Pamela flickers between fiction and nonfiction, Little Nell also overflows her pages; the curiosity about her death arises in and because of the gap between the two serial installments.

Jeremy Rosen points out that in the contemporary book market classic novel characters remain flash points for readers' interest. He describes the rise, in the 1990s and early 2000s, of a genre he calls "minor-character elaboration" ("Insatiable" 144). In this genre, a writer moves a minor character of a canonical novel to the center of a new novel, allowing him (or, as Rosen points out, more usually her) to tell another side of the story.[2] Rosen argues that this genre satisfies both politically progressive readers and publishers seeking to bolster their revenues: it "allows producers to simultaneously exploit both the timeless value of the classics and ostensibly oppositional political energies" ("Insatiable" 144). Rosen focuses on revealing the market motivations for what initially looks like a progressive genre (in that it opens canonical stories to the voices of women and people of color); he argues that readers buy these books out of a desire to confirm their own cultural capital, to show that they are readers who already know who Jane Eyre or Mr. Darcy is. He is less interested in whether people might buy such books at least in

part because of their curiosity about the characters in the canonical work and how they might look from a different perspective.[3]

I offer this very brief survey of the history of the way novel characters attract interest to show first how the draw of fictional character tends to align with a sense of (or in the case of Rosen's discussion, a market commitment to) the fictional character overflowing the boundaries of a particular book or with readerly curiosity about a character's fate that is in excess of the character's fictional and thus ontologically bounded status. Of course, not all fictional characters are charismatic; some writers—including Teju Cole, whose work I will consider later in this chaper—deliberately eschew charisma in order to question its place in fiction. But the charismatic character is a staple of the novel and of cultures of novel-reading. It is also crucial to the social work that the novel is often imagined to do; if novels develop our empathy, or turn our attention to the disenfranchised, they are often imagined to do so by making us care about particular characters in ways that prompt us to care for people in our social worlds.[4] This is yet another way that charismatic characters seem to exceed the borders of the books in which they reside: they can act as conduits to other populations.

Literary critics tend to use the language of sympathy rather than charisma to discuss these characters and their operations. I am offering "charisma" in its place in an attempt to draw out the ways that such characters bind readers to them and demand irrational forms of fealty. I also want to mark my commitment to charting the social life of media (including novels) rather than its cognitive effects on those who engage with it. Critics who consider sympathy and its near relative empathy often investigate literature from the perspective of cognitive psychology. Suzanne Keen's *Empathy and the Novel* uses neuroscientific tools to probe whether the historical alignment between novel-reading, sympathy, and virtue actually functions in the ways that many

critics claim it does, arguing that "the evidence of a relationship between narrative empathy and the prosocial motivation of actual readers does not support the grand claims often made on behalf of empathy" (Keen 145). Like Keen's work, Blakey Vermeule's *Why Do We Care About Literary Characters* answers its titular question by turning towards cognitive psychology; in both cases, as in the work of Lisa Zunshine and Elaine Auyoung, questions about sympathy and empathy are questions about how individual readers engage with literature on a cognitive level.[5] I share with these critics the belief that readers experience characters as rich and complete beings and that we ought to be puzzled by why that is the case. I am interested in the social life of both novels and social media, however, rather than the cognitive effects either prompts—except insofar as these cognitive effects, or the ones that writers imagine their characters prompting, might emerge into social life. In this commitment I follow scholars like David Palumbo-Liu, who in his *The Deliverance of Others* uses a sociological vocabulary rather than a cognitive one to think through the ways that literature affects readers. Palumbo-Liu argues that literature is a delivery system, a way of encountering difference in which the mechanisms of the novel may mute the strangeness of whatever it offers to the reader. While he offers a careful criticism of the ways that systems predicated on human commonality might falter in the face of human difference, in his likening of novels to other systems he sometimes elides what is particular about literature. As he argues that novels' awareness of their own status as delivery systems makes them useful tools for registering and evaluating other contemporary global systems, the literary texts he discusses can come to seem as clinical as organ transplants or economic aid, two of the systems Palumbo-Liu considers. His notion of the novel as a delivery system is conceptually useful, but I want to expand upon his work by considering the ways that novelists might deliberately gum up the works of their delivery mechanisms—and to consider the system of the

internet, one that Palumbo-Liu mentions in his conclusion but into which he does not delve. Like Sara Ahmed, I am compelled by the question of "what sticks?" As she points out, emotions do "circulate between bodies" but "they 'stick' as well as move" (*Cultural Politics* 4).[6] I am interested in stickiness as a mechanism, and how novelists court or block or attempt to route the feelings that their characters draw—and in how this mechanism works in a particular media and political moment.

If I find David Palumbo-Liu's notion of delivery systems slightly inattentive to the complexity of reader's emotional attachments, I am also wary of the language of sympathy and empathy that marks much ethical as well as neurocognitive criticism. This body of work tends to use "sympathy" or "empathy" to describe the relationship that readers have with characters, and to examine how these relationships might draw out readers to engage with other people. This criticism draws on a history of thinking about engagement that grows out of Adam Smith's theorizing of sentiment and sympathy. It thus gives rise to what Rachel Greenwald Smith calls "the affective hypothesis," or in her words,

> the belief that literature is at its most meaningful when it represents and transmits the emotional specificity of personal experience…. There is an odd and unsettling consensus: we read works of literature because they allow us direct contact with individuals who are like us but not like us; they allow us to feel what others feel; they provoke empathy; and they teach us how to understand what it means to be a unique human being. (R. Smith 1)

Smith locates this critical trend across a number of different theoretical orientations; she also aligns it with the rise of the social form of neoliberalism. She argues that it prompts investment in the individual character at the expense of making larger social currents visible; this emotional investment is, in her reading, too structurally similar to financial speculation and the expectation

of return on investment that it carries. I share some of her reservations about the too-easy alignment of character and person, and about sympathy with fictional characters as a route towards more ethical behavior.[7] Yet her dismissal of affect is too total: just because emotional investment can have structural similarities to financial investment does not mean that the two always share the same political orientation.

One of the reasons that I find David Palumbo-Liu's "delivery systems" language so compelling is that it acknowledges the imbrication of characters with the language of their novels, and with the philosophical or political commitments of writers—in other words, the ways that characters are very much *not* people (although people might be similarly shaped by their social contexts) but threads in the larger fabric of a novel. And yet both Palumbo-Liu and Smith, as they try to think beyond sympathy, leave behind too much of the affective content of literature. I am turning towards the language of charisma in an attempt to take that affective content seriously while preserving the suspicion of affect and human commonality that makes Palumbo-Liu's and Smith's work so incisive.

While I am, as I discussed earlier, in some ways drawing on the mundane and quotidian definition of charisma, I am also drawing on Max Weber's theory of charismatic authority in my attempt to pinpoint the powers of attraction with which Cole and Ozeki endow their characters and the representational and social work they suggest such characters can do. Weber offers three forms of authority: traditional, legal-rational, and charismatic. He associates traditional authority with forms of government like feudalism, in which a leader's authority derives from the sanctity of tradition. Legal-rational authority is bolstered by a belief in law and usually undergirded by a bureaucracy; the form it takes is that of the modern state. Charismatic authority, however, is commanded by a particular leader whose followers see him as endowed with "specifically

exceptional powers or qualities" (Weber 241). As Erica Edwards points out, such a form of authority is, for Weber, "the locus of modern excess, a site where extraordinary—that is, extra-rational—needs [are] satisfied; charismatic leadership satisfie[s] human longings that bureaucracy and traditional authority would not meet" (Edwards, *Difference* 13). Charisma, thus, often comes into play at the breakdown of legal-rational or traditional authority, at moments when such forms of authority fail to satisfy a population's desires. A charismatic leader emerges on a wave of affect or an overflow of irrational need. I find Weber's claims about charismatic leadership compelling for considering the role of literary characters because the loving relationships that readers have with characters are similarly irrational and similarly powerfully committed. They are also, as I have been arguing, often excessive; they trouble category distinctions and overflow their novels.

Of course, the charismatic character is not to be confused with the charismatic leader. Reading a novel is not the same thing as going to a political rally or casting a vote; it has different consequences. Even in the context of politics rather than literature, though, the very concept of charisma can be troubling: as Vincent Lloyd puts it, "the word that deflates every attempt to praise charisma, or even just to think carefully about charisma, is *Hitler*" (7)—while Weber's 1922 theory does not align charisma with fascism, the two have become so identified with each other in the last half of the twentieth century that it can be difficult to prize them apart. Lloyd argues that we ought to do so and proposes that we distinguish between what he calls "democratic charisma" and "authoritarian charisma" (Lloyd 5). The latter, according to Lloyd, "confirms social hierarchies and reinforces the powers that be" while the former uses "the words, images, and performances characteristic of a community to underscore the contingency and limitations of those words, images, and performances" (5). While I am not as certain as Lloyd

that it is so easy to distinguish between the two, I do think his emphasis on media is helpful: he insists that charisma is always mediated, and that bad forms of charisma attempt to efface their reliance on media while good ones make us see how our engagement with them is mediated. I will return to media's ability to hide itself later in this chapter: for now I will simply say that I think their work calls attention to its operations in the ways that Lloyd associates with democratic charisma and thus tries to turn readers' attention to the operations of authoritarian charisma in contemporary culture.

I cannot clear charisma of the charges against it, as Lloyd attempts to do. I have reservations about Weber's formulation of charismatic authority—as Roderick Ferguson points out, Weber's subjects "are not at the mercy of discourses that render them illegitimate rational subjects from the start" due to the "particularities of race, class, gender and sexuality" (85). Weber fails to acknowledge the ways that rational Western modernity is founded on exclusions, on the marking of other ways of being as irrational. His theory does not account for the ways that black subjects or female subjects (or transgendered subjects, or working-class subjects, or queer subjects, among others) are already understood as forming the underside of rational modernity, and so may only have access to forms of authority marked as irrational or charismatic. In other words, understanding charisma as eruption fails to acknowledge legal-rational authority's constitutive exclusions. It also reifies charisma and charismatic leadership, understanding it as one among various social structures rather than as a culturally specific performance or a response to a particular set of constraints. Erica Edwards argues that sociology as a whole has followed in Weber's footsteps in failing to understand the cultural aspects of charisma; those who work on charisma "understand charismatic authority as a static social structure rather than a culturally constructed set of values, associations, contestations" (*Difference* 23). She cites Philip Smith as

the rare sociologist who understands charisma as "a discursive matrix produced at the site of cultural production" rather than "an empirical phenomenon discoverable by science" (*Difference* 23).

Like Edwards, I am interested in the ways that charisma is a narrative structure that may be more malleable than sociologists have understood it to be. Her work on charisma in African American literature has informed mine in that she insists that charisma is a "political fiction" that is "staged in real time and in media playback" (*Difference* 3)—in other words, that it is a narrative and mediated form. My work differs from hers, however, in that she is interested in the ways that African American writers have contested the narratives of charismatic leadership that are often associated with the civil rights movement by offering narratives of other forms of leadership and ways of achieving social change. I want instead to borrow the operations of charisma (the ways that it produces and demands feeling, the ways that the feeling it produces is in excess of its apparent object and reaches beyond that object, and the ways it is bound up with mediation) in order to talk about how readers' relationships to literary characters might operate. If Edwards considers how texts narrate (or undermine) scenes of charismatic leadership, I am interested in how a text might perform scenes of charismatic connection.

While Weber's formulation of charismatic authority may fail to take into account its own exclusions along with the cultural formations that enable it, I find it useful for considering how certain kinds of literary characters operate: it makes clear that many loyalties are both strong and irrational, it (as Erica Edwards elucidates) offers a narrative structure for social change that relies on a strong emotional tie with a singular figure, and it is intriguingly relational in a way that seems to illuminate Cole's interest in closing empathy gaps and the formal choices he makes in his Tweets. Further, many of the figures I have cited as examples of charismatic characters

(Pamela and Little Nell, for instance) are ones that occupy the excluded position from which Ferguson argues charisma can seem the only route to authority—they are female characters who occupy a lower-class position. These characters generate new forms of authority via their charisma, and their narratives make clear that it is only through this charisma that any authority they might hold can come into being, because they otherwise have no access to power.

Using "charisma," then, allows me to draw on a sociological tradition that considers the relationships of members of social groups to each other, but also attempts to acknowledge the ways that Cole and Ozeki paint the media landscape into and about which they write as one that is hostile to sympathy, or one in which sympathy is not an adequate response. "Sympathy" grows out of an enlightenment tradition in which rationality and sentiment are intertwined and dependent on each other; it does not acknowledge the seductiveness of the literary character and the media landscape, the ways that living on media is addictive. I offer "charisma" in its stead because it has teeth as well as charm. While fictional characters cannot hurt a reader, they can exert power over readers—if only by keeping them in their chairs just a little longer. Social media is similarly addictive.

Further, though, Weber's understanding of charisma illuminates the ways that Cole and Ozeki attempt to use their characters as conduits to populations of which the imagined reader is not a member. The charismatic character is not a site of education in the ways that the sympathetic character is understood to be. But nor is the charismatic character simply a magnet for care, because whatever care he or she draws can spill out or be routed towards others. The charismatic character, in other words, is not an endpoint, but a potential delivery chute, to return to Palumbo-Liu's formulation. In this it structurally resembles the charismatic leader: Weber points out that such a leader may not actually possess the "exceptional powers" she is imagined

to wield—all that matters, for a leader to be a charismatic one, is that her followers see her that way. As Weber puts it, "what is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded" (242).[8] Charisma, in other words, is purely relational: it comes into being in the space between a leader and his followers, and often because the followers see the leader as a conduit for the divine or, in nonreligious contexts, some other source of charm and power. Weber sees the charismatic leader as drawing power from his connection to the divine; his followers can reach the divine through him or can access the benefits of divine power through their relationship with him. This notion of the conduit also illuminates the ways that charisma operates at a different scale from that of sympathy: sympathy describes a relationship between two individuals, while charisma acts on populations. The engagement with global circulation that marks Cole's and Ozeki's work is also an engagement with scale. Ozeki's work in particular attempts to grapple with losses that cannot be narrated as the stories of individuals. Charisma marks these writers' attempts to route care not from an individual character to a particular other person, but to move readers towards feeling for a larger population without asking the character to simply stand in for that population and without trying to educate the reader in care. Instead the character works as a bridge—like the charismatic leader, she connects a population with some other entity.

Teju Cole: The Limitations of Mediated Empathy

The idea that literature can act as a bridge between a reader and a population that the reader might not otherwise consider has haunted much of Teju Cole's work. Of Barack Obama, Cole writes in *The New Yorker*'s Page-Turner blog in February 2013 that "It thrilled me, when he was elected, to think of the President's nightstand looking rather similar to mine. We had, once again, a reader in chief" ("A Reader's War"). Yet as he goes on to chronicle the Obama administration's commitment to drone warfare, he asks, "What became of literature's vaunted

power to inspire empathy?" ("A Reader's War). He returns to this question of empathy in an interview with *Mother Jones* magazine, saying

> I had been thinking so intensely so much about the global war on terror, especially the heavy silence that has surrounded the use of drones to assassinate people outside this country. I just realized that [what] we're facing here is an empathy gap. And this ["Seven Short Stories about Drones"] was just another way to generate conversation about something that nobody wanted to look at. (Cole, Interview)

Here Cole is describing his reasons for writing "Seven Short Stories about Drones," a series of Tweets in which he interrupts the first lines of famous novels with drone strikes, effectively assassinating canonical stories as an attempt to turn his followers' attention to "something nobody wanted to look at." He goes on to say that he wanted, with the Tweets, "to somehow participate in the discussion about justice. What does it mean to be just to the others out there whose lives we do not think about. One of the answers I came up with was simply tell their stories" (Cole, Interview). For all that Cole discusses the failure of a "reader in chief" to behave differently than a non-reading leader might, his discussion of "Seven Short Stories" triangulates the reading of literary texts, conversations, and empathy.[9]

In the *New Yorker*, Cole calls the lack of attention to drone warfare "the consensus about mournable bodies" (Cole, "Unmournable Bodies"). While he does not cite Judith Butler, the phrase "mournable bodies" is an echo of *Precarious Life*, her meditation on the politics of mourning. Mourning, Butler reminds us, is a story; in order to mourn a body, we need to have a certain story to tell about it. Her discussion of the relationship of obituaries to nation-building shows how much the newspaper operates as a check on the kinds of community that can be imagined; in *Precarious Life* she points out that "there are no obituaries for the war casualties

that the United States inflicts, and there cannot be" (34). But even if (as Cole and Butler remind us) certain stories cannot be told, it does not follow that telling stories and doing justice are uncomplicatedly continuous with each other. While Cole's interviews and cultural journalism reflect an apparent belief that storytelling might be a way of being just, his Tweets offer something more ambiguous.[10]

"Seven Short Stories about Drones," the series of Tweets Cole references in his *Mother Jones* interview appeared in 2013. Cole Tweeted them one by one, but also published them as a collection in *The New Inquiry*, a leftist online journal of culture and politics for which he was regularly blogging at the time, suggesting that they ought to be understood as a group. In chronological order, they read as follows (each line break marks a new Tweet):

> Seven short stories about drones.
>
> 1. Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. Pity. A signature strike leveled the florist's.
>
> 2. Call me Ishmael. I was a young man of military age. I was immolated at my wedding. My parents are inconsolable.
>
> 3. Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather. A bomb whistled in. Blood on the walls. Fire from heaven.
>
> 4. I am an invisible man. My name is unknown. My loves are a mystery. But an unnamed aerial vehicle from a secret location has come for me.
>
> 5. Someone must have slandered Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything truly wrong, he was killed by a Predator drone.
>
> 6. Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His torso was found, not his head.

7. Mother died today. The program saves American lives. (@tejucole)

Clearly these are not stories about actual victims of drone strikes; they certainly do not attempt to tell the stories of those "out there whose lives we do not think about" (Cole, Interview). They do not even tell the stories of the novels whose opening lines they interrupt; they prevent these stories from unfolding. Instead, Cole borrows the charisma of canonical novels in order to turn readers' care and attention to the victims of American drone strikes. The Tweets do ask us to see those victims as the protagonists of stories. But instead of using Twitter to bring stories of actual drone victims to a wider audience, they ask readers to react to the deaths of characters rather than to the deaths of people. Cole hollows out the literary character in order to use it as a kind of delivery chute for the anonymous victim of drone violence; the end of the Tweet hands the reader something that the beginning of the Tweet did not seem to offer. Yet even as the Tweets rely on that sleight-of-hand, the substitution of drone victim for canonical character, they also rely as much on those characters' charisma, which the novels' canonicity offers their characters. (One might not care all that much about Buck Mulligan as an individual character, but he takes on, here, the fame of *Ulysses*, a cultural touchstone whose loss many would deeply mourn.) The description of the drone violence suggests a reference to a real victim of a real drone; yet that victim remains anonymous and not quite visible to the reader because Cole offers him or her the mantle of a literary character, lending the victim the charisma of a canonical fictional text while also keeping the reader's affective response at a slight remove from its object. The Tweets rely on the relationship between literature and empathy while simultaneously registering ambivalence about its operations. They are, as Miriam Pahl puts it, an "aesthetic articulation of doubt towards the transformative potential of language and literature" (Pahl 75). The shock of the Tweets registers only if a reader cares about the stories so summarily ended—but the Tweets also

critique such readers for that very love of novels, pointing out that loving Mrs. Dalloway has not resulted in care for real victims of American policy. Further, as Pahl notes, the violence they mark is as integral a part of the society to which they speak as are the great works of literature for which that society praises itself. What they present, then, is frustration about the ways that care for a character does not necessarily lead to care for other people, a frustration with the way that, as Suzanne Keen has shown, the empathy that novels engender in readers often does not lead to "prosocial action" (99).

But with this odd mash-up of classic novel character and real victim of drone violence Cole also calls into question the representativeness and singularity of literary character, the way that very few characters can gain the kind of roundness and psychological depth that the novel unevenly offers. Alex Woloch points out that the novel, in its representation of social life, needs to pull two ways (towards psychological depth and towards social expansiveness) but it cannot offer psychological depth to all of its characters equally (Woloch 19-20). And minor characters often line up with socially marginal populations, as Woloch himself notes and as other scholars like Joseph Slaughter and Shameem Black have investigated (Slaughter 86-140, 205, 269; Black 1-18). One response to the knot of representational and political discrimination that such scholars chart is to write novels that center on such populations rather than using them simply as foils or as local color. But Cole's work does not take this route: instead it registers dissatisfaction with the idea that a marginalized figure's move to the center of the story might begin to redress the text's, and by extension the reader's, unjust dispersal of attention. By keeping the imagined victim anonymous, Cole forestalls the kind of emotional attachment to a specific victim that might be a route towards ethical engagement. We ought to care about violence itself, he suggests. And we ought to work towards a kind of exhaustive taxonomy rather than being satisfied with a

representative human interest story. Cole follows these Tweets with another one: "Everything we know so far about drone strikes: http://www.propublica.org/article/everything-we-know-so-far-about-drone-strikes" (@tejucole, "Everything").[11] Not only does this Tweet bolster emotion with information by shifting the reader's attention from novel characters to nonfiction, it offers *all* available information; Cole wants the reader to know "everything."[12] The move from one story to "everything" is a move from the representation of an individual's experience to exhaustive information about a population's experience. It seems to refuse, perhaps even to repudiate, the shaping role of narration.

The Tweets align Cole with critics and writers concerned about what Shameem Black calls "invasive imagination" (19). Black traces a scholarly metanarrative of the problem of representing social difference in which "representing alterity is frequently understood as an act of discursive domination that replicates, in literary form, the violent operations of political, economic, and social inequality" (19). The Tweets elegantly dodge this problem by registering a problem of narration: how might one populate novels with characters in a way that mediates the relationship between reader and another population in a just manner? The Tweets offer one way of managing the affective draw of fictional characters: they show how fictional character can be an entry into feeling, but they also try to route that feeling towards real suffering without asking a character to represent that suffering by standing in for a larger population.

They also make themselves a part of the attention economy of the internet. This economy is one in which, as Frances Ferguson puts it, we are constantly "'hailed'" by "communications that present messages from strangers in tones of greatest intimacy" (522). This collision of intimacy and strangeness marks an environment in which we must constantly decide to whom to respond, which messages deserve our attention, just how much we can care, and how we might

act on that caring. It is also one in which we are constantly catching feelings from faraway others: the "Facebook experiment" of 2012 seemed conclusively to show that the kind of emotional contagion scholars have traditionally associated with physical presence could in fact operate over the social media site. In the 2012 study, Facebook manipulated its users' feeds, changing the number of positive and negative posts they saw in an effort to discover whether these posts had psychological effects on the people who saw them. The authors of the study concluded that "emotions expressed by friends, via online social networks, influence our own moods, constituting, to our knowledge, the first experimental evidence for massive-scale emotional contagion via social networks" (qtd. in Booth, "Facebook reveals news feed experiment"). Cole's use of Twitter, and the way he describes his Twitter presence, shows him to be aware of its effects. In his interview with *Mother Jones*, Cole describes the demands of such a landscape: he notes that there is a "heavy silence" around an issue he cares about and tries to create a "discussion" about it online by "tell[ing] stories" (Cole, Interview). Cole seems to see competing for attention as the only way to begin to make a claim for justice—but relying on discussion risks complicity with what Jodi Dean calls "communicative capitalism," the affective and real economy of the internet. Believing that the charismatic character in the well-told story can prompt political action risks confusing feelings with politics. Dean associates this risk with the very form of the Internet, arguing that its networks treat "Ideas… in terms of empathy and its lack" and "in connection with actual experience" rather than "abstractly or in a more analytic field" (Dean 49). This relationship between experience, narration, and affective capture is also central to the operation of political charisma: as Eva Horn argues, "charisma is less a state than a process or a 'path'" (11), and while Weber's work pays more attention to the normalization of charisma than to its genesis, it is "only as an extraordinary and memorable history [that charisma

can] gain a concrete form" (11). It is precisely this genesis of charisma that Dean suggests powers engagement with online politics, and it is this genesis of charisma that Cole (and Ozeki, whom I will turn to shortly) make use of and to which they call their readers' attention.[13]

Of course, treating ideas "in connection with actual experience" is exactly what novels do, and their ability to do so has been the source, for many proponents of the novel, of much of novels' social and ethical power. Yet novels are self-evidently fictional while the contemporary media environment teems with real as well as fake news. In such an environment, the engaged novelist runs the risk of being complicit with an attention economy that relies on charismatic figures to capture feeling, and substitutes caring about such figures for political action, or for understanding the structural or systemic nature of persecution or other forms of injustice. While participatory media seemed, to Guy Debord, to offer a way beyond the spectacular discourse that "leaves no room for any reply" (13), contemporary critics like Dean and Alexander Galloway argue that the ability to reply does not constitute political power. As Dean puts it,

> Today people discuss the realities that concern them everywhere and all the time—blogs, Facebook, Twitter, they ooze with the realities of individual concern…. Discussion, far from displaced, has itself become a barrier against acts as action is perpetually postponed. What appears as an exchange of reasons is a vehicle for the circulation of affects. (*Blog* 110)

Even if social networks make identification and engagement possible, the forms of action they offer are extremely circumscribed.

If Dean's critique of internet politics shows one of the potential pitfalls that Cole's engagement with and evasion of feeling attempts to skirt, we can also see the Tweets as registering a different risk of mediation: another way of reading them is to see them as the

internal monologue of a particularly well-read drone operator, whose victims seem fictional to him because they are far away and presented on a screen. In such a reading, it is media's ability to distance and dehumanize that comes to the fore, and it is this risk that Ruth Ozeki investigates in her 2013 novel *A Tale for the Time Being*, which features a number of instances of media that encourage outsized cruelty to others: YouTube offers high school bullies an international audience, while software companies develop weapons that resemble video games. A central character quits his job as a software engineer after designing some of these interfaces, saying that "At the time those young boys were carrying out their missions, it would all feel unreal and exciting and fun…But later on, maybe days or months or even years later, the reality of what they'd done would start to rise to the surface" (Ozeki, *A Tale* 388). Here, mediation is "unreal" and therefore simply fun; mediated violence does not have the consequences, for its perpetrators, that real violence does. It postpones the effects of post-traumatic stress, even if it does not prevent these effects from eventually surfacing. Cole's Tweets prompt but do not answer a constellation of questions about violence, mediation, and literary character. They suggest a catch-22 of mediation and emotion: readers or viewers feel either too much or too little in a media-saturated environment, and in neither case can use fiction to better understand how to navigate the world. Read through this lens, Cole's 2012 novel *Open City* comes into view as a sustained meditation on the relationship between affect, narration, and political engagement. The novel has been read as a critique of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, but I want to show that it filters its critique of aesthetic cosmopolitanism through one of affective political engagement. As it does so, it attempts to find a representational strategy for presenting systemic and large-scale injustice (one that I would align with Cole's removal of the drone victim from his Tweets about drone violence) and also tries to chart a middle way through the muddles of feeling, suggesting

that neither impersonality nor emotional fervor is an ethical response to injustices systemic and personal.

Open City: Dispassionate Encounter and the Problem of Scale

Open City takes encounter—with other people, with an urban landscape, with art—as its central subject and plot device; it also maintains a tight focus on its protagonist, Julius, a character who keeps emotional response at bay. While Julius often finds himself emotionally buoyed or sustained by his encounters with art, his encounters with other people tend to be fraught. He responds with irritation when called into relation by others, from an old school friend he encounters in the grocery store (156), to a cab driver who says "I'm African just like you" (40). Casually hailed as "brother" by a postal worker, he responds by making "a mental note to avoid that post office in the future" (186, 188). Julius's discomfort with even the most casual demands on his attention (and implicitly, allegiance or affection: of the cab driver he says "I was in no mood for people who tried to lay claims on me" (40)) has drawn attention from critics, but they have tended to frame this issue as Cole's critique of aesthetic cosmopolitanism (Hallemeier, "Cosmopolitanisms"; Vermeulen); they point out that Julius's *flânerie* in New York City and Brussels and his immersion in photography exhibits, art museums, and record stores seem only to increase his self-willed isolation rather than bringing him into engagement with other people. Certainly a commitment to cosmopolitanism is at stake here: Julius is suspicious of all forms of nationalism, and his rejection of the cab driver stems at least in part from the way the man calls on their shared African origins. Cole's novel asks us to see how art fails to turn Julius toward the people around him, and also shows readers the ravages of xenophobia and a thoughtless commitment to national ties.

But if Julius's responses to particular individuals fall short of compassion, the novel does use his solitary and reflective walks as a way to tell a complex story of New York's history, one that is particularly attentive to moments of thoughtlessness and cruelty. Cole's strategy is to use Julius as a lens through which to reach towards the kind of scale that he also gestures at in the Tweet that turns readers towards "everything we know so far about drones"—away from the small set of the novel's characters and towards a much wider field. Julius's ruminations tend to be prompted by the city's landmarks; on a solitary walk by the Hudson River, he looks out at Ellis Island, "the focus of so many myths" and thinks that

> …it had been built too late for those early Africans—who weren't immigrants in any case—and closed too soon to mean anything to the later Africans…. Blacks, 'we blacks,' had known rougher ports of entry: this, I could admit to myself now that my mood was less impatient, was what the cabdriver had meant. This was the acknowledgement he wanted." (*Open* 55)

Julius can respond to the island but not to the cabdriver, and the novel contains many similar scenes: Julius ponders the Holocaust when faced with a crowd moving into the subway or ruminates about New York's intertwined histories of banking and slavery when he comes upon a slave graveyard in the financial district. Yet his reflections always come at a remove from other individuals, as his memory of the cab driver underscores here. Julius's inability to bring the individuals he meets into meaningful contact with his knowledge of their historical situatedness is chilling. But he is an effective lens: the reader comes away from the novel with a memory of long histories and large populations. The novel documents the failure of aesthetic cosmopolitanism but is also a meditation, in beautifully honed prose, on the need for a cosmopolitan orientation in the contemporary moment—and by "a cosmopolitan orientation" I

mean one that takes all sufferers equally seriously regardless of one's relationship to them and is suspicious of racial, national, or religious fealty. *Open City* suggests that a cosmopolitan orientation towards the world has ethical power—but that such an orientation must muddle through the messiness of feeling rather than refuse its part in ethical behavior.

For if Julius presents himself as affectless, the novel consistently aligns the language of political commitment with that of emotional engagement. Thinking about environmentalism, Julius notes that he has not "experienced a fervor over" it yet but is starting to respect those who are fervent (*Open* 198); musing on his acquaintance Farouq, a would-be Marx or Malcolm X, he reflects that "he too was in the grip of rage and rhetoric… the way to be someone, the way to catch the attention of the young and recruit them to one's case, was to be enraged" (*Open* 107). For Julius, rage and violence are a kind of affective rust that has "eaten into every political idea," or a "cancer" (*Open* 107): he cannot disentangle political commitments from heightened and destructive emotion. Julius's language aligns emotion with rapidly proliferating disease and decay—politics infected with feeling. Yet despite his negative depiction of emotion, he connects his own noncommittal relationship to larger causes with his inability to feel strongly about them. In order to fully commit to recycling, for instance, he would need to "feel [the environmental crisis] seriously in [his] bones" (*Open* 198). Julius distrusts a regime of political affect—a charismatic political regime—but can imagine no other route towards political action. He is willing enough to acknowledge that he probably should recycle, but that abstract conviction has not converted into a felt bodily commitment to the rightness of doing so. *Open City* offers a protagonist who manages his suspicion about affective contagion and incoherence by minimizing his commitments, but one who also wonders whether this response constitutes "an ethical lapse graver than rage itself" (*Open* 107). Cole's own language about political feeling also aligns

ethics and emotion, and points out the ways these can fail to converge. While he acknowledges that the two impinge on each other, he is wary of that relationship—and wary particularly because of his belief that our emotional commitments are limited, arbitrary, and not as extensive as our political commitments ought to be: this disjunct between the two types of commitment is the gap of empathy he discusses in *Mother Jones.* Like Julius, Cole distrusts a charismatic political regime, but is unable or unwilling to imagine beyond it—and his novel suggests that readers should be aware that they live within it.

To some degree, we can align *Open City*'s rejection of feeling with its attempts to mark the ways that injustice is systemic; such a representation means that a personal response is always already both misdirected and insufficient. Seen this way, Cole's refusal to make Julius an object of care aligns his novel with Rachel Greenwald Smith's argument, in *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism*, that the emotional catharsis offered by engagement with a character can distract the reader from the reality of his or her political situation, and that emotional investments are structurally too similar to economic investments; loving characters simply participates in neoliberalism. Yet Cole does not entirely retreat from individuality and feeling as important sources of ethical behavior. Late in the novel an accusation explodes our understanding of Julius: another character, a friend from his childhood in Nigeria, accuses him of having raped her—and perhaps even more damningly, of having seemed to entirely forget this act of violence. In light of this accusation, Julius's high-minded rejection of feeling and personal responsibility suddenly comes to seem cravenly self-serving. His long walks and meditative relationship to the city begin to look more like an avoidance of his own acts of cruelty, a kind of prolonged acting-out. Julius's coldness and distance are not, or not simply, to be read as a measured response to the ravages of history and the systemic injustices of the present moment:

the rape accusation reminds the reader that acts of cruelty can be personal as well as systemic. Erica Edwards argues that this revelation is the key to the novel: "[t]he cartographic pretensions of a psychoanalyst who *discovers* his own capacity for harm thus reflect the current public amnesia, the historical forgetting built into the architecture of the city after the September 11 attacks" ("New Black Novel" 673). I think Edwards is correct to see the accusation as a sign of the failures of "modernity's knowledge projects, from cartography to psychoanalysis" ("New Black Novel" 678): cartography and psychoanalysis are both ways of knowing that in this novel fail to grasp what ought to be obvious. Cartography fails, as we have seen from Julius's ruminations, because it does not register histories of violence. Psychoanalysis fails to register and recuperate the harm Julius has clearly caused—it offers a system of thought for Julius to hide behind rather than a way of alleviating pain. We already know, although the mention of this fact is muted in the novel, that one of Julius's patients, a historian of early America who writes about the genocide of Native Americans, has committed suicide while Julius is on vacation in Belgium. Julius abandoned her by leaving when he knew her hold on health was frail—but the knowledge project of psychoanalysis also failed to respond to the pain that the knowledge project of history inflicted on her. The novel implies that the patient breaks because she feels she has to be a vessel for the knowledge of genocide. All of these failures, in other words, take place on both an interpersonal level and a systemic one—and in this case happens when the single person must hold the knowledge of the systemic failure. Attentive to the two levels at which the novel operates, Edwards reads Julius and the city as figures for each other: "[j]ust as the city has built monuments of self-congratulation and cultivated calm on top of its atrocities, so has Julius buried his sexual violence within his professional achievement and enculturation" ("New Black Novel" 677). While I concur with much of her reading of the novel, I think that seeing Julius as a figure

for the city as fails to take into account the novel's engagement with scale. By traversing space and time, the novel asks us to consider whether all forms of cruelty can be collapsed into each other. We can condemn Julius for his acts of interpersonal violence or neglect without seeing those acts as figures for systemic racism and state violence: the novel does not collapse the two into each other but lets them both unfold while being attentive to the differences between them. Further, the novel accomplishes its condemnation of Julius's coldness without undermining the vision it has granted readers—a vision mediated through Julius's consciousness—of the ways that injustice is systemic as well as interpersonal. By preventing readers from feeling for and with Julius, the novel refuses to use the charismatic character as a route towards engagement, seeking instead a representation of the sweep and scale of historical cruelty; but by showing Julius's own failure to feel, it also makes clear that a lack of interpersonal care is another form of cruelty.

A Tale for the Time Being: The Charismatic Character as Conduit

Open City and "Seven Short Stories about Drones" manage charisma by skirting it, briefly borrowing it in the Tweets and experimenting with doing without it in *Open City.* Cole seems to regard with suspicion the idea of using the charisma of a single character as a way of managing (and mediating) a reader's relationship to a much larger suffering population, especially in the context of a media environment that inflames and inflates affect. Ruth Ozeki's 2013 novel *A Tale for the Time Being* offers a different response: her central character, Nao, is nothing if not affectively sticky, in stark contrast to Cole's Julius. Both writers offer dramas of sympathy-management under a contemporary media regime; despite their different depictions of the role of a literary character's charisma, reading them together shows how capture and captivation, rather than sympathy alone, is at stake in the contemporary novel's attempt to

mediate a reader's relationship to faraway others. As Ozeki put it in an interview, "This book… is very much about the process of fiction writing itself and what happens when an imaginary character reaches out to you. It's not like you, the author, make up the imaginary character, but rather, the character reaches out and calls forth an imaginary author" (Ty 162). Ozeki's central character is not an occasion for sympathy but a willful actor, reaching out to open the novel, which begins with an address to the reader ""Hi! My name is Nao, and I am a time being. Do you know what a time being is? Well, if you give me a moment, I will tell you" (*A Tale* 3). While the reader may or may not find Nao captivating,[14] the opening moment is a moment of capture, as is the one that Ozeki describes when she suggests that a character "calls forth" an author. If Julius is suspicious of attachment, Nao actively seeks it.

These opening lines come from Nao's diary, which the novel's other protagonist, Ruth (a character loosely but clearly based on Ozeki herself),[15] finds inside a package that has washed up on the beach of the remote island on the west coast of Canada where she lives. Nao's diary chronicles her difficult life as a teenager in early twenty-first century Japan; having moved there from California with her parents, she is bullied and isolated for her American-ness, despite being ethnically Japanese. The novel alternates between Nao's and Ruth's perspectives, and charts Ruth's growing involvement with Nao and the effect the relationship has on her life. She becomes deeply invested in learning what happened to Nao, and also in learning about Nao's family history, which requires the translating and reading of other documents (letters and diaries of Nao's uncle Haruki, a kamikaze pilot in World War II) in the lunchbox. The novel, in other words, is an investigation: Ruth tries to find out what happened to Nao, who she fears might have been killed in the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that devastated eastern Japan. Within the alternate timeline of the diary, meanwhile, Nao investigates the life of her grandmother Jiko.

Along both timelines woman and girl attempt to learn more about the life of Nao's uncle Haruki, and about the choices made by Nao's father (also named Haruki), whose loss of his job as a software engineer precipitated the family's move from California to Japan. If investigation is a theme of the novel and the driving force of its plot, what is key for my purposes (why?) is that the novel is as interested in what prompts investigation (in this case, the spark of Nao's character) and in the corollary benefits of engaging in an investigation (that one might form a community with other investigators, and that one might learn about than just the central object of the investigation.)

If *Open City* is ambivalent about charisma and affect as ways of prompting engagement across distance and difference, then, *A Tale for the Time Being* offers a counter-narrative. It commits to an affectively sticky, compelling central character; it also commits to a plot that, while not linear in its chronology, drives towards revelation and the clearing up of mysteries. In these ways, it is a much more traditional novel than Cole's, and thus useful to read alongside Cole's more descriptive and ruminative *Open City* and the intensely novelistic "Seven Short Stories About Drones." If the novelists' responses look very different, it is clear that for both of them the central question of the effects (narrative, ethical, political, affective) that the charismatic character might have on the reader is intertwined with the effects that the contemporary media landscape, primarily the internet, has on the same reader. Both are also concerned with an issue of scale: Cole uses Julius's consciousness as a lens for a representation of systemic and historical injustice, while Ozeki uses Nao to turn Ruth's attention to the widespread suffering caused by the earthquake and tsunami.

One of the ways that Ozeki's novel calls attention to the contemporary media landscape is by making it contingent: Ruth's investigations play out in large part via internet searches, but

she has a very patchy connection on her isolated island. As Tung-Hui Hu points out, the cloud seems to be "just there, atmospheric and part of the environment" but is in fact "a particularly mute piece of infrastructure" (Hu IX). By calling our attention to the ways that the network is an infrastructure (and thus can break down),[16] Ozeki calls attention to the ways that it structures emotional life as well as experiences and capabilities. Nao is subject to bullying in school, and the bullies' reach and cruelty is magnified by their access to YouTube, where they post videos of a "funeral" they hold for her as well as of an assault on her in a school bathroom. They also make use of online auction fetish sites, where they sell the period-stained underwear they steal from her during that assault. Nao's father designs online interfaces for video games, which are then commissioned by a US military contractor so that the interfaces can be turned towards "designing weapons controllers for soldiers to use" (*A Tale* 387). For Ozeki, as for Cole, the drone operator becomes a figure for the contemporary individual: participating in mediated violence that has very real effects on the world but cocooned physically (and as Ozeki in particular suggests) emotionally from that violence. The videotaping of Nao being bullied makes clear that it is not simply contemporary warfare but contemporary life that is at stake: mediation amplifies the potential for cruelty and the reach of vicious behavior even for those who are not soldiers, and it distances the perpetrators from their effects on their victims.

I will return to the ways that Ozeki portrays the affective landscape of the internet as uncertain and dangerous, magnifying cruelty but also giving Ruth a lifeline to the world beyond her island. For the moment, what I would like to emphasize is the way that this landscape has the qualities of an *Alice in Wonderland* episode—it is dangerously unpredictable, magnifying or shrinking people and emotions—and the way that such an emotionally dangerous landscape is the backdrop against which Ruth and Nao's relationship plays out. While Ozeki depicts the

affective dangerousness and unpredictability of mediation, in other words, she also relies on the fictional character as a site of affective connection. Rather than jettisoning mediation entirely due to the outsized care or cruelty with which her novel aligns it, Ozeki commits to the possibilities of such care while acknowledging its dangers.[17] As I argued in the introduction to this chapter, many critics would use "sympathy" to discuss both the relationship between Nao and Ruth and the effect that watching this relationship unfold is meant to prompt in the reader. But as I claimed there, I think "charisma" is more useful, both because it makes clear the ways that this relationship is coercive and undeniable ("the character reaches out and calls forth an imaginary author" as Ozeki puts it) and because its seductiveness and danger do justice to the strangeness of the affective landscape of contemporary media as rendered by Ozeki. Nao is compelling to Ruth both in the ways literary critics tend to use that word (she is an engaging character) but also in that she compels action on Ruth's part.

But I am also relying on "charisma" because it encompasses an idea of access to something beyond the charismatic person himself; and here I am using charisma as an analogy rather than claiming that Weberian charisma is a perfectly accurate description of Nao's effect on Ruth. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, Weber's charismatic leader is a conduit to something behind and beyond him; his followers fall under his sway because they imagine he has access to the divine. This is central to the instability of charismatic leadership, because followers are affectively committed to the leader himself only insofar as their commitment extends beyond him to something imagined that they themselves cannot touch. If he no longer appears to have this connection, he loses their commitment. If the leader is no longer seen as an effective conduit, he can no longer lead.[18] The affective relationship implied by charisma, then, is unstable. Weber writes of charismatic regimes that "[t]here is no such thing as appointment or

dismissal, no career, no promotion. There is only a call at the instance of the leader on the basis of the charismatic qualification of those he summons" (243). Sympathy, by contrast, depends on the idea of emotional education, the notion that feeling for one person—real or fictional—might teach an individual to feel for another person. As Marta Figlerowicz puts it, "One often hears novels being praised for their representations of deep, complex individuals. They are seen to thereby enhance our appreciation of how complicated and meaningful any particular person's experience might be" (*Flat* 171). The understanding that Figlerowicz lightly mocks here underpins much work on narrative, sympathy, and ethics; it draws on Adam Smith's claim that to feel sympathy, an individual must imagine themselves in the situation of another. Smith argues that "we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation…. it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are [their] sensations" (A. Smith 9). The person looking at a scene of suffering imagines—constructs a narrative about—what is causing pain: "[s]ympathy… does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it" (A. Smith 12). It is by putting ourselves in another's situation that we feel for them or feel as they do, in Smith's formulation. A viewer imagines a situation and reacts to it. But this form of emotional education, of learning how one might feel in another's situation, is not how *A Tale for the Time Being* operates. While Ruth does feel for Nao, Nao operates as much as conduit to other communities as an end in herself or a prompt to feeling; her presence in Ruth's life both forces Ruth to engage with the people who live around her and leads Ruth to confront the destruction wrought by the earthquake and tsunami that devastated Japan in 2011. "Sympathy" is not sufficient to describe the way these engagements operate; they do not arise out of Ruth's feeling for Nao and lead her to extend that feeling to others. Instead, they depend on Nao in the sense

that Nao is the conduit by which Ruth comes into relation with others. "Charisma" makes visible the ways that Ruth feels bound by Nao, and the ways that the novel solicits from its readers the kind of engagement it depicts Ruth as entering into. But charisma also better describes Ozeki's depiction of how emotional engagements with singular fictional characters operate to turn a reader's attention to much larger populations that are represented as at risk or understood as vulnerable; as with Cole's work, charisma goes some way towards addressing anxieties about scale that can permeate the global novel. It also does justice to the ways the novel paints mediation as an opportunity for both outsized care and outsized cruelty. In what follows, I will show how the novel uses Nao to bring Ruth into relation, and how this relationship operates against the backdrop of, and often through, the internet's strange affective landscape.

Ruth's engagement with Nao, and the sense of responsibility it engenders, is at least partly prompted by the directness of Nao's opening address: "Hi! My name is Nao, and I am a time being." (*A Tale* 3). While the novel moves in and out of this second-person voice, and while its ostensible writer (Nao) finds a reader (Ruth) within the narrative, the "you" here is, of course, also the reader of the novel. Our speaker "Nao" goes on to directly contrast the imagined single reader of this text (her personal diary) with the group readership she imagines for another diaristic form, that of the personal blog. As Nao puts it,

> if I thought the world would want to know about [Nao's grandmother] old Jiko, I'd post her stories on a blog, but actually I stopped doing that a while ago. It made me sad when I caught myself pretending that everybody out there in cyberspace cared about what I thought, when really nobody gives a shit. (*A Tale* 25)

The audience of a blog, for Nao, is either "everybody" or "nobody," rather than the intimate and singular "you" that she wants for her reader.[19] The "everybody," like Cole's "everything we

know so far about drones," depicts an all-or-nothing mass media form, while here the novel or the diary is aligned with a principle of selection. The contrast between the one and the many might be ethically troubling in the singularity and seeming randomness of its focus ("why allow our attention to be drawn by this call in particular?" Julius might ask.) But Ozeki's novel suggests that the calls to which a reader responds can widen his or her ability to care rather than circumscribing it; while Nao captures Ruth's attention, she also brings Ruth into relation with the people around her. As Ruth's husband reminds her when she becomes proprietary about Nao, "you" is plural as well as singular (Ozeki, *A Tale* 344). Ruth herself comes to realize that she cannot understand the story alone: because Nao's diary comes in a package with her great-uncle Haruki's letters and diaries, which are written in languages Ruth cannot read, she has to seek out translators in the community in which she lives. Nao guides her towards the people who live around her, people Ruth has not been particularly interested in befriending until the appearance of Nao's text. The novel, in other words, uses the affective spark of a singular character to draw Ruth into relation with a larger community of readers.

Ruth is annoyed by the other islanders, finding them nosy and meddling; she seeks companionship instead in books, and depends on her internet connection to bring her news of the wider world to her isolated island. But if the islanders are irritating, the internet is an unreliable source of companionship. Waiting for an email reply that might help her untangle the mystery of Nao's identity, Ruth finds herself irritated and impatient, and ties her irritation to a more general frustration:

> As she stared at the pixels on the screen, her impatience grew. This agitation was familiar, a paradoxical feeling that built up inside her whenever she was spending too much time online, as though some force was at once goading her and holding her back.

> How to describe it? A temporal stuttering, an urgent lassitude, a feeling of simultaneously rushing and lagging behind…. It was a horrible, stilted, panicky sensation, hard to put into words. (*A Tale* 227)

This description of Ruth's movement through the digital landscape suggests that it operates on a different timescale from that of the human—Ruth feels like she is "simultaneously rushing and lagging behind," unable to fall into step.[20] As with Nao's greeting to her reader, though, the question of time is wrapped up in a question of audience; here, Ruth is waiting for an email response from a particular person.[21] The language of the passage highlights her desire for connection: she stares "at the restless pixels" as though in a mirror or at a face. But the pixels themselves cannot possibly be "restless" in the way we usually understand that word when we give it an affective content like boredom or anxiety. Ruth is simply finding her own restlessness reflected back at her; she is waiting for someone to respond, to look back at her, and instead sees "pixels"—the screen, here, reduced to its components. The language moves behind the images and text that Ruth must be seeing on the screen to the digital elements that make them up.

Sherry Turkle argues that "the emotional charge of cyberspace is high" even though people who move through it know that they ultimately cannot depend on "cyberfriends" and online communities when they experience true emotional difficulty (*Reclaiming* 153). Turkle likens the anticipation and heightened emotion associated with the internet (rendered in Ozeki's novel as the itchy feeling that Ruth experiences as she waits for an email) to waiting for "the sound of the post," and yet the predictability of the post's arrival is in contrast to the sense of endless possibility that online contact offers. This unpredictability creates an emotional state of anticipation and possibility, one that can easily transform, as Ozeki's novel chronicles, into a state of panic. As Turkle notes, "People talk about digital life as 'the place for hope,' the place

where something new will come to them" (*Reclaiming* 153). But what if that "something new" never materializes? Turkle's point is that smartphones and internet avatars mean that users can be constantly connected, constantly awaiting something new, without being asked to cope with the ways that having an in-person conversation can sometimes be boring or difficult and does not usually give rise to the sense of boundless possibility that going online can. For Turkle, though, the payoffs of "physical, messy, untidy life" for one's interpersonal relationships are far greater than those associated with online relationships; she champions the first over the second. Ozeki's novel does not suggest that Ruth ought to abandon her online searches or her reading of Nao's diary, the mediated connections that sustain her even as they frustrate her; it does, however, make the strange affective landscape that Turkle describes present for the reader.

Against the affective landscape of restless pixels, Ozeki mobilizes the idea of engagement with a fictional character that we saw Cole put forth on Twitter. Like Cole, when he splices together drone victims and famous literary characters, she also blurs the lines between a fictional world and a real one. The character Ruth is a thinly veiled version of Ozeki herself, and Nao's journal, which washes up from the ocean into Ruth's life, seems to be the record of a real life, but of course only exists in the fictional world of Ozeki's novel. Memoir and novel surface as contrasts in the character Ruth's life as well: she is a novelist who has stalled out on a memoir that she has been trying to write for years. Facing her manuscript, she thinks how "the tone of the writing bugged her—cloying, elegiac…. She was a novelist. She was interested in the lives of others. What had gotten into her, to think she could write a memoir?" (*A Tale* 64). Novel-writing, here, is aligned with an awareness of and interest in "the lives of others"—it is a form of engagement rather than simply a calling to generate fictional people and worlds. Despite Ruth's claim, though, novel-reading is also a suspension of lived experience, which can itself be

alienating—as we see in Ruth's avoidance of the lives of the others who live around her on her island.

Marlo Starr argues that *A Tale for the Time Being* "intervenes in discourses about the liberating potential of disembodiment: considering, respectively, Buddhist meditation and cyber-technologies as means for transcending bodily experiences" (100). Starr points out that Nao, physically bullied by her classmates in ways that call attention to the way she smells and other aspects of her body, retreats into Buddhist meditation and life online, but finds that her "life in the material world seeps into her life online, disrupting perceptions of the Internet as a disembodied space removed from messy, lived experience" (105). While Starr's reading usefully points out the ways that Ozeki's novel works against conceptions of the internet as a space of total freedom from embodiment, Starr too quickly concludes that the novel is thus a critique of cyberspace's failure to offer liberation to its users. While *A Tale for the Time Being* is certainly critical of the ways that the bullying Nao experiences is made more violent and more enduring (in that the video of it stays online forever) by the bullies' ability to broadcast it online, the internet is also represented as a useful tool; it allows Ruth to learn about Nao, and it facilitated the courtship that resulted in Ruth's marriage, allowing Ruth and her husband Oliver to build a relationship that sustains them both and that would not have been possible prior to the proliferation of personal internet connections. I have been using the phrase "the digital media landscape" to describe the way that the internet functions in the novel; one reason I rely on this terminology is that novel presents the internet as a given. It makes some relationships possible, while also depriving some characters of agency. In other words, it is simply a heightened version of everyday life, which can also be full of both threat and possibility. Starr's argument seems to imply that one might be better off leaving the internet behind and committing to other ways of

connecting across distance; Ozeki's novel suggests that the internet is not only here to stay but can also be a useful tool.

As *A Tale for the Time Being* unfolds, Ruth realizes that Nao might have been killed in the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that devastated eastern Japan. Prompted by her concern for a particular person (a person she knows only textually, as the character of a first-person account), Ruth must herself face the overwhelming number of victims of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Information about the tsunami is described as itself a deluge: "the global bandwidth was flooded" with stories of the disaster until "the tide of information receded" (*A Tale* 113). Ruth watches video after video—recorded on cellphones even as people fled—of the tsunami, and recognizes that for all that she is overwhelmed by the number of videos and of interviews of survivors, the ones she sees make up "a miniscule few representing the inconceivable many" (*A Tale* 114). Ruth finds herself "trawling the internet" (again, here the volume of digital information is understood as a physical body of water) in search of a single person: "She was searching for a body" (*A Tale* 112, 115). Her search is another way that care for a singular character prompts engagement with a larger population, without asking that character to stand in for that population.

As in Cole's Tweets, the relationship between the particular victim and the many is in part an issue of the ethics of representation; it is impossible to give voice to each story. The cellphone cameras almost everyone in Japan carries make possible the recording and transmission of many more stories than would otherwise be told—but they still do not allow *all* of them to be represented. Further, the technology that makes the recording and transmission possible is overwhelmed by it (the "bandwidth was flooded" (*A Tale* 113)), and also cannot pause on any one story—the flood of information about Japan only lasts for a "brief period of

time" before "the uprising in Libya and the tornado in Joplin superseded the quake, and the keyword cloud shifted to *revolution* and *drought* and *unstable air masses* as the tide of information from Japan receded" (*A Tale* 113). Ruth has to face this flood of information because she is trying to sift through it for news of one particular person, a person she has only experienced as a character in a text, but for whom she has come to care enough that "she needed to know if Nao was dead or alive" (*A Tale* 115). If Ozeki's novel cannot tell each victim's story, it can attempt to register both the volume of the stories and the particularity of each one. It can also imagine a relationship between character and reader that prompts a reader to explore a wider range of potential stories. Here Ozeki evinces a similar impulse to the one that Cole describes as motivating his "Small Fates"—telling the stories of people who are not around to tell their own. As Ruth puts it, "Not knowing is hard. In the earthquake and the tsunami, 15,854 people died, but thousands more simply vanished, buried alive or sucked back out to sea by the outflow of the wave. Their bodies were never found. Nobody would ever know what happened to them" (*A Tale* 400). Ozeki cannot, and does not attempt to, tell the story of each of these victims—but by giving the exact number of the dead, she registers the ghostly multitude that flicker just beyond Ruth's vision. And by describing her search for Nao as the search for "a body" (*A Tale* 115), Ozeki aligns Nao with these thousands of nameless lost bodies and makes clear that in Ruth's search for the particular body she wants to find, she must sift through and look at all the other bodies and testimonies.

The charismatic character who has prompted this attentiveness, then, does not impede Ruth's view of the numbered and numberless other victims, but instead brings them to Ruth's attention. As well as a way of representing and managing an affective relationship to disaster, this is a way of managing the landscape of the internet. As I have shown, both Cole and Ozeki

align the internet with an impulse towards totality and large numbers that can be overwhelming. This impulse also gives rise to the itchy, anticipatory affect Ozeki and Turkle associate with "being online": the sense that anything could happen because of the vast number of possible connections. Ruth navigates this landscape through and because of Nao, but her engagement with it is not circumscribed by her relationship to Nao.

The relationship that Ozeki elaborates here between Nao and all the victims of the earthquake and tsunami, of individual character to larger social or environmental tragedy, marks a shift in Ozeki's work: like her two earlier novels, *My Year of Meats* (1998) and *All Over Creation* (2002), *A Tale for the Time Being* turns on fears about environmental degradation and the tendency of the strong to prey on the weak.[22] And in both earlier novels, media in general and television in particular play a key role. In each of them, television producers and PR professionals bring visibility to an environmental issue through a human-interest story. *A Tale for the Time Being*, however, presents a more complex and ambivalent tale of the way representative human-interest stories mediate a reader or viewer's relationship to structural problems or environmental degradation. Mediation is at issue in a new way in *A Tale for the Time Being*: in the earlier novels, media are present as an opportunity and a mechanism.

The central character in *My Year of Meats*, Jane Tagaki-Little, is a television producer, a position that allows her to tell stories that reach a global audience and make connections between Japanese and American housewives. While the novel acknowledges (in fact, turns on) the way that these stories are shaped by corporate interests, it does not spend much time on the medium of television itself. As Spoth and Warner write, "The critical consensus [on *My Year of Meats*] seems to be that Ozeki offers a powerful portrait of female agency (inflected by biracial and cross-cultural identities) within repressive male systems of commerce and control" (Spoth and

Warner). In other words, the novel is concerned with Jane's ability to manipulate and subvert the corporate scripts she is meant to shoot; her ability to do so is hampered by the fact that the medium of TV is controlled by a corporate interest, rather than by the affordances of the medium itself.[23] As Shameem Black convincingly argues, *My Year of Meats* "insists that individuals can challenge the representational violence it associates with a dehumanizing optic of global capital by reappropriating existing circuits of late capitalist simulacra" (68). *A Tale for the Time Being*, by contrast, depicts the internet not simply as neutral delivery mechanism that can repurposed, but as an affective landscape.[24] And to the extent that it deals with the internet as delivery mechanism, it pays a great deal of attention to what media critics call its affordances—the things it makes possible, the ways that it encourages a user to engage. It suggests that as a communications medium that can become a way of living, the internet encourages distance from embodied experience, a distance that can amplify some emotions and mute others. Shameem Black argues that the limits of *My Year of Meats* are its commitment to sentiment, grounded in its sense that the emotional worlds of an American television producer and a Japanese housewife are distant but, crucially, not too different, and the power disparity between them is not too wide (Black 69); *A Tale for the Time Being* presents a far more unpredictable emotional landscape.[25]

Conclusion: Partial Commitments

Despite its wariness around mediation's mechanisms, *A Tale for the Time Being* remains committed both to mediation (it is, after all, a novel), and particularly to mediation as a source of emotional connection. In this novel's imagination of the way that care for a single character might prompt awareness of a wider field of suffering, the internet is simultaneously the medium that gives Ruth information about the victims of the earthquake and tsunami and also a communications media with an impulse towards totality that can make users feel frustrated and

alone. Ruth needs something to guide her movement through the videos she watches; caring about Nao provides her with that guide, precisely because Ruth has to "trawl" through so many other stories in her attempt to find out what might have happened to Nao. This movement through stories is a more ambivalent approach to loss than the earlier novels offered; in *My Year of Meats* and *All Over Creation* the injustices the novels depict can be redressed or averted once a story about them is told to a sympathetic audience. In *A Tale for the Time Being*, however, Ruth can only bear witness. The novel puts her in a similarly ambivalent position vis-à-vis Nao's story: while the novel bends its generic conventions towards those of science-fiction by making it possible for Ruth, in a shadowy alternate universe, to have a conversation with Nao's father and encourage him not to commit suicide, the ending of the novel does not clear up the question of whether Nao survived the earthquake and tsunami. Mediated storytelling cannot necessarily save Nao, and it certainly cannot save the victims of the natural disaster. Yet the charismatic character remains an opportunity; Nao initiates Ruth into the world around her (when she has to gather translators for Haruki's letters and scientists to explain how old the sea creatures encrusting the Hello Kitty lunchbox are) and also turns her attention to the tsunami victims. If "Seven Short Stories about Drones" hollows out the charismatic character in order to deliver the bodies that are otherwise (in Judith Butler's terms) unmournable, in Ozeki's novel such a character can, without losing any of her own oddities, become both a lifeline and a guide as she compels a reader's or writer's attention. Both Ozeki and Cole, though, offer the shadow presence of the bodies of other sufferers behind their fictional characters. These sufferers remain anonymous and not-quite-represented, and yet the particular character is a conduit to them. They are suggested, either via Cole's use of classic novel characters as delivery chutes for anonymous victims of drone violence or via Ozeki's blending of fact and fiction as she uses the charismatic

Nao to draw Ruth's, and the reader's, attention to the thousands of victims who have "simply vanished" (*A Tale* 400). In each case, the novelists confront a problem of scale: both writers sketch the internet's impulse towards totality ("everything we know so far about drones," from Cole, and "if I thought everybody wanted to know about old Jiko," from Ozeki), and by registering such large-scale representation as something to which a medium might aspire, they suggest that the novel's commitment to single characters and well-wrought stories of individuals demands an ethically troubling principle of selection. How could one story be enough, and which story ought to be told?

This question resonates with Chimamanda Adichie's well-known TED Talk, "The Dangers of a Single Story," in which Adichie insists that it is the moral duty of readers to expose themselves to a range of stories about other places in the world, so as not to fell into habits of stereotyping. As Nirvana Tanoukhi usefully points out, Adichie places the burden of amassing multiple stories on the reader, rather than on the writer; in fact, readers are required to seek out multiple stories precisely so that writers can be free to tell whatever idiosyncratic story they want to tell about their place and people. Tanoukhi goes on to note that specificity is, even in Adichie's scheme, always fraught: the problem she pinpoints is that "specification… can be compromised by literary forms's susceptibility to repetition. What beings as a robust contextual strategy may transform into an automatically enacted contextual scheme" ("Movement" 670). Tanoukhi, like Adichie, sees this problem as both an aesthetic and a moral or political one: readers and writers can get stuck in a particular version of an event or a place, even if they read or produce a number of different narratives, because all literary descriptions draw on earlier descriptions. Adichie's TED talk, like her novel *Americanah*, raises and then skirts the problem of representativeness. As I argued in chapter one, *Americanah* commits to flat characters as a point of departure, managing

a pantheon of characters described by the outlines of their demographic and socioeconomic positions and bringing Ifemelu into encounter with many of them. Cole and Ozeki offer a different way of navigating the relationship of a single narrative to a larger population. Each of them attempts to avoid the representativeness that Tanoukhi argues is inherent to literary form and production by using the charismatic character to turn readers' attention to a number of other bodies—crucially, without either representing those bodies or asking the character to stand in for them. One of the many reasons that I have refused "sympathy" as a description of how these characters work because the narrative-generating properties of sympathy participate in the reductiveness that Tanoukhi points out is inherent to narrative. Cole's and Ozeki's charismatic characters demand our attention while operating as conduits to other populations.

In both cases, there is something awkward in the transfer of attention, yet that awkwardness is itself central to the project. As Cole's investigation of Julius's troubled relationship to affect, and the ways it taints his cosmopolitan orientation, shows, a too-seamless alignment of feeling and ethics or politics is dangerous—it partakes of what Lloyd calls "authoritarian charisma" when he argues that "democratic charisma calls attention to the limits of mediation while authoritarian charisma conceals mediation to create the illusion of pure presence" (24). And as Jodi Dean argues, such seamlessness is what the internet tries to encourage. But instead of acceding to the terms of such a regime, Cole and Ozeki refuse to abandon affect or media even as they make visible the ravages that the emotional landscape of the internet can cause, in the case of Ozeki's novel, or can elide, in the case of Cole's Tweets. Both writers acknowledge what David Palumbo-Liu calls "our embeddness in media": they suggest ways that readers might manage mediated attention and traverse mediated affect (178). These novels offer no way to make the traversal of the gap between singular charismatic

character and a group of suffering people universally useful and meaningful; instead Cole and Ozeki call our attention to that transfer, refuse to make it seamless, insist on what Rebecca Walkowitz calls "the friction of medium" (*Born* 233). Walkowitz's phrase is an attempt to register the ways that texts can either attempt to efface or call attention to their textuality, as well as either denying or encouraging translation: texts can "register the friction of medium while also acknowledging the friction of language and geography" and "identify translation as a source of production and as a drag on simultaneous reading" (*Born* 233). Walkowitz is attempting to parse the ways that contemporary texts enter into a global literary marketplace, and how they conceive of themselves and their readers moving through (or perhaps getting stuck in) such a space. Refusing to make themselves frictionless is one way of doing so. Cole and Ozeki, as I have been arguing, are also trying to make friction and drag a part of a reader's user experience[26]—even as they draw on the strong ties that readers have with fictional characters and the ways that these ties might efface their origin in and dependency on media.

Acknowledging the drag of medium means refusing to ignore the different affordances of different media, the ways that they make some things possible while making others more difficult. Cole and Ozeki's depictions of drone operators suggest that the contemporary media environment, and particularly contemporary warfare, attempts to eliminate "drag" in mediated contexts and also in lived experience by making violence seem fictional, unreal, and even fun to those who perpetrate it. Despite their critique of contemporary violence and mediation, neither is willing to see fiction as simply complicit with such a media environment. By insisting on the possibilities but also the problems of understanding attachment to literary characters as a route to or mode of political or ethical commitment, Cole and Ozeki call the reader's attention to his or her own embeddedness in media. They refuse to collapse fiction into lived experience, as they

critique the ways that network culture substitutes the circulation of affect for other forms of political action. If they remind us of E.M. Forster's dictum that we must "only connect," they underline the ways that the "only" part of the dictum circumscribes the work that connection can do even as they refuse to devalue connection's limited potential.

I have been insisting on charisma rather than sympathy throughout this chapter because, among other reasons, I think so doing calls attention to the ways that the contemporary media environment's affective landscape is odd and sometimes dangerous. Similarly, Forster's dictum, which tends to be read as a kind of gentle nudge, ought perhaps to be heard as the imperative that it is. It demands connection rather than simply encouraging it.[27] Connection, the fact of the digital age, is in Forster's imperative a moral responsibility. While Patrick Jagoda reads the contemporary moment as one in which Forster's imperative "no longer makes sense," Ozeki and Cole go beyond this dismissal to attempt to navigate the problems of scale that come with attempting to take it seriously in the contemporary moment (1). Storytelling, with its emphasis on the singular character, can seem an inadequate principle of selection when navigating such a landscape. Ozeki's novel offers one way that an individual story can help a reader navigate it; Ozeki offers another when she says in an interview that "you can completely buy into the 'reality' of [the] story you are telling yourself about who you are, or you can… understand the [Buddhist] truth of no abiding self and learn to hold your story lightly" (Ty 162-3). "Hold[ing] your story lightly" is one way of navigating the landscape that Ozeki paints; the phrase does not ask users to put down stories and to refuse the emotional charge of narrative. But it does ask readers, and internet users, to take care, and not to grip too tightly or commit too intensely to a particular narrative. Ozeki retains her commitment to storytelling as a way of being present in the world, yet she also registers the dangers of becoming too wrapped up in a story. "Charisma," I

think, registers better than "sympathy" the attractions but also the dangers of storytelling and literary character, especially as those attractions and dangers relate to the political commitments readers might hold, revise, or want to act on. Cole's and Ozeki's attempts to use singular characters to route readers' attention towards large, faraway, vulnerable populations (of which, crucially, the reader is not understood to be a member) rely on those characters' charisma. By hollowing out the charismatic character, or using the character as a vector of concern, a guide that points towards such populations, Cole and Ozeki use these characters as mediators rather than asking them to be representative. Cole's use of Julius expresses frustrations with and reservations about such a project, but by aligning Julius's cruelty with his detachment, Cole also suggests that a cosmopolitanism that refuses to grapple with the complications of affect is an impoverished one. Such complications of affect are amplified by the digital media landscape into which Cole's Twitter project writes, and which Ozeki's novel depicts, because mediation and distance operate to make faraway people both more present and less real. "Charisma" expresses and grapples with the emotional dangers and the irrationality of such a landscape, dangers that Julius's numbness and the horrible bullying that Nao undergoes make clear. This vision of mediation and agency is an ambivalent one, but their representational strategies preserve and register that ambivalence, testifying to a commitment to mediation's possibilities in full awareness of its potential pitfalls.

Notes

1. The question of the audience for the "global novel" is a complex one. I do not wish to imply that the role of the global novel is to represent less privileged lives to more privileged readers, or that those two populations would align easily with the global South and the global North. Critical discussions of the ways that the novel circulates otherness tend to elide the question of what counts as otherness and who is imagined to encounter it—yet often the reader is implicitly imagined as privileged in various ways. The rise of "global Anglophone" as a novel genre and scholarly field certain demands a more robust theorizing of the implied reader of these texts, but that theorizing is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For the purposes of this chapter I am imagining the reader, character, and population to which the character gives access as in a kind of triangular relationship. I do so because that seems to me to be the relationship implied by the novels and other texts I read here, rather than because I want to offer a normative version of the reader of the global Anglophone novel. As Miriam Pahl mentions in her discussion of Cole as Afropolitan, Cole clearly understands himself as having both a Nigerian audience and an American or Canadian one and is concerned with offering texts that are differently legible to his different readers (Pahl 81). Ruth Ozeki's self-positioning is less explicit, but I would argue that the opening pages of *A Tale for the Time Being*, in which the protagonist Nao addresses the reader, imply a reader who shares Nao's American origins but not her Japanese heritage—primarily because Nao does not see herself as needing to explain the former in the same way that she does the latter. Both Nao and Ruth, the other protagonist, explain and describe the aspects of Japanese culture that surface in the text in ways that would not be necessary for a Japanese

reader. Further, the text's thematics of ocean-crossing, translation, and cultural alienation imagine a reader faced with a culture they do not feel themselves to be a part of.

2. I would quibble with Rosen's use of "minor" in his genre name, as many of his examples are of novels written from the point of view of characters that are not quite minor, even if they are not the original protagonist or focal character; he cites a version of *Pride and Prejudice* told from the point of view of Mr. Darcy, for example. But certainly Rosen's point, that such fictions elaborate and expand the original narrative in new directions, stands.

3. For Rosen, such motivations have to do with readers' desire to have their own cultural capital confirmed, and he makes a compelling argument for the market forces that drive such productions, and the cynicism of their appeal to progressive politics—and yet his argument ignores the potential for real curiosity by readers as at least one potential motivation for picking up a rewriting of a classic story.

4. As Suzanne Keen notes, it is by "extending themselves into the experiences, motives, and emotions of fictional characters" that readers might learn " sto sympathize with real others in their everyday lives" (Keen 38). Keen pinpoints this turn in fiction in the Victorian era, and notes that some novelists pushed further than others in this work, pinpointing Thomas Hardy's focus on working class men and "fallen women" as an example of how far this attempt to provoke sympathy via narrative might go.

5. See Elaine Auyoung, "The Sense of Something More in Art and Experience"; Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*; Blakey Vermeule, *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters?*; Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel*.

6. Ahmed goes on to say that the question, 'What sticks?,' is one that is posed throughout [her] study. It is a reposing of other, perhaps more familiar, questions: Why is social

transformation so difficult to achieve? What are relations of power so intractable and enduring, even in the face of collective forms of resistance? This book [*The Cultural Politics of Emotion*] attempts to answer such questions partially by offering an account of how we become invested in social norms" (*Cultural Politics* 11-2). Like Ahmed, I am interested in the relationship between feeling, collectivity, and intractable relations; I borrow her language in this chapter for my own purposes in the hope that they are continuous with hers.

7. Candace Vogler also questions the ways that scholars use of literary characters to map or prompt ethical behavior, in her case from the discipline of philosophy rather than literary studies. While I think Vogler is a little too dismissive of the social aspects of reading, I am sympathetic to her frustration at philosophers' substitution of characters and plots for examples from social experience. (See Vogler, "The Moral of the Story.")

8. Of course, the followers of the charismatic leader will not continue to follow him in the total absence of these characteristics: "if proof and success elude the leader for long, if he appears deserted by his god or his magical or heroic powers, above all, if his leadership fails to benefit his followers, it is likely that his charismatic authority will disappear" (Weber 242). Yet even the loss of charismatic authority is not predicated so much on the unmasking of the leader as on his followers' perception of his ability to make good on his promises or to translate his divine connection into benefits for those followers. The power (or lack of power) of a charismatic leader is predicated entirely on his ability as a conduit; even if he fails, he fails not on his own merits but because the source of his abilities has been somehow stopped up.

9. Interestingly, Suzanne Keen's study of literature and empathy, while it disputes the connection between reading and empathy, suggests that discussing literature under the direction

of a teacher (especially a teacher invested in empathetic response) may provoke both empathy and prosocial action. (Keen 147).

10. “Seven Short Stories about Drones” is not the only project Cole has offered on Twitter—others are his “Small Fates” and “I Time of the Game.” Both of them attempt narration that spans the globe, and “The Time of the Game” also explicitly positions watchers of the World Cup as equals rather than narrating the stories of more vulnerable figures to less vulnerable figures. “The Time of the Game” attempts the same thing Cole sees the World Cup as offering more broadly: it “‘becomes this opportunity for an alternative internationalism. A lot of countries, when we hear about them, it’s terror, it’s war, poverty.’” When watching the World Cup, “‘you actually have to sit there and watch men from Ghana for 90 minutes’” (Cole, qtd. in Meyer.)

11. It is important to note that this Tweet only appears on Twitter; it is not part of the “Seven short stories about drones” that Cole presents at *The New Inquiry.* It seems that the need to educate oneself in order to act is a drive that Cole sees as demanded on Twitter but not in the context of his blog “on vision, visuality, and visual culture” for the leftist publication (Cole, *Double Take*).

12. This impulse towards totality seems to also undergird his other Twitter project, “Small Fates,” of which he says “I wrote a few thousand” before he stopped writing them. He goes on to say that he stopped only because “too many people were *enjoying* them” (Cole, Interview, emphasis mine). Again we see the impulse to register as much as possible, and again a concern about regulating readers’ affective responses to his writing.

13. Horn argues that while sociology (following Weber) has charted the normalization of charisma rather than its genesis, literature “serves as the medium to make the rise of the

charismatic personality plausible and comprehensible" (11). She points out the use of biography and autobiography to cement the importance of particular charismatic figures. Further, though, she points out that "Whereas Weber's examples of charismatic authority largely presuppose the leader's physical presence… in modernity the physical confrontation of a leader with his followers is hardly ever possible…. Political charisma in modernity thus depends on a mediation through images, texts, and films…. [These media] transmit charismatic productions to a large and widely distributed audience, enabling this audience to find unity in the *representations* of their leader" (Horn 12). Horn's claim about mediation and charisma, read alongside Dean's arguments about the operations of the contemporary media environment, suggest that charismatic leadership is not a form of authority that has been superseded by the modern bureaucratic state, but a resurgent mode of political leadership. (The rise of Donald Trump and his election as president are, if anything, too obvious a piece of evidence for this claim.)

14. The success of the novel depends to a great extent on the reader finding Nao as compelling as Ruth does; Ruth serves as a model for the kind of reading that the novel encourages. Under such a reading regime, disliking Nao is not really an option— it would be hard to read the entire novel if a reader found her irritating. This is one of the many ways in which Ozeki, in contrast to Cole, is committed to characters' affective stickiness, and to a more traditional version of the novel, in which plot and character, rather than description, are paramount.

15. The similarities between "Ruth" and Ozeki are too numerous to ignore: both are writers living on isolated Canadian islands, married to German environmental artist/scientists named Oliver. Both are half-Japanese and have studied in Japan. In an interview, Ozeki admits that the novel is a "fictionalized autobiography," and says that this form makes it "a kind of

invitation to the reader to research and find out. This book could be a treasure hunt— or better yet, a scavenger hunt— if someone wanted to take it that way, because a lot of stuff in the book has tendrils reaching out into the real world" (Ty 165). I will argue that Nao's charisma makes Ruth into a searcher; here, Ozeki suggests that *A Tale for the Time Being* could operate similarly on its readers, turning them back towards the "real world" because of the way that the novel is autobiographical rather than simply fictional.

16. In this the novel is similar to *Americanah*— when Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, she is confronted with the unreliability of the internet there, which effects her ability to run her blog. In both cases, the novelists contrast the difficulties of accessing the internet either on a remote Canadian island or in Lagos with the ease of internet connection in New York or Princeton. While differential access to the internet is not central to the novels, it's an important point: the "world wide web" is not evenly dispersed over the globe, and it is difficult to get online in exactly the places where one would also find it difficult to connect personally with the producers of what we might call global culture. While the notion that the internet is a leveling mechanism in terms of cultural production is central to *Americanah*, the novel also acknowledges the barriers to accessing it. Ozeki's novel does as well; her character Ruth has agreed to move to the remote island where her husband works on the condition that she can order as many books as she wants online— the books, in other words, are meant as a substitute for the stimulation her old home, New York City, provided. But the island is so damp that the books decay, and the internet only functions intermittently. These details work in the novel in part to underline Ruth's isolation, which in part explains her obsession with Nao, but also to remind the reader of the materiality of media. As Ruth puts it, "[t]he internet was their primary portal into the world, and a portal that was always slamming shut" (*A Tale* 147).

17. Marlo Starr argues that *A Tale for the Time Being*, like Ozeki's earlier novel *My Year of Meats*, attempts to model transnational feminism. While *My Year of Meats* depends on the shared female bodies and desire to bear children of its Japanese and American characters, however, *A Tale for the Time Being* "emphasizes a form of community that does not deny or smooth over difference or assume a shared identity that is anchored to gendered conceptions of the body" (Starr 120). While I concur with Starr's conclusion, her argument relies on a rejection of the internet's possibilities; she claims that Nao seeks to escape her body through writing online, and that her attempt fails, so she turns to her diary. I hope to show in this chapter how the internet is a more ambivalent and also a more material presence in *A Tale for the Time Being* than Starr's argument acknowledges.

18. As Weber puts it, "if he appears deserted by his god or his magical or heroic powers… it is likely that his charismatic authority will disappear" (242).

19. Marlo Starr aligns the imagined singular reader of Nao's diary with what she calls the diary's "bodily qualities" (115)—she contrasts the ways that the diary is "an extension of Nao's body" (115) with the ways that the internet encourages distance from one's body. Yet Ozeki's novel does not support such a binary; not only is Nao's body made visible on the internet when her classmates post a video of their assault, the internet itself is depicted as having materiality—we are constantly reminded of Ruth's spotty internet access and reminded that this access is spotty because the cables have to travel over water, and are subject to weather.

20. The difficult timescale of the internet also seems to deprive Ruth of agency, another historical concern about the role of media and emotion in political engagement, perhaps most influentially articulated in Susan Sontag's *On Photography*.

21. This moment of frustration and confusion is not dissimilar to the moment in *Americanah* when Ifemelu discovers the anti-Obama websites and chatrooms that exist alongside her own blog, and feels that they open out into infinite space, challenging both the boundedness implied by the physical metaphor of “chatroom” (a house can only have so many rooms, while the internet can have an infinite number of chatrooms) and Ifemelu’s sense that her own online community is a meaningful one that can be a source of social change. Both Ruth and Ifemelu are unable to assimilate their experience online with timescales or spatial scales that they understand, and yet they still attempt to. This problem is “hard to put into words” because the language of these novels is resolutely personal and interpersonal; both writers seem to understand the internet as operating on its own sense of time and space. This sense is close enough to human experience that the characters can almost grasp it in language, but ultimately eludes the human scale on which these characters operate and thus gives rise to a sense of anxiety, a sense of something just out of the field of vision or just beyond the ability of language to capture.

22. As Ozeki puts it in an interview, “this theme of bullying has been in the background of all of my books— whether it is corporate bullying, the bulling of ad agencies, or the bullying of the meat industry, agribusiness— it has always been there.” (Ty 164)

23. Following Caroline Levine, I am borrowing the concept of affordances from media and design theory. As Levine succinctly states, “*Affordance* is a term used to describe the potential uses or actions latent in materials and designs…. A fork affords stabbing and scooping” (*Forms* 6). Levine’s notion of the affordances of different forms sits usefully alongside David Palumbo-Liu’s concept of delivery systems—both are helpful in my attempt to, as Levine puts it, “think about both constraint and capability” (*Forms* 152).

24. The novel does remain interested in hacking, which it uses to describe characters' engagement with a range of objects; Nao uses the cover of a Proust novel to write her journal and Oliver attaches a scope to his iPhone. But while it also suggests that Nao's father Haruki figured out how to "scrub" the internet of certain pieces of information, it does not suggest that such hacking fully addresses the larger threats delineated in the novel—and it is worth noting that "hacking" tends to be used metaphorically in the text, to describe the kind of tinkering with objects that Nao and Oliver perform, rather than to describe actual hacking.

25. Again, charisma rather than sympathy is at stake—*My Year of Meats* plays out in a landscape of sympathy and sentiment, while *A Tale for the Time Being* offers a more ambivalent version of how engagement with a faraway other might unfold.

26. In using the phrase "user experience" I am borrowing the language of user experience design, a field that attempts to it easier for people to interface with technology. Cole and Ozeki's commitments move in a different direction, attempting to make visible both what mediation offers and how it falls short, rather than effacing the latter. This language of user experience resonates with the language of affordances, which I have also found useful in this chapter. Both draw on fields that think carefully about the relationships between humans and technology in ways that I think are useful for literary critics.

27. Within Forster's *Howards End*, Leonard Bast dies, in effect, for failing to adhere to it.

Chapter 3: Collaborative Character in Rachel Cusk's *Outline* and Sheila Heti's *How Should a Person Be?*

As George Levine notes in his study of realism, writing in the realist tradition is always marked by "the struggle to avoid the inevitable conventionality of language in pursuit of the unattainable unmediated reality" (8). Levine's description gets at the crux of the realist problematic: while critics and writers often use "realism" to refer to a particular set of formal strategies, Levine's work shows how it is more useful to think of realism as an orientation towards the world. Realist writing is marked by the attempt to get beyond description or mediation (usually in the full or at least partial knowledge that doing so is impossible) and thus realist writers often reject the strategies of a previous generation as overly formal, stiff, or fake. This chapter charts the formal strategies that attend that struggle in the work of two contemporary writers who try to, again in Levine's words, "make contact with the world out there" (8).

In this chapter, I consider the autofictional turn in the twenty-first century novel and its positioning of the relationship between character and media; I do so with particular reference to the work of two of the form's practitioners, Rachel Cusk and Sheila Heti. While the popularity of autofiction as a genre has interesting implications for the operations of character and media in the twenty-first century, for the purposes of this chapter I turn to Cusk and Heti because within this larger field their work offers similar ways of attempting both to get beyond mediation and pay attention to its status as media. Their work does so by depicting the constraints of realism as a problem of media rather than as a problem of literary form. They represent their quarrel with the formal straightjacket of realism as an argument with visual media, which they depict as constructing and constricting everyday life in ways their novels try to resist. They depict visual

media (photography in particular) as a reified form of representation that warps lived experience—it is imposed from above rather than being negotiated. Their work positions itself not against earlier novelists but against the conflation of realist representation and mediation as a condition of contemporary life. In chapter 2 I suggested that the need to register "the friction of medium" is particularly at stake in the depiction of mediated violence (Walkowitz, *Born* 233). In the context of Heti and Cusk's work, however, the concern with media that hides its status as such aligns with Vincent Lloyd's concerns about forms of authoritarian charisma that manifest in contemporary celebrity culture. This charismatic regime encourages everyone to endow everyday life with the sheen of celebrity. Social media, the tool that makes participation in such a regime possible, attempts to hide its status as media and depict itself as continuous with embodied experience—but it prizes a form of self-presentation in which people are "bigger and happier and more beautiful than you remembered them to be" (Cusk, *Outline* 50). Cusk and Heti's work contends that the demand to present oneself as such is particularly pressing for women. These novels assert that visual media is in fact the result of a set of formal choices that feel, to them, static and fake; against it they offer texts that prize dynamism and collaboration.

I will argue that the disgust with fictionality that the writers who embrace autofiction voice is an attempt to resist a particularly mediated moment—a mediated moment whose operations have been conflated with realism such that what these writers articulate as the rejection of a form (realism) is in fact a rejection of self-concealing media (of self-presentation mediated through visual modes). In this context, they position character as a collective project, even as they explicitly align their protagonists with their own autobiographies.[1] What these writers prize—and what they position against visual media (and thus more broadly against both mediated capitalism and gendered social narratives)—are collaborative constructions of

character and narratives. In this chapter I will make two linked arguments: first, that Rachel Cusk and Sheila Heti offer collaborative constructions of character and set these against the photographs they associate with the contemporary media landscape, elevating conversation over the circulation of images. Second, that autofiction puts pressure on character: the autoficional character shares the name of a person in the world yet is also a creation of fiction, because the autofictional writer is explicitly not writing a memoir. In turning both ways such characters make clear how much self-construction happens in and through media. The autofictional character is explicitly mediated: yet in making clear its status as media it comes into "contact with the world" (G. Levine 11) and does so by opening itself to revision and collaboration.

Autofiction and Realism

There is much more Francophone scholarship on autofictional texts written in French than there is Anglophone scholarship on works written in English or in other languages; Jacques Houis goes so far as to call autofiction a "very French concept" (135). The term was coined by a French writer, Serge Doubrovsky, as a way to describe his 1977 novel *Fils* (Jones 1). The recourse to autofiction as opposed to autobiography is in part an acknowledgement of a kind of unworthiness of the autobiographical text: he writes,

> "grand-homme-au-soir-de-sa-vie-et-dans-un-beau-style. Peux pas prendre la pose. […]. J'Y AI PAS LE DROIT. Pas member du club, on me refuse l'entrée. MA VIE N'INTERESSE PERSONNE.'"
>
> "great man in the evening of his days presented in a beautiful style. Can't strike that pose. I DO NOT HAVE A RIGHT TO IT. Not a member of that club; they wouldn't let me in. MY LIFE INTERESTS NO ONE." (Doubrovsky, qtd. in Jones 3, translation mine)[2]

Doubrovsky's definition of autofiction shifted as his career unfolded, but as well as the rejection of the heroic, autofictional narratives usually required "a literary style, a perfect onomastic correspondence between author, narrator, and main character, and finally a strong psychoanalytic angle" (Schmitt 126). Marjorie Worthington points out that what Doubrovsky marks as autofiction is often understood as memoir in the American context (again we see the tension between Francophone and Anglophone iterations of the genre and concept); she turns instead to Gerard Genette, whose criteria for an autofictional work are that it feature a central character that is clearly a version of the author and that it simultaneously mark itself as clearly fictional (Worthington 481, Genette 77). The autofictional texts I consider hew to Genette's definition, but many are also marked by Doubrovsky's resistance of the heroic mode. They offer strong correspondences between the name and life of the protagonist and those of the author as well as a self-definition as fiction rather than autobiography.[3] Further, the texts, while they are clearly carefully crafted, are crafted to represent the digressiveness and shapelessness of lived experience rather than to conform to a traditional plot arc.

Much of the little writing there is in English on autofiction emphasizes its liminal quality and what that quality offers to practitioners of the genre. Rocío D. Davis argues that "working in the liminal space between the fictional and the autobiographical might… enable writers to negotiate their ideas and positions without… claiming authority over them" (80). Arnaud Schmitt suggests that such texts can "provide the reader with a unique feeling of referential directness, of a communicative endeavor" because they do not imply mastery over the narrative of a self the way he claims an autobiography does (130). Florence Labaune-Demeule makes the argument that "[t]he somewhat hybrid genre of autofiction enables writers to stand half-way between subjectivity and objectivity" while Pavlo Shopin argues that autofiction "becomes a

mode of writing that attests to the ambiguity and fracture of the subject" (Labaune-Demeule 115, Shopin 204). Worthington claims that autofiction "requires continuous adjustments to the reading process as the novel vacillates between biographical fact and outright fiction" (472). The half-way nature of autofiction, I would argue, also provides the genre with a particular kind of character, one that like the form itself vacillates in ways that call attention to it: it is clearly tethered to a real person but does not claim to factually represent that person as an autobiography or memoir would. Because the autofictional character hovers between fiction and non-fiction, mediation is explicitly at stake in these texts in a way it need not be in a less liminal genre.

Because of the way it hews to personal experience, writing autofiction is a way of avoiding acts of "invasive imagination" that is very different from the modes I argued Ruth Ozeki and Teju Cole attempted (Black 19). Perhaps one way of explaining its popularity is that it seems to avoid any charge of cultural appropriation, even as it participates in "an awareness that … truth is not universal or eternal but fleeting and in the eye of the beholder," an awareness that Worthington argues marks the "post-truth" era (476). It is also, perhaps, a logical extension of the "write what you know" ethos of the MFA program, an ethos that Mark McGurl has shown dominated American literary production after the Second World War. I will suggest that at least some of the work in this vein is also motivated by a desire to draw readers' attention to the intensely mediated nature of the present moment. Whatever the motivation for the autofictional turn, though, there were a number of such novels published in the early 2000s. Perhaps the most well-known example is Karl Ove Knausgaard's six-volume work *My Struggle* (2009 – 2018), but other examples abound: Ben Lerner's *Leaving the Atocha Station* (2011) and *10:04* (2014), Sheila Heti's *How Should a Person Be?* (2010/2012), Rachel Cusk's trilogy of *Outline* (2015), *Transit* (2016), and *Kudos* (2018), and Michael Chabon's *Moonglow* (2016). Teju Cole's *Open*

City (2011) and Elena Ferrante's Neopolitan quartet (2012 – 2015) share some of these formal features but not all. As well as these new novels, the beginning of the 2000s saw the reissue of older ones: most notably, Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick*, originally published in 1997, was reissued in 2006 to far greater acclaim than it had met on its initial publication.[4]

I group these novels and novelists together because the novels share formal features, but also because the novelists talk about their work in similar ways. Their shared refusal of the conventions of realist fiction is striking: Karl Ove Knausgaard claims that "just the thought of fiction, just the thought of a fabricated character in a fabricated plot [makes him] nauseous" (505). Rachel Cusk (author of eight novels), describes fiction as "fake and embarrassing… ridiculous." ("Aftermath"). Sheila Heti (author of two novels and a book of short stories) says that "it seems so tiresome to make up a fake person and put them through the paces of a fake story" (Hickey). Elena Ferrante writes that she is "tired of fiction" but also that she "can't trace a line between fiction and nonfiction" ("I'm tired").

These writers' rejection of fiction seems to place them in a realist tradition: realism is perhaps best described not as a form but as an evolving set of formal characteristics that are historically contingent and often conceived as a rejection of or improvement on the qualities that defined a previous generation's realism. I position these writers against realism rather than against fiction more broadly because what they are inveighing against is not an act of imagination that is marked as such by formal experiment or recourse to the conventions of speculative fiction. They are concerned about acts of imagination that might confuse themselves with reality or (perhaps more damningly) seem to a reader to be confusing themselves with reality. Being called "fake" stings most when one is trying to seem natural. Realism is a commitment to representing lived experience in a way that *feels* less mediated than earlier

attempts do—it is, in other words, a form that attempts to efface itself. But even as novelists claim that their work is closer to the real than that of the present generation, the realist novel is always aware of its status as media: as Ian Watt argues, the novel always raises “the problem of the correspondence between the literary work and the reality which it imitates” (11). This tension between an attempt to give readers unmediated experience and an awareness of the status of the work as always necessarily mediated is at the heart of realism.

Autofiction foregrounds this tension by simultaneously insisting on a referent and (by calling itself fiction rather than autobiography) complicating its relationship to that referent. This runs counter to the way that realist fiction refers to the real. Roland Barthes influentially argues that the way description works in the realist novel is not as a reference to the objects that are being described but to “the category of ‘the real’ (and not its contigent contents)” (“Reality” 148). Barthes calls this an “unavowed verisimilitude” because unlike classical rhetoric, the realist novel does not preface its descriptions with something like “*let there be, suppose*”: in classical rhetoric, according to Barthes, “reality could in no way contaminate verisimilitude” (“Reality” 148, 147). Realist description’s relationship to the real is more slippery: it seems to refer to objects out in the world (to have a physical referent) but Barthes claims that it actually simply signifies realism as an aesthetic practice. Autofiction makes an attempt to disrupt this aspect of realism: by giving characters names that are the same as those of their creators, for instance, it insists on a referent in the physical world. By refusing to be autobiography, however, it also ties itself to a history of fiction-writing. Its liminal nature interrupts the expectations of both fiction and non-fiction in terms of their reference to a real world. In doing so, it asserts its status as media while also explicitly connecting itself to something beyond media. What will try to show, with reference to Cusk and Heti, is that this double move is a critique of forms of contemporary

media that seem to claim to be unmediated, to give users access to "real life"—but that actually operate by rules that are more similar to those Barthes describes as governing description in the realist novel.

The Gesture vs. the Object: Prizing Conversation

Cusk and Heti's work begins from the claim that novelistic conventions (like plot and character) and other forms of media representation distance readers or viewers from lived experience and its intensity. Their work also contends with social tropes that offer gendered narratives for themselves and their characters. In other words, their novels intertwine media representation and gendered social expectations more broadly: media is one of the mechanisms by which such expectations are reproduced and circulated. Their turn to autofiction attempts to get to something "intensely real" (Cusk, "Quietly Radical") as Cusk has put it, or to "a faithful representation of … a worldview" (Stoeffel), as Heti describes a successful novel. In other words, a text that is unfolding and mimetic—and that, in the attempt to duck the conventions of a form, also might slough off those of social life.

This chapter considers Heti's *How Should a Person Be?* (2010/2012) alongside Rachel Cusk's *Outline* (2015):[5] each novel chronicles a short period (months for Heti, weeks for Cusk) in the life of a female artist. The novels are different in many ways: Heti's heroine, also named Sheila, is brash and assertive while Cusk's, called Faye, recedes from view. Heti's novel also offers more of a plot—or at least more activity and movement—than Cusk's does: *Outline* unfolds as a series of conversations, seemingly prompted by the mere existence of the passive protagonist. Heti's prose is determinedly flat, sometimes even bad, while Cusk's craft is apparent throughout. What the novels share, though, is a commitment to conversation and the shared construction of identity: much of Heti's text unfolds as a play, removing the presence of a

narrator and placing all of the characters' contributions on equal footing, and Cusk's novel also unfolds through conversations that do not explicitly privilege the narrator's point of view over those of her interlocutors.[6]

Heti's novel offers a useful defense of its seemingly shambolic and conversational form: about midway through *How Should a Person Be?*, Sheila claims that "the three ways the art impulse can manifest itself are: as an object, like a painting; as a gesture; and as a reproduction, such as a book" (*How* 184). These are an esoteric set of alignments and contrasts, especially when presented so baldly: certainly a painting is an object, but is a book a reproduction? What form does a "gesture" take? And do all books belong in the same category? The language is useful, though, first as a way of understanding the form Heti's own novel takes: staking out a place for it as a "reproduction" of reality disavows the way the book we're reading is a shaped story, points us towards an unedited documentary reel rather than a crafted piece of fiction. More intriguing, though, is the way that "object," "reproduction," and "gesture" sit on a spectrum of dynamism: an object is static, while a gesture is a movement, and a "reproduction" falls somewhere in the middle, implying both the prior existence of an object to be reproduced and a series of actions imitating it. Heti's novel pulls dramatically away from the status of "object," and argues that people, too, ought to watch out for the impulse to turn themselves into objects: "when we try to turn ourselves into a beautiful object, it is because we mistakenly consider ourselves to be an object" (*How* 184). For Heti, then, art and life operate from the same impulse, and while a work of art can be an object, one that wants to get at what it really means to be human should be, like a person, always in the process of becoming.

In her review of *A Man in Love*, the second volume of Karl Knausgaard's *My Struggle* (a novel that seems even more invested in registering the digressiveness of everyday life than

Heti's), Heti uses similar language to describe his achievement: "Most novels carry a whiff of pride, the novelist just over there in the curtains, beaming at what he's created. But life is not a gold medal, so such a novel is not like life, it's like a badge the writer hopes to wear through life" (Heti, "So Frank" 22). "Badge," like "object" or "gold medal," suggests accomplishment but also stasis, experience shaped into a form it will continue to hold. As she describes "most novels" as static and a bit fatuous, Heti also claims that such works ward off life: the novelist watches from the wings or "wear[s his badge] through life," displaying his bona fides rather than immersing himself. Calcified rather than lively, such a novel betrays the form's commitment to charting a protagonist's movement through a social world.

Cusk's novel also insists on revision and conversation as a form of shared meaning-making: the stories that circulate in *Outline* are always being revised by their hearers. Its protagonist, Faye, is a writer teaching a workshop in Athens; the novel begins on her plane ride from London and ends as she is about to leave for the Athens airport. A conversation that takes place close to the beginning of the novel is exemplary of how the novel unfolds: on the plane from London, she meets a man who tells her about his three marriages to different women. At first Faye seems to take in and implicitly ratify his version of events. Later, though, she thinks,

> I remained dissatisfied by the story of his second marriage. It lacked objectivity; it relied too heavily on extremes, and the moral properties it ascribed to those extremes were often incorrect. I found that I did not believe certain key facts… and nor was I entirely convinced by her beauty, which again seemed to me to have been misappropriated. (*Outline* 29)

The problem with this story is that it is not believable—the narrator's critique of the story is of its literary elements. While this reaction to the story seems to be presented as internal

monologue, the seat mate responds to it, making clear that the protagonist has voiced at least some of it aloud. He "laughed, and said that I was probably right"—and goes on to admit that "he hadn't quite given me the full story" (*Outline* 30, 31). When he offers some of the missing facts, what's said becomes "more ambivalent than, in the first version, it had seemed" (*Outline* 31).

A true story, then, is both "more ambivalent" than the clash of good and evil that the first version offered, and also comes into being via a question or edit from the storyteller's listener. While one could read this scene as a tussle for the real meaning of the story—a mirror image of the original story the man tells, in which he and his second wife struggle for control over events—the conversation is not an agonistic one. The seat mate doesn't respond with anger, digging in his heels;[7] instead, he concedes that his listener has a point. Together, they move towards a version of the story that, rather than insisting on one version of events, hews more closely to something resembling "objectivity" (*Outline* 29). Here, the route towards objectivity comes through a back-and-forth between two anything-but-objective interlocutors. As readers, seeing this kind of conversation unfold gives us license to evaluate and potentially revise the stories that we read. Of course, we always have this ability— but Cusk's novel makes it a constitutive part of novel-making and novel-reading. Both novels, in other words, are evolving rather than static objects, and offer collaboration as a mode of storytelling.

Cusk and Heti do present versions of realist self-presentation in their novels, versions that look like objects rather than gestures: they pause on photographs, the primary mode of presenting the self in a mediated and always semi-public present. While their novels elide social media, the photographs that constantly surface show how narratives of self are formed through images that circulate in the world and online. When the character Sheila buys the same dress as

her friend Margaux, for instance, Margaux objects that "I really do need some of my own identity" (*How* 116). Even if Sheila only wore the dress when the two women were in different cities, doing so would still impinge on Margaux's sense of self, she says, "since of course we only exist in pictures" (*How* 116); by being photographed in the same dress, Sheila would transgress a boundary between her and Margaux. A world in which "we only exist in pictures" sounds like a world structured by Facebook or by celebrity culture, and Heti's novel acknowledges that Margaux's diagnosis of contemporary life is not a bad one, while juxtaposing itself as an alternate claim: look, it says, we also exist in these recordings of our conversations, the messy and often self-revising text they offer between and behind the photographs. In Cusk's *Outline*, an intriguing moment puts the narrator's discomfort about the relationship between photographs and lived experience on display: she describes the café across from her apartment, which has

> a long side window … entirely obscured by a photograph of more people sitting outside at tables, so that a very convincing optical illusion was created…. The people in it were slightly larger than life-size, and always, for a moment, exiting the apartment, they seemed terrifyingly real. The sight of them momentarily overpowered one's own sense of reality, so that for a few disturbing seconds you believed that people were bigger and happier and more beautiful than you remembered them to be. (*Outline* 50-1)

This moment hovers in Cusk's novel as Margaux's claim about existing in pictures does in Heti's. Both offer an alternate version of what a realist representation of life might look like. What seem initially to be real people turn out to be "bigger and happier and more beautiful" than the ones Cusk's narrator-protagonist actually encounters. A fairly commonplace design choice, though, is for the narrator "terrifying" and "overpower[ing]" because the photograph makes a

claim to represent reality and co-opts the narrator's own careful attempts to understand and engage with the people around her and how they move through the world. The photograph is a distorted mirror image of *Outline* itself, which is almost entirely composed of people having conversations in cafés (or on airplanes, or in writing classes). *Outline* rejects the monolithic and non-negotiable version of realism that the photograph represents: as I argued earlier, its stories come into being as collaborations and conversations rather than as assertions. The novel, as its title indicates, comes down on the side of the provisional. It aligns itself with a sketch rather than with photographic realism, the notes that help one plan a novel in the place of the finished novel. The photograph is an assault on the sensitive narrator not only because it is a tacky affront to her taste, but also because it leaves her no opening, instead "overpower[ing] her sense of reality." It is akin to the novel that Cusk is refusing to write when she calls making up characters "fake and embarrassing": realist enough that our narrator mistakes it for real life, yet insistent on a version of that life that is shinier than lived experience ("Aftermath").

Like Margaux's comment, the cafe photograph gestures towards the larger media landscape through which these novels move. This landscape is monolithically pretty, like Cusk's photograph, and replaces lived experience, as Margaux describes. Teju Cole, in his rewriting of Flaubert's *Dictionary of Received Ideas* for the contemporary moment, captures its operations well when he defines "SUNSET" as "Beautiful. Like a painting. Post on Instagram and hashtag #nofilter" (*Known and Strange* 77). Cole asserts that we only know what a sunset is if it looks like a beautiful sunset we have seen in a painting or photograph, we only know that we saw it in person if we post it on social media, and when we make it into an image to share we have to mark it as an unfiltered version of reality. In an interview, Heti claims that such a landscape makes particular demands on women:

> Especially for women, it's a big concern ["being ugly to yourself in private"], a bigger concern everyone wants you to have—how to be attractive, how to be beautiful, how to be an ideal, how to be looked at in such a way that no one sees your ugliness, how to hide it. That's what all the women's magazines are about, how to hide your ugliness. ("Conversation" 111)

If Cole describes the present moment as a feedback loop of experience and media, then Heti describes it as one in which women must simultaneously be "looked at" and "hide [their] ugliness" ("Conversation" 111). In both cases, public and private spheres are collapsed into each other, and one's image of oneself (or one's surroundings) is conflated with the need to circulate that image. Cusk and Heti attempt to disrupt this landscape by offering narratives that refuse the narrative equivalent of the painterly sunset and—in Heti's work more than in Cusk's—assert the ugliness that is a part of all human experience. Their work is sociable: much of Heti's novel presents itself as transcripts of her friends talking, while Cusk's novel relies on strangers striking up conversations with each other and taking those conversations seriously as opportunities for engagement. Cusk and Heti offer a provisional and collaborative version of the novel that tries to come into contact with real life rather than referencing other realist accounts, set against the backdrop of a media landscape that asks instead for polished performances of self (G. Levine 8, Barthes 148).

Social Media Displaces the Novel

Ato Quayson offers a useful reading of this media landscape. He argues that social media platforms fit into the tradition of the realist novel, but that they also depart from it in crucial ways. Quayson argues that the novel operates by what he calls "the efficacy of audience identification"—identification by readers, that is, with someone or something other than

themselves ("I Can"). Social media platforms, however, offer the satisfying narrative structure[8] of the novel, and yet users "no longer have to necessarily identify with fictional others in stories, novels, films or on TV, but have all the tools at their disposal to insert themselves into the circuits of spectoriality for others to look at" (Quayson, "I Can"). Margaux's claim to Sheila that "we only exist in pictures" is a claim about a world in which the self is defined by Quayson's circuits of spectoriality. Social media, in Quayson's terms, grows out of a novelistic tradition but disrupts a key element of that tradition, the identification with other beings (whether those beings be fictional or real.)[9] Facebook, for instance, provides the opportunity to present oneself to the world—or rather, to insert an image of oneself into the spectacle that passes for the world. Media critics like Sherry Turkle also note the ways Facebook in particular resembles novels: she interviews Facebook users about the "highlights collage" that Facebook offers them, and notes that they respond more or less enthusiastically: "the highlights collage became a scaffolding for a narrative and they didn't mind that Facebook had authored the first draft" (*Reclaiming* 87). In Turkle's terms, the social media user not only uses is a platform to share his or her identity, but also gives up authority over the structure and genre of their identity narrative.

One way to counter Quayson's claims about the ways identity is asserted rather than negotiated over social media would be to argue for the participatory nature of social media. Turkle's discussion of the highlights collage, though, shows how that participation is highly structured by the platform itself. Further, while we often think of networks as implying multiple nodes of agency (in opposition to hierarchical models of authority or the one-to-many delivery system of older forms of mass media like television), media theorists like Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker maintain that while networks might look like a structure of distributed agency, "in recent decades the processes of globalization have mutated from a system of control

housed in a relatively small number of power hubs to a system of control infused into the material fabric of distributed networks" (3). As I discussed in my introduction, Alexander Galloway argues that interactivity has traditionally been held up as an ideal by artists, political theorists, and media theorists on the left—and that the "novel forms of control" (Galloway & Thacker 5) that contemporary participatory networks exercise mark "the political tragedy of interactivity" (Galloway, "The Whatever" 291), because interactivity has become "one of the core instruments of control and organization" (Galloway, "The Whatever" 291) rather than an instrument of liberation. Galloway, writing on his own or with Thacker, makes this point again and again, indicating by this repetition both how crucial it is and how much it runs counter to a great deal of twentieth-century political and aesthetic discourse. While Quayson's concern is with the lack of interactivity that supposedly interactive networks actually offer, Galloway's argument shows how such networks demand interactivity—but on their own terms. Further, by doing so they function as surveillance networks: "interactivity means total participation, universal capture." (Galloway, "The Whatever" 291).[10] For Quayson, Galloway, and Thacker, then, the participatory nature of networks is either a ruse or a cover for forms of control that are the more insidious for hiding themselves in plain sight or masquerading as socially liberatory. That social media is not usually understood by its users as a genre also means that it, paradoxically, can give the impression of offering unmediated or unshaped experience. Quayson's suggestion that the social media platforms that operate on these networks borrow the form of the realist novel begins to show how media and form collapse into each other in ways that make it hard to see how the form gives a particular shape to experience.

Of course, scholars have long argued over the politics of the form that the realist novel gives to lived experience. Central to this debate is the question of whether the form can imagine

and explore new forms of social life or whether it can only record the world as it is. How much difference can the form allow or imagine? As I discussed in chapter one, most critics of the realist novel conclude that characters can only be so different from the reader before that reader fails to recognize them; the delivery system of the novel, in David Palumbo-Liu's terms, can only hold so much otherness. Joseph Slaughter concurs that the realist novel replicates the liberal public sphere but that it can slowly and slightly expand the contours of that sphere. Quayson's discussion of social media as a replacement for the novel suggests that in this new form identification has contracted even more: readers or users only engage with themselves. John Carlos Rowe makes a similar argument about the relationship between social media and the novel: "[t]he assemblage of my Tweets, e-mails, and/or instagrams when *taken together* constitutes my identity as a digital character" (459). He goes on: "the everyday practices of countless people around the world confirm that they find in such social media their best means of asserting their identities, shaping and sharing their own characters, and in many other ways doing the work once done by the novel" (463). Rowe's claims are intriguing partly because of his suggestion that the assemblage of digital communications constitutes a person's identity as a character: as it did in *The Circle*, social media converts a real person into something like a fictional character. But Rowe goes on to claim not only that social media has replaced the novel but that "the work once done by the novel" was not that of engaging with others but of "asserting [one's own identity]" (463). Rowe's is a bleaker vision than Quayson's not just because one media form has eclipsed the other but because the earlier media form never allowed for the kinds of identifications that animate Quayson's account. I think accounts of the death of the novel have been greatly exaggerated, but I also think that it is worth taking seriously that social media has a generic form, that it is similar to that of the realist novel (but supplemented by visual media) and

that it is a technology of self-formation. If chapter one asked how elastic the realist novel can be, this chapter argues that social media is an inelastic form in part because it does not acknowledge that it is a form, and that autofiction is one way of countering that inelasticity.

How Might a Person Collaborate?

From the very start of *How Should a Person Be?*, its narrator aligns character with media, and wants those around her to hold an "unchanging" image of her in their heads. While social media is absent from this novel, the performance of self is imagined as one of visual media in imitation of celebrity culture. In the opening pages of *How Should a Person Be?*, Sheila muses on its titular question, even as she says that she knows "that character is just an invention of the news media" and that "[a]t a certain point, I know, you have to forget about your soul and just do the work you're required to do" (*How* 2). This moment is quickly dropped; in the next paragraph the narrator is back to "How should a person be? … I can't help answering like this: a celebrity….no one [would] be too interested in taking my picture, for they'd all carry around in their heads an image of me that was unchanging, startling, and magnetic" (*How* 2-3). Yet even in these opening pages Sheila has an inkling that maybe she ought, rather than seeking fame and stasis, to "just do the work" (*How* 2). If much of the novel chronicles Sheila's avoidance of the work she is meant to be doing, the closing pages of the novel offer both a reminder that the work needs to be done and a model for how one might do it. The answer to "how should a person be?" might be a different question: "what should a person do?"

Near the end of the novel, after Sheila and Margaux's friendship has collapsed because of Sheila's various forms of encroachment on Margaux's identity (as well as buying the same dress, Sheila has committed the more grievous transgression of taping their conversations and then transcribing them to turn in as the script of a play she has been commissioned to write.) Sheila

racks her brain for a way to become friends again and concludes that the problem of their friendship has been that "she [Margaux] had made a sacrifice for me,… while I had made no sacrifice for her. I had done nothing scary or of risk to myself for Margaux's sake. There was a real imbalance" (*How* 261). Sheila's conclusion here recasts the artistic community she has depicted over the course of the novel, one that has seemed to be dialogic and collaborative. In fact, Sheila's friendship with Margaux has been extractive all along, even if Sheila's skittishness is in part a function of her belief that Margaux is the superior artist. To become friends with Margaux again, Sheila concludes, she has to right the imbalance between them—she ponders it as she sleeps, and "when I woke the next morning, I had no idea what the gesture should be" (*How* 262). This return of the language of gesture ties this moment back to Sheila's earlier discussion of the art impulse that can manifest as object, reproduction, or gesture. Sheila needs to make a gesture of friendship to Margaux, but Margaux tells her that the gesture she needs to make is an artistic one: when she and Sheila meet, she demands that Sheila finish her play.

The stitching together of friendship and art-making that happens in the use of "gesture" is made explicit by the fact that Margaux needs Sheila to make her art in order to save their friendship. Further, Margaux is willing to collaborate on the work of art: she says that

> I want [the play] to answer your question—about how a person should be—so that you never have to think about it anymore. So that whatever you do from that point on isn't about that question, and so our friendship won't be either. And you can use anything you need from me to answer that question—my words, whatever, just answer it. (*How* 262)

Margaux offers up her collaboration in language that makes it sound almost like an act of self-abnegation: "you can use anything you need from me" (*How* 262), she says. She is willing to be a collaborator, to allow Sheila to use her "words, whatever"—but collaboration must happen

with her full consent; she can offer herself but Sheila cannot simply mine her talent and experience without acknowledging that she is doing so. Margaux also draws some boundaries even as she drops her defenses: Sheila can take from her to make a work of art, but not indefinitely. Margaux counters Sheila's ruthlessness with compassion, offering up her collaboration despite Sheila's abuse of their friendship. But the model of collaboration she offers does not completely eradicate the distinction between living and working, being friends and being collaborative artists.

Of course, the question of how a person should be is the title of the novel—a fact that the scene between Margaux and Sheila acknowledges. When Margaux tells Sheila what she must do, Sheila is at first overwhelmed:

> It was the worst, most difficult thing she could have asked of me. And certainly she would be the only person left who could love me—I would have no new friends once my ugliness was out there in the world to see…. Her eyes drifted to my gray hair.
>
> "And do it quickly," she said. "You're going to have to work harder than you've ever worked in your life.
>
> I sat in silence, then turned to her.
>
> "Does it have to be a play?"
>
> She thought for a minute, then grinned. "No." (*How* 262).

What comes out of this scene, of course, is the substitution of the novel we are reading for the play Sheila was meant to write. The scene also offers a gesture (of collaboration between two female artists) rather than an object (a play about women.) And it offers an act of revision: Margaux asks for a play, but Sheila changes the form of the work even as she agrees to take it on—and Margaux does not interpret that change of form as a rejection of the project she has

asked Sheila to do. This movement between friendship and art-making in this scene shows how the two are intertwined in ways that the novel values—but also that they can also be disentangled, and indeed occasionally need to be in order for a friendship to function. Rachel Sanger Buurma and Laura Heffernan argue that "[i]n refusing to signal an outside of Sheila and Margaux's lives, the novel dissolves the hard division…. between a classical writing life and an embodied social life." (90). Certainly *How Should a Person Be?* is interested in probing the divide between "life and literature" and particularly in considering the relationship between "embodied social life" and artmaking,[11] yet I think it is important to notice that this scene between Margaux and Sheila keeps part of their friendship out of the making of Sheila's art—in fact, demands that Sheila finish her project both so that their friendship can continue and that it can be put in the service of something other than Sheila's art.

Sheila and Margaux's collaboration is the subject of the novel—but it is also the context of the novel, as Buurma and Heffernan's description of the Canadian edition shows. They point out how

> [t]he cover wrapper of the Canadian edition of How Should a Person Be? includes similarly sized photo images of Margaux Williamson and Sheila Heti, suggesting a link between the Margaux and Sheila characters and the historical Margaux Williamson (whose last name appears only once, on the lips of a fan, in the novel) and Sheila Heti (whose last name appears only the in novel's paratextual material)" (92)

The US edition offers only a photograph of Heti and no mention of Williamson on the cover wrapper, but the Canadian edition does, as Buurma and Heffernan argue, link the characters and the living artists—it also, however, positions Margaux as something of a co-author. The paratext, in other words, reinforces the novel's valuing of collaborative work over the single author. While

the Canadian paratext reinforces the novel's collaborative nature, its publication history suggests a refusal of the status of finished object. Within the novel, in place of the finished play that Sheila has been commissioned to write, we end up with the novel of attempts. But the novel itself has also been revised: Heti continued to change it even after its initial publication in Canada, publishing a different version in the US two years later. That the novel exists in two versions is yet another way that it celebrates and instantiates dynamism, the gesture rather than the object; the two published versions sit alongside each other, neither one the "correct" edition.

The Limits of Conversation

It is tempting to position Heti's novel and her commitment to real life and dynamism in the context of the New Sincerity. Heti's background—she has been on the editorial board of Dave Eggers's *The Believer* for many years—as well as her avowed commitments to "real life" might lead one to align her with New Sincerity enthusiasts like Eggers. But while Heti's frustration with fictionality, like Cusk's, is certainly sincere, her commitment to "the real" does not seem best understood within the sincerity/irony dichotomy that David Foster Wallace famously posed, and that writers like Dave Eggers took up as a rallying cry. The connection with Eggers is useful, though: like him, Heti constructs collective projects, and a contrast that Lee Konstantinou draws between Eggers and Wallace is useful here. Konstantiou argues that in their commitment to sincerity against irony, Wallace attempts to construct an individual type, while Eggers attempts to create new institutions. As he writes,

> Wallace's brand of postirony, for all its power, was more concerned with overthrowing the rule of a particular type of person, the ironist, than with changing the institutional relations that facilitated the rise of this type. Put schematically, Wallace sought to defeat bad institutions that give rise to toxic incredulity by constructing a characterological

> model committed to belief rather than constructing a characterological model committed to challenging (let alone seizing) power... he did not focus on transforming postmodern institutions. Eggers, by contrast, seems to have understood the importance of constructing alternative institutions. (215)

Eggers's "alternative institutions"—*The Believer*, 826 Valencia, Voice of Witness, and ScholarMatch—are ones that value and indeed institutionalize sincerity; but while Konstantinou contrasts them with Wallace's commitment to the individual liberal humanist, the institutions Eggers forms are ones that advance the values of liberal humanism. (There is something particularly Dickensian about ScholarMatch, which matches donors with students who need funds for college education.) Voice of Witness "advances human rights by amplifying the voices of people impacted by injustice."[12] When these mission statements do not quite replicate Teju Cole's description of the motivations and methods of his "White-Savior Industrial Complex" (@tejucole, "White Savor")—and ScholarMatch's comes close—they participate in a mode of politics whose limitations I have discussed in previous chapters. Walter Benn Michaels, Alexander Galloway, and Jodi Dean, among others, have shown the ways that "amplifying… voices" (Voice of Witness) does not necessarily redress injustice; to paraphrase Michaels, injustice is not always produced by who we hear and how we hear them ("Neoliberal Aesthetics"). Especially in the contemporary media environment, Eggers's alternative institutions do not offer satisfying solutions. His alternative institutions instate the sincere liberal-humanist individual (the "particular type of person" Wallace imagines (Konstantinou 215)) as a kind of gatekeeper: he identifies members of the deserving poor to find them patrons or decides whose voices must be amplified in an unjust world.

I pause on Wallace and Eggers here because the contrast between individual and systemic responses to oppression or injustice has been a concern of this project as a whole, but also because comparing Heti and Cusk's collaborations with Eggers's institutions allows us to see what is compelling about them. Buurma and Heffernan align Heti with Barthes in order to make an argument about Heti's work that is similar to the one Konstantinou makes about Eggers's: they argue that *How Should a Person Be?* deliberately offers a "more hesitant and preparatory form" that "explore[s] the lived relationship between individuals and their surroundings" rather than offering "the humanist individual and her luminous work of art as a check on overweening institutions" (94). If Wallace offered a luminous individual work, and Eggers an alternative institution, Heti and Cusk offer a hesitant individual in conversation with other hesitant others.

Cusk and Heti thus avoid some of the pitfalls into which Eggers's new institutions enthusiastically pitch themselves. Still, as a principled refusal of mediated capitalism, their approach leaves something to be desired. It is tempting to align an attempt at communal narration with a leftist politics (one that is truly collective as opposed to Eggers's patron model), but the collectives delineated in these novels are only ever interpersonal—Heti can only ask how a *person* can be. To the extent that such a person sees herself as a member of a class, it is that of a group of friends and disaffected artists. These are coteries rather than collectives. Cusk's contested narratives tend to play out within the borders of the family or of a (almost always heterosexual) romantic relationship. The conversational form they imagine resists the demands of the media landscape, but it cannot imagine political alternatives to mediated capitalism, an omnipresent regime that they experience as a threat to their personhood. They can offer gestures of resistance to this regime, but they do not imagine these as political. Instead they imagine artistic alternatives, acts of shared creation between two people or three. These collectives do not

ask readers to imagine alternatives to the structures in which most people live—tellingly, in a piece for the New York Times about raising teenage daughters, Cusk writes that

> Adolescence… shares some of the generic qualities of divorce. The central shock of divorce lies in its bifurcation of the agreed-upon version of life: There are now two versions, mutually hostile, each of whose narrative aim is to discredit the other. ("Mother" 40)

Here we see the inverse of Cusk's narrative technique in *Outline*: family and marriage are both communal narratives, but in the dysfunctional families Cusk discusses, the central problem is that each party insists on her own narrative and insists on it trumping another's version of the story. And the story is still and always the story of a marriage or a nuclear family. It is instructive that in her 2001 memoir, *A Life's Work*, Cusk also aligns love and narrative: "My loves have observed the conventions first of the familial narrative, then of the romantic. I have never sought to rewrite these conventions. I have accorded with their cadences, their plot" (*Life's Work* 78). While *Outline* asks characters and readers to collaborate on character and on the ways that characters react to or read the conventional narratives in which they live, it by no means explodes those conventional narratives.

The limits of Cusk's approach, but also her defense of those limits, make themselves clear in another of her essays for the *New York Times*, in which she discusses her attempt to overhaul her family's home. Evaluating her options, Cusk finds herself painted into a corner: no matter what she chooses to do about the house—whether she invests time and aesthetic energy into it, so as to transform it into a pleasant place for herself and her family, or she refuses to do so, in order to avoid falling into the role of overworked housewife—she feels that her actions will be understood within an already-written narrative about women, domesticity, and family

life. Before she begins fixing up her home, a male acquaintance comments on how much he appreciates its ugliness, telling her

> … how rare and refreshing it was to be somewhere untransfigured, somewhere of an authentic ugliness that didn't look like a photograph in a magazine or a poor imitation of one. He complimented me on taking this stand against the ubiquity of middle-class tastes; he appeared to view it as an artistic and philosophical position. Don't ever change it, he said with a small smile. I'll be disappointed if you do. ("Making")

This acquaintance reads—in fact, insists upon—Cusk's home as an instantiation of a political and aesthetic claim. If she tries to make it more pleasant to live in, she will risk the disappointment of at least one male critic. Cusk makes it clear that, in her experience, it is women who bear this burden of their homes' expressiveness; even when men take up domestic chores, they "never seem quite so trammeled or devoured by domesticity, nor so possessed by its utopian visions" ("Making"). Cusk cannot imagine a way out of this problem, because in her formulation the problem is as simple and intransigent as being a woman (and in particular a mother) living in a house: it would be impossible, she argues, to inhabit any of these roles without being aware of how overdetermined they are, and it would be similarly impossible to simply abandon them.

This belief in a quite conservative notion of the relationship between gender, domesticity, and work recurs throughout Cusk's writing. *A Life's Work* (2001) and *Aftermath* (2012) show Cusk battling with a viewpoint that she positions as socially imposed but in which she clearly believes: that a combination of cultural archetype and biological essentialism ultimately governs human life and relationships. An exemplary sentence in *Aftermath* runs, "It is as though, for a man, a woman represents the possibility of doing without God" (*Aftermath* 51). This sentence is

in reference to Agamemnon and Clytemnestra and their marital battle— but it is crucial to the structure of *Aftermath* that the *Oresteia* is on some level simply telling an ahistorical truth about how men and women relate to each other. In other words, Agamemnon and Clytemnestra are "man" and "woman," and so are any given husband and wife in the twenty-first century. Cusk also uses the language of transvestitism to describe her marriage, in which her husband served as the primary caregiver for their children so that she could write full-time. Cusk resolutely and consistently names professional ambition and the desire to work outside of the home as "male values," saying, for instance, that "[w]hat I lived as feminism were in fact the male values my parents, among others, well-meaningly bequeathed me—the cross-dressing values of my father, and the anti-feminine values of my mother. So I am not a feminist. I am a self-hating transvestite" (*Aftermath* 15). Susan Fraiman, among others, reminds us that an engagement with domesticity need not be so intensely gendered or conservative. Cusk's writing, however, makes the case that disentangling domesticity from traditional female roles is well-nigh impossible.

I pause on *Aftermath* because its structure is useful for considering the arc of Cusk's career: the novels that precede her memoirs are fairly conventional realist comedies of manners, notable mostly for the coexistence of their commitment to that form and of a caustic attitude about its conventions and the social world it chronicles. The shift into memoir shows Cusk considering similar themes to those of her novels, but from an explicitly autobiographical position, as though she is impatient with constructing fictional versions of women struggling to balance children and a professional life and marriages marked by discord over gender roles. But a belief in the ways archetypes govern human behavior, and that attempting to live in a nontraditional way results in contorted or thwarted people and families, runs through her work. Throughout, she is committed to registering what she sees as the human costs of living in an

unconventional way. To return to the liminal or half-way nature of the autofictional form, Cusk's move from fiction to memoir to autofiction suggests a range of ways of grappling with or contesting received narratives—*Outline* offers the most open form of the three, the one most able to revise narratives of self. I have been arguing that *Outline* attempts collaborative making as a way of presenting character: while this collaboration has limitations because of its interpersonal nature—it cannot figure new social formations or collectives larger than two or three—it does go some way towards sloughing off the constraints that Cusk's earlier work could neither vanquish or ignore.

Both Cusk and Heti's projects, then, are limited by their interpersonal nature: while they prize collaboration, they do not imagine ways of collaborating across distance (physical or social) or of staging large-scale collaborations. Yet Cusk's language when she talks about her home returns us to the central and compelling problem of both *Outline* and *How Should a Person Be?*: she writes that, "[l]ike the body itself, a home is something both looked at and lived in, a duality that in neither case I have managed to reconcile" ("Making"). Heti's novel offers a similar connection between body and house when early in the novel Margaux paints a portrait of Sheila. She shows it to Sheila, saying that "I wanted to call it *The Genius* but instead I'm calling it *House for a Head*. I don't believe enough in genius, but I *do* believe in having a house for a head" (*How* 94). Sheila, of course, is insulted at being demoted from the status of genius, but Margaux's belief that one should have a house for one's head—that one should, in other words, be able to live in one's head and in the world with a sense of stability—is another attempt to traverse the duality that Cusk describes.[13] Mediated capitalism asks people, and particularly women, to be objects to be looked at; what Heti and Cusk try to offer instead are aesthetic objects that are also structures to live in and to share with others. The interactive aesthetic they

offer remains at a small scale because it relies on unmediated connections with other people as well as on an awareness of the role of media in contemporary life.

Conclusion: Embodiment Over Mediation

In the midst of *Outline*, its narrator makes explicit her refusal of a narrative of growth and self-improvement. “We are all addicted to it,” she says: “the story of improvement, to the extent that it has commandeered our deepest sense of reality. It has even infected the novel” (Cusk, *Outline* 99). This language of addiction, infection, and commandeering, offers a series of somewhat mixed metaphors—but what unites all of them is the sense of threat from a force that takes control over “reality” and also of the narratives that represent reality (*Outline* 99). Cusk’s novel attempts to inoculate itself by offering a protagonist that seems willfully passive as to many of her circumstances, but not at all passive conversationally: she asks and answers questions and in doing so constructs stories of the past (her own and others) in collaboration with the characters she encounters. This collaborative version of story-telling—of creating character—is implicitly offered to the reader as well, making the text, like the characters it presents, a porous one.

“The story of improvement” (Cusk, *Outline* 99) is the story by which people can become “bigger and happier and more beautiful” (Cusk, *Outline* 51) than they already are—as Cusk suggests here, and as I have argued, it is also a form that demands such improvement. Further, it is a story that has wormed its way into both everyday life and mediated representation thereof. Heti and Cusk, I have argued, foreground a provisional and collaborative aesthetic as a way of resisting the contemporary modes of self-presentation and of making visible the ways that artistic production might be complicit in a regime of charisma or mediated capitalism. If realism has always been a struggle against the conventions of a previous generation of writers, Cusk and

Heti's work turns our gaze not back towards earlier realist novels but around us at the forms of visual and social media. Autofiction, particularly in the work of these two writers, comes to seem less a revision of the realist novel than a way of foregrounding how humans are always in some sense fictional creations—but fictional creations tethered to a living body.

Characters that share the names of their authors are not the same beings as the figures in a memoir: they insist simultaneously on fictionality and referent. This double insistence makes their mediated status intensely visible—and thus refuses the mode of presentation that Ato Quayson has suggested social media offers, which hides its status as media by aligning itself with forms (realist photography, in this context) that have become so normalized as to seem the only mode by which presentations of self might operate. This normalization also reifies experience and closes off engagement: these novels suggest that visual media is particularly complicit in the feedback loop of media, realism, and the loss of the messiness of lived experience as represented in art. In the place of a presentation of self that refuses the vulnerability of true exposure, these writers offer the collaborative construction of character, primarily through the conversations that form the backbone of both novels.

These conversations are situated and embodied in ways that limit the forms of collectivity they can offer: they give us groups of two or three at most, and those who make up the groups are fairly similar to one another. They also seem to place the reader somewhere beyond media, suggesting that acts of collaboration might only happen through somewhat antiquated technologies, like the tape recorder that Sheila uses to take down her friends' conversations. Is there a media form that might be both lived in and looked at, to return to Cusk's description of a home? Quayson's reading of social media suggests that it is a communications technology that is only interested in being looked at, like the photographs that Cusk and Heti portray in their

novels. But for all that these writers offer intriguingly collaborative constructions of character and person, those collaborations are so small scale as to seem a turn inward rather than an orientation towards the world. Considered against the possibilities that Adichie's flat characters and Cole and Ozeki's charismatic ones offer, the forms of collaboration Cusk and Heti put forth may offer a way to develop the self, but no way to come into relation with other beings beyond those in one's immediate circle. Unmediated contact as a way of engaging with the world out there" (G. Levine 8) is not, perhaps, quite as satisfying as critics of digital media might want it to be.

Notes

1. In this alignment their projects look a little bit similar to Ruth Ozeki's in *A Tale for the Time Being*, in that one of the novel's central characters, Ruth, shares a number of biographical details with Ozeki, as I discussed in Chapter 2. Yet Ozeki's novel is explicitly concerned with the need to write fiction, and her use of herself as a character comes across as a late-stage instance of postmodern play rather than as a commitment to chronicling lived experience. The distance between herself and Nao, and the novel's dips into genre fiction modes (the detective novel, the sci-fi novel) make clear that the novel is interested in a person's engagement with forms of mediation, rather than an attempt to seamlessly represent lived experience.

2. My thanks to Lindsay Turner for checking the accuracy of my translation.

3. Much recent fiction follows a titling convention that includes "A Novel" after the novel's title. *How Should a Person Be?* does so, as does *Open City*. The need to mark novels as such seems to intersect with my claims about the rise of autofiction as a genre and its attempt to negotiate an intensely mediated moment.

4. Kraus's novel is different from other autofictional texts published in the 1990s and early 2000s, such as Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock* (1994) and Bret Easton Ellis's *Lunar Park* (2005). Each of these texts uses an autoficional structure to critique the nature of truth and narrative in a way that more closely resembles postmodern fiction. Kraus's work, like that of the other authors I mention, is less concerned with postmodern play and metatextuality and more with the question of self-formation.

5. *How Should a Person Be?* was published in Canada in 2010 and in the US in 2012. The two editions are different from each other; Heti revised the novel although her US publisher

was planning to publish the same text that had been published in Canada. *Outline* was published in the UK in 2014 and in the US in 2015 and was not revised between the two publication dates.

6. In contrast to *Outline*, *Transit* and *Kudos* do seem to privilege the narrator's perspective in ways that Merve Emre argues are prefigured in *Outline*. I think, however, that the narrator's passivity in *Outline* is so marked that it is worth highlighting rather than subsuming into the more traditional and assertive narrative voice of the second two novels.

7. Later in the novel, an interlocutor does respond by refusing to consider an alternative point of view and shutting down consideration and revision of his story; this is presented as an act of aggression and also as an assertation of self that blocks self-knowledge rather than arising from it (Cusk, *Outline* 244).

8. As Sherry Turkle points out, Facebook in particular has a narrative structure; it is "set up to inspire narration" (*Reclaiming* 81) and often presents users with actual narratives made from their posts.

9. In earlier chapters, I have discussed the different ways that contemporary writers position social media's ability to allow users to identify with others. Adichie's novel suggests that blogs and online forums can be a site for conversation—but this depends, crucially, on the flatness of the characters in these forums and their disembodiment. They are also text-based forums rather than the combination of image and text that makes up the kinds of Facebook posts Quayson discusses here. Cole and Ozeki suggest that identification is possible, and in fact often sought—but also that identification is not a sufficient ethical response to tragedy. (Cole and Ozeki's critique of identification, in fact, aligns usefully with Quayson's notion that engagement is not possible—Cole and Ozeki's work suggests that the kinds of identification that are possible are flawed and partial.)

10. Jodi Dean makes a similar point in *Blog Theory*: “The displacement of political conflict to the terrain of networked media has the perverse repercussion of perpetually expanding the topography of struggle even as it constantly signals the locations, intentions, and networks of those who are fighting. This expansion has strengthened communicative capitalism as it feeds on accelerating crises and emergencies. It also increases the exposure and vulnerability of those engaged in active protest and resistance on the ground” (Dean 124-5).

11. Buurma and Heffernan do not consider the relationship of literature to other forms of art, but it seems important to note here that writing in particular tends to be understood as the act of an individual undertaken in solitude, in contrast to other forms of art-making that might be more collaborative. The fact that Sheila is supposed to be writing a play that will presumably be performed at some point, and that Margaux and her other friends are painters rather than writers, reminds the reader that different forms of art-making have different relationships to collaboration.

12. See chapter 2 for a discussion of the problems of imagining injustice as something that can be corrected by amplifying the voices of the powerless.

13. Heti does not mention Louise Bourgeois’s paintings here, but “house for a head” is an apt description of Bourgeois’s many *Femme Maison* prints and paintings, which depict nude women with houses where their heads (and sometimes upper bodies) would be. Deborah Wye argues that for Bourgeois, these imagines imply both confinement and stability, much as the home seems to for Cusk.

Conclusion: Risking Virtual Intimacy

Shaka McGlotten describes the early twenty-first century as a moment when "intimacy has gone virtual, if it ever was real" (1). This project has been an attempt to understand the operations of virtual intimacy in such a moment: how do readers fall for fictional characters, and to what extent do such tumbles into affection resemble how they meet other human beings in mediated contexts? How might characters mediate readers' relationships to large and faraway populations? Can understanding characters as simultaneously textual and human-like—as combining mediation and an imagined referent—help us navigate social media platforms, which impose their own generic forms on the ways we experience and share our lives?

In attempting to answer these questions about intimacy, fiction, and media, I have tried to stitch together what I have been calling, following John Frow, the two camps ("ethical" and "structural") of character criticism (vi). Frow argues that the first camp sees characters as something like humans while the second understands them as collections of texts, and that the rift between the two has never been successfully healed (vi). I have tried, if not to heal the rift, at least to take the claims of both camps seriously. I have done so because I think neither one fully describes how characters work—but also because both inflect the ways that humans traverse mediated landscapes in their own lives. Tying the two together also begins to fill a gap in criticism of the contemporary global novel. Such criticism is committed to charting the form's ability to circulate otherness but argues that it does so through offering characters who are irreducibly particular or through the novel's interpenetration with other forms of discourse. I have tried to make a case for the ways that particular figures and novels' textuality come together to model imaginative engagement.

What I am most sympathetic to in the work of the "ethical camp" (which I would align with the work of critics concerned with the form and ethics of the global novel) is their discomfort about asking particular characters to stand in for larger populations, as earlier critics like Georg Lukács and Fredric Jameson tended to do. Lukács claims that "the live portrayal of the complete human personality is possible only if the writer attempts to create types" because of the "organic, indissoluble connection between man as a private individual and man as a social being, a member of a community" (*Studies* 8). He argues that bourgeois society puts in place a false divide between public and private, but that this division is "a mutilation of the essence of man" and the truly great realist novelist always works against it (*Studies* 9). In his influential 1986 essay on third-world literature, Jameson concurs that "we [those of us who live in what Jameson calls the first world] have been trained in the deep cultural conviction that the lived experience of our private existences is somehow incommensurable with the abstractions of economic science and politics" ("Third" 70). He argues, however, that the relationship between the personal and the political is "wholly different in third-world culture"—in that context, he claims, "*the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*" ("Third" 70, italics in the original). Jameson's argument, resting as it does on the sharp distinction between cultural practice in the first world and in the third, discomfits many critics of the global novel.

It does so in part because of the demand it makes on characters from certain parts of the world to be representative rather than autonomous. Dorothy Hale argues that frustration with making this particular demand on character animates much of the ethical criticism of the twenty-first century novel. But as I have argued throughout this dissertation, the turn Hale describes runs the risk of effacing some of the textuality of character. We can see this effacement in the

vocabulary such critics use about character and the novel: Derek Attridge, for instance, in his influential argument against reading J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* as a national allegory for South Africa, says that it should be read instead as a "singular evocation of the peculiar mental and emotional world of an individual undergoing a traumatic episode in his life" (*J.M. Coetzee* 63). Attridge is always sensitive to the particularly literary character of literary works, and yet that very sensitivity here results in his understanding David Lurie, the central character of *Disgrace*, as "an individual" (*J.M. Coetzee* 63) in the world.

What I have suggested in this project is that writers of globally-circulating fictions are as concerned as these scholars are to avoid subsuming a character into a population in ways that make the character less of a peculiar individual being and the population less heterogeneous. Yet such writers do not give up on the project of rendering the "indissoluble connection between man as a private individual and man as … a member of a community" (Lukács 8) because carefully making that connection is particularly important at a moment when literature circulates globally and participates in the ways that readers conceptualize those who are far away from them. How writers navigate problems of scale as they partially attach characters to larger populations while respecting the differences within those populations, and how they position this kind of engagement against the connective tissue that social media platforms offer, has been a central concern of this dissertation. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's internet "monikers" situate their bearers geographically and make some claim about how their social position influences what they have to say—but the monikers also contain something idiosyncratic, asserting particularity as well as socioeconomic status. Further, they provoke conversations in which her protagonist, Ifemelu, learns that such beings are not what she expects them to be. Teju Cole and Ruth Ozeki mobilize and critique charisma in order to use individual characters to turn readers' attention

towards larger populations. Their work shows the ways that a model of sympathy not only fails to do justice to large-scale violence but also breaks down in the context of the spiky affective landscape of the internet. Sheila Heti and Rachel Cusk represent character-making as a collaborative process and invite readers into it. If their projects are limited by the small scale of their collaborations, they also make clear the ways that some forms of self-presentation over media are more elastic and open to revision than others. Each of these projects engages with the intersection of literary character, global circulation, and an ethics of encounter—but each of them engages with these questions via formal choices around the presentation of character rather than by offering characters who are (as Madigan Haley describes the way the current critical turn understands character) "autonomous, largely private individuals" (107). These are resolutely characters rather than people, somehow collective rather than private: insistently mediated and delineated as fictional, they are not simply bourgeois individuals. The gap between the "structural" and "ethical" camps of character criticism remains—and yet, as I have argued in these chapters, it is one that novelists traverse by offering characters that assert both textuality and personality.

I would suggest that these ways of being both text and person offer not only a lens onto the operations of the global novel, but also modes of engaging with the internet in our own lives. We can make ourselves flat characters in such a context without losing our roundness; we can resist the operations of the "White Savior Industrial Complex" and the "subsumption" of narratives of liberation the network performs; we can insist on conversational forms rather than believing that we "only exist in pictures" (@tejucole, "White Savior"; Galloway, "The Whatever," 116; Heti, *How* 116). We can avoid the nightmare of *The Circle*, in which we succumb to the demand for total transparency and undergo the loss of self that results. Mediated

intimacy has its perils, but thoughtfully traversing the digital media landscape, learning to be both character and person, offers otherwise unimaginable possibilities of encounter and engagement.

Works Cited and Consulted

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah.* Knopf, 2013.

---. "'Americanah' Author Explains 'Learning' To Be Black in The U.S." Fresh Air Interview. 27 Jun. 2013. https://www.npr.org/2013/06/27/195598496/americanah-author-explains-learning-to-be-black-in-the-u-s. Accessed 11 May 2018.

---. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Anchor, 2007.

---. *Purple Hibiscus*. Algonquin Books, 2012.

---. "The Danger of a Single Story." TED Global 2009, Oxford, UK, 23 July 2009. https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.

---. *The Small Redemptions of Lagos*. 27 Aug 2014 – 2 Nov 2014. https://americanahblog.wordpress.com/. Accessed 3 February 2015.

---. *The Thing Around Your Neck*. Anchor Books, 2010.

Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion.* Routledge, 2004.

---. "Happy Objects." *The Affect Theory Reader.* Edited Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seidworth. Duke University Press, 2009, pp. 29-51.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, 2006.

Anjaria, Ulka. "The Realist Impulse and the Future of Postcoloniality." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2016, pp. 278-294.

Appadurai, Arjun. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 7, iss. 2-3, 1990, pp. 295-310.

Aristotle. *The Poetics*. Translated by Malcolm Heath. Penguin Classics, 1996.

Armstrong, Nancy. “The Affective Turn in Contemporary Fiction.” *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2014, pp. 441-465.

Attridge, Derek. *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event.* University of Chicago Press, 2004.

---. *The Work of Literature*. Oxford University Press, 2015.

Atwood, Margaret. “*The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* ‘in Context.’” *PMLA*, vol. 119, no. 3, 2004, pp. 513-17.

Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis.* Princeton University Press, 1968.

Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey.* Penguin Classics, 2003.

Auyoung, Elaine. “The Sense of Something More in Art and Experience.” *Style*, vol. 44, no. 4, Winter 2010, pp. 547-565.

Bady, Aaron. “Chimamanda Adichie’s Solid Personal Achievements.” *Zunguzungu*, The New Inquiry, 15 Mar 2014. https://thenewinquiry.com/blog/chimamanda-ngozi-adichies-solid-personal-achievements/. Accessed 18 Sept 2014.

Bakhtin, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, 1981.

---. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, translated by Vern W. McGee, University of Texas Press, 1986.

Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative.* Third Edition. University of Toronto Press, 2009.

Barthes, Roland. “The Reality Effect.” *The Rustle of Language*, translated by Richard Howard. University of California Press, 1989, pp. 141-8.

---. *S/Z: An Essay.* Translated by Richard Miller. Hill and Wang, 1975.

Basu, Manisha. "Loving and Leaving: The Ethics of Postcolonial Pain in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*." *ariel: A Review of International Literature*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2012, pp. 67-86.

Baucom, Ian. "A Study in African Realism." *Public Books*, Public Culture, 1 Nov. 2013. Accessed 4 March 2015. http://www.publicbooks.org/a-study-in-african-realism/

Benhabib, Seyla. "The Pariah and Her Shadow: Hannah Arendt's Biography of Rahel Varnhagen." *Political Theory*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1995, pp. 5-24.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller." *Illuminations*. Edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, 1985, pp. 83-110.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press, 2011.

---. "Introduction: What Does it Matter Who One Is?" *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 34, no. 1, Autumn 2007, pp. 1-4.

---. "On the Case." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 33, no. 4, Summer 2007, pp. 663-372.

Berning, Nora. "Narrative Ethics and Alterity in Adichie's Novel *Americanah*." *CLC Web: Comparative Literature and Culture*, vol. 17, no. 5, 2015, https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2733. Accessed 7 May 2018.

Best, Stephen and Sharon Marcus. "Surface Reading: An Introduction." *Representations*, vol. 108, no. 1, Fall 2009, pp. 1-21.

Bewes, Timothy. "Against Exemplarity: W.G. Sebald and the Problem of Connection." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 55, no. 1, Spring 2014, pp. 1-31.

Black, Shameem. *Fiction Across Borders*. Columbia University Press, 2010.

Bolter, Jay and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media.* The MIT Press, 2000.

Booth, Robert. "Facebook reveals news feed experiment to control emotions" *The Guardian* (online), 29 June 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jun/29/facebook-users-emotions-news-feeds. Accessed 30 Mar 2017.

Booth, Wayne. *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. The University of California Press, 1988.

Bowlby, Rachel. "Foreword." *Adventures in Realism*, edited by Matthew Beaumont, Blackwell Publishers, 2007, pp. ix-xviii.

boyd, danah. "Facebook and 'radical transparency' (a rant)." *apophenia*, 14 May 2010, http://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2010/05/14/facebook-and-radical-transparency-a-rant.html. Accessed 12 Apr. 2018.

Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence.* Verso, 2006.

Buurma, Rachel Sanger and Laura Heffernan. "Notation After 'The Reality Effect': Remaking Reference with Roland Barthes and Sheila Heti." *Representations*, vol. 125, no. 1, Winter 2014, pp. 80-102.

Campanelli, Vito. *Web Aesthetics*. NAi Publishers, 2010.

Cavell, Stanley. *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*. Harvard University Press, 1979.

Chakravorty, Mrinalini. *In Stereotype*. Columbia University Press, 2014.

Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. "Race and/as Technology, or How to Do Things to Race." *Race After the Internet*, edited by Lisa Nakamura and Peter A. Chow-White, Routledge, 2012, pp. 38-60.

Cohn, Dorrit. *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction.* Princeton University Press, 1984.

Cole, Teju. *Every Day is for the Thief*. Random House, 2014.

---. *Double Take: A blog on vision, visuality, and visual culture. The New Inquiry.* https://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/dtake/. Accessed 21 May 2018.

---. Interview with Sarah Zhang. *Mother Jones* (online), 6 Mar. 2013, https://www.motherjones.com/media/2013/03/teju-cole-interview-twitter-drones-small-fates/. Accessed 1 Oct. 2015.

---. *Known and Strange Things.* Random House, 2016.

---. *Open City: A Novel*. Random House, 2012.

---. "A Reader's War." *Page-Turner*, *The New Yorker* (online), 10 Feb. 2013. https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/a-readers-war. Accessed 17 May 2018.

---. "Seven short stories about drones." *The New Inquiry*, 14 Jan. 2013, https://thenewinquiry.com/blog/seven-short-stories-about-drones/. Accessed 1 Oct. 2015.

---. "Unmournable Bodies." *Cultural Comment*, *The New Yorker* (online), 9 Jan. 2015. https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/unmournable-bodies. Accessed 1 Oct 2015.

---. "The White-Savior Industrial Complex." *The Atlantic* (online). 21 Mar 2012. https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/. Accessed 30 Apr 2018.

Cusk, Rachel. *Aftermath.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012.

---. "Aftermath was creative death. I was heading into total silence." Interview with Kate Kellaway. *The Observer*, *The Guardian* (online), 24 Aug. 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/aug/24/rachel-cusk-interview-aftermath-outline. Accessed 12 Jul. 2016.

---. *A Life's Work: On Becoming a Mother.* Fourth Estate, 2001.

---. "Making House: Notes on Domesticity." *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 4 Sept. 2016, p. 34.

---. "The Mother of All Problems." *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 22 Mar. 2015, p. 38.

---. *Outline*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015.

---. "Preface." *Literature Compass*, vol. 8, iss. 12, 2011, pp. 873-874.

---. "Rachel Cusk on Her Quietly Radical New Novel, Outline." Interview with Megan O'Grady. *Vogue* (online), 14 Jan. 2015. https://www.vogue.com/article/rachel-cusk-new-novel-outline. Accessed 12 Jul. 2016.

---. *Transit*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016.

Davis, Rocío G. "Fictional Transits and Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being.*" *Biography*, vol. 38, no. 1, Winter 2015, pp. 87-103.

Day, Elizabeth. Review of *Americanah*, by Chimamanda Adichie. *The Observer* 13 Apr. 2013, 35.

De Cervantes, Miguel. *Don Quixote*, translated Edith Grossman. Harper Perennial, 2005.

Dean, Jodi. *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive*. Polity Press, 2010.

---. "Cybersalons and Civil Society: Rethinking the Public Sphere in Transnational Technoculture." *Public Culture*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2001, pp. 243-266.

Debord, Guy. *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, translated by Malcolm Imrie, Verso, 1990.

D'Hoker, Else. "The Challenges of Community in Rachel Cusk's *Arlington Park*." *Anglistik*, vol. 26, iss. 1, 2015, pp. 13-23.

Dickens, Charles. *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Penguin Classics, 2001.

Edwards, Erica. *Difference Incorporated: Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership.* University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

---. "The New Black Novel and the Long War on Terror." *American Literary History*, vol. 29, no. 4, 2017, pp. 664-681.

Egan, Jennifer. *A Visit from the Goon Squad.* Anchor, 2011.

Eggers, Dave. *The Circle*. Vintage Books, 2014.

---. *Voice of Witness.* http://voiceofwitness.org/. Accessed 6 Apr. 2018.

Elias, Amy. "Interactive Cosmopolitanism and Collaborative Technologies: New Foundations for Global Literary History." *New Literary History*, vol. 39, no. 3, Summer 2008, pp. 705-725.

Emre, Merve. "Rachel Cusk's Unforgiving Eye." *Harper's Magazine*. June 2018. Accessed 24 May 2018. https://harpers.org/archive/2018/06/of-note/.

Felski, Rita. *Uses of Literature.* Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.

Ferguson, Frances. "Now It's Personal: D.A. Miller and Too-Close Reading." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2015, pp. 521-40.

Ferguson, Roderick. *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique.* University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

Ferrante, Elena. "I'm tired of fiction, I no longer see a reason to go hunting for anecdotes." Elena Ferrante's Weekend Column, *The Guardian*, 17 Feb. 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/feb/17/elena-ferrante-im-tired-of-fiction-i-no-longer-see-a-reason-to-go-hunting-for-anecdotes. Accessed 19 Feb. 2018.

---. *Those Who Leave and Those Who* Stay, translated by Ann Goldstein. Europa Editions, 2013.

Figlerowicz, Marta. “Affect Theory Dossier: An Introduction.” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2012, pp. 3-18.

---. *Flat Protagonists: A Theory of Novel Character*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

Flaubert, Gustave. *Madame Bovary.* Translated by Lydia Davis. Viking, 2010.

Forster, E.M. *Aspects of the Novel*. Penguin Classics, 2005.

Fraiman, Susan. *Extreme Domesticity*. Columbia University Press, 2016.

Fraser, Nancy. “Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History.” *New Left Review* 56, 2009, pp. 97-117.

---. “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy.” *Social Text*, no. 25/26, 1990, pp. 56-80.

Frow, John. *Character and Person*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Frye, Northrup. *The Anatomy of Criticism.* Princeton University Press, 2000.

Gallagher, Catherine. “The Rise of Fictionality.” *The Novel, Vol 1: History, Geography, and Culture*, edited by Franco Moretti, Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 336-354.

Galloway, Alexander. “Does the Whatever Speak?” *Race After the Internet*, edited by Lisa Nakamura and Peter A. Chow-White, Routledge, 2012, pp. 111-128.

---. “Networks.” *Critical Terms for Media Studies*. The University of Chicago Press, 2010. 280-296.

Galloway, Alexander and Eugene Thacker. *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks.* University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Genette, Gerard. *Fiction and Diction*, translated Catherine Porter, Cornell University Press, 1993.

Gibbs, Anna. “Contagious Feelings: Pauline Hanson and the Epidemiology of Affect.” *Australian Humanities Review*, vol. 25, 2002.

Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seidworth. “An Inventory of Shimmers.” *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seidworth, Duke University Press, 2009, pp. 1-28.

Goyal, Yogita. “Africa and the Black Atlantic.” *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2014, pp. v-xxv.

Grewal, David Singh. *Network Power: The Social Dynamics of Globalization.* Yale University Press, 2009.

Hale, Dorothy. “Aesthetics and the New Ethics: Theorizing the Novel in the Twenty-First Century.” *PMLA*, vol. 124, iss. 3, 2009, pp. 896-905.

Haley, Madigan. “Marginal Figures and the Ethos of the Global Novel.” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2015, pp. 103-121.

Hallemeier, Katherine. “Literary Cosmopolitanisms in Teju Cole’s *Every Day is for the Thief* and *Open City*.” *ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 44, no. 2-3, 2013, pp. 239-50.

---. “‘To Be from the Country of People Who Gave:’ National Allegory and the United States of Adichie’s *Americanah*.” *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2015, pp. 231-45.

Hampton, K.N., Rainie, L., Lu, W., Dwyer, M., Shin, I., & Purcell, K. (2014). “Social Media and the ‘Spiral of Silence.’” Pew Research Center, Washington, DC. http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/08/26/social-media-and-the-spiral-of-silence/.

Hansen, Mark B.N. “New Media.” *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, edited by W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen, The University of Chicago Press, 2010, pp. 172-185.

Harvey, W.H. *Character and the Novel*. Chatto & Windus, 1965.

Hayles, N. Katherine. *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2008.

Heti, Sheila. "'Be Silent, Recover My Strength, Start Again': In Conversation with Elena Ferrante." *Hazlitt*, 14 Nov. 2016, https://hazlitt.net/feature/be-silent-recover-my-strength-start-again-conversation-elena-ferrante. Accessed 17 May 2018.

---. "A Conversation with Sheila Heti." Interview with David Naimon. *The Missouri Review*, vol. 35, no. 4, Winter 2012, pp. 106-118.

---. *How Should a Person Be?* Henry Holt, 2012.

---. *Motherhood.* Henry Holt, 2018.

---. "So Frank." *London Review of Books*, 9 Jan. 2014, pp. 21-22.

Hickey, Dave. "Dave Hickey [Art Critic/Journalist/Short-Story Writer]." Interview with Sheila Heti. *The Believer*, November/December 2007. https://www.believermag.com/issues/200711/?read=interview_hickey. Accessed 12 July 2016.

Horn, Eva. "Introduction." *New German Critique* 114, vol. 38, no. 3, 2011, pp. 1-16.

Houis, Jacques. "Transgressive Autofictions: Literary Counterculture in 1960s Saint Germain-des-Prés." *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 33, iss. 3, Fall 2013, pp. 135-156.

Hu, Tung-Hui. *A Prehistory of the Cloud*. The MIT Press, 2015.

Hungerford, Amy. *Making Literature Now*. Stanford University Press, 2016.

Hunter, J. Paul. *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction*, WW. Norton & Company, 1990.

Jagoda, Patrick. *Network Aesthetics*. University of Chicago Press, 2016.

---. “Terror Networks and the Aesthetics of Interconnection.” *Social Text 105*, vol. 28, no. 4, Winter 2010, pp. 65-89.

James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady.* Penguin Classics, 2003.

Jameson, Fredric. “A Note on Literary Realism in Conclusion.” *Adventures in Realism*, edited by Matthew Beaumont, Blackwell Publishers, 2007, pp. 261-271.

---. *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke University Press, 1992.

---. “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism.” *Social Text*, no. 15, 1986, pp. 65-88.

Jones, Elizabeth H. “Serge Doubrovsky: Life, Writing, Legacy.” *L’Esprit Créateur*, vol. 49, no. 3, Fall 2009, pp. 1-7.

Keen, Suzanne. *Empathy and the Novel*. Oxford University Press, 2007.

Kelly, Adam. “Dialectic of Sincerity: Lionel Trilling and David Foster Wallace.” *Post45: Peer Reviewed*, 17 October 2014. http://post45.research.yale.edu/2014/10/dialectic-of-sincerity-lionel-trilling-and-david-foster-wallace/. Accessed 10 October 2016.

Kirkpatrick, David. *The Facebook Effect: The Inside Story of the Company That Is Connecting the World.* Simon and Schuster, 2011.

Knausgaard, Karl Ove. *My Struggle: Book 2: A Man in Love*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2014.

Knights, Lionel Charles. *How many children had Lady Macbeth? An essay in the theory and practice of Shakespeare criticism*. Haskell House, 1973.

Konstantinou, Lee. *Cool Characters: Irony and American Fiction*. Harvard University Press, 2016.

Kraus, Chris. *I Love Dick.* Semiotext(e), 2006. (Reissue).

Labaune-Demeule, Florence. "The Novel in Post-Colonial Literatures: Re-Mapping the Genre." *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, vol. 38, iss. 2, Spring 2016, pp. 109-121.

Leetsch, Jennifer. "Love, Limb-Loosener: Encounters in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*." *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, vol. 6, 2017, http://jprstudies.org/2017/04/love-limb-loosener-encounters-in-chimamanda-adichies-americanahby-jennifer-leetsch/. Accessed 7 May 2018.

Lerner, Ben. *10:04*. Picador, 2015.

---. *Leaving the Atocha Station*. Picador, 2011.

Levine, Caroline. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network.* Princeton University Press, 2015.

---. "The Strange Familiar": Structure, Infrastructure, and Adichie's *Americanah.*" *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 61, no. 4, 2015, pp. 587-605.

Levine, George. *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterly*. The University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Lloyd, Vincent. *In Defense of Charisma.* Columbia University Press, 2018.

Lovink, Geert. *Networks Without a Cause: A Critique of Social Media*. Polity Press, 2012.

Lukács, Georg. *The Historical Novel.* The University of Nebraska Press, 1983.

---. *Studies in European Realism.* Howard Fertig, 2002.

Lynch, Deirdre. "A Character of Charter, in Five Metaphors." *A Companion to the English Novel*, edited by Stephen Arata, Madigan Haley, J. Paul Hunter, and Jennifer Wicke, John Wiley and Sons, 2015, pp. 209-224.

Mack, Renata. *The Digital Divide: Standing at the Intersection of Race and Technology*. Carolina Academic Press, 2001.

Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New* Media. The MIT Press, 2001.

Marx, John. *Geopolitics and the Anglophone Novel, 1890-2011*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Maslin, Janet. "Braiding Hair and Issues About Race." Rev. of *Americanah*, by Chimamanda Adichie, *The New York Times*, 19 May 2013, p. C1.

Mbembe, Achille. "The Internet is Afropolitan." *The Chimurenga Chronic*, Interview with Bregtje van der Haak, 17 Mar 2015, http://chimurengachronic.co.za/the-internet-is-afropolitan/. Accessed 8 May 2018.

McGlotten, Shaka. *Virtual Intimacies: Media, Affect, and Queer Sociality*. SUNY Press, 2013.

McGurl, Mark. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing.* Harvard University Press, 2009.

McKeon, Michael. *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740.* Johns Hopkins University Press, Anniversary edition, 2002.

McNeill. "Life Bytes: Six-Word Memoir and the Exigencies of Auto/Tweetographies." *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online*, edited by Anna Poletti and Julie Rak, University of Wisconsin Press, 2014, pp.144-166.

Meyer, Robinson. "Teju Cole's Favorite Images From 'The Time of the Game.'" 15 Jul. 2014. https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/07/teju-coles-favorite-images-from-the-time-of-the-game/374463/. Accessed 21 May 2018.

Michaels, Walter Benn. "Neoliberal Aesthetics: Fried, Rancière and the Form of the Photograph." *Nonsite.org*, Emory College of Arts and Sciences, 25 Jan. 2011. http://nonsite.org/article/neoliberal-aesthetics-fried-ranciere-and-the-form-of-the-photograph. Accessed 8 Feb. 2015.

Morais, Betsy. “Sharing is Caring is Sharing.” *The New Yorker* (online edition), 30 Oct. 2013, https://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/sharing-is-caring-is-sharing. Accessed 30 Apr 2018.

Morrison, Aimée. “Facebook and Coaxed Affordances.” *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online*, ed. Anna Poletti and Julie Rak. University of Wisconsin Press, 2014, pp. 112-131.

Moretti, Franco. *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature.* Verso, 2014.

---. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. Verso, 1987.

Nakamura, Lisa and Peter A. Chow-White. “Introduction— Race and Digital Technology: Code, the Color Line, and the Information Society.” *Race After the Internet*, edited by Lisa Nakamura and Peter A. Chow-White, Routledge, 2012, pp. 1-18.

Newton, Adam Zachary. *Narrative Ethics.* Harvard University Press, 1995.

Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings.* Harvard University Press, 2005.

Nussbaum, Martha. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature.* Oxford University Press, 1992.

---. *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*. Beacon Press, 1997.

O'Brien, Kathleen. “I Can't Jump Ship from Facebook Yet.” *The New York Times*, Sunday Review Section, 14 Apr 2018, SR5.

Ozeki, Ruth. *All Over Creation*. Penguin Books, 2004.

---. *A Tale for the Time Being*. Penguin Books, 2013.

---. *My Year of Meats: A Novel*. Penguin Books, 1999.

Pahl, Miriam. "Afropolitanism as critical consciousness: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's and Teju Cole's internet presence." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2016, pp. 73-87.

Palumbo-Liu, David. *The Deliverance of Others: Reading Literature in a Global Age*. Duke University Press, 2012.

Plato. "The Republic," translated by G.M.A. Grube and Rev. C.D.C. Reeve. *Complete Works*, edited by John M. Cooper, Hackett Publishing Company, 1997, 971-1223.

Plotz, John. "Is Realism Failing? The Rise of Secondary Worlds." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 50, no. 3, 2017, pp. 426-35.

Poster, Mark. "Cyber Democracy: The Internet and the Public Sphere," *Reading Digital Culture*, edited by David Trend, Wiley-Blackwell, 2001, pp. 259-271.

Punday, Daniel. *Writing at the Limit: The Novel in the New Media Ecology*. University of Nebraska Press, 2012.

Quayson, Ato. "I Can, Therefore I Shall: Identifications from the Novel to Facebook." *Arcade: Literature, the Humanities, and the World.* 3 Dec 2013. http://arcade.stanford.edu/blogs/i-can-therefore-i-shall-identifications-novel-facebook. Accessed 1 Aug. 2016.

Raboteau, Emily. Rev. of *Americanah,* by Chimamanda Adichie. *The Washington Post* 10 June 2013. Print.

Rainie and Wellman. *Networked: The New Social Operating System*. The MIT Press, 2012.

Rancière, Jacques. "The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics." *Critical Horizons*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2006, pp. 1-20.

Redfield, Marc. "The Bildungsroman." *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature* (online edition) edited by David Scott Kastan, 2006.

Rettberg, Jill Walker. *Blogging*. Polity Press, 2008.

Richardson, Samuel. *Pamela, Or Virtue Rewarded.* Oxford University Press, 2008.

Robbins, Bruce. *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress*. New York University Press, 1999.

---. "Information and Emotion: On the Ambitions of Contemporary Fiction" in *The Romanic Review* vol. 100, no. 1-2, 2009, pp. 93-102.

---. "The Sweatshop Sublime." *The Public Intellectual*, edited Helen Small. Blackwell Publishing, 2002. 179-202.

Rosen, Jeremy. "An Insatiable Market for Minor Characters." *New Literary History*, vol. 46, no. 1, Winter 2015, pp. 143-163.

---. "Minor Characters Have Their Day: The Imaginary and Actual Politics of a Contemporary Genre." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 54, no. 1, Spring 2013, pp. 139-174.

Rowe, John Carlos. "The Reader Writes Back: Social Media and the Novel." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 50, no. 3, 2017, pp. 452-464.

Rubenstein, Michael; Bruce Robbins; and Sophia Beal. "Infrastructuralism: An Introduction." *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 61, no. 4, Winter 2015, pp. 575-586.

Ruttenberg, Nancy. "Introduction: Is the Novel Democratic?" *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, no. 47, vol. 1, 2014, pp. 1-10.

Sassen, Saskia and Robert Latham. *Digital Formations: IT and New Architectures in the Global Realm*. Princeton University Press, 2005.

Schmitt, Arnaud. "Making the Case for Self-narration Against Autofiction." *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, vol. 25, no. 1, Summer 2010, pp. 122-137.

Selisker, Scott. "The Bechdel Test and the Social Form of Character Networks." *New Literary History*, vol. 46, no. 3, Summer 2015, pp. 505-523.

Servon, Lisa. *Bridging the Digital Divide: Technology, Community, and Public Policy*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2002

Shaviro, Steven. *Connected, or What It Means to Live in the Network Society*. University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

Shopin, Pavlo. "Unpacking the Suitcases: Autofiction and Metaphor in Herta Müller's *Atemschaukel*." *seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, vol. 50, no. 2, May 2014, pp. 197-215.

Shteyngart, Gary. *Super Sad True Love Story: A Novel*. Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2011.

Slaughter, Joseph. *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law*. Fordham University Press, 2007.

Sontag, Susan. *On Protography*. Picador, 2001.

Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments.* Ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L.Macfie. Liberty Fund, 1982.

Smith, Philip. "Culture and Charisma: Outline of a Theory." *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 43, 2000, pp. 101-111.

Smith, Rachel Greenwald. *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism.* Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Smith, Zadie and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. "Between the Lines: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie with Zadie Smith." *Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture*. 19 Mar. 2014. https://livestream.com/schomburgcenter/events/2831224. Accessed 11 Jun. 2016.

Spoth, Daniel and Cleo Warner. "The Seeds of Chaos: Spontaneity as Resistance in the Work of Ruth Ozeki" *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture (1900-Present)*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2015.

Starr, Marlo. “Beyond Machine Dreams: Zen, Cyber-, and Transnational Feminisms in *A Tale for the Time Being.*” *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2016, pp. 99-122.

Steiner, Peter. “On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog.” *The New Yorker*, 5 July 1993, pp. 61.

Sterne, Laurence. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman.* Norton Critical Editions, 1980.

Stoeffel, Kat. “The Problem Child: Why Won’t America Publish Heti’s Second Novel?” *The Observer,* 16 December 2010. http://observer.com/2010/12/the-problem-child-why-wont-america-publish-sheila-hetis-second-novel/. Accessed 20 Aug. 2016.

Su, John. *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel.* Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Tamir, Diana I. and Jason P. Mitchell. “Intrinsic Value of Self-Disclosure.” *Proceedings of the National Academic of Sciences*, vol. 109, no. 21, 2012, pp. 8038-43.

Tanoukhi, Nirvana. “The Movement of Specificity.” *PMLA*, vol. 128, no. 3, 2013, pp. 668-674.

---. “The Scale of World Literature.” *New Literary History*, vol. 39, no. 3, Summer 2008, pp. 599-617.

Taussig, Michael. *Mimesis and Alterity*. Routledge, 2003.

@tejucole. “1. Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. Pity. A signature strike leveled the florist’s.” *Twitter*, 14 January 2013, 12:04pm, https://twitter.com/tejucole/status/290867008776597504

---. “2. Call me Ishmael. I was a young man of military age. I was immolated at my wedding. My parents are inconsolable.” *Twitter*, 14 Jan 2013, 12:06pm, https://twitter.com/tejucole/status/290867500151881728

---. “3- The banality of evil transmutes into the banality of sentimentality. The world is nothing but a problem to be solved by enthusiasm.” *Twitter*, 8 Mar 2012, 12:35pm, https://twitter.com/tejucole/status/177809821712650240.

---. “3. Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather. A bomb whistled in. Blood on the walls. Fire from heaven.” *Twitter*, 14 Jan 2013, 12:08pm, https://twitter.com/tejucole/status/290868089879416832

---. “4. I am an invisible man. My name is unknown. My loves are a mystery. But an unnamed aerial vehicle from a secret location has come for me.” *Twitter*, 14 January 2013, 12:11pm, https://twitter.com/tejucole/status/290868849077796864

---. “5. Someone must have slandered Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything truly wrong, he was killed by a Predator drone.” *Twitter*, 14 January 2013, 12:13pm, https://twitter.com/tejucole/status/290869171082903552

---. “5- The White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege.” *Twitter*, 8 Mar 2012, 12:37pm, https://twitter.com/tejucole/status/177810262223626241?lang=en.

---. “6. Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His torso was found, not his head.” *Twitter*, 14 January 2013, 12:15pm, https://twitter.com/tejucole/status/290869704984240129

---. “7. Mother died today. The program saves American lives.” *Twitter*, 14 Jan 2013, 12:16pm, https://twitter.com/tejucole/status/290870071662891008

---. “Everything we know so far about drone strikes: http://www.propublica.org/article/everything-weknow-so-far-about-drone-strikes” *Twitter*, 14 Jan 2013, 12:18pm, https://twitter.com/tejucole/status/290870451956236288

---. “Seven short stories about drones.” *Twitter*, 14 Jan 2013, 12:02pm, https://twitter.com/tejucole/status/290866560309030913?lang=en

Toivanen, Anna-Leena. “Emailing/Skyping Africa: New Technologies and Communication Gaps in Contemporary African Women’s Fiction.” *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 47, no. 4, pp. 135-161.

Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other.* Basic Books, 2012.

---. *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age.* Penguin Books, 2016.

Ty, Eleanor. “A Universe of Many Worlds’: An Interview with Ruth Ozeki.” *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.*, vol. 38, no. 3, fall 2013, pp. 160-171.

Van Dijck, Jose. *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media.* Oxford University Press, 2013.

---. *The Deepening Divide: Inequality and the Information Society*. SAGE Publications, 2006.

Vermeule, Blakey. *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters?* The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Vermeulen, Pieter. “Flights of Memory: Teju Cole’s *Open City* and the Limits of Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism.” *Journal of Modern Literature* vol. 37, no. 1, 2013, pp. 40-57.

Vogler, Candace. “The Moral of the Story.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2007, pp. 5-35.

Walkowitz, Rebecca. *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature*. Columbia University Press, 2015.

---. “Comparison Literature.” *New Literary History*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2009, pp. 567-582.

Wall, Cynthia. *The Prose of Things.* University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Wallace, David Foster. "E Unibus Pluram," *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 13, no. 2, Summer 1993, pp. 151-194.

Walzer, Michael. *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1994.

Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding.* University of California, Notations Edition, 1974.

Weber, Max. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive* Sociology, translated by Ephraim Fischoff, Hans Gerth, A.M. Henderson, Ferdinand Kolegar, C. Wright Mills, Talcott Parsons, Max Rheinstein, Guenther Roth, Edward Shils, Claus Wittich, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. University of California Press, 1978.

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford University Press, 1978.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. A.J. Matsell, 1833.

Woloch, Alex. *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel.* Princeton University Press, 2003.

Wood, James. "Human, All Too Inhuman." *The New Republic*. 24 Jul. 2000. https://newrepublic.com/article/61361/human-inhuman. Accessed 14 May 2015.

Worthington, Marjorie. "Fiction in the 'Post-Truth' Era: The Ironic Effects of Autofiction." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 58, no. 5, pp. 471-483.

Wye, Deborah. *Louise Bourgeois: An Unfolding Portrait.* The Museum of Modern Art, 2017.

Zunshine, Lisa. *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel*. Ohio State University Press, 2006.