The language of the most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) combines doom-laden scenarios with more optimistic opportunities for adaptation and mitigation. Acting as an authority on the subject, the IPCC establishes what *should* be the proper response to the statistics and analysis contained within the report—a response that is attentive to the urgent nature of the environmental crisis. "Act now, or else" is the most prevalent theme throughout the report, serving a dual function: to describe the current conditions and what gave rise to them, but also to extrapolate data sets to anticipate a future that is bleaker and more desolate than today's. Reports such as this figure prominently in the construction of fantasies—if you are a denier—or, for the more apocalyptic minded, soon-to-be realities resulting from climate change specifically, and environmental disasters more broadly. Strangely, as the metanarrative of climate change becomes increasingly popularized, predicted future realities become inherently bound up in descriptions of the present moment. The environmental disasters that reports such as the IPCC's warn against are simultaneously forthcoming, but also always already happening.

Similarly, there appears to be a dual function in the way the term Anthropocene is invoked in critical conversation today. Scientifically, it describes the current geological period, marked by the direct impact that humans have on the health of the environment. Coined in 2000 by Paul J. Crutzen, the Anthropocene era began in the eighteenth century, a date chosen because "…during the past two centuries, the global effects of human activities have become clearly noticeable…Such a starting date also coincides with James Watt's invention of the steam engine in 1784" (Crutzen 17-8). Despite its scientific origins in a specific geological era, it is now popularly employed to denote the inevitable end of the human species. The Anthropocene is the debut of the human in the planet's geological affairs, but also the period in which man becomes

the true tragic hero of history in an ironic, because reversed, Hegelian teleology ending not in Absolute Knowledge, but his self-wrought absolute destruction. With the increasingly dire reports on the environment, the spirit of scientific advancement heralded by the Enlightenment gives way to the "fully enlightened earth" that "is radiant with disaster triumphant" (Horkheimer & Adorno 1). The desire to maintain the divide between culture and nature succumbs under the overwhelming evidence of the species acting as a geophysical force. Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam series channels the idea of a "fully enlightened earth" as she presents readers with a future world in which scientific progress

The MaddAddam trilogy is a speculative account of a future world in which the ubiquitous use of technologies leads to an increasingly violent and untenable instrumentalization of nature. In a world where political and governmental institutions have disbanded, clearing the way for a society ruled by corporations specializing in bioengineering, the breakdown of a coherent governing body allows the corporations to operate without any oversight. As such, the only limitations that the scientists have are the projects they are able to imagine and bring to fruition.[1] The ethically unsound practices of the corporations are continually reaffirmed as consumers seek out the latest products. Focusing on the first two novels of the MaddAddam series, I will argue that the violent instrumentalization of nature depicted is rooted in the human subject's inability to come to terms with a personal death in light of the greater death of the species that the Anthropocene calls to attention. *Oryx and Crake* (2004) presents a society that seeks to transcend a fear of death and achieve immortality on a symbolic level. This pursuit necessitates a passive acceptance of a deteriorating world. To accept the information inherent in

[1] While many of the technologies present in the book may seem farfetched, Margaret Atwood has stated on several occasions, including in the acknowledgement to the first novel, that all of the scientific techniques and their products are possible to some degree in the current moment. It is for this reason that Atwood insists that her novels are not a works of science fiction, but rather speculative fiction.

the formulation of the Anthropocene, all of its statistical baggage of doom and gloom, is an acknowledgement of both personal finitude and the precarity of the planet we inhabit. Thinking through the Anthropocene, then, requires a deeper understanding of the human's intimate relations with the planet's ecology. The second novel in the trilogy, *Year of the Flood* (2009), presents readers with an alternative to the technocratic driven society explored in *Oryx and Crake*. The characters, ideas, and events that often time stand in contrast to *Oryx and Crake*, and the novel suggests possible ways for both acknowledging and thinking through the intersections of individual and collective death.

Oryx and Crake tells the story of two children whose parents work at one of the largest scientific corporations, HealthWyzer. The novel navigates between a bildungsroman, as the two boys grow up in the HealthWyzer Compound, and a post-apocalyptic novel in which a lethal pandemic was deliberately unleashed on the human population. It is the apocalyptic aspect of the novel, both the events and worldview that are necessary for the apocalypse to occur, which will be the focus of my analysis. Before moving too quickly into the content of the novel, let us first establish the theoretical framework that will inform my reading of the text.

Hyperobjects and the Anthropocene

Understanding the Anthropocene requires an acknowledgement of intersubjective and interobjective relations across space and time, as the present moment is intimately entwined with past events, events with resonances lasting long after the initial event. The Geological Society of London recently released a report stating that as of November 2013, it would take one hundred thousand years for the global climate to return to a pre-industrial state if all carbon emissions were cut. Such a vast time span cannot truly be comprehended, and the objects the Anthropocene

require us to consider—global warming, nuclear fallout/waste, melting polar icecaps, evolution—are entities that Timothy Morton calls "hyperobjects." Hyperobjects have several properties in common:

> They are *viscous*, which means that they "stick" to beings that are involve with them. They are *nonlocal*…any "local manifestation" of a hyperobject is not directly the hyperobject. They involve profoundly different temporalities than the human-scale ones we are used to…Hyperobjects occupy a high-dimensional phase space that results in their being invisible to humans for stretches of time. And they exhibit their effects *interobjectively*; that is, they can be detected in a space that consists of interrelationships between aesthetic properties of objects. (Morton 1)

An awareness of and engagement with hyperobjects reveals that there is no escaping their "zones of aesthetic causality." They are aesthetic because a hyperobject only reveals itself through the co-emergent properties that come into being through the interrelationships between objects—the object that is the human subject is embedded within the zone that the hyperobject global warming emits, so that the human's experience of the hyperobject is never global warming qua global warming (or any hyperobject qua hyperobject), but rather an aesthetic, sensuous experience particular to that moment's interobjective relations. Scaling this idea down to my interaction with the blue pen sitting on my desk might help explain interobjective relations. At this moment, my pen is a particular shade of blue, a shade that is dependent on its relational position to both the light source of the room and my eyes. As I move my pen to another spot on my desk, I perceive a darker shade of blue. Turning off the light reveals yet another shade of blue. Yet the pen remains the same pen throughout the entire experience. Its aesthetic feature—in this case, the visible color of the pen itself—comes into being via the light that reflects off of its

surface, which my brain then translates into a particular color. This is not to say that the pen's visible color is dependent on me, the viewer, to bring it into being, but that its aesthetic features co-emerge as my eyes take the pen into account.

Entanglement means not just the fact that all human relations are bound up within hyperobjects, but also that there is no getting "outside" of these massive entities. This sense of interconnectedness, Morton argues, is the loss of a coherent, knowable world. In much the same way that the Anthropocene challenges long held conceptions of the nature/culture divide, hyperobjects close the gap between humans and the non-human world. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that the articulation of the Anthropocene creates an ontological void. By implicating humans as the prime actors in natural history, the Anthropocene forces a reconfiguration of the human's ontological position in the world. We have become a geophysical force, a non-human collective, and in this new mode of existence "we are no longer simply a form of life that is endowed with a sense of ontology…we have developed a form of collective existence that has no ontological dimension" (Chakrabarty 13). Prior to the Anthropocene, Chakrabarty argues, the human subject held a relational understanding of the world with a stable frame including the foreground of human culture, set against the background of "nature." He suggests that this lack of an ontological dimension manifests as a void, an emptiness that arises from our inability to have an unmediated experience of ourselves as a geophysical force. The Anthropocene ruptures any distinction between foreground and background, and our ability to coherently frame the world falls away. We can see that both the Anthropocene and hyperobjects challenge traditional ontologies, and while Chakrabarty insists that an ontological void exists when thinking about humans on a global scale, Morton provides ways of filling that void. His work on hyperobjects

adds to the growing body of work on speculative realisms generally, but object oriented ontology specifically.

If, as both Morton and Chakrabarty assert, the effects of suddenly finding oneself to be a member of an unimaginably vast network of not just the entire human species, but all entities, hyperobjects included, is radically unsettling, then how might we navigate through this?[2] Scientific knowledge has effectively severed answers to questions on the meaning of life from transcendent sources. The question of meaning, then, as Simon Critchley argues, "becomes a matter of finding a meaning to human finitude" (Critchley 29). To conceptualize my death is to think of a future, a future without me. Yet a paradox arises, as it is precisely the cessation of thought that constitutes my death, and thus all representations of thinking beyond death are misrepresentations. Even before we expand our consideration to a larger collective, there exists at the hyper-local level of the individual the incomprehensible notion of personal death. In the Anthropocene, which is also the time when hyperobjects are made visible by the tools of modernity, death takes on an expansive dimension in that it transcends the individual and becomes a collective death. As described earlier, both the Anthropocene and hyperobjects challenge the notion of individual subjectivity, and require thinking beyond the self to collectives as large as the human race and the entire planet's ecology. An individual's relationship to his or her own personal death is subsumed by the death of the species that is inherent in ideas of the Anthropocene and hyperobjects. Turning now to *Oryx and Crake,* I will employ Morton's work on hyperobjects and the idea of the Anthropocene to show how they are present within the text.

[2] In *Politics of Nature* (2004), Bruno Latour proposes that a truly political form of ecology involves the formation of collectives in which new "propositions" (actants/objects/entities, both human and non-human) must be carefully considered and accounted for before being granted admittance into the collective. Latour's propositions fail to account for the ways in which hyperobjects appropriate entities into their own collective without due process.

As I will show, presence does not necessarily entail acknowledgement, and it is this lack of acknowledgement, I argue, that results in the apocalyptic event.

Oryx and Crake

Much of the criticism on *Oryx and Crake* is concerned with the role of scientific progress and anthropocentrism in bringing about what Allison Dunlap calls the "eco-dystopia" of the novel. Dunlap argues that Atwood cautions against the human exceptionalism that fuels the desire of bioengineers to manipulate genomes, irrespective of environmental or ethical considerations. Stephen Dunning reads the novel through a Freudian lens, noting the dangers of the ego that manifest in Crake's vision. Man's manipulation of *technics,* Dunning argues, transform "what Freud took to be the permanent features of our psychological landscape" (Dunning 95). Grayson Cooke argues similarly, broadening technics to include language and symbolic meaning making. He sees the novel as exposing "a deeper seam at which the material and the semiotic meet: the biotechno-logical and capitalistic manipulation of nature, technology, and the human" (Cooke 113). In configuring Jimmy as the "last man," Roger Davis reads Jimmy/Snowman as invoking the "purity of whiteness and the optimism of science and progress of European Enlightenment" (Davis 237). Jimmy/Snowman ultimately fails in this optimistic vision, as his inability to lead at the end of the novel reflects his resentment of the responsibilities he carries. Chung-Hao Ku and Dannette DiMarco both read Crake as the quintessential *Homo faber*, revealing the violence inherent in his instrumentalist approach towards achieving his own ends. While these critical analyses are certainly useful in engaging with the text's occupation with scientific progress and anthropocentrism, they fail to synthesize ecological considerations with human meaning making, which I believe to be explicitly linked in the novel. Before moving on, let us first acclimate to the lay of the land.

The two young protagonists, Jimmy and Crake, grow up in the HealthWyzer Compound. As with all corporation Compounds in Atwood's world, HealthWyzer is a self-contained enclosure. Within the walls of the Compound are schools, housing sections, shopping malls, hospitals and recreational facilities. In short, there is no reason or incentive that a person would need to leave his or her particular compound. In fact, movement into and out of compounds is highly regulated by the CorpSeCorps. Functioning as the de facto policing body, the CorpSeCorps' major role is preventing any hostile bioforms—bacterial or viral diseases—from entering the Compounds, as well as ensuring that a corporation's valuable research and development data does not exit the Compound. Grayson Cooke correctly observes that the Compounds are "safe, controlled, biologically monitored, and secure, and what they produce is done under the guise of an altruistic desire to better human life" (111). From companies such as HealthWyzer, OrganInc, and RejoovenEsense (which specialize in the production and marketing of designer drugs), to companies such as ChickieNobs Nubbins and SoyOBoy (which manufacture laboratory-produced food), there is a specialized containment of those who opt into the ideologies of a scientific program which privileges capital gain in favor of ethical limitations. Snowman recounts visiting Crake at the prestigious Watson-Crick University, where the brightest students, those considered "number people," are recruited to work on projects such as ChickieNobs. As Jimmy and Crake enter one of the NeoAgricultural labs, Jimmy is shown "a large bulblike object that seemed to be covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin. Out of it came twenty thick fleshy tubes, and at the end of each tube was another bulb growing" (Atwood 202). Crake explains the organic mass is a chicken, genetically modified to produce only breasts or drum-sticks, up to twelve at a time. Unrecognizable as a chicken, the abomination lacks a head, but has only "a mouth opening at the top", where "they dump the nutrients in. No eyes or beak or

anything, they don't need those" (202). The animal's ethical status has been considered, only so far as "the animal-welfare freaks won't be able to say a word, because this thing feels no pain" (203). Form yields to function, and the ideal form in the moment of global capitalism is a production efficiency that yields a greater profit. Let us now turn to Crake, the mastermind behind the catastrophe.

Upon graduating from Watson-Crick, Crake is hired by HealthWyzer, a company that develops not only therapeutic medicines, but also covertly creates new diseases. The diseases are inserted into over-the-counter vitamins, which allows for rapid diffusion among the population. Crake casually asserts, "Naturally they develop the antidotes at the same time as they're customizing the bugs, but they hold those in reserve, they practice the economics of scarcity, so they're guaranteed high profits" (Atwood 211). This business model is not too far off from the way pharmaceutical companies are presently operating. Zohydro, the first hydrocodone-only opioid, was recently approved by the FDA despite the risk it being abused. It is no coincidence that the manufacturing company, Alkermes, has the solution for opiate addiction—earlier this year they released a medication that treats opioid addiction and prevents relapse. Grayson Cooke argues that this is contemporary society's version of the *pharmakon*.[3] He notes that as pharmaceutical companies and their marketing/branding firms become more integrated, "questions regarding 'what is a disease?' and 'what is a cure?' are increasingly complex and even absurd" (Cooke 113). Despite the therapeutic veneer of HealthWyzer and Alkermes, both manipulate the consumers for their own profit. It is in this context that Crake develops the BlyssPlus pill that protects the user against all sexually transmitted diseases, provides an unlimited supply of libido, and prolongs youth (Atwood 294). The success of the pill relies on

[3] Originally from Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus,* Derrida later takes it up in his deconstruction of several of Plato's texts in "Plato's Pharmacy," (1981).

the desirability of its effects as well as a sense of immortality that will "sell itself" (294). Human finitude becomes mediated in consuming the pill, a euphoric feeling, no doubt, that in turn increases the already prevalent negligence of the non-human world. The narrative plays out this negligence while also enacting the elusive subjective interaction with hyperobjects.

This subjective interaction with hyperobjects manifests in specific ways within the representation of the environment. Throughout the novel we are given momentary glimpses into the state of the environment. Pollution appears on the first page, its aesthetic dimension described in a sunrise: "On the eastern horizon there's a greyish haze, lit now with a rosy, deadly glow" (Atwood 3). Only observable when interacting with the sun's light at dawn, the pollutants in the air recede from view as Earth rotates, yet their presence remains. The "greyish haze" is not a contained entity that exists "out there," in the observable distance, but in recognizing the uncanny nature of hyperobjects, air-pollution included, we find that the observer in the story is enmeshed interobjectively with the pollution. The "deadly glow" suffuses Snowman's surroundings, fills his lungs, and reveals the nonlocality of hyperobjects. The pollution gives way to the hyperobject global warming. Snowman, living on the shores of the ocean near Boston, must contend with rising ocean levels and increased temperatures. Again, hyperobjects are distributed across space and time, and so when the narrator reveals that "Noon is the worst, with its glare and humidity," which forces Snowman to retreat to the cover of the forest, he is not experiencing global warming qua global warming, but a local manifestation of it (Atwood 38). When the heat recedes it is not an indication of global warming's disappearance: "Global warming doesn't go golfing at the weekend. The gaps and ruptures are simply the *invisible presence* of the hyperobject itself, which looms around us constantly" (Morton 76). This momentary subjective experience of the hyperobject of global warming is an aspect Morton calls

"phasing." Objects phase between the aesthetic "foreground" and "background," moving from visible and felt presence to seeming absence. The hyperobjects mentioned above appear only in Snowman's post-catastrophe narrative. Functioning as isolated worlds, the Compounds preclude any consideration of the dynamic environment outside the gates.

While as a reader I am able to point to the presence of hyperobjects in the novel, their presence is meaningless without taking into account the role of the hyperobject in the novel itself. That is, hyperobjects in the novel act as invisible entities whose downward causation impacts the narrative, yet remain unacknowledged. The technophilic society presented in *Oryx and Crake* ensures that a cornucopian worldview persists, reinscribing the attitude of disavowal towards hyperobjects.[4] The narrative, then, is shaped by hyperobjects, and the scientists of the corporations respond not by acknowledging, but rather by eschewing their role as perpetrators in bringing into existence they hyperobjects. It is precisely this absence of engagement with hyperobjects that is symptomatic of a preoccupation with mediating an individual fear of death. To find oneself inside of a hyperobject's zone of aesthetic causality, and to be aware of this, requires conceiving the world with an entirely new set of relations. This entails a displacement from man's pampered position of privilege—to understand that the notion of man as "the paragon of animals," is an untenable idea perpetuated by an Enlightenment belief that the material world is there for man's taking. Even more unsettling is that we are brought into unsettling proximity with our own finitude, which for Cary Wolfe, working through Derrida's work on ethics, is the "vulnerability felt on the basis of inability, in the non-power at the heart of power" (Wolfe 82). In other words, it is vulnerability felt in the presence of entities whose

[4] Cornucopians hold that scientific progress will provide the technologies necessary to support an ever-increasing population on earth. Humanity has unlimited room for growth, and all material/subsistence considerations will be solved by science.

timescales absorb and diminish any significance that is brought to bear on the scope of human life. By experiencing finitude outside of the self—through fictional narratives or media outlets—we indefinitely defer the nihilism stemming from the unknowable phenomenology of dying because "it is a state of affairs about which one could neither have an adequate intention nor find intuitive fulfillment" (Critchley 85).

An attunement to the threat of hyperobjects, coupled with the always already existing fear of individual mortality results in a double dose of nihilism that must be mediated and kept at bay. While the work of deferring thoughts of both individual and collective death is evident on a number of occasions throughout the novel, there is one scene in particular that I wish to explore. Claire Colebrooke, in her essay "Earth Felt Wound: the Affective Divide" claims that modern day Western society is suffering from "hyper-hypo-affective disorder." Images meant to elucidate affective responses invade and pervade our visual field, whether by choice—the media I choose to consume—or forced on me via advertisements that greatly rely on affective responses. The rapid rate of affect consumption leads to "affect fatigue," which entails a dampening of affective response. As affect consumption becomes more ubiquitously integrated into daily life, there is a decreased lag time between the embodied, sensual experience and somatic integration. Deep attention to the affect, then, becomes derailed as the onslaught of affect ensures little time to process.

Hyper-hypo-affective disorder manifests in *Oryx and Crake* as Jimmy and Crake, throughout their friendship, spend several hours a day surfing the internet. With the aid of a credit card number stolen from Crake's uncle, the two teenagers are able to access a number of live feeds broadcasting acts of violence against both humans and nonhuman animals. Their response to viewing nonhuman animals being tortured was that it "quickly grew repetitious"

(Atwood 85). The repetition desensitizes Jimmy and Crake from having a meaningful affective response to the videos. So they would move on to hedsoff.com, a site that broadcasts public executions in foreign countries. Far from being passive spectators, the boys would cheer and jeer along with the large crowds present at the execution. In viewing the event from behind the safety and comfort of a computer monitor, Jimmy and Crake's experience of the beheadings not only displaces the event to a distant geographical location, but also fictionalizes it through the act of distancing, thereby negating its potential capacity for emotional import. Animal cruelty, violence, and death have been narrativized and fictionally depicted so often that the "dominant experience is that of intensities. A culture of shock and awe allows us to sit before a screen and enjoy the affects of horror, terror, mourning, desire, disgust, and excitement without sense" (Colebrook 51). Writing nearly 80 years prior to Colebrook, Walter Benjamin poignantly asserts that humanity's "self-alienation has reached such a degree that it is capable of experiencing its won destruction as an aesthetic enjoyment of the highest order" (Benjamin 306). The aesthetic enjoyment functions to displace the realization of such an event to a fictional or future realm, always deferred to the horizon of improbable events. Returning to a concept mentioned earlier, these highly mediated experiences of tragic events function as a *pharmakon*; the therapeutic aspect rests in the deferral of the nihilism that would result in a true engagement with human finitude- both on the level of the individual and of the species. Yet this deferral, as the term implies, will always succumb with the arrival of death. In becoming so highly mediated, the inability to conceptualize death fosters passive denial over the state of the environment. So again, the novel is explicit in the ways individuals collectively seek to defer the acceptance of mortality through consumption—both of pharmaceutical drugs, and of affects associated with death. This allows the reports on the environment, such as the IPPC's mentioned in the introduction, to go

unheeded and remain penumbral white noise. As we will see, Crake recognizes the pervasive inability to acknowledge implications that the Anthropocene entails.

Returning now to Crake's BlyssPlus pill, let us examine his solution to the concerns addressed above. Crake reveals to Jimmy that the pill, unbeknownst to those taking it, also functions to sterilize the user, preventing any further reproduction. Crake reasons:

> As a species we're in deep trouble, worse than anyone is saying. They're afraid to release the stats because people might just give up, but take it from me, we're running out of space-time. Demand for resources has exceeded supply for decades in marginal geopolitical areas, hence the famines and droughts; but very soon, demand is going to exceed supply *for everyone*. (Atwood 295)

Crake's seemingly altruistic vision for population control stems from unfavorable economic conditions. Yet he believes that the pill would confer large scale benefits not only to individuals, "but on society as a whole; and not just only on society, but on the planet " (294). Crake's acknowledgement of the hardships humanity faces in light of the rapidly depleting natural resources is reduced to a series of computations. Crake is a "numbers person," after all, and so his solution is to simply reduce the number of detrimental factors—the size of the human population. Crake describes this problems in terms of 'space-time." Clearly, he feels that extinction looms so large because humans are using up too many resources and taking up too much space-time—and they are doing this too quickly. Crake's sense of urgency here is implicit within his joining of the two terms—space and time can not be physically separated because they are being depleted in tandem. Thus, configuring them as distinct is not only beside the point, but it also requires more time and space than Crake suggests we they have. As a figure that embodies

scientific progress, Crake has a sufficiently twisted sense of ethics and possesses the freedom to research and develop without monetary restrictions. Through his research, Crake believes himself capable of rectifying the "deep trouble" humans are in. When Jimmy asks Crake how projects such as BlyssPlus are funded, Crake bluntly responds that "grief in the face of inevitable death…the wish to stop time. The human condition" (292). BlyssPlus may not be capable of altering the human condition. Crake recognizes that there is nothing that will prevent death, which is a strong concession for a scientist whose ambition is genocide of the human race. The BlyssPlus pill, as such, is only a temporary solution in the interim as the final component of Crake's plan takes shape.

Crake's therapeutic vision also involves the creation of a genetically modified humanoid species called the Crakers. Recruiting highly successful scientists to aid him in the "Paradice Project," Crake and his team modify and manipulate the neuro-physiological makeup of the human. A built in resistance to UV, the ability to digest unrefined plant materials, and possession of microbe resistance are a few of the physiological features implemented into the newly created genome (Atwood 304). Additionally, and perhaps more drastic than the quality of life updates, are the newly rewired neural networks:

> Gone were its destructive features, the features responsible for the world's current illnesses. For instance racism…the Paradice project people simply did not register skin colour. Hierarchy could not exist among them, because they lacked the neural complexes that would have created it, Their sexuality was not a constant torment to them, not a could of turbulent hormones: they came into heat at regular intervals, as did most mammals other than man. (305)

The solution is to strip ideological formation, and in a sense revert man back to a pre-historic state, but with all the trappings that modern-day bioengineering can afford. The most significant change to the Craker's makeup is the removal of the fear of death. Crake argues that immortality is merely a concept—"If you take 'mortality' as being, not death, but the foreknowledge of it and the fear of it, then 'immortality' is the absence of such fear," and through this logic, then, the absence of a fear of death is immortality" (303). While Crake does not mean that the absence of such a fear allows a person to live forever (true immortality), his logic implies that there is a liberating potential in precluding the foreknowledge of death. As such, there would be no language to conceptualize the actual event, and therefore no distinction could be made between "alive" and "not alive/dead" on the symbolic level. If we understand a function of hyperobjects and the Anthropocene to be that they inhibit a genuine engagement with collective death, then Crake's solution to the human condition seems also to be a solution to the problems inherent in thinking through hyperobjects and the Anthropocene.

Crake's genetic engineering prowess allows him to take a shortcut out of nihilism brought on by an enmeshed existence inside of hyperobjects. While hyperobjects and the Anthropocene challenge our ability to collectively understand ourselves, they also confer a sense of futility on the work of any person or collective attempt to "save the environment." The problem with this, Morton argues, is that the notion of productive work for the environment becomes unavoidably full of hypocrisy. "Hyperobjects make hypocrites of us all," Morton says (136). By this he means that any attempt to negotiate the problems of, for example, the hyperobject pollution, are ultimately ineffective. We find this most evident in "eco-friendly" products. To genuinely think that my purchase of "Endangered Species Chocolate," which promises that "10% of net profits are donated to help support species, habitat, and humanity," is

going to help the plight of leopards and jaguars is hypocritical. While a much more in-depth analysis of the contradictions inherent in this new wave of "green capitalism" can be done, it suffices that the hypocrisy resides in a failure to recognize the way the chocolate was produced, how the packaging materials were manufactured, the fuel that was burned in order for many components of the chocolate to wind up in Charlottesville, Virginia, etc. This hypocrisy and sense of futility lead to nihilism, which can only be cured "from within nihilism itself, from within the reified hyperobjects that we have in part created through that very technology, whose measurements are the products of the very latest, fastest, most complex performances of that same technology" (Morton 137). Morton suggests that there is no escaping nihilism, and that there are no shortcuts. To escape implies the potential existence outside the notion of hyperobjects. Crake fails to realize that the end of the human race does not entail the end of the Anthropocene. The viscous hyperobjects do not cease to exist without humans to measure, calculate and experience them. Hyperobjects stick to all other entities alike. The world the Crakers inherit will be as equally affected by these Hyperobjects.

The final step in Crake's plan, which only becomes known to Jimmy after the fact, is the insertion of a time-lapse virus into the BlyssPlus pill. Once the pill was distributed across the globe, the virus then became active. After the catastrophe Jimmy returns to the Paradice Project lab, where he finds Crake's computer "deliberately turned on." (346). Jimmy discovers that Crake "had developed a vaccine concurrently with the virus, but he had destroyed it prior to his death" (346). Jimmy had been unknowingly inoculated, allowing him to survive and live on into the post-apocalypse world as Snowman. Crake's recognition of the dire situation humanity must confronts now brings him face-to-face with death; not just his own, but that of the species as well. Crake recognizes and acknowledges humanity's inability to come to terms with death, and

yet his creation, BlyssPlus, only deepens the rift between self-knowledge and finitude. The rift results in passive inaction and continued depletion of the earth's resources, ultimately driving Crake to such extreme measures.

Crake's mind, attuned to the sciences and mathematics, allows him to reduce the entire species to a single factor in an unbalanced equation. In figuring humans as a single collective, Crake reifies the species in order to instrumentalize and act on behalf of the whole, which in the object oriented ontology sense means "*the reduction of a real object to its sensual appearance-for another object.* Reification is the reduction of one entity to another's *fantasy* about it" (Morton 119). To understand just exactly what this means we must first defend the autonomy of objects—hyperobjects included. This next section will be heavily influenced by Levi Bryant's *The Democracy of Objects* (2011), in which he proposes a flat ontology in which the dynamic interactions of objects are irreducible to one another.[5]

The philosophical tradition, beginning with Kant, is characterized by correlationism, which holds that experiences of beings are always experiences as they manifest *for us*, and claims can never be made about beings in-themselves, or beings apart from us. In contrast to this, Bryant's ontology holds that a subjective experience of an object is but a limited set of the broader local manifestations that an object actualizes in the world. Bryant's ontology is "designed to capture the context dependency—whether that context be internal or external—of the events an object produces in its manifestations" (Bryant 69). The manifestation of an object's qualities are not *for* a subject, and in this way both object oriented ontology (or speculative

[5] Flat ontology meaning that all objects produce difference in relation to one another, and thus are real, but exist on different scales.

realisms more broadly) and the anthropocene require us to imagine and confront being without sentience.

In an attempt to do justice to the complexity of Bryant's propositions without unnecessarily delving too deep into a tangential topic, we will limit our focus to one more aspect of his work. Via Deleuze's conception of a vertical ontology of depths, difference (events produced in the world) arises from the depths of the virtual. There are, then, at least two sides to every object—the actual side consisting of its qualities and extensities (how I sensuously experience the object), and the virtual side consisting of its potentialities (those properties which an object is capable of producing). Deleuze uses genes as an example, which function "as a contributor to the overall form that an actualized organism embodies from a set of differential relations and singularities that share no resemblance to the actualized organism (Bryant 106). Crake takes a limited set of features, which I'm referring to as the unfavorable factors, and reduces the complexity of human life to be contained strictly within the boundaries of these unfavorable factors. Crake's view of the object that is the human species is as it appears *for him.* He resorts to a correlationist position in which the complexity of the human collective is reduced to his experience of a limited set of that collective's qualities, closing off the virtual side that has not yet, or may not ever be actualized in the world. This premature foreclosure creates and reinforces the fantasy of humanity as a destructive species. In moving from correlationism to reification, Crake ultimately arrives at instrumentalization of the most violent kind.

The Waterless Flood

I would like to begin incorporating the themes and events of the second novel of the MaddAddam series, *Year of the Flood.* In contrast to the technocratic concerns of *Oryx and*

Crake, *Year* shifts focus to the overpopulated urban regions outside of the fortified Compounds. While the CorpSeCorp act as the enforcement agency within the Compounds, and regulate movement into and out of the sterile high-tech laboratories and living quarters, the "pleeblands" are, for the most part, left to operate without oversight. *Year* is centered around Sewage Lagoon, a particularly rough pleebland on the outskirts of the HealthWyzer compound.[6] Nestled within a series of abandoned buildings in Sewage Lagoon resides the God's Gardeners, eco-religious group headed by a number of "Adams" and "Eves." *Year* is neither a sequel nor a prequel of *Oryx and Crake,* but rather stands in parallel to it. The story focuses on two female characters, Ren and Toby, and like *Oryx and Crake* alternates between the post-catastrophe world, and memories of the past, prior to the pandemic. Before getting into the views of the Gardeners, I will highlight the strange parasitic relationship that exists between the compounds and the Pleeblands.

In *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy and Crake venture into the pleeblands around New York City to celebrate the successful creation of the BlyssPlus pill. On the way, Crake inoculates Jimmy because the pleeblands "were a giant Petri dish: a lot of guck and contagious plasm got spread around there. If you grew up surrounded by it you were more or less immune" (287). Crake's comparison of the Petri dish and the pleeblands is particularly apt, as the inhabitants of the pleeblands serve unknowingly as test subjects for the "health" products of the Compound corporations. Sarah Appleton argues that the corporations "rely upon a carefully premeditated market of, and for, death, a death hidden in the very products of consumption" (64). As mentioned earlier, this can be seen most explicitly in the branding and marketing of the

[6] The pleeblands are divided into neighborhoods, similar to neighborhood divisions in large cities. We will recall that HealthWyzer is the compound at which Crake and Jimmy worked prior to the BlyssPlus pandemic.

BlyssPlus pill that, despite its promise to dispel fears of death, ultimately causes death. This practice takes on explicitly neoliberal overtones, which is further reinforced by Crake:

> 'The best diseases, from a business point of view,' said Crake, 'would be those that cause lingering illnesses. Ideally—that is, for maximum profit—the patient should either get well or die just before all of his or her money runs out. It's a fine calculation.' (*O&C* 211)

The economy is driven not by the movement of manufactured goods, but of bioengineered diseases and their respective cures. A person's perception of their own mortality is effectively mediated in this biotech economy, as desire shifts from the accumulation of commodities to cosmetic enhancements that promise, for example, AnooYoo (a new you). One of *Year of the Flood's* central characters, Toby, is required to spend time outside of the EdenCliff Rooftop Garden (the Gardener's name for their home in Sewage Lagoon), working at AnooYoo Spa-in-the-Park. Customers would arrive "frightened by the first signs of droop and pucker," and leave:

> buffed and tightened and resurfaced, irradiated and despotted.
>
> But still frightened, because when might the whole problem—the whole *thing*—start happening to them again? The whole signs-of-mortality thing…Nobody likes it, thought Toby—being a body, a thing. Nobody wants to be limited in that way…
>
> If you really want to stay the same age you are now forever and ever, try jumping off the roof" death's a sure-fire method for stopping time. (*Year* 264)

The corporeal body acts as a constant reminder of individual mortality, and companies like AnooYoo prey upon the anxieties that their products and procedures incite within the minds of potential customers. What we have, then, is a parasitic relationship masquerading as a symbiotic

one. Toby's stance on this, as I will show in a moment, reflects the Gardener's broader disavowal of the biotech corporate practices in what can be characterized as an acceptance of nihilism.

In *Living in the End Times,* Slavoj Zizek argues that despite our collective knowledge and awareness of the implications of climate change, humanity has undertaken systematic methods of denial and mental withdrawal from this knowledge. God's Gardener's, however, have channeled their energy—both physical and mental—towards preparing for the impending changes. A Christian sect, the Gardener's perform a revisionist reading of the Bible that is fused with contemporary scientific knowledge and environmental concerns.[7] J. Brooks Bouson points out that alongside a green reading of the Bible, the Gardeners have all the components of an organized religion. They "listen to sermons, they sing hymns, they have special feast days and marriage and burial ceremonies, and they follow their own saints' calendar" (Bouson 18). The Gardener's congregation of saints includes: Saint Bashir Alouse, Saint Crick, Saint Eull of Wild Foods, Saint Jacques Cousteau, Saint E.O. Wilson, and Saint Dian Fossey among many others. The biblical excerpts, woven throughout the novel, function to not only provide insight into the Gardener's ideological worldview, but also serve as a history of the Gardeners as a whole. A celebration of "Creation Day" coincides with the formation of the God's Gardeners. On that day, a sermon "Spoken by Adam One", the leader of the group, attempts to resolve the conflicts between scientific knowledge and religious beliefs. The Gardeners are asked to remember the first words of God:

[7] In an interview with Sinclair McKay, Atwood asserts that she was not aware of the increasingly popular Green Bible.

> the Earth is without form, and void, and then God speaks Light into being. This is the moment that Science terms "The Big Bang," as if it were a sex orgy. Yet both accounts concur in their essence: Darkness; then, in an instant, Light. (*Year* 11-2)

Adam One, the leader of the organization, attempts to reconcile a scientific view of the world with "their sacramental view of the Life" (*Year* 240). Through this reconciliation, Adam One hopes to "push popular sentiment in a biosphere-friendly direction by pointing out the hazards of annoying God by a violation of His trust in our stewardship" (241). Much of the Gardener's belief system acts as a critique of the positions taken by Crake and his technocratic cronies.

Despite the difference between the Gardener's call for stewardship and Crake's instrumentalizing approaches, both share similar fundamental views on the deteriorating state of the world. Crake, believing the human race to have gone past the point of no return, deems it necessary to remove their harmful presence entirely. The Gardeners, however, take a much more passive approach to the ecological, political, and social problems confronting them. The language Adam One uses in his sermons is reflective and meditative, and never a call to action. He asks his congregation to "consider," "reflect," and "remember," as he speaks of the forthcoming doom. The Gardeners take up as their emblem the figure of Noah, "the chosen caregiver of the Species," and consider themselves to be "a plural Noah" who "have been called," and "forewarned" (*Year* 91). Recalling Morton and Chakrabarty's insistence that hyperobjects and the Anthropocene challenge our ability to think in terms of large collectives, the Gardeners have successfully navigated through this problem with their self-figuration as "a plural Noah." This designation is dually interesting in that the term does not imply many individuals acting in isolation—which would be plural Noahs, but rather a single vision composed of many individuals acting in unison, and working towards a common goal. Their

ability to conceptualize themselves as a unified collective is a necessary component in their understanding of their enmeshed existence with hyperobjects.

Although the Gardeners understand and conceptualize themselves as a single collective, and despite their grounding in religious doctrine, they do not believe themselves to be "chosen" by God. Celebrating the Feast of the Ark of the Covenant, Adam One tells the Gardeners:

> We can feel the symptoms of coming disaster as a doctor feels a sick man's pulse. We must be ready for the time when those who have broken trust with the Animals—yes, wiped them from the face of the Earth where God placed them—will be swept away by the Waterless Flood… (91)

Rather, their attunement to the planet's ecology allows for the practical understanding that society's practices are untenable. Unlike Crake, whose response to the world around him was to hole up in a laboratory and bioengineer the apocalypse, the Gardeners spend their time in the Edencliff Rooftop Garden, harvesting fruits and vegetables, biding their time, preparing for the impending apocalypse.

Toby, having been rescued by the Gardeners from dismal life of squalor in the pleeblands, first comes to experience the Rooftop Garden in a state of wonder. Compared to the violence and filth of the streets below, "it was so beautiful, with plants and flowers of many kinds she'd never seen before…Each petal and leaf was fully alive, shining with awareness of her" (43). The Gardeners have created a veritable green space which provides all the necessary foodstuffs. The Gardeners, and the space they inhabit, stands in stark contrast to both the Compounds and the rest of the pleeblands. The Gardeners are strict vegetarians—in part due to the religious restriction against eating flesh, but also on a more practical level, because in the speculative future Atwood creates, there is a scarcity of animal protein. That is, of course, animal

protein that was not created in a laboratory, such as ChickieNobs. Prior to Toby's life as a Gardener, she was an employee at a chain called SecretBurgers. Its name derives from the fact that "no one knew what sort of animal protein was actually in them," and as the company's slogan declares, "*Because Everyone Loves a Secret!*" (*Year* 33). As with many of the comic puns that the MaddAddam series contains, there is an upfront, face-value honesty to the unethical practice behind the production process.[8] And yet, chains like SecretBurgers continue to operate successfully. There is a similar unwillingness to engage with the implications of the Anthropocene, hyperobjects, and all the environmental disasters that they constitute and which are constituted by them. SecretBurger customers are aware of the questionable status of the meat they are consuming, yet continue to purchase and consume it. I know that driving my car contributes to climate change, but I continue to do so. The hyperobject global warming, existing on a time-scale of a hundred thousand years, negates the possibility of any meaningful personal ethical action. And while I am not claiming that the SecretBurger chain is a hyperobject, the conditions that necessitated the new meat industry can be directly linked to hyperobjects. As the land becomes increasingly arid due to the rise in temperature, the cost of fodder skyrockets, and results in a decrease of livestock.

Hyperobjects, Morton argues, turn us into hypocrites. The age of hyperobjects is the age of inescapable hypocrisy. No amount of personal, ethical action is meaningful when it comes to objects that last ten or 100 thousand years. He says "there is a radical asymmetry between the urgency and the passion and the horror that we feel when confronted with a hyperobject that

[8] This is reminiscent of the popular clothing store, Banana Republic. In political science, the term 'banana republic' is used to describe a country whose welfare greatly depends on the exporting of a single, limited resource. In this system, social classes become stratified, as the working class labors to produce the product, while the ruling elite exploit the labor force. For the retail clothing store, then, the clothing is manufactured using cheap labor large in China is then exported to the U.S. and sold at a large profit margin. Every purchase made explicitly reinforces the economic stratification.

could profoundly alter life on Earth" (135). While the scale and influence of hyperobjects increases collective knowledge of their persistent and long-lasting effects, any attempt to negate those effects becomes a futile endeavor. The God's Gardeners are fully conscious of this contradiction, and their awareness allows them to navigate through the nihilism. Their eschatology requires preparation for the end times. The Gardeners are instructed to construct Ararats—hidden and safe havens that contain provisions that will see the Gardeners through the initial phase of the Waterless Flood.[9] Only with a well-provisioned Ararat can the Gardeners float, and survive the Flood. In invoking one of the earliest stories of catastrophe, the flood in Genesis, Atwood is unconventionally inserting her novel into the apocalyptic narrative tradition.

Atwood is by no means new to the genre of dystopic/apocalyptic fiction. Her 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale* is set in the not-too-distant future in which America is ruled by a patriarchal theocracy that subjugates, reducing them to vessels of reproduction. Atwood's fiction, *The Handmaid's Tale* included, stray from dystopian and apocalyptic genre conventions in unique ways that set her work apart from more traditional renderings. The structure of post-apocalyptic fiction generally follows one of two paths. The first begins with the world prior to the transforming event, culminating in its actualization. Representations of this sort include *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2010). The second narrative structure begins with the apocalyptic event having already occurred, and the world has already been transformed. Along these lines we have the popular dystopian novels Orwell's *1984* (1949) and Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). The more apocalyptic vein includes Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954) and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006). In these representations the societal, political and geographical landscape of the past remains elusive.

[9] Mount Ararat, according to the book of Genesis, is where the Ark of Noah came to rest after his death.

The importance of the two different styles rests in the divergent structuring of both *Oryx and Crake* and *Year of the Flood*. Although the novel begins in the post-apocalyptic future, the narrative weaves extended memories of Jimmy's past with the present, "post" catastrophe world. As mentioned in the previous section, hyperobjects, which the Anthropocene forces into our ontic purview, exist on spatial and temporal scales that are unfamiliar to us. Similarly, Atwood's novels can be read as breaking from the accustomed perception of time as a series of linear moments. Out of habit Jimmy glances at his watch on the first page of the novel: "A blank face is what it shows him: zero hour" (3). The final lines of *Oryx and Crake* read, "From habit [Jimmy] lifts his watch; it shows him its blank face. Zero hour, Snowman thinks" (374). The global pandemic suspends time, and the "post" world that Jimmy and the Crakers now inhabit is bracketed off from the historical conditions that ultimately lead to the actualization of the apocalyptic event. The narrative structure, however, works against such a liberating view. Frank Kermode, writing on the tradition of apocalyptic narratives, comments that we "long for an end that will clear out all the old detritus and allow for a new beginning" (Kermode 26). The plot structures in both *Oryx and Crake* and *Year of the Flood* work against such a possibility, navigating between the present and memories of the past. The movement between memories and narrative present denies for both the reader and the characters of the novels, the potential of a clean historical break. The potential for clearing out the detritus of the past is negated as Jimmy's memories intercede and resonate in the "post" moment. To emphasize the enmeshment of the past and present, the text provides no clear sign-posting as to which moment in time we are engaging with. And while this feature is not exactly disorienting or confusing, it adds to the sense that past and present are intimately linked. The events of the past resonate across time and space, remaining active in the "post" world in which Jimmy finds himself.

This strange function of time works in the opposite direction as well—our reading experience is of an amalgam of moments from Jimmy's life. The initial scenes of the novel are of the world already ravaged by ecological disasters and the BlyssPlus pandemic, and thus determine a reader's experience of the entire series. In this sense the apocalypse of Atwood's speculative fiction has always already occurred. As we read we are stuck anticipating the events we already know will occur, and in this way, history functions as a viscous hyperobject that allows for no possibility of escape. Crake's goal of enacting a hard planetary reset does not account for Jimmy's memories of the past.[10] His two part plan is motivated by a desire rid the planet of the destructive human race and repopulate it with a species that lacks knowledge of the historical conditions that, as far as Crake is concerned, necessitated their creation. He attempts to bring about a Kermodean apocalypse in the strictest sense, in which the detritus of the past may be swept neatly under the rug.

Year of the Flood similarly refuses distinct readings of past and present. Just as any reading of the Bible is informed by the Book of Revelations and the apocalypse at the end of time, our foreknowledge that Waterless Flood does occur inflects our reading experience. Anticipation of the event happening is simultaneously foreclosed by reading the first novel—we know what Crake does, but also by the structure of *Year of the Flood.* The first chapter of the second novel is titled "Year Twenty-Five, Year of the Flood" (4). Before the narrative begins we are aware of Flood having already occurred. Toby's concerns stand in contrast to the terror that Jimmy suffers in the absence of official time. At the first sign of the Flood Toby holes herself up in the AnooYoo Spa Center, where she successfully constructed an Ararat. Standing on the roof she looks out, noticing the absence of traffic which allows her to hear the birds chirping. She

[10] While this might draw parallels to deep ecologists calls for a return to a primitive state, it is "hard" in the sense that it would be returning to a time prior to humans.

wonders, “Do they notice that quietness, the absence of motors?” (4). She suffers no terror, but knows to remain calm and bide her time as she rides out the Flood, waiting for the dust to settle.

Spotting vultures in the distance, Toby recalls what the Gardeners taught her about the birds—that they “are our friends…They purify the earth. They are God’s necessary dark Angels of bodily dissolution. Imagine how terrible it would be if there were no death!” (4). This passage highlights the Gardeners unmediated acceptance of mortality. The memories and teachings of the past enable her to survive. Structurally, the novel emphasizes the importance of memory and history. Each chapter begins with a date, and a corresponding feast or saint that is celebrated on that particular day. Toby’s memories of the past are guided by the Gardener’s calendar. Far from desiring a break from the past, Toby embraces, and continually calls upon fond memories of her days in the EdenCliff Rooftop Garden.

The Anthropocene and hyperobjects impose their domineering presence into every aspect of modern day existence. A truly ecological mode of thinking must be coupled with acknowledging our interobjective enmeshment within these entities. If ever there was a moment in history to thwart human exceptionalism, this is it. To find meaning in human finitude when we are threatened on every side by annihilation, is to think outside the self, and begin to understand our collective existence as a geophysical force, and the future causality stemming from it. Atwood’s novels allow us to experience the extrapolation of rampant consumption stoked by a technophilic society. *Oryx and Crake* reveals the limits of a cornucopian worldview. Despite the belief in a future that will be saved by science, there is an ultimate failure to recognize the inevitable finitude of man. The novel shows ways in which society attempts to distance themselves from this recognition, and in doing so, the rift between nature and culture widens. The two can never be reconciled. The second novel of the series, however, reveals that an

attunement to the enmeshed nature of existence is in fact possible. While Atwood may be suggesting that a genuine ecological mode of thought might necessarily be coupled with religion (after all, why should one fear death if there is no God to punish the sinners?), the truly productive work of the novel—the work that allows readers to better understand their place inside of hyperobjects—are the insights into how one might move through the nihilism. It requires an engagement with history, memory, and recognizing that past conditions cannot be forgotten as they are always felt. An engagement with the historical conditions that lead to the current environmental state provides the Gardeners with the grounding for an ethical stance of stewardship. The Gardener's, above all else, are aware of their finitude, and this strategic positional awareness is what allows them to actively prepare for, and survive the waterless flood.

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