Violence and Visual Media in the Contemporary Global Novel

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Abstract

Theorists of late-20th-century violence Ronald Bogue and Marcel Cornis-Pope have characterized our contemporary media landscape as "a permanent spectacle of violence," a "theater of overstimulation." At the same time, violence across the globe is waged out of sight: under conditions of political detention, via drone-operation commands, in domestic settings, and through damage done to human bodies by conditions of economic deprivation. Given this tension between hyper-visibility and invisibility that characterizes how political violence is represented and disseminated across 21st-century global mediascapes, this dissertation argues that the novel affords unique formal opportunities for portraying and ethically grappling with extreme phenomena, thus supplementing and invigorating approaches to violence taken by political scientists, anthropologists, legal scholars, and media theorists.

This interdisciplinary project explores novels that address formations of political violence—such as terrorism and counter-terrorism, state responses to ecological disaster, and enforced material deprivation—which pose extremely complex problems of representation and response. "Violence and Visual Media" thus addresses two major questions within the discipline of global Anglophone literature: first, with the nature of political violence constantly morphing (due to advances in technology, changing forms of warfare, and new modalities of perception), what avenues for representation and visibility can a literary form like the novel afford, in the midst of a crowded and globally reaching visual and discursive field? Second, and related, what does the future hold for the novel, as just one form within a contemporary media ecology that is constantly breeding new platforms, formats, and interfaces for visual representation and narrative design? In answering these questions, the project considers an archive of novels that seek to represent violence in their narratives, but also by integrating ekphrastic descriptions of visual media, primarily photography, film, and images found on the Internet. Novels that combine narrative and ekphrasis activate modes of visualizing and attending to violence that emerge as alternatives to the perceptual horizons that other media afford.

Each chapter of "Violence and Visual Media" examines the force that visual mediums exert on the novel as a whole, foregrounding how visual texts enable the novel to excavate and interrogate how these neighboring forms confront violent phenomena. The first chapter confronts the vast archives of disaster imagery found on the Internet, which in their excessive quantity pose a specific set of challenges and opportunities to the print novel. Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) brings the Internet into the novel in order to ponder what online visual archives—defined by their plenitude and global reach—offer as repositories for cultural memory. Within the novel, Internet communication facilitates but also obfuscates experiences of political rupture. Ozeki's novel in particular invokes the phenomenology of networked digital image archives, including Google Image searches and video-sharing sites. These technologies enable distant viewers to encounter catastrophes like the 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami; yet their inclusion in the novel, as I show, reveals how they prioritize staggering excesses of visual information over attention to the deep historical contexts of contemporary catastrophes. By examining how characters engage with both written and visual documents about overwhelming loss, I propose how we might reorient the activity of "paying attention" toward ethical ends in the age of the Internet.

The second chapter turns to a different domain of media, as Barry's *City of Bohane* deploys ekphrastic renderings of printed photographs in order to uncover hidden violences and bring to light historical connections that may not be immediately apparent. Along with

photographic ekphrasis, *City of Bohane* deploys allegory and speculative fiction as it predicts the ravages of post-2008 austerity that certain political discourses and policies seek to repress. *City of Bohane* confronts the past, present, and potential future of Irish austerity through allegory and a sustained engagement with visual media forms. The chapter contextualizes contemporary austerity within a deep historical time frame that is often obscured or left out of present discourse surrounding this increasingly relevant political paradigm. Exploring what I term "the aesthetics of austerity" in the novel, I unpack how *City of Bohane* speaks otherwise about this political response to economic crisis through a complex allegorical lens, making visible how forms of slow violence, to use Rob Nixon's theory, including environmental degradation and economic oppression, can symbolically or even materially manifest as spectacular eruptions of physical, person-to-person violence. My analysis homes in on a short chapter that contains an ekphrastically rendered catalog of photographs taken during a violent feud, and I demonstrate how this aesthetic gestures toward a transhistorical and intersectional solidarity that brings into view a horizon of possibility for urgently needed political change.

My final chapter asks why the spectral presence and subsequent absence of the Twin Towers on the Manhattan skyline looms so large in post-9/11 literature, while the spaces of state confinement established during the subsequent War on Terror largely have yet to be explored in fictional worlds. The destruction of the Twin Towers has become so ubiquitous in post-9/11 visual culture that Miles Orvell has labeled that phenomenon "the destructive sublime," while in the contemporary novel, the gesture of ekphrastically describing the falling towers on TV has become a common trope, appearing in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*, as well as Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*. These novels present the ekphrastic record of 9/11 from a variety of geographic standpoints and thereby situate it within a global frame of perception. These passages, viewed together, challenge a privileged, US-centric perspective that dwells upon 9/11 as an open wound and thus threatens to justify the executive and legal overreach that followed. While 9/11 has left indelible marks in visual culture and literary narratives, the US-led War on Terror, waged in response to the attacks, is largely conducted outside of public view, particularly in sites of extraordinary rendition such as Guantánamo Bay, CIA "black sites," and British "control order houses."

As the purposefully obscured successors to the spectacle of 9/11, these spaces of state confinement remain outside the limits of recent fictional worlds, with a few exceptions. The chapter explores how Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009) foregrounds the spectral presence of the destroyed Towers while also leaving one of her protagonists, Raza, on the threshold of a potentially lifelong detention in Guantánamo Bay. I read Shamsie's allusions to that space of confinement alongside work by the British artist Edmund Clark, who gained rare civilian access to Guantánamo Bay to photograph his series *Guantánamo: If the Light Goes Out*. Through this comparative analysis, I consider the moral force of absence: the specter of Guantánamo that haunts Shamsie's novel and the absent physical body in Clark's photographs, which portray Guantánamo as an architectural and biopolitical space evacuated of human life. Shamsie's decision to end her narrative just before Raza enters Guantánamo achieves a similar effect: forcing the reader to fill that spectral space of confinement with her imagination of what lies ahead for human detainees.

"Violence and Visual Media" thus moves between close examination of ekphrastic passages and deep analysis of novels within their historical and global contexts. In so doing, the project offers a new way of reading contemporary literature in relation to global politics and in concert with its neighboring visual media forms. Ultimately, it suggests new approaches to

thinking about how novels in particular, and works of art more broadly, might compel us to apprehend, wrestle with, and respond to atrocities in a deeply considered and sustained way.

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Introduction

On September 2nd, 2015, the body of three-year-old Syrian refugee Alan Kurdi washed up on a beach near Bodrum, Turkey. Shortly following this discovery, images taken by a Reuters photographer began to circulate across online publications and social media platforms like Twitter, generating reactions that express shock, grief, and outrage. Most major news outlets posted these photographs, which were almost invariably prefaced by a trigger warning and accompanied by a brief verbal description of the images, perhaps to communicate the experience to those choosing not to look: a small body lying face down in the sand; a Turkish police officer approaching the body and then carrying it away.

These verbal sketches of photographs, which are often embedded in detailed news reports, amount to moments of ekphrasis, a literary technique defined by James Heffernan as "the verbal representation of a visual representation" and the aesthetic form at the center of this dissertation (3). As the Syrian tragedy and its witnessing attests, the twenty-first-century subject lives every day in a terrain that McKenzie Wark has termed "virtual geography," a terrain made manifest by the ubiquity of digital media and new networks of human connectivity. This relatively new visual terrain thus manifests a phenomenology of perception not bounded by one's proximity to an event. Virtual geography, enabled by advanced technologies of image-capture and information-sharing, makes representations of violence both ubiquitous and politically consequential; in April 2017, images of a sarin gas attack influenced the American President to reverse his policy on the Syrian regime and to engage in retaliatory military action.[1]

Images such as these attest to the power of visual documents of violence, but also their vulnerability to decontextualization as meaningful representations of complex geopolitical

situations. Susie Linfield has written that it is "the camera—the still camera, the film camera, the video camera, and now the digital camera—that has done so much to globalize our consciences; it is the camera that brought us the 20th century's bad news. Today, it is, quite simply, impossible to say, 'I did not know': photographs have robbed us of the alibi of ignorance" (46). Like Nick Ut's famous photograph of a napalm victim in Vietnam, the recent images dispatched from Syria prove Linfield's point: having stumbled across them in a newspaper or on a social network, one can no longer claim "the alibi of ignorance." Depictions of brutality often instigate unsettling emotions: revulsion and shock, perhaps followed by a sense of guilt or heightened responsibility. Yet the phenomenology of viewing such an image can often obliterate the historical and contextual forces that brought the depicted moment into being, and in that sense, images of violence tempt self-protective amnesia or conceptual over-simplification.

What follows is an investigation into how narrative and visual media conspire to represent phenomena that pose manifold challenges to sense perception, interpretive hermeneutics, ethical deliberation, and political response. If visual documents of violence contain an emotional power that, in Linfield's formulation, "is divorced from narrative, political context, and analysis" (50), then the novel, a technology that melds narrative context with descriptive imagery and analysis, affords certain aesthetic resources that can render, scrutinize, and meditate upon neighboring visual media forms. The novels I consider address a spectrum of violent phenomena: material deprivation, natural disasters, state-sponsored violence, and terrorism. They do so through narrative means, but also by integrating ekphrastic descriptions of visual media, including photography, film, visual art, and the Internet. These novels by Kevin Barry, Ruth Ozeki, Indra Sinha, Don DeLillo, and Kamila Shamsie are constructed out of narrative, but narrative that takes visual documents seriously as alternative means for

contemplating the phenomenological and ethical problems that situations of violence present. This archive of texts, therefore, poses questions about the ethics of mediating and viewing atrocity from afar, and my analysis strives to demonstrate how a transmedial reading practice can reveal new modes of comprehending and responding to these urgent situations.

In *Violence and Visual Media*, I address two major questions that have become urgent within the sub-discipline of contemporary Anglophone literature: first, with the nature of political violence constantly morphing (due to advances in technology, changing forms of warfare, and new modalities of perception), what avenues for representation and visibility can a literary form like the novel afford in the midst of a crowded global visual and discursive field? Second, what does the future hold for the novel, as just one form within a contemporary media ecology that is constantly breeding new platforms, formats, and interfaces for visual representation and narrative design? Rather than conceding that contemporary political violence may be too multifarious, too far-reaching, and either too visually obscure or sublime to be captured by a literary genre, *Violence and Visual Media* argues that the modalities of violence under consideration bring to light some of the novel's singular formal resources, which are at once representational, interpretive, and political. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the novel is foundational for my argument: that the novel, given its relative newness as a literary genre ("younger than writing and the book"), has always been uniquely positioned to reflect "the tendencies of a new world still in the making" (321, 324). Evolving out of an eccentric conglomeration of forms including pamphlets, Socratic dialogues, and Menippean satire, the novel has always developed in "the zone of maximal contact with the present . . . in all its openendedness" (325).

For these reasons, the novel becomes an ideal site for addressing contemporary iterations of violence—including terror attacks, severe material deprivation, negligent handling of nuclear waste spills, and indefinite detention in highly regulated state facilities—that pose especially complex problems of representation, visualization, and response. The problems arise from the ways these manifestations of violence generate a paradox between hyper-visibility and invisibility, or overexposure and obscurity. Theorists of late-20th-century violence Ronald Bogue and Marcel Cornis-Pope have characterized our contemporary media landscape as "a permanent spectacle of violence," a "theater of overstimulation" (2). At the same time, violence across the globe is waged out of sight: under conditions of political detention, via drone-operation commands, in domestic settings, and through damage done to human bodies by conditions of economic deprivation. These phenomena, therefore, invite novels to draw upon their heteroglossic capacity to weave forms of discourse and description together in order to unearth, reveal, and interrogate the dimensions of violence that go unaddressed by other epistemological ways of knowing the world.

To take an example from my chapter on post-financial-crash Irish fiction, austerity as a political phenomenon relies on its effects being morally and politically obscured within the global public sphere. As a political operation that benefits the already-wealthy at the expense of those living in states of financial precarity, austerity legitimizes itself by morally reframing the political-economic conditions that brought it into being. This legitimizing narrative, which I engage in detail in the chapter, also obliterates from view the material damage that these conditions of enforced deprivation inflict upon the bodies of vulnerable citizens—the poor, the sick, the elderly, and the children. In post-2008 Ireland, these problems of how to read economic crisis and how to respond to it politically are as urgent as they were during the Great Hunger of

the mid-nineteenth century, or during the Troubles that grew out of economic and political repression of Irish Republicans in the North. Kevin Barry's *City of Bohane*, the novel at the center of this chapter, deploys allegory—a narrative technique—in order to ground the present crisis in history and to project its potential outcome into futurity. At the same time, the text centers around a catalog of ekphrastic images depicting a violent insurgency; in doing so, it draws upon visual archives surrounding political conflict in Ireland in order to capture the unnarratable shock of economic injustice when left to fester to the point of explosive catharsis.

Additionally, *City of Bohane* draws upon traditions of oral storytelling and linguistic hybridity, inviting the reader into Bohane's discursive community by way of second-person address. In Bakhtinian fashion, therefore, *City of Bohane* exemplifies the novel's heteroglossic possibilities by mingling diverse dialects together with multiple narrative styles (allegory and speculative fiction, to name two). The extended passage of ekphrastic description, additionally, contributes another dimension to the novel's formal hybridity. It draws upon the syntax of visual representation in order to disrupt narrative and inject what Roland Barthes calls the "punctum" of the image into the reader's consciousness: "this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces [the viewer]" (26). *City of Bohane* thus optimizes both the resources of narrative and the signifying force of a visual medium, in order to posit severe economic inequality as a form of violence that does material damage to human bodies.

I argue that the extent to which visual media has saturated culture across the globe requires the novel to address these neighboring forms in some way. Ekphrastic passages become one such method of address; they stage an explicit conversation between language and other mediums, and in so doing they open a text up to new possibilities for visualizing violence that traverse verbal and visual languages. This ekphrastic relationship works mutualistically: it brings

the novel into necessary contact with other media, and then that contact provides an opportunity to examine both the affordances and limitations *of those other media* as vehicles of representation. The novel, interpolating passages of ekphrasis into narrative, provokes readers to consider how photography, digital image archives on the Internet, visual art, and other forms work to represent extreme phenomena such as violence. The inclusion of media ekphrasis in novels also reveals how these visual forms are necessarily limited in their capacity to address such phenomena. The novel, of course, also has its limits. Yet the friction that ekphrasis generates—between prose and visual media—invites a necessary reckoning with how verbal and visual encounters with violence work to figure extremely complex geopolitical conflicts. Ekphrasis thus becomes not only an aesthetic strategy that beckons visual materials into the novel; it also establishes the grounds for a theoretical investigation into how violence is represented across various cultural forms, and how these forms are disseminated to readers and viewers across the globe.

Before proceeding, I pause briefly to address a distinction that I am drawing between two kinds of prose: narrative and ekphrasis—or, in a more general sense, description. A binarism between these two modes of writing strikes me as both naïve and necessary, naïve because description, even of a plastic art like painting or photography, rests on narrative, moving as it does from one observation about form to the next. In Murray Krieger's famous definition, ekphrasis is "the still movement of poetry," and William J. T. Mitchell extends this description to posit ekphrasis as "the shaping of language into formal patterns that 'still' the movement of linguistic temporality into a spatial, formal array" (154). In this sense, then, ekphrasis is composed of narrative movement; language cannot ever be "still." Yet ekphrastic passages exert an uncanny pressure on narrative, instigating a fluctuation in temporality that opens space for

contemplation about the object being described, as well as its situation and significance within a larger story. So if it is naïve to claim that ekphrasis is something entirely other than narrative, many scholars have been fascinated by it as a discrete form; these include Krieger, Mitchell, Heffernan, Wendy Steiner, and Stephen Cheeke, among others. In a contemporary media ecology saturated with visual forms, I assert that the technique is uniquely positioned to both render and interrogate—in language—the existence of artifacts that are constructed out of materials other than language.

By this point, there are few studies of ekphrasis in prose narrative, for the form has largely been considered a poetic technique rather than one asserting a notable presence in novels.[2] *Violence and Visual Media*, therefore, aims to advance critical understanding of how "the still movement of poetry" can usefully and consequentially be harnessed as one among many aesthetic tools available to novelists who address contemporary politics and social formations in their work. Two recent books, in particular, have contributed to the project of examining ekphrasis in Anglophone novels, and my study is indebted to the ground they have broken in this field: Brian Glavey's *The Wallflower Avant-Garde: Modernism, Sexuality, and Queer Ekphrasis* and Debjani Ganguly's *This Thing Called the World: The Contemporary Novel as Global Form*, both published in 2016. Glavey's project helpfully "treats ekphrasis as a process, upending form in much the same fashion that theories of performativity reconceive gender: as a vision of impossible coherence produced via iterations of imitation and failure" (7). Glavey's awareness that ekphrastic writing will always be a failed project—for words cannot ever fully encapsulate a plastic art form—informs his exploration of how the gesture becomes "especially eloquent on questions of suffering" (13). I find that claim particularly relevant to my

study of literature that depicts violence. Throughout the project, I seek to probe the paradoxical coexistence of failure and eloquence that Glavey identifies in ekphrastic writing.

Ganguly's focus aligns to a large extent with my own: her project contains a chapter in which she reads "the novel worlds of our time as ekphrastic texts that carry the burden of making legible to our myriad virtual publics the melancholic, visually excessive remainders of our capitalist deathworlds" (34). Ganguly masterfully situates readings of fiction by Joe Sacco, Kevin Powers, Nadeem Aslam, and Ian McEwan alongside a theorization of what ekphrasis provides in representing what she calls "mediated deathworlds" of the twenty-first century. But the "widespread mediatization of war-induced humanitarian crises" that Ganguly foregrounds seems to me only one of the two opposed conditions of contemporary violence with which the novel must engage (42). Realist fiction may have arisen in a time of rapidly expanding literacy and in contestation with diverse forms, but one of its central claims has always been its capacity to foreground the under-represented, or whom Jacques Rancière names "the uncounted." In our time the novel must contend with a greatly heightened tension between hyper-visibility and obscurity that characterizes how contemporary crises are portrayed and perceived across the world. In other words, I argue that the dynamics of mediating political violence turn on absence, opacity, and silence as much as they do on overexposure and surplus. My chapter on Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* confronts the sublime excess of visual depictions of natural disasters, but I also consider how the novel signals what those image-archives occlude. Across the project, I am as much concerned with excessive mediation as I am with the representational challenges posed by phenomena that are more inscrutable in the visual record: the ravages of post-financial crash austerity, and the obscured spaces of state detention in which the War on Terror operates. I mean, in this sense, to associate both the contemporary novel with a complex

and varied understanding of violence and ekphrastic passages with a correspondingly diverse range of strategies in response.

On a formal level, ekphrasis becomes a useful gesture for representing violence because it shares with violence a figurative similarity: that an ekphrastic object, like an experience that inflicts immense pain on the body or psyche, may be fundamentally unrepresentable. Theorists ranging from Gilles Deleuze to Elaine Scarry foreground the impossibility of completely representing atrocity; Marco Abel, surveying this tradition, writes, "Although we claim that we know violence when we see or experience it, violence has remained one of the great incomprehensible events of life" (56). Yet many writers nonetheless strive to make violence communicable, much as ekphrastic language does its best to bring a visual object into the reader's consciousness. In this sense, ekphrasis in a novel works as both an implement within and a synecdoche for a text's broader attempts to address atrocity. On the level of description, ekphrasis tries yet inevitably fails to bring a visual medium into view, while language, as Scarry has shown, can only strive in vain to verbalize pain. There exists, therefore, a structural homology between a) what we might call the noble failures of ekphrastic writing, and b) attempts by language to render violence comprehensible outside the sensorium of an individual body being afflicted.

Working in an adjacent theoretical discourse, trauma theorists including Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, and Geoffrey Hartman point to the fundamental incomprehensibility of traumatic experience. If trauma persists as a lack within human memory—as Freud first pointed out when studying shell shock victims during World War I—so too does the ekphrastic object haunt a verbal text by virtue of its incontrovertible absence from it. It is precisely this sense of aesthetic haunting that makes ekphrasis integral to the novels I examine. Each of these novels registers

and memorializes loss of some kind; their narratives hinge upon the tension between signaling lost lives, rights, and communities while striving to confer visibility onto that loss. The spectral presence/absence of a visual object reflects that tenuous difficulty involved in perceiving and commemorating something that has been taken away. At the same time, ekphrasis represents an attempt to bring that loss back into one's field of perception. Whether it be an image of insurgent protestors risking their lives for a political cause, a catalog of video clips providing an overwhelming amount of visual information about a nuclear spill, or the spectral conjuring of Guantánamo Bay's interior, ekphrasis breaks narrative open and points outward toward other modes of visualizing shock. It operates as a two-way corridor running along the novel's linguistic border: it folds visual media into a text's signifying grammar, and at the same time it pushes the novel's conceptual boundaries outward to acknowledge other, yet nonetheless important, nonlinguistic forms. Mitchell writes that "the textual other must remain completely alien; it can never be present, but must be conjured up as a potent absence or a fictive, figural presence. . . . The ekphrastic image acts, in other words, like a sort of unapproachable and unpresentable 'black hole' in the verbal structure, entirely absent from it, but shaping and affecting it in fundamental ways" (158). Rather than regarding that "black hole" as a strike against language's capacity to conjure violence, I contend that ekphrasis's "potent absence or fictive, figural presence" renders it a fitting vehicle for summoning ghosts that haunt any novel confronting atrocity and loss.

In addition to its aesthetic contribution, ekphrasis also serves a political function when working alongside narrative to figure violence. In this sense, Rancière's theory of politics as an "aesthetic" phenomenon contributes one conceptual frame for my analysis and underpins my choice of ekphrasis as a focus-point within the novels I study. Rancière defines politics in

opposition to "the police," not literally a police force but rather a symbolic constitution of the social that holds the power to "partition the sensible," or to determine who gets to become visible, to speak, or to "count" in a shared political commons.[3] Partitioning the sensible becomes a deeply political project, for it reframes politics in terms of appearance: making present certain constituences that "the police" attempts to silence or obscure. The novels I consider foreground those subjects who have been rendered invisible, mute, and/or uncounted within their political contexts: the victims of enforced deprivation in postcolonial Ireland and across Europe; the still-unresolved number of casualties from the March 2011 catastrophes in Japan; and the terror suspects subjected to extraordinary rendition and imprisonment without trial in the name of the Global War on Terror. In each of these cases, sociopolitical bodies holding power obscure signs of injustice or discord within their political commons; as Rancière would put it, these bodies say to all observers, "'Move along! There is nothing to see here!'" The novels in this project demand that we as readers stop moving, that there is something more to be seen in the situations that they seek to represent. More specifically, moments of media ekphrasis, interrupting narrative progression in these texts, force us to contemplate both the modality of violence that they depict and the specific ways in which images of violence get framed and disseminated across our contemporary global mediascape.

I want to make clear, at this point, that ekphrasis is merely one among many aesthetic strategies that novels deploy, and my study focuses as much on the narrative forms that encircle ekphrasis as it does on close-reading the passages themselves. Mitchell's point about the absent visual object "shaping and affecting [the verbal text] in fundamental ways" echoes my inquiry into how ekphrasis fits into a novel's larger narrative design. Sarah Cole, studying violence in modernist literature, sums up what imaginative literature can contribute to interdisciplinary

efforts to understand violence: "Literature, with its unique ability to embed long pasts into vibrant narratives of the present, and with its restless urge to rewrite inherited stories, has always offered an exemplary forum for making violence knowable, showing how it can be simultaneously the crucible for a culture's highest values (in war, especially) and a force radically to undermine those ideals" (3-4). The novels I examine probe and manifest exactly this connectivity between longer histories and the contemporary moments in which they were conceived. These gestures include Kevin Barry situating post-2008 austerity in a deeper lineage of economic oppression in Ireland; Ruth Ozeki mapping connections between the Japanese government's negligence during the 2011 Fukushima nuclear spill, its willingness to send young kamikazi fighters to their death during World War II, and global disregard for environmental destruction; and Kamila Shamsie constellating three moments of historical rupture: the nuclear bomb's destruction of Nagasaki; the partition of India; and the post-9/11 War on Terror. The narrative styles on display in these texts include allegory, speculative fiction, first-person diary writing, parataxis, epic, and parable. In examining these texts, I aim to model a reading practice that moves between close examination of ekphrastic passages and deep analysis of novels within their historical and global contexts. In so doing, the project offers a new way of reading contemporary literature in relation to global politics and in concert with its neighboring visual media forms.

In this respect, "Violence and Visual Media" contributes to a growing field of literary studies that explores the effects that visual media are having on the contemporary novel. I am indebted to work along these lines by Jessica Pressman, Daniel Punday, N. Katherine Hayles, John Johnston, and Kathleen Fitzpatrick, among others. Punday's work in particular strikes me as promising as well as limited, and to some extent my fundamental claim about the novel's

heteroglossic possibilities runs counter to his concessions about the novel's formal limitations. In his book *Writing at the Limit: The Novel in the New Media Ecology* (2012), Punday asserts that "contemporary writers are redefining the vocation of the novel today by exploring the limits of the novel as medium. To do so, they invoke media like film, music, and comics as 'others' against which the limits and strengths of writing can be understood" (37-38). Observing that many novels of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries reference new media forms (such as film, television, or video games), Punday examines an archive of texts that he calls "media novels," which go beyond simply glancing at other media forms in passing and instead take "media other than writing as a thematic or structural element" (3). Considering the novel as one cultural form amidst a surrounding ecology of visual mediums, Punday joins other critics, including Alvin Kernan and Sven Birkerts, in speculating about the fate of *writing*, understood as words on a page, and *reading* as two activities that may fade—or will continue to fade—as these other media maintain prominence in the global marketplace.

Punday's study of media novels, therefore, contributes to this subfield of contemporary novel studies that examines the novel alongside—rather than in privileged isolation from—its neighboring visual media forms. From one perspective, this media-traversing scholarship could appear to herald an expansive sense of what the novel, as a print text, can still accomplish or convey, even as globally broadcast television series, blockbuster films, and video games with vast online player networks displace print-reading as a prominent cultural activity. From Punday's perspective, however, these intermedial exchanges explicitly mark the *limit* of narrative writing; his designation of other mediums as the novel's "others" signals his commitment to demarcating sharp boundaries between forms. The novel, he readily admits, "has lost its traditional vocation" and, in order to remain relevant, must exist within a "model of

segmented space organized by different media" (237). Throughout *Writing at the Limit*, Punday remains committed to this notion of "the limit," focusing primarily on what the novel as a cultural form is *unable* to do rather than attending to how its dwelling within a diverse media ecology may, in fact, enhance its potential as a medium for representation and revelation.

On the contrary, I am interested in how such "media novels" challenge what Punday and others perceive as the limitations of the print novel. A novel such as Barry's *City of Bohane*, for example, does not simply gesture toward visual media as a way of cordoning off its status as a novel per se. Rather, *City of Bohane* integrates the influence of visual media as part of the narrative dynamics by which it responds to a contemporary sociopolitical crisis. My approach may thus align more with Hayles's concept of "comparative media studies," which acknowledges that "print is itself a medium" and calls for "approaches that can locate digital work within print traditions, and print traditions within digital media, without obscuring or failing to account for the differences between them" (2013, vii; 2012, 7). Ultimately, however, I am less interested in mapping relationships between print and technical materialities, and more so in the possibilities that media novels offer for contemplating contemporary global violence in all of its semiotic and affective complexity. There is surely a study to be written on novels like Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* or Marisha Pessl's *Night Film* that incorporate actual visual images into the materiality of the novel. This project, however, focuses strictly on *linguistic* representations of *visual* representations of violence because this doubly mediated dynamic generates opportunities to contemplate the nature and ethics of representation itself—as well as the future of the print novel as a cultural form.

With respect to the texts I have selected for my archive, I deploy the term "global" as a descriptor while recognizing the complexity and frequent contestation of that term. *PMLA*

recently published a special issue on "Literature in the World," oriented toward a reconsideration of what we mean when we speak of "global," "world," or "comparative" literature. Introducing the issue, Simon Gikandi writes, "There seems always to be a gap between the desire for reading literature on a global scale and the claims of national languages or privileged cultural regions" (1199). I sympathize with Gikandi's recognition that reading literature "on a global scale" makes a claim about scope, inclusion, and wide-ranging expertise that escapes most texts and their critics. On the topic of "global" literature, my project is marked many times over by critical thinking by Gikandi, Ganguly, Paul Jay, David Damrosch, Pascale Casanova, Emily Apter, and Pheng Cheah, among others. In light of their work, I am interested in how the inclusion of visual media in novels can stretch their scope far beyond their geographic point of origin. Each novel that I consider is both grounded in specific locales and cognizant of how visual mediums can appear to extend one's perceptual capacity, making the possibility of a "global" consciousness at least somewhat concrete. So, for the purposes of *Violence and Visual Media*, the global is a horizon toward which novels may be oriented, but it is a horizon that, as Gikandi acknowledges, will always remain aspirational.

Each chapter of "Violence and Visual Media" examines the force that visual mediums exert on the novel as a whole, foregrounding how visual texts enable the novel to excavate and interrogate how these neighboring forms confront violent phenomena. My first chapter confronts the vast archives of disaster imagery found on the Internet, which in their excessive quantity pose a specific set of challenges and opportunities to the print novel. Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) brings the Internet into the novel in order to ponder what online visual archives—defined by their plenitude and global reach—offer as repositories for cultural memory. Within the novel, Internet communication facilitates but also obfuscates experiences of political rupture.

Ozeki's novel in particular invokes the phenomenology of networked digital image archives, including Google Image searches and video-sharing sites. These technologies enable distant viewers to encounter catastrophes like the 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami; yet their inclusion in the novel, as I show, reveals how they prioritize staggering excesses of visual information over attention to the deep historical contexts of contemporary catastrophes. By examining how characters engage with both written and visual documents about overwhelming loss, I propose how we might reorient the activity of "paying attention" toward ethical ends in the age of the Internet.

The second chapter turns to a different domain of media, as Barry's *City of Bohane* deploys ekphrastic renderings of printed photographs in order to uncover hidden violences and bring to light historical connections that may not be immediately apparent. Along with photographic ekphrasis, *City of Bohane* deploys allegory and speculative fiction as it predicts the ravages of post-2008 austerity that certain political discourses and policies seek to repress. *City of Bohane* confronts the past, present, and potential future of Irish austerity through allegory and a sustained engagement with visual media forms. The chapter contextualizes contemporary austerity within a deep historical time frame that is often obscured or left out of present discourse surrounding this increasingly relevant political paradigm. Exploring what I term "the aesthetics of austerity" in the novel, I unpack how *City of Bohane* speaks otherwise about this political response to economic crisis through a complex allegorical lens, making visible how forms of slow violence, to use Rob Nixon's theory, including environmental degradation and economic oppression, can symbolically or even materially manifest as spectacular eruptions of physical, person-to-person violence. My analysis homes in on a short chapter that contains an ekphrastically rendered catalog of photographs taken during a violent feud, and I demonstrate

how this aesthetic gestures toward a transhistorical and intersectional solidarity that brings into view a horizon of possibility for urgently needed political change.

My final chapter asks why the spectral presence and subsequent absence of the Twin Towers on the Manhattan skyline looms so large in post-9/11 literature, while the spaces of state confinement established during the subsequent War on Terror largely have yet to be explored in fictional worlds. The destruction of the Twin Towers has become so ubiquitous in post-9/11 visual culture that Miles Orvell has labeled that phenomenon "the destructive sublime," while in the contemporary novel, the gesture of ekphrastically describing the falling towers on TV has become a common trope, appearing in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*, as well as Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*. These novels present the ekphrastic record of 9/11 from a variety of standpoints—a slum in Bhopal, a living room in Tokyo, and multiple vantage points throughout New York City—and thereby situate it within a global frame of perception. These passages, viewed together, challenge a privileged, US-centric perspective that dwells upon 9/11 as an open wound and thus threatens to justify the executive and legal overreach that followed. While 9/11 has left indelible marks in visual culture and literary narratives, the US-led War on Terror, waged in response to the attacks, is largely conducted outside of public view: via drone operation commands and in sites of extraordinary rendition such as Guantánamo Bay, CIA "black sites," and British "control order houses."

As the purposefully obscured successors to the spectacle of 9/11, these spaces of state confinement remain outside the limits of recent fictional worlds, with a few exceptions. The chapter explores how Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009) foregrounds the spectral presence of the destroyed Towers while also leaving one of her protagonists, Raza, on the threshold of a potentially lifelong detention in Guantánamo Bay. I read Shamsie's allusions to

that space of confinement alongside work by the British artist Edmund Clark, who gained rare civilian access to Guantánamo Bay to photograph his series *Guantánamo: If the Light Goes Out*. Through this comparative analysis, I consider the moral force of absence: the specter of Guantánamo that haunts Shamsie's novel and the absent physical body in Clark's photographs, which portray Guantánamo as an architectural and biopolitical space evacuated of human life. The bodies of detained prisoners haunt Clark's photographs, resonating with Judith Butler's assertion that during the War on Terror certain lives are not grieved because they not are considered as having been lived. Shamsie's decision to end her narrative just before Raza enters Guantánamo achieves a similar effect: forcing the reader to fill that spectral space of confinement with her imagination of what lies ahead for human detainees.

Rey Chow has said that "literature is about the impossibility of complete healing."[4] Having spent time with these texts over a number of years, I find the phrase to be a near-perfect summation of what novels about violence can ultimately offer. That horizon of impossibility, however, does not stymie writers, and it does not diagnose futility in their attempts to bring about some form of understanding, reconciliation, or even healing in the face of unspeakable tragedy. On the contrary, literature that confronts such topics is powered and sustained by that very impossibility: it is the generative force that keeps novelists writing and that keeps narrative moving, striving to make the forces that demand healing visible and comprehensible to a wide-ranging collection of readers. As an aesthetic technique, ekphrasis is premised on impossibility: words cannot become paintings, no matter how precise the language may be. In that sense, ekphrasis becomes a fitting vehicle—and symbol—for what literature both endeavors and fails to do as an aesthetic intervention.

To say that a book could heal a genocide would be hopelessly naïve. Yet to take seriously literature's *attempts* at complete healing—to ratify its achievements of revelation and reckoning—is one way of nurturing an ethical position in relation to a global community whose share of tragedy is unevenly apportioned. If literature cannot stop wars or heal wounds, I hope that this project has testified to what might be gained in trying to view violence from a number of angles, to excavate, through one's reading practice, the dimensions of harm and the possibilities for solidarity that course with urgency through a diverse collection of literary achievements.

Chapter 1: The Digital Sublime, in Print: Visualizing and Narrating Catastrophe in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*

Telesthesia

Type the phrase "japan tsunami 2011" into a Google search bar, and Google would instantly respond, as of March 2016, with "about 29.7 million results."[1] The trove of web pages, news articles, blog posts, encyclopedia and Wikipedia entries, and other discursive materials that comprise this ~29.7 million figure seems vast in scale, yet at least it is finite. Google quantifies such results, and by clicking one "O" after another at the bottom of the page, a user navigates through the millions of hits that the search algorithm has curated, ranked more or less by their relevance to the search terms, their popularity, and whatever other techniques a publisher has used to increase its search-engine optimization. Though vast, the search archive is at least conceivable at its limits; 29,700,000 is a large number, but it is a number, conferring an imaginable sense of scale onto the documents that Google has retrieved.

Click over to the "Images" tab in the Google interface, and the display of data that greets the eye is considerably smoother, an undifferentiated collage of images unfurling down the page as one scrolls. The "Images" search result, however, is entirely unquantified. [Fig. 1] Lacking the "about 29.7 million results" indicator at the top of the "Web" search results page, the "Images" results appear completely boundless, not indexed numerically in any visible form. At the top of the page, above the horde of images themselves, the search engine suggests a handful of sub-categories: for the "japan tsunami 2011" search, these include "Wave," "Before and After," "Nuclear Power Plant," and "Damage," giving the user the option of approaching the visual record of disaster from a variety of slightly more specified angles. [Fig. 2] Whether one chooses

a sub-topic or not, however, the visual information is presented as a flattened-out, undifferentiated pastiche of troubling images: a wave cresting over a city in one photograph; clouds of coal-black smoke erupting out of the earth one row below. The torrent of images reproduces itself as one scrolls down the page. [Fig. 3] When the scroll bar bottoms out on the right side of the screen, Google does not give users the option of proceeding to the next numbered page; rather, a small bar bearing the command "Show more results" appears, and with a click, yet another outpouring of disaster images materializes, and the process of scrolling begins anew. To the viewer of the "Google Image Search," that is to say, there is no evidence to suggest that images of the "japan tsunami 2011" are not completely boundless, infinite.

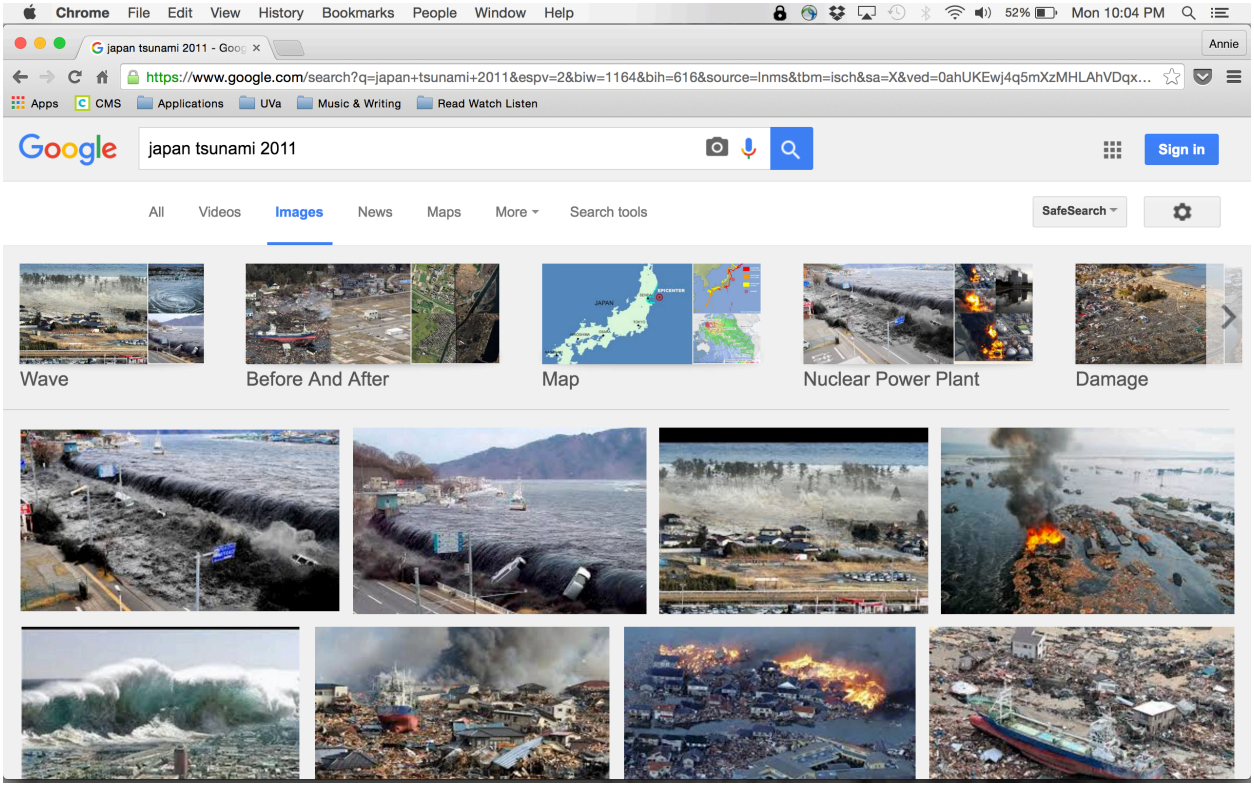

Figure 1. Google Image Search, "Japan Tsunami 2011," 2016.

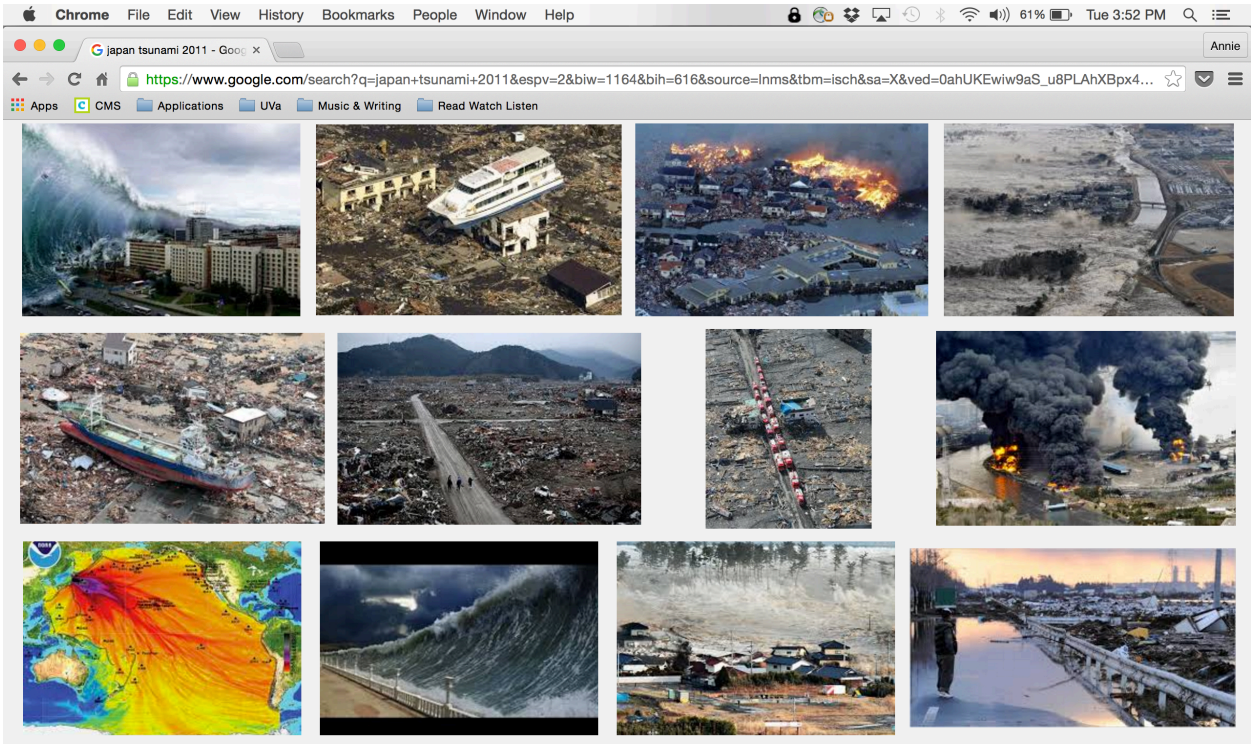

Figure 2. Google Image Search, “Japan Tsunami 2011,” 2016.

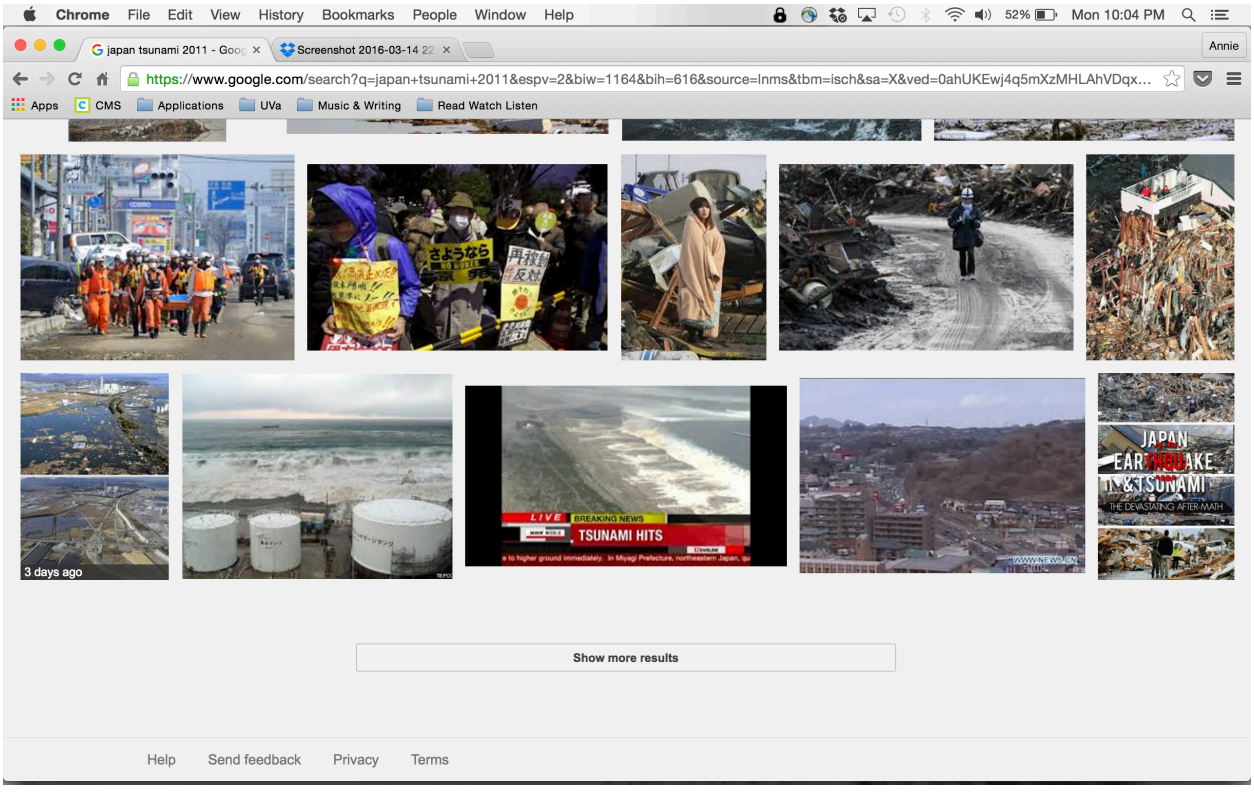

Figure 3. Google Image Search, “Japan Tsunami 2011,” 2016.

Typing phrases into search engines and sifting through the results is an action that Ruth, a protagonist of Ruth Ozeki's novel *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013), performs, repeatedly and compulsively, as she strives to figure out the provenance of a mysterious package that she has found washed up on a beach in Vancouver Island, a package she believes to have traveled across the Pacific following the 2011 tsunami in Japan. Among other topics, Ozeki's novel approaches and interrogates what we might call the phenomenon of the networked digital image: the text- and image-forms that live and circulate on the Internet, including Google search archives and viral videos. Throughout the novel, Ozeki dramatizes encounters between a curious human mind and the potentially endless torrent of images—specifically, in Ruth's case, of disaster, death, and other traumas—that lurk just a keystroke away from our line of vision. In particular, these passages foreground the seemingly boundless nature of *networked digital archives*, which, along with other communication technologies, create a specific kind of perceptual experience that McKenzie Wark calls "telesthesia"—"perception at a distance" (vii). The phenomenon of telesthesia, manifested in *A Tale for the Time Being* by the presence of digital videos and image search archives that its characters view, poses a number of ethical questions about how a spectator with an Internet connection encounters events, and victims of those events, that happen at a distance yet can easily materialize before the spectator's eyes in pixelated, and selectively aggregated, form.

The form of the print novel, of course, cannot physically accommodate a digital image database. Writers like Ozeki, therefore, who engage this phenomenon of telesthesia must grapple with how to make language perform the signifying work of visual image archives—or, alternatively, to mark distinctions between the capacities of language and visual media to represent catastrophe to distant spectators. Given such a provocation, this chapter explores how

Ozeki confronts the challenges that online visual archives pose to the technical boundedness of the print novel. Reading *A Tale* as a text that takes seriously both the sublime reach of the Internet—particularly the Internet as a visual medium—and the deliberate attention that language affords to its object of signification, I suggest that these image archives, in marking the novel's technical limits, ultimately work to enlarge its thematic, geographic, historical, and ethical scope. Specifically, I argue that *A Tale for the Time Being* both interrogates the "telesthesia" that online image databases provide, and builds narrative out of their ubiquitous presence in contemporary global culture. Deploying the technique of ekphrasis to capture fragments of the visual Internet, *A Tale* also optimizes the resources of the print novel in order to constellate different historical and geographic flashpoints. Ozeki's sustained attention to online visual archives, combined with the connectivity facilitated by narrative, ultimately models a practice of reading or viewing the Internet that radically reorients the practice of "paying attention." Encountering documents of pain across linguistic and visual mediums also identifies resources for cultivating hope during a period of Japanese history that scholars have associated with "a proliferation of narratives of decline and diminishing hope" (Kavedžija 1). This sense of "disillusion and hopelessness" evident in Japan around the time of *A Tale*'s writing resulted from a variety of factors: the prolonged economic recession beginning in the 1990s; the lingering traumas wrought by World War II, including the deployment of young men to fly kamikaze suicide missions; the disappointments of "techno-optimism" and the sense that technology has facilitated widespread isolation and bullying, especially among youth; and, perhaps most notably in *A Tale*, the series of disasters that occurred in March 2011: the Tōhoku earthquake, the resulting tsunami, and the related Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, which resulted in 15,894 total deaths.[2] Though much of *A Tale* focuses on the fallout of what has come to be known as 3/11, the novel does not view

this catastrophe in isolation, but rather links it—through ekphrastic description and narrative connections—to the other historical phenomena listed above.

A chief means by which Ozeki approaches this "perception at a distance," particularly when describing Ruth's searches online for the chaotic aftermath of 3/11, is through ekphrastic ruptures in the narrative fabric of her novel. Ekphrasis, in James Heffernan's words, is "the verbal representation of a visual representation," which "explicitly represents representation itself" (3, 4).[3] In a text, the technique functions as "the unruly antagonist of narrative," which "stages a contest between rival modes of representation: between the driving force of the narrating word and the stubborn resistance of the fixed image" (5, 6). In staging this "contest," as noted in my Introduction, ekphrasis becomes both a challenge to and an extension of what verbal narrative can accomplish. In gesturing toward the visual, it lends flexibility to the capacity of narrative to stretch across geographic distances, while opening a space for thinking about what visual and narrative vehicles for representation can or cannot accomplish in our visually saturated, twenty-first-century media ecology.[4]

In *A Tale* specifically, the many ekphrastic passages draw different moments of experience together through the harmony of their striking aesthetic form. To be more specific, ekphrasis is the aesthetic gesture that links together images of 3/11's devastation, a video of a young girl being cyber-bullied and sexually assaulted, and an old photograph of a kamikaze fighter who died flying a suicide mission during World War II. The moments captured by these images may seem disparate at first, yet Ozeki draws them together to form what Walter Benjamin calls a "constellation in which [one's] own epoch comes into contact with another one," or what Michael Rothberg has recently termed "multidirectional memory."[5] Benjamin's constellatory vision of history, developed in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1925) and

sustained through his final text "Theses on the Concept of History" (1940), becomes relevant to all three chapters in this dissertation, in fact. Each of the texts I examine is concerned with bringing different historical moments together in order to better comprehend the violences of our confounding present. Rothberg's multidirectional memory becomes another useful frame through which to consider how Ozeki's *A Tale*, Kevin Barry's *City of Bohane*, and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* position different chronotopes alongside one another in order to unearth connections between them. Rothberg defines multidirectional memory as follows: "Against the framework that understands collective memory as *competitive* memory—as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources—I suggest that we consider memory as *multidirectional*: subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative" (3). Ozeki is clearly invested in this project of "cross-referencing," as *A Tale* maps her two protagonists' obsessions with two different historical catastrophes: Ruth with 3/11, and Naoko, a young girl in Tokyo, with her grandfather's experience as a kamikaze fighter. Rothberg goes on to suggest that thinking about memory in a multidirectional and cross-cultural fashion contains "the potential to create new forms of solidarity and new visions of justice" (5). The violences under scrutiny in *A Tale*—the 3/11 catastrophes, Japan's kamikaze program, gendered cyberbullying, ecological damage, and land theft—do not suggest easy recourses to "justice." The novel's architecture, however, combining ekphrastic moments with narrative context and psychological excavation, activates a reading practice that combines multidirectional memory with the imperative that we scrutinize our contemporary geospatial awareness: our visual contact with far-off catastrophes, or our "telesthesia." Ultimately, Ozeki impels us to *think about the thinking* that we do when we encounter images of disaster, especially online: to find a third way between losing ourselves in the endlessness of an image database and repudiating techno-assisted

spectatorship altogether. This third way ultimately involves an ethical reorientation toward distant "others," which specifically posits deep attentiveness as a conduit to hope, reconceived as a "relational" practice that responds to external tragedy by building relationships and filiations between people affected by tragedy in different ways across the globe (Kavedžija 10).

Throughout this chapter, I outline the modalities of disaster and violence that *A Tale* represents narratively, and I then explore how the novel confronts three concepts that capture the challenges posed by the Internet for viewing catastrophe from afar: "The Digital Sublime," "The Mediated Sensorium," and "The Half-Life of Information in a Digital World." Throughout, I bring these concepts together by closely analyzing an aesthetic technique that I term "Internet ekphrasis." As it will become increasingly clear, *A Tale*'s form is rhizomatic, mimicking in its structure the immensity and excess of networked digital space. In writing this chapter, I acknowledge the constraints of the linear essay form when approaching a text such as this; as a result, the chapter self-consciously digresses and, perhaps, reproduces in its own form the blueprints of networked space that Ozeki maps in her novel.

Weird Global Media Events

The succession of catastrophes that occurred in Japan beginning in March 2011—the Tōhoku earthquake, the resulting tsunami, and the related Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster—resemble what Wark terms "weird global media events": "'Events' in the sense of singular irruptions into the regular flow of media. 'Global' in that there is some linkage between the sites at which they *appear to happen* and the sites where we remote-sense them. Some kind of feedback across national and cultural spaces takes place" (vii). Wark refers here to the "virtual geography" in which these events take place, a space that transcends physical locations and

becomes "global" due to the international crossings and feedback that such technology enables. *A Tale for the Time Being* navigates how that "feedback" can work between the zero-point of a catastrophe and the perceptual sensorium of a spectator encountering that event thanks to visual media objects and the networks that facilitate their transmission. As a novel, furthermore, *A Tale* interrogates the "global" nature of such media events, exploring how there might develop an ethical, rather than strictly technological, connection between perceivers and those who are perceived in a virtual landscape. The novel asks: What does it mean to be a "global" spectator—someone who views and ethically reckons with often-catastrophic events across a vast distance that, due to networked digital media, comes to feel uncannily small? Where is the viewer in relation to, or what does she owe to, those people whose lives, traumas, and even deaths she witnesses remotely? These questions that the novel poses are not exclusive to the March 2011 events, though the text does highlight how those specific events generated what appears in a Google Image search (as suggested above) to be an infinite, and readily accessible, trove of visual representations that traveled rapidly from their source, the Tōhoku region in Japan, to screens across the globe. Rather, these are questions that all subjects with access to networked digital imagery must continue to ask ourselves, perhaps first naively but ultimately in a more purposeful manner, as we navigate the torrents of visual materials that greet our sensoria any time we gaze into a screen.

Viral Violence

A Tale for the Time Being follows two parallel and, in certain ways, intertwined narratives—one, the diary of a sixteen-year-old Japanese girl named Nao who lives in Tokyo, and Ruth, a writer who lives on a remote island in British Columbia with her husband, Oliver,

who is an ecological artist with an interest in science. Suffering from writer's block, Ruth goes for a walk and finds a package washed up on a shoreline adjacent to the Pacific Ocean. Thinking at first that the package is just "someone's garbage, no doubt, tossed overboard or left behind after a picnic or a rave," Ruth decides to open it and finds it to be a Hello Kitty lunchbox containing three items: a stack of handwritten letters, an antique wristwatch, and a copy of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, with the pages removed and a diary interpolated in their stead (8). This encounter between two writers—Nao, the diarist, and Ruth, in search of a new project—sets off a tale that traverses a wide range of topics and ideas including, to name just a few, Buddhist philosophy, quantum mechanics, the dot-com bubble, Japanese techno-culture, adolescent bullying, historical cycles of violence, and the relationship between virtual space and material, analog writing in our contemporary moment.

While this list of concerns may seem multifarious and even somewhat indiscriminate in scope, the novel works at navigating connections between these last three topics in particular: the bullying that Nao suffers at school; the eruptions of contemporary societal trauma that almost uncannily recall past historical moments; and the capacity of different cultural forms to transmit and memorialize such extremes of human experience. Narratively, the novel shifts back and forth between excerpts from Nao's diary, written in the first person, and chapters written in close third-person perspective that trace Ruth's thoughts and actions. In so doing, it makes legible certain commonalities between instances of violence that differ vastly in scale yet injure human bodies and psyches through similar means—a formal process reflecting Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory." As we learn throughout the novel, the legacy of political violence is essentially baked into the DNA of each main character: Nao's great-grandfather, whom she calls Haruki #1, was conscripted as a kamikaze pilot during World War II and died fighting in the

conflict, while Ruth and Oliver each have ancestors who were persecuted under, respectively, the Japanese internment camps and the Nazi regime. Ozeki writes of Ruth and Oliver, "Their marriage was like this, an axial alliance—her people interned, his firebombed in Stuttgart—a small accidental consequence of a war fought before either of them were born" (32).

This initially comes off as a brief descriptive aside, yet after reading further in the novel, this observation gains in significance. While this single sentence of narration suggests that Ruth minimizes this connection, the novel ends up braiding these strands of historical-political conflict together with more contemporary disasters. Most significantly, the specter of the March 2011 events haunts the entire story, for Ruth fears that Nao and her family might have perished in the 2011 earthquake or tsunami—the Hello Kitty lunchbox thus seeming, potentially, like a final utterance from one young victim of that catastrophe. Yet March 2011 does not stand in isolation from prior historical ruptures. *A Tale* suggests, rather, that the kamikaze operation and the Fukushima disaster share common features, specifically the peril of state power extended to such a degree that it endangers the individual lives of citizens for the sake of protecting its own sovereignty. In the case of World War II, this refers to the Japanese government conscripting pacifist students (such as Haruki #1) to fly suicide missions in an ill-fated attempt at self-defense. *A Tale* focalizes this state-sanctioned violence through the character of Haruki #1, Nao's grandfather, who was conscripted from studying philosophy at Tokyo University in order to fight in the war. Nao learns this from her great-grandmother Jiko, a Buddhist nun, who corrects Nao's assumption that Haruki #1 was drawn to suicide for philosophical reasons: "When I said this to Jiko, she told me that Haruki #1 didn't actually want to commit suicide. He was just this young guy who loved books and French poetry, and he didn't even want to fight in the war, but they made him. They made everybody fight in the war back then, whether you wanted to or not" (68).

Although Haruki #1 died long before the novel's setting, a packet of letters that Haruki wrote to Jiko prior to his death plays a significant role in the text, shaping Nao's fascination with her grandfather.

Aside from in his letters, Haruki emerges in the novel by way of an ekphrastic image, a photograph taken of him in high school that Nao finds when surreptitiously searching Jiko's office in the temple where Nao visits her. Nao finds Haruki's photograph among "three small black-and-white photographs of Jiko's dead children," and Nao notes in her diary how she notices something new about the photograph when looking at it this time: "I'd seen these pictures before but I never paid any attention. They were just stiff, old-fashioned strangers . . . . But now everything was different." Evidently, the experience of reading Haruki's letters affects how Nao perceives the photograph; the combination of reading and viewing, therefore, confers an entirely new significance onto this graying document. Nao gives sustained attention to the process of observing the image:

> In the photo, he looked younger than his ghost, a pale student with a school cap and a poetic expression, frozen under glass. . . . The glass was dusty, so I rubbed it with the hem of my skirt, and just as I was wiping, something in his face seemed to move a little. Maybe his jaw tightened. A tiny spot of light seemed to shine from his eye. If he had turned his head and looked at me and spoken I wouldn't have been surprised, and so I waited, but nothing else happened. He just kept staring off toward a farway place beyond the camera, and then the moment was gone, and he was just an old picture in a frame again. (216)

In this passage, the ekphrastic language lends temporality to the still image: Nao narrates the unfolding process of scanning her eyes over the image, and in those moments, Haruki #1 seems

to gain life within the image. The specific qualities of the photographic medium—the possibility for light to catch on a certain detail, or for dust on the frame to approximate a sense of movement—lend an uncanny vivacity to Haruki #1's portrait, and Nao allows her imagination to run with this strange conjuring of movement and animation. This moment exemplifies what certain theorists of photography have observed: for Barthes, the photograph creates "a new space-time category: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority, the photograph being an illogical conjunction between the *here-now* and the *there-then*" ("Rhetoric of the Image," 59). The formal features of Haruki's photograph, which Nao indulges by studying it closely, develop that conjunction between the past moment in which his portrait was captured and the present moment of Nao's viewing.

In this sense, this brief passage instigates a temporal layering that evolves throughout the novel: the multidirectional memory that draws connective lines between World War II and contemporary Japan. This specific image focalizes that relationship: between Nao's contemporary situation and Haruki's past experience, which comes to shape her own understanding of suicide and how to cultivate hope in the face of its temptation. Aside from photography itself, ekphrasis here provides a way of generating narrative beyond the instant of its viewing. As James Heffernan writes, "ekphrasis is dynamic and obstetric; it typically delivers *from* the pregnant moment of visual art its embryonically narrative impulse, and thus makes explicit the story that visual art tells only by implication" (4-5). The story that the referenced photograph tells is one of familial loss, as well as young life sacrificed in war. This ekphrastic description, plus Nao's extended focus on Haruki #1's letters, works to humanize the figure of the kamikaze pilot, a gesture that Daniel McKay views as quite radical because in the past, the

kamikaze fighter has often been stereotyped and deployed (particularly by North American writers) as justification for the US dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (7).

In addition to humanizing Haruki #1, however, *A Tale* castigates how the Japanese government subjected young, promising men to almost certain death in the name of patriotism. The novel aligns this historical occurrance with another one in which state power rendered individual lives disposable in service of its self-preservative insticts: the Fukushima nuclear spill in March 2011. As Masami Usui writes, "Because of the rapid technological development and the environmental devastation, 3/11 is shifted to a more man-made disaster than a natural disaster" (92). Usui demonstrates here how it is insufficient to view the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear spill succession solely as an ecological catastrophe, outside the realm of human agency. Like the post-2008 austerity measures that I examine in Chapter 2, the March 2011 events represent an unforeseeable horror exacerbated by decisions that governmental bodies make about how to respond to it. In this case, Ozeki foregrounds the fact that the Japanese government permitted the corporate overseer of the Fukushima Daiichi plant, Tepco, to release 11,500 tons of contaminated water into the Pacific, and then occluded details about dangerous radiation levels in the region surrounding the plant.[6] The novel's spotlighting of military and capitalist opportunism is not confined to Japan, either; Nao's father, Haruki #2, built gaming software in Silicon Valley that was later purchased by a military contractor for the purposes of improving drone warfare techniques. In this way, *A Tale for the Time Being* maps connections between historical reference points, situating each in a deeper history and a more globally comparative frame than we might initially imagine for them. On a formal level, it is ekphrastic technique that binds these reference points throughout the novel, and in this chapter I explore additional

ekphrastic moments that, by way of their formal characteristics, speak back to this moment in which Haruki #1's photograph seems to come to life through language.

In this sense, one of the novel's foremost *narrative* gestures—this transhistorical contextualization of political conflict—amounts to the exact opposite of the semiotic overload that one receives upon opening a Web browser and typing in phrases such as "World War II kamikaze pilot" or "Fukushima nuclear disaster." Yet nonetheless, the novel grants significant diegetic time to Ruth's ventures into cyberspace, specifically her efforts to locate information about the March 2011 victims (one of which, she believes, may be Nao herself). In the sections that follow, I explore these two interrelated aspects of the novel: on the one hand, the text's engagement with virtual space, or with what the art historian Caroline A. Jones calls "our always-already mediated, [global digital] sensorium," and on the other, the ways in which violence becomes viral in the novel (22). By this I mean that *A Tale* explores not only how violent imagery (figuratively, in the common parlance) "goes viral" online, but also how, within the novel's diegetic world, violence spills over into and proliferates across nearly every aspect of the story. Whether it be a teenager's body being abused by sadistic classmates, a young man's life ending in a plane over the Pacific, or land being seized from indigenous people by imperial settlers, acts of cruelty push at the limits of what language is able to signify. (This is not to say that these experiences are exactly equivalent; rather, they pose both perceptual and narrative challenges that writers must take up in confronting them.) As Elaine Scarry has written, "Pain—unlike any other state of consciousness—has no referential content. . . . It is precisely because it takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language" (5). In *A Tale*, Ozeki explores how pain and suffering may be expressed *not only* through language, but also through visual media forms that are becoming more and more prominent as means by

which humans encounter distant tragedy. Ekphrastic passages that depict information on the Internet allow readers to transit between the novel's fictional world and the registers of visual representation that have, perhaps, become more common venues for viewing disaster in recent decades.

Internet Ekphrasis

Representing the Internet as a conceptual or even material space within a work of fiction is not an entirely new gesture. A prototype of what we currently understand as the World Wide Web appeared in Mark Twain's 1898 short story "From the 'London Times' in 1904," in which a character invents a new device called the telectroscope, described as a "'limitless-distance' telephone." This technology was capable of connecting "the telephonic systems of the whole world" and thus enabled users to watch what anyone, anywhere in the world was doing at any given moment—a feature that rings eerily familiar in our post-Snowden digital era. Like Ozeki, Twain deploys ekphrasis when describing the visualizations that the telectroscope permits: descriptions of the pictures that characters perceive when they look into the device. Thanks to the telectroscope, "the daily doings of the globe [are] made visible to everybody," and the story ultimately develops moments of ekphrastic telesthesia. First, a prisoner sentenced to death spends his final days in his cell using the telectroscope and thereby exploring the globe remotely: Clayton (the prisoner) "called up one corner of the globe after another, and looked upon its life, and studied its strange sights, . . . and realised that by grace of this marvellous instrument he was almost as free as the birds of the air, although a prisoner under locks and bars" (n.p.). Twain portrays Clayton's experience of telesthesia as a kind of euphoric escapism, the device allowing him to perceive the sun shining in China during dark nights in his cell. These moments of

ekphrasis point outward from the narrative, indicating a broader perceptual horizon made possible by this technology.

The narrator's musings, as he watches Clayton achieve this optical distance-crossing, read like early-adopter paens to the utopian possibilities of the World Wide Web, before some of its darker aspects became apparent. In fact, in Twain's story the telectroscope's powers actually end up serving an almost miraculous purpose, exonerating Clayton from his sentence when the narrator glimpses Clayton's presumed murder victim attending a parade—alive and well—in Peking. In this sense, Twain's ekphrastic telesthesia highlights the technological marvels of a visual network, while Ozeki, a century later, begins to think more critically about the ethical consequences posed by forms of global spectatorship made possible by the Internet. The ambiguous possibilities of networked systems resembling the contemporary Web held the fascination of writers after Twain, yielding science fictions including Isaac Asimov's *Naked Sun*, published in 1957, and William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, of 1984.

Given the absolute ubiquity of the Internet at the turn of our current millennium, it's not surprising that recent novels are attempting to represent and incorporate the Web as we now know it into their fictions. Along with *A Tale for the Time Being*, this impulse is evident in the hacktivist characters in G. Willow Wilson's *Alif the Unseen*, a novel about resisting state censorship in Egypt during the Arab Spring, and the deviant programmer at the center of Hari Kunzru's *Transmission*, who sends a virus throughout the world and, in so doing, exposes the precarity of networked technology and of the professional and personal relationships that rely on those networks for survival. Writing the Internet into novels thus seems, in many ways, like a compelling and even obligatory gesture at our current historical moment. Actually converting into words, however, the Internet—a global system of interconnected mainframe, personal, and

wireless networks, which use TCP / IP suites and fiber optic cables to link over a billion devices worldwide[7]—becomes a complicated task to execute within a print form that is physically bounded and subject to certain basic conventions of grammar, syntax, and spatial organization. Clearly, it is fundamentally impossible to translate into language the phenomenon of a network that is overwhelmingly vast and dazzlingly complex in its cybernetic, multi-modal, and spatially unbounded nature. Yet the Internet, as a productive network of forces, generates new opportunities for novelistic experimentation, as *A Tale for the Time Being* illustrates. The text depends upon querying and occupying the Internet in order to forge connections between its two protagonists, Ruth and Nao, as well as other characters like Haruki #1, that stretch across both virtual space and analog textual materials including diaries, letters, and photographs.

So where, technically speaking, is a contemporary print novelist to begin this task? With fragments of cyberspace, perhaps, given that the print novel is itself built not out of pixels and hyperlinks but rather out of words printed in codex or eBook form. Novelists so far have experimented with various textual features, including differentiated typography; blog-, text-, and email-mimesis; and even emoticons and emoji.[8] In *A Tale for the Time Being*, Ozeki does, in fact, experiment with differentiated typographical features in select moments throughout the text. Yet the scarcity and strangeness of such moments suggests that her investment lies not in novels taking on the mimetic valences of digital communication, but rather in actually safeguarding certain conventions of the print novel. For example, in the first section of the novel, which takes the form of an excerpt from Nao's diary that Ruth is reading, Nao adds a simple emoticon after introducing herself to her future reader: "And I better tell you a little more about myself if we're actually going to keep on meeting like this…! ☺" (4). To a certain extent, this gesture works toward establishing Nao's character as a tech-savvy teenager steeped in the graphical interfaces

of cell phones (*ketai* in Japan) and computer monitors. It is significant to note, however, that Nao's diary entries, according to Ruth's observation, are supposedly written in purple-ink penmanship; they are hand-written, not typed into a word-processor capable of generating that specific style of emoticon.

Thus, the ☺ mark—which a computer user can easily produce by typing : plus)—sits in the text like an uncanny crossing between handwriting and digital writing. That uncanniness is easy to miss, because in the novel's text, Nao's entries are *not* actually written in purple pen; they are typed, and thus Nao's analog, non-digital penmanship haunts the text as an eerie absence. A twenty-first-century reader, therefore, might begin the novel unaware of the extent to which she has been trained to take emoticons like ☺ at face value; she might not realize that Ozeki is playing with or tricking us as we accept the emoticon's presence in a putatively handwritten diary entry. The impossibility of translating the enormity of the Internet into a novel is thus paralleled by Ozeki's (or, perhaps, her publisher's) unwillingness to actually include handwritten, purple penmanship in the novel. *A Tale* is thus not formally mimetic in this respect; it plays with these crossings or conflations between pre-digital writing and the typography that readers may have come to expect as they constantly type into screens. Ultimately, this strange ☺ moment suggests that, for all of Ozeki's diegetic engagement with cell phones and Internet content in the novel, she remains committed to the conventions of the print novel, while occasionally winking at the ways in which digital typography has come to disrupt the familiarity of written language that predated the emoticon.[9]

Additionally, when Ozeki transcribes email messages between characters, she switches from the "Garamond Premier Pro" font, in which Penguin Books has set the novel, to a more email-normative Sans Serif type. Other contemporary novelists, including Hari Kunzru in

Transmission (2005) and Paul Murray in *Skippy Dies* (2010), similarly use font changes to mimic cybernetic communication. This seems like a clear choice meant to signal that the epistolary form of email correspondence breaks with the more elevated or exceptional "style" in which we tend to encounter novelistic prose. These gestures toward textual mimesis, however, cease in *A Tale* when Ozeki turns to online writing and digital images, which are frequently evoked, ekphrastically, in the text, but which never themselves appear in their true visual forms. We may call this "Internet ekphrasis," a way of capturing visual materials online via language. Throughout the novel, Ozeki peppers the text with fragments of cyberspace, sections that range in size from brief ekphrastic sketches of digital images to more extensive explorations of visual artifacts taking on space-time dimensions of their own: in particular, when Ruth pursues a lengthy Internet search, or when Nao plays an online video over and over. The moments that Ozeki selects as bases for extended plunges into visual mediascapes are significant: world-historical events such as Y2K, 9/11, and the traumas of March 2011 in Japan—what Wark, as mentioned above, calls "weird global media events." But alongside these epochal media events, Ozeki also includes smaller ones, such as a smartphone video taken by Nao's classmates of her using the restroom, which I explore in detail below. These passages provoke a reader to think not only about how those epochal moments *look* as visual images and *read* when transcribed into language, but also about how the visual record of such ruptures circulates through cyberspace and reaches viewers who are thus called upon to witness them from afar.

In the current Internet age, literary scholars have been contemplating how relationships between self and other, or perceiver and perceived, are changing in a new media ecology distinguished from past historical moments by the sheer plenitude of available media and the speed at which such media can be disseminated globally. David Palumbo-Liu, for example,

writes about how novels "deliver" portraits, experiences, and even experiential traumas of distant others to a reader—in short, how novels may not only portray but actually "deliver" the phenomenon of "difference" from one geographically and experientially distinct life to another. Palumbo-Liu's reading of contemporary world literature, which includes a chapter on Ozeki's first novel *My Year of Meats*, contributes to thinking about what novels can "teach us about living together ethically" and "creating an *ethical* global community" (xii).[10] Palumbo-Liu's work seems motivated by a concerted advocacy of literature as an instrument or even a pedagogical apparatus for inviting readers to act or respond to distant tragedy. This commitment does valuable work in uncovering the aesthetic means by which novels negotiate difference in an increasingly global economy and mediascape; it also, to my mind, risks giving insufficient attention to the semiotic complexity inherent *in media texts themselves* and, by extension, to novels (like *A Tale*) that attempt to verbally render and ethically reckon with such visual materials. In particular, the phrase "delivery-system," which Palumbo-Liu deploys as a definitional umbrella under which he situates the novel as a cultural form, seems instrumentalist, as though novels, as "systems," deliver a specific product to be received by a reader in a certain manner. There is, however, more substance to be explored with regards to novels like *A Tale*, which execute a doubled gesture of mediation by representing digitally networked images *within* the medium of the novel—in this case, by way of ekphrastic descriptions, paratactic cataloging of those descriptions, and revelation through free indirect discourse of a character's consciousness as she views and sorts through the images. These gestures provoke readers to contemplate the dynamics of mediation specifically, as well as the ways in which we *view*, and *read*, such media on screens.

A Tale for the Time Being posits ways in which the by-now-familiar experience of viewing a disaster via Internet searches and networked digital images may be supplemented and complicated by other aesthetic relations between witnesses and the subject(s) that they witness in mediated form. Specifically, the novel foregrounds and weaves together a variable constellation of discursive materials and aesthetic forms that, as an archive contained within the novel's binding, portrays the focal point of March 2011 in a manner that enriches and challenges the paradigmatic encounter between a viewer, or a witness, and a two-dimensional representation of said focal point. Lev Manovich has famously argued that a database, such as an Internet search archive, differs markedly from or even competes with narrative, a cultural form claiming "to make meaning out of the world." The database, writes Manovich, "represents the world as a list of items, and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events)" (225).[11] While Manovich views these forms as conflicting and competing, a novel like Ozeki's could be said to contain aspects of both: narrative's sequential unfolding of events in time, and passages that contain ekphrastically rendered descriptions of database objects, specifically images of the March 2011 events supplied by Internet search engines that its characters explore. As a literary technique, ekphrasis stalls narrative time and, in so doing, impels the reader to contemplate both the content of the image *and* the nature of such representation itself: in this case, how the experience being depicted becomes mediated into a digital file, concatenated into a database, and then displayed before a viewer in a dazzling panoply of two-dimensional images on a screen.[12] The novel as a cultural form can bridge the narrative / database divide by rupturing narrative with ekphrastic digital images. By way of this technique, novels can initiate an ethical reckoning with the role that both

database *and* narrative play in how extreme phenomena such as March 2011 get represented and disseminated across global mediascapes.

I thus diverge from Manovich's stark binarism in suggesting that the novel can bridge two forms that he believes to be irreconcilable. His writing on database and narrative, nonetheless, supplies two crucial claims that underpin my argument about *A Tale*: first, that the database has emerged as a true cultural form that must be reckoned with alongside narrative genres; and second, that because of database's ever-increasing cultural prominence, "we need something that can be called 'info-aesthetics'—a theoretical analysis of information access as well as the creation of new media objects that 'aestheticize' information processing" (217). By engaging with Internet databases, and particularly with digital images that circulate through their networks, *A Tale* broaches this notion of "info-aesthetics," as the novel explores the representational possibilities—and limitations—of data-based information and literary narrative alike. In her novel, Ozeki moves beyond simply repudiating the caprices of cyberspace in favor of the apparently sturdier, more composed medium of the novel. Rather, *A Tale* places these three media into relation—digital images of disaster, the Internet itself as a visual interface, and the print novel, a far older cultural form that nonetheless possesses capabilities for offering alternative narratives for and connections between historical events that other visual forms may elide. In so doing, the text explores this aesthetic and political friction between the Internet and novels as they appear alongside each other in the 21st century. Ultimately, *A Tale* itself becomes a novel that in Bakhtinian fashion digests and weaves together different discursive materials and registers.[13] It thereby activates a mode of *reading* contemporary disaster and historical tragedy with an eye that becomes more finely tuned to relationships between events, individuals, visual

media forms, and acts of writing and reading than the modes of seeing to which that eye may have become accustomed in a visually saturated, contemporary media ecology.

Reading the Internet

Since the rise of the commercial Internet in the 1990s, much scholarly and popular-media scrutiny has focused on questions of how the Internet is changing the nature, practice, and significance of reading as a human activity. The Internet, as a communicative network and a commercial marketplace, presents a plethora of temptations designed to capture and ultimately monetize human attention. If reading, traditionally understood, requires a focused expenditure of attention paid to a single text, then exposing oneself to the Internet's purposefully distracting semiotic field would seem to detract from and even threaten the relevance of that prior mode of reading. *A Tale for the Time Being*, as a text, engages substantively with how reading and viewing the Internet affect its two protagonists; it is also, of course, a novel—specifically a novel about a writer trying to write a novel. It thus demands and explores exactly the type of reading practice that many scholars perceive to be under threat given the distracting temptations of the Internet. In this section, I touch on these debates about the praxis of reading—or *not* reading—in the presence of the Internet's almost hegemonic hold over human attention. I do so in order to advance the point that *A Tale for the Time Being*, both within its narrative and as a codex itself, offers opportunities to contemplate how the activity of "paying attention" may be recuperated or harnessed toward formulating an *ethics of attention*, a concept that phenomenological philosophers have begun to develop by engaging the work of Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch. "Attention," according to many media theorists, appears to be a precious human resource that has been negatively exploited in the age of Internet-enabled capitalism. By examining the *attention*

that Ozeki pays to her protagonists' online explorations—particularly through the ekphrasis that she embeds in narrative—and by thinking about how the novel itself commands attention, I hope to suggest that attention may be reclaimed as a vital resource in imagining an ethical orientation toward distant others in an age when catastrophe is regularly viewed from afar, through screens.

Virginia Heffernan describes the Internet's distracting semiotic field as such: "In the quarter-century since Tim Berners-Lee created the immensely popular system of hyperlinks known as the World Wide Web, the Web has become a teeming, sprawling commercial metropolis, its marquee sites so crammed with links, graphics, ads, and tarty bids for attention that they're frightening to behold" (33). Heffernan's description evinces two somewhat contradictory perspectives on the Internet's aesthetic: first, that the murk and mess of it amounts to "a massive and collaborative work of realist art," distinguished by its "hallucinatory splendor" (8, 16); and second, that all of that splendor functions mainly to obscure and advance its primary function: as a global marketplace. Michael Goldhaber and Tiziana Terranova, among many others, link the Internet to the rise of what they call the attention economy, wherein human attention—necessarily scarce because of the brain's limited processual abilities—becomes "not simply a commodity like others, but a kind of capital" (2). In the attention economy, profit accrues according to the amount of human attention paid to a given website, ad, article, image, or other node of the Web. Private corporations, notably Google and Facebook, optimize this dynamic by using mechanisms such as Google's "second index" to collect, concatenate, and then market the data that users supply when using its suite of products (its search engine, email system, and entertainment platforms, among others).[14] Terranova theorizes this attention-capture as a form of profiting from "free labor": when we believe ourselves to be surfing the Web or chatting with a friend, we are actually producing value for which we are not directly being

compensated. Terranova asserts that this activity is not only exploitative but also physically and mentally destructive. Building on arguments by Nicholas Carr and Jonathan Crary about how information-saturation, produced by the Internet, is reconfiguring human minds, Terranova writes:

> When read together, [their] statements about the attention economy and the crisis of attention point to the reconfiguration of the attentive capacities of the subject in ways which constitute attention at the same time as a *scarce*, and hence a *valuable resource*, while also producing an *impoverished subject*. The brain provides the scarce resource that allows the digital economy to be normalized, while also suffering a depletion of its cognitive capacities. (7)

Terranova asserts here that the attention economy impoverishes the subject in two ways: first, by essentially extracting its time without compensation, and then, as a result, by depleting the brain's ability to function as an organ. While this perspective certainly reads as pessimistic, Terranova retains hope that attention might be reclaimed to think beyond the limitations of capitalist sociality; she calls for "a further exploration of some other ways in which paying attention can become a practice that will be able to produce different forms of subjectivity and different models of what an economy of social cooperation could be like" (13). Terranova's interest in imagining new ways of "paying attention" can inform how we read *A Tale for the Time Being*, which explores both extremes of life in the attention economy, its harms and its possibilities.

Specifically, the novel traces the effect that the Internet has on its characters' ability to read, write, and think, exemplifying the distinction that N. Katherine Hayles has drawn between "close" and "hyper" reading.[15] Hyper reading, stimulated by the hyperlinked nature of the

Internet, characterizes much of Ruth's activity online, particularly when she is seeking information about the March 2011 catastrophe and about whether Nao, or any of her family members, might be among its victims. And from one angle, this hyper reading looks somewhat dismal, foreclosing the kind of "deep attention," to use Hayles's phrase, that one cultivates by reading more substantial texts like novels—in fact, Ruth at one point blames the Internet for her inability to focus on her own project of writing a novel (92).

Ruth's occasional moments of attention-deficit would thus seem to support the argument that literary critic Sven Birkerts has made about how reading the Internet and reading novels are directly oppositional activities. In an essay provocatively titled "Reading in a Digital Age: Notes on Why the Novel and the Internet Are Opposites, and Why the Latter Both Undermines the Former and Makes it More Necessary" (2010), Birkerts writes, "Information now comes to seem like *an environment*. The real, which used to be defined by sensory immediacy, is now re-defined" (n.p.). Birkerts's notable panic over this state of affairs in global media culture suggests that the plenitude of stimulation that greets the human sensorium as it dips in and out of LCD-screened worlds all day long is more than just occasionally irritating or, as Sherry Turkle and others have argued, socially isolating. From a literary perspective, Birkerts implies that we are actually *losing* our ability to read, to do the kind of thinking that deep immersion in a novel has long enabled. This form of thinking—which Birkerts valorizes as "contemplative, or intransitive"—has been supplanted by "analytical, transitive" thinking—the sole form of thinking that the Internet stimulates, according to Birkerts. The latter activity is "goal-directed," wherein "information is a means, its increments mainly building blocks toward some synthesis or explanation." Losing our ability to think *in*transitively, then, amounts to losing our minds in favor of empowering our brains—and brainpower, as Watson winning *Jeopardy* has shown, can

easily be replaced by machines. We are thus, in Birkerts's formulation, not just losing interest in novels; we're actually losing touch with our ability to truly see and to reckon ethically with the world around us. Birkerts's essay sets up an explicit opposition between novels and the Internet: that novels provoke "thinking for its own sake," while the Internet provokes thinking that "would depend on a machine-driven harvesting of facts toward some specified end" (n.p.). This binary, however, collapses in the face of novels like *A Tale* that assimilate the Internet into their diegetic worlds, as a medium to be read not in lieu of, but rather alongside, print novels. Rather than accepting this binary, certain contemporary novels like *A Tale* engage directly with the Internet in their verbal texts and thus, we might say, enable a *third* kind of thinking, which becomes especially valuable when the topic at hand is something as extreme as ecological disaster or war. This third way would be contemplative, intransitive thinking *about* the specific modes of thinking that we do when we browse through journalism and images online.

We see this in *A Tale* when Ruth's interest in a particular topic will spark a bout of hyper reading, which will then lead her into an entirely new topic, and ultimately down a vortex of information-gathering that both extends her perceptual capacity across the globe and challenges her ability to distinguish fact from fiction, or relevant data from irrelevant speculation. Believing that the watch contained in the Hello Kitty lunchbox might have been a token given to kamikaze fighters during their training, Ruth at one point turns to Google and types in "*sky soldier Japanese watch*." Her first search yields relatively unhelpful results: "Hundreds of hits came back for websites where she could watch an *anime* series called Sky Soldier. Not useful" (85). But the next few paragraphs trace the wild search-engine quest that Ruth embarks on, fueled by her curiosity about the watch, the diary, the lunchbox, and how these items even got to British Columbia from Japan in the first place. The text of the novel charts this frenzied process of

hyperlexia enabled by the Internet: how Ruth's browser window shuttles between her attempts to find the watch's owner and a pastiche of journalism written in the wake of the March 2011 earthquake. What's notable about the description of this scene is that Ozeki itemizes the news articles as a string of declarative statements, written in the past tense. This method of describing the news search invests each article summary with a kind of ironic authority and pulls the entire mass of articles together into a narrative that is at once judicious and absurd. One part of the paragraph reads:

> Angry parents in Fukushima were demanding to know why the government wasn't doing anything to protect their children from radiation. The government was responding by fiddling with the numbers and raising the levels of permissible exposure; meanwhile, nuclear plant workers, battling the meltdown at Fukushima, were dropping dead. A group calling themselves the Senior Certain Death Squad, made up of retired engineers in their seventies and eighties, volunteered to replace the young workers. The suicide rate among people displaced by the fallout and tsunami was on the rise. (86)

The narration of this passage seems, on one hand, to assemble a cohesive narrative out of chaos: various people or groups taking certain actions in response to the initial event. But at the same time, there's something wry, or even sarcastic, about the tone here, for the narrator removes entirely the layer of journalistic mediation implicit in any news story and instead smooths all of these stories into a polyvocal, and ultimately somewhat cacophonous, mix of perspectives.

In this way, the passage accomplishes two things at once: it invests each subject with an equal amount of narrative authority—the parents, the government, the Senior Certain Death Squad, or any others who wrote or were interviewed for these pieces. There's a democratic thrust to this gesture: a wide array of narratives come into view, and web journalism enables a certain

displacement of authority away from powerful discursive agents—state actors, corporations, established publications, and the like—in favor of centering more diverse perspectives. At the same time, however, this sequence in the novel quickly exhausts itself, as Ruth stumbles upon some particularly gruesome images of suicide. At this point, Ozeki writes, "She groaned as the wheel on the search engine spun, and then gasped at the results" (86). Here, sparing her readers, Ozeki pivots away from the scene with a section break. While Ruth has gathered a wealth of information about the catastrophe from a variety of sources, she eventually clicks her way into territory that is too upsetting to view. By truncating Ruth's search here, and marking that truncation with a section break, the text delimits a point beyond which curiosity can lead to serious psychological disturbance. The passage thus acknowledges that there is a potentially infinite number of overlapping, often conflicting narratives swirling around the many that Ruth happens to read—a possibility that is somewhat thrilling given its potential to extend Ruth's perceptual capacity across the Pacific and to democratize information-sharing. The only limit-point to this potentially endless search becomes Ruth's affective response to material so horrific that the novel stops short of describing it. The novel essentially censors itself here, perhaps with the reader's tolerance for brutality in mind.

Embarking on a series of click after click that becomes increasingly random is likely familiar to most web users in the age of search engines and networked image archives. Scholars, too, have seriously approached this phenomenon in disciplines ranging from cybernetics and information theory to psychology, sociology, and the humanities. Ingrid Hotz-Davies, a literary critic, summarizes the excessive nature of Internet semiotics in this way: "As a medium for the indiscriminate and global dissemination of information, the Internet is a massive, amorphous, rhizomic collection of substantiated facts, guesswork, fantasy, madness, debate, criminal energy,

big business, stupidity, brilliance—all in all, a seemingly limitless multiplication of voices, all clamouring to be heard" (n.p.). The above passage from *A Tale from the Time Being* gestures toward exactly this plenitude, nodding at the rhizomatic swamp of words that a Google Search can unearth. Yet Ozeki does not dismiss or pronounce a value judgment on that form of information retrieval. Rather, the novel offers up for analysis the phenomenology of an Internet search—how a human sensorium encounters a massive influx of content unfurling on a web browser, while trying to process an ecological, social, and political disaster of such enormous proportions that it will always exceed the imaginative grasp of someone witnessing it through a screen.

The Digital Sublime

I now turn away from the activity of "reading" the Internet, which Ruth pursues in the passage above, and toward the distinctive experience of searching for images, rather than text, online, which Ruth and Nao both pursue elsewhere in the novel. A search-results database, such as Google Images or its fictional avatar in *A Tale*, is designed to generate a spectacle of seemingly endless imagery, a visual archive distinguished by its plenitude and its user-friendly aesthetic: digital photographs separated by thin white borders, available for further exploration with just a scroll and a click (as indicated in figures 1-3.) If user-friendly, however, this online archive also becomes overwhelming, even anxiety-producing in its sheer immensity. The phenomenon of viewing an image-results page, particularly responding to a disaster-related search command like "japan tsunami 2011," resonates with Vincent Mosco's concept of "the digital sublime": an iteration of Edmund Burke's sublime that has taken shape since the rise of the "information superhighway" in the 1980s and that has generated its own mythology of

progress and achievement alongside a pervasive sense of terror and awe. Mosco writes, "Today, cyberspace has become the latest icon of the technological and electronic sublime, praised for its epochal and transcendent characteristics and demonized for the depth of evil that it can conjure." Mosco goes on to compare this "digital sublime" to the awe that Shelley, Wordsworth, and other writers experienced in the face of natural wonders like France's Mont Blanc at the turn of the 19th century. He writes, "Just as the romantic poets were transfixed before majestic peaks of Europe, today's poets, indeed all of us, experience reveries in cyberspace. But there are also horrors," among which Mosco lists the ruthless crimes of Ted Kaczynski (the Unabomber), "a man driven by his revulsion with a computer-driven society to kill and maim people associated with new technology" (24).[16]

While Kaczynski's physical violence constitutes the outer limits of personal dissatisfaction with technology, we might say that the digital sublime also generates smaller, more mundane "horrors" on a regular basis, extending into the realm of the human psyche when it is confronted by massive influxes of digital imagery that rush into cyberspace when an ecological disaster, a war, or another act of tragedy occurs. These events, and certain media users' virtual contact with them, have now become commonplace rather than exceptional, as John Sifton argues in his book *Violence All Around*. While violence has remained a central human preoccupation since the inception of orally transmitted narratives—that is to say, since the beginning of culture as we know it—technologies such as the camera and particularly the pocket-sized smartphone have amplified our visual exposure to brutality. They have thus altered our relationship to violent phenomena *as* and particularly *after* they occur.

What has changed about human encounters with violent imagery in the Internet age, ultimately, has to do with the speed at which such images circulate and the volume at which they

greet the human sensorium when a person has access to technological devices and networks.[17] Scholars at the interdisciplinary Centre for the Study of the Networked Image, based at London South Bank University, advocate for the importance of studying the ontology and pervasiveness of "networked images," such as those retrieved by Google Image searches, in our current media ecosystem. For these scholars, the term "networked image" denotes "a set of contemporary practices, platforms, software and computer programmes which are reconfiguring the visual and sonic in culture and shifting settled notions of temporality, movement and space."[18] To take as an example the "japan tsunami 2011" Google Image search, the potential for a person to make experiential contact with the tsunami becomes both augmented and warped by a variety of factors that the CSNI scholars might cite: by the availability of high-resolution digital cameras; the ease with which digital images can be uploaded and circulated throughout the Web; the swiftness with which a user can scroll through, view, click on, and expand such images; the manner in which a search-engine interface arranges these images paratactically, thus forming a seemingly endless virtual collage of disaster; and so forth. These capabilities, therefore, "reconfigure" the visual record of the tsunami and "shift" public perception of the ecological disaster away from an isolated event that unfolds in a temporal sequence and within a particular geographical space. The survivors at the zero-point of an event, of course, experience it as a bodily and psychological trauma in real time. Yet the CSNI scholars' understanding of networked digital images focuses on distant viewers, whose understanding of the tsunami would "shift," instead, toward that of a temporally and spatially diffuse phenomenon that can rematerialize with a few keystrokes that grant visual access to a networked archive of images. When Mosco includes "indeed all of us" among those who are both enchanted and overwhelmed by the digital sublime, his analysis comes to bear on the phenomenology of viewing these

networked images of conflict, disaster, and trauma on a regular basis. By citing "today's poets" in addition to the more generalized "us," Mosco gestures toward the ways in which writers, artists, and other creative makers are responding to cyberspace's sublime enormity in the 21st century. As this mode of encountering disaster through pixels on a screen becomes more commonplace, and as the digital sublime comes increasingly to define human modes of interacting with our physical surroundings, artists and novelists are reckoning with this experience in their work.

The Mediated Sensorium

Art historian Caroline A. Jones has described how the ubiquity of smartphones, laptops, security cameras, and other devices in the twenty-first century has amplified the "always-already mediated" nature of the human sensorium. By the phrase "always-already," Jones acknowledges that we should not overstate the "newness" of "new" technology in mediating how humans experience the world; she notes that "without the 'medium' of air or water, the anthropoid ear finds it impossible to hear," for example (5). With Vincent Mosco and other media theorists, however, Jones concurs that the decades since the invention of the commercial Internet have produced more concrete and synthetic forms of mediation. These forms impel the human sensorium to encounter a new or at least heightened range of inputs and, as a result, affects. Human interaction with the world, according to Jones, has become "amplified, shielded, channeled, prosthetized, simulated, stimulated, irritated." Yet, somewhat counterintuitively, Jones argues that such extremes of mediated experience actually *lull* us into a kind of "twenty-first-century 'comfort zone,' in which the prosthetic and supplemental are habitual" (5). We may extrapolate from this that digital image archives, such as those which Ozeki references in the

novel, enhance optical perception, extending a sighted individual's long-range visual field across oceans and national borders. In doing so, however, these archives curate a visual experience of the wider world that becomes comfortable rather than marked by exceptional shocks and jolts of awareness. Such shocks and jolts do, of course, still occur, yet Jones suggests that a person's increased contact with media serves to *normalize*, rather than foreground, the extremities of human experience that media enable us to witness.

A Tale for the Time Being, however, works to demarcate *both* limit-points of mediated perceptual experience: both the lull and the overdrive, the mundane and the extraordinary. The former (the lull, the mundane) is expressed in the novel by passing narrative and characterological details; the latter (the extraordinary) through passages of ekphrasis that rupture the calm of narrative progression and cry out for the reader to radically examine the *nature and implications of that mediation* itself. Regarding the former, Ruth skims through troubling online content with a kind of flattened, generalized malaise: "She pored over websites, collecting information on ADD, ADHD, bipolar disorder, dissociative identity disorder, parasites, and even sleeping sickness, but her biggest fear was Alzheimer's" (92). As noted here, Ruth spends most of her time online pursuing disturbing topics: trying to diagnose her own anxiety problems or searching for March 2011 victims. She feels even more unsettled, however, when her shaky dial-up Internet connection fails, and then marginally better when it returns and "her mind [is] back online" (172). As Jones would suggest, Ruth attains a meditative state online, thanks to the smooth navigation experience that the Internet affords, even when the content that she peruses is decidedly uncomfortable.

Nao, even more so than Ruth, essentially lives online; like her classmates, her ketai (smartphone) is ever-present, and she spends hours fixated on websites that feature harmful

content that her classmates have created *about her*. Two examples of this are a "page with my panties for sale" at online auction (284), and a video-sharing site on which her classmates have posted a video of a fake funeral they staged for her "death." Surfing the latter site, Nao compulsively refreshes the page, looking for more hits: "The number of hits hadn't increased at all since the last time I checked, which was depressing, considering that I'd only been dead for less than two weeks and was already being forgotten" (137). These passages are marked by a tone of resigned detachment, as though the process of searching through and refreshing Web pages establishes a soothing "comfort zone" that ameliorates the troubling content that the characters are encountering in cyberspace.

Amidst these narrative accounts of Ruth's and Nao's activities online, however, ekphrastic descriptions of digital Web content occasionally erupt into the text. On a formal level, by stalling narrative time and, in Heffernan's words, "refus[ing] to be merely ornamental," these moments forcefully inject visual information into the narrative reading experience (5). In this sense, ekphrasis becomes an especially powerful technique to deploy when writing about disturbing images and the traumatic response that viewing them can incite. Because they often depict violent imagery, the novel's ekphrastic passages hold the potential to shock a reader out of the comfort zone permitted by one's daily information flow that Jones describes. A particularly striking such passage appears after Nao's classmates post, on a video-sharing site, the video of her using the restroom and then being tied up and threatened with rape. Ozeki delves into the visual appearance of that video itself, thus forcing the reader to encounter, at least imaginatively, the extremely invasive and abusive images that now circulate online:

> They posted the video on the Internet that night. One of my classmates emailed me the link. The image quality from the ketai phone cams was crap, grainy and shaky, and you

> couldn't really see my face too clearly, which I was grateful for, but the video was awfully clear. With my arms and head tied up in my skirt and my naked legs kicking, you could almost say I looked like a giant prehistoric squid, squirming and oozing ink from my ink sac in a futile attempt to confuse my predators. (278)

The third sentence in this excerpt, beginning with "The image quality," proceeds by establishing and then toppling expectations regarding the video's content and appearance. Nao first insinuates that the image quality was "crap, grainy and shaky," so that her face has remained mercifully obscured. The nonrestrictive clause "which I was grateful for" implies that the video, given its rough-hewn aesthetic, will not be too damaging to Nao's reputation or to viewers who might be triggered by a graphic depiction of physical abuse onscreen. Following that suggestion, however, the second half of the compound sentence abruptly doubles back on the sentiment voiced earlier: the video is not grainy enough; it is, rather, "awfully clear." The subsequent sentence then hurtles unexpectedly into the profane, portraying the injury inflicted onto Nao's body by way of words like "tied up" and "kicking." The squid metaphor closing the paragraph drives the point home: in the video, Nao's physical autonomy has been violently stripped away. Sub-human, she appears as an extinct marine creature trying fruitlessly to deploy an ineffective self-defense mechanism.

The intrusion of the visual register into narrative here is shocking in a number of ways. For one, the passage breaks down, in sequential language, the phenomenological experience of viewing this type of video, of oneself. It narrates the process of recognition by which Nao initially perceives the "grainy and shaky" quality of the image, and then becomes gradually aware of her own body materializing onscreen. The sequencing of language in this passage, therefore, isolates those specific moments of perception and recognition: the "crap" quality and then the "awfully clear" image. It thus demonstrates the aesthetic of many amateur videos online,

which are at once completely devoid of context and graphically violent. Nao's stumbling recognition of herself onscreen points to a certain mode of online viewership, whereby content can be made without consent and consumed without knowledge of the subject's situation.

The video depicts, from an exterior vantage point, a character whose interior we have grown to know, having read her diary throughout the novel. Being asked, as a reader, to imagine viewing Nao's body in this debased and digitally mediated form propels one to contemplate the loss of agency that anyone suffers when the body is not only viciously bullied, but also captured and then disseminated across media platforms intended to produce virality. Because it is a verbal technique, however, ekphrasis offers the resources of language to extend a meta-commentary about the visual object being described. Viewing an *actual* video like the one Nao describes, a person might perhaps glimpse similarities between the human body and "a giant prehistoric squid." Yet as readers, that comparison is thrust before us, whether we choose it or not, and we thereby witness three levels of interpretive perception: first, the graphic description of the video; second, Nao's reaction to that video; and third, Nao's impulse to metaphorize *herself* onscreen, to reach for a comparison between her own personhood and an extinct sea creature who possesses no agency over its body. This "representation of representation," to quote Heffernan, enables readers to come into imaginative contact with the shock of the visual, while also allowing access to the character's cognition as she describes and responds to that representation.

This passage describing Nao's onscreen assault also confers attention onto an online phenomenon that is becoming increasingly prevalent but remains exceptionally difficult to prevent, respond to, and adjudicate. Specifically, the situation to which Nao's classmates subject her—by recording her in the bathroom stall against her will and then tying her up with a rope, threatening to rape her, while keeping the cameras running—amounts to a phenomenon that has

gained recent legal, scholarly, and media attention: technology-assisted sexual violence (TFSV). TFSV occurs when "mobile and online technologies are used as tools to blackmail, control, coerce, harass, humiliate, objectify or violate another person."[19] Also known as "image-based sexual exploitation," this practice occurs when sexually explicit images are captured against a subject's will and then distributed to others. While TFSV has become prominent worldwide given the rise of social networks and image-distribution sites, it is a notoriously difficult practice to adjudicate, and it thus leaves victims like Nao with little recourse to seek justice following such abuse. Nao's experience, communicated through the ekphrastic description of the video, confers visibility upon a type of abuse that falls outside the realm of criminal prosecution (in Japan, as elsewhere) and lacks any structured form of social restitution.[20]

While TFSV must be thought of within a broader schema of gendered violence, within that frame it is also an entirely unique phenomenon, singularized by technologies that enable the recording and distribution of degrading images. Close attention to this passage from *A Tale for the Time Being* reveals both the particular harm that TFSV enacts on its victims and the ease with which an instance of TFSV can be brushed aside as a one-time event that seems immune to disciplinary recourse and almost impossible to prevent. Its inclusion in the novel, via Ozeki's ekphrastic description of Nao viewing the video, impels readers to consider this event as a physical manifestation of gendered violence amplified by smartphone technology and spread widely thanks to the ease with which one can upload video content to websites. This constitutes, therefore, a form of violence unique to the age of networked visual images—a form of violence that demands scrutiny as a side effect of networked technology, which continually stymies attempts by scholars, legislative bodies, and courts to define and respond to it.[21] As a novel, *A Tale for the Time Being* initiates that process of reckoning with this violence; it does so

specifically through the ekphrastic image and then by embedding that image in a passage of first-person narration. This dynamic in the text impels the reader to encounter a verbalized image of the abuse, as well as the impact that the abuse and its video recording have on the victim's consciousness.

In Nao's case, the video—its making and distribution—carries an additional valence of exploitation, in that her classmates upload it to the Internet in order to profit financially from their cruelty toward Nao. Her classmates record the video in order to draw attention to an online auction they've set up to sell the underwear she was wearing while being assaulted; the videos are thus produced and distributed in order to humiliate Nao, but also to profit financially from that humiliation, given the likelihood that a fetishist would purchase the items online.[22] Next to the "grainy and shaky" video of Nao's assault, writes Ozeki, "was a link to a burusera [schoolgirl] fetish site where hentais could bid on my blood-stained panties. The auction was scheduled to last for a week, and the bidding was fast, but this time I didn't feel any satisfaction at the rising hit count" (278). By this point, the novel has moved through three stages of Nao's experience as a victim of TFSV: enduring the physical assault; viewing the ekphrastically rendered video online; psychologically processing it; and watching hypnotically as the hit count for the panty-auction rises—i.e., reckoning with its presence in digital form on the Internet. By tracing Nao's extended encounter with the video of her assault, this passage of the novel dramatizes the phenomenological experience through which a survivor of technologically facilitated sexual violence comes into contact with the visual record of that violence. The ekphrastic intrusion of the video into narrative thus compels a reader to contemplate not only the image itself, but also how it affects the character featured in the image, how her brain processes the image as she views it, and what effect it has on her subsequently (here, Nao ceasing to go to

school and considering suicide). It is this unique property of the novel as a form—weaving ekphrasis into narrative—that enables this extended process of attending to Nao's specific experience of non-consensual assault, its recording on video, and the viral spread of that video on the Internet.

The final effect that the ekphrasis accomplishes here is to create a formal linkage between this video of Nao and, a few paragraphs later, the videos that Nao's father had been viewing online, contemporaneously, according to his browsing history. The passage that ends this chapter is striking in its formal similarities to the one quoted above: Nao and her mother had both "seen the websites he was hanging out on. Weapons technology pages. War blogs. Military fan sites. Al Jazeera. Missile footage that looked like first-person shooter games, only grainy and dark. Bombs exploding. Buildings collapsing. Beatings. Bodies" (279). The invocation, once again, of "grainy and dark" footage recalls the video of herself that Nao described, a semiotic alignment suggesting global and political connections between the actions to which Nao has been subjected and the military adventurism conducted in the Middle East under the sign of counter-terrorism.

This friction between the "comfort zone" and its periodic ruptures, as generated by the intrusion of ekphrastic moments into narrative, not only produces an aesthetic dynamic that mimics how humans who use devices tend to experience the world. Additionally, because the verbal text grants access to descriptions of media as well as to a character's affective and psychological responses, this dynamic provokes a form of ethical reckoning that is not necessarily required by the act of scanning through a Google Image archive or videos on a website. This aesthetic friction reminds the reader how it feels to be shaken outside of her sensory comfort zone, and how interpersonal violence, natural disasters, and massive failures of state response to them should be thought of as *exceptional*, rather than commonplace. They

should look and feel extreme, not merely like normalized blips on one's increasingly crowded sensorial radar.

"The Half-Life of Information in a Digital World"

Novels, therefore, that tackle the experience of viewing and browsing online can have the effect of highlighting the relatable comfort zone that many users reach when their minds are essentially bathing in a constant stream of digital information. It then becomes essential to contemplate the primacy and longevity of that information, alongside other cultural forms, as potential vehicles for not only representing, but also for *archiving* the memory of phenomena such as group bullying or March 2011. In a 2013 interview with Eleanor Ty in *MELUS*, Ozeki explained how parts of *A Tale* grew out of her own fascination with the Internet as a cultural archive and as an inevitably faulty prosthesis for human memory. She says:

> There is this idea that we forget those kinds of histories: we forget the history of [World War II], we forget the hidden histories of all of these things that, without memory, we are doomed to repeat. . . . I was interested in the idea of the Internet as a kind of temporal gyre and in asking the questions, what is the half-life of information in a digital world? What happens in a world where things are no longer written down in physical form? How stable is our information and our archiving now? (n.p.)

Ozeki here voices concern about the ephemerality—or at least the considerable mutability—of information on the Internet. Though she does not address the novel directly, her response implicitly suggests that a novel, as a form counterpoised against the Internet, might provide a way not only of archiving information for posterity, but also for putting analytic pressure on the capabilities—and the shortcomings—of "information" or "data" that we often take for granted.

These concerns are reflected in *A Tale*'s obsession with scenes of writing and with the materiality of diaries and books alongside computer monitors, smartphones, and the networks that link them. (For example, it is notable that Nao's diary, a physical literary artifact, survives its journey across the Pacific, while Ruth is ultimately unable to find a digital trace of Nao's identity online.) Additionally, Ozeki's response spurs contemplation about what the novel, itself a technology, can provide as a vehicle for remembrance, contextualization, and a particular form of connectivity: distinct, it is worth pointing out, from the utopian "digital connectivity" celebrated by cell phone companies and social networking sites keen on attracting customers in the attention economy.[23]

With the phrase "all of these things that, without memory, we are doomed to repeat," Ozeki seems to be suggesting that there's a substantive way in which memory does more than simply *memorialize* tragedy that has occurred in the past. Historical memory, rather, becomes integral to the prevention of future, uncannily iterative and even causally related tragedies. Her response, however, reflects doubt about the respective capacities that certain cultural forms (such as the Internet or any digital database) hold as vessels for historical memory, particularly within our 21st century global media ecology; certain types of "information and archiving," that is, may be less stable or effective than others. This recalls Manovich's distinction between database and narrative: how databases (such as an Internet search) lack the cause-and-effect linkages and prioritization of information that narrative affords; rather, databases are "collections of individual items, with every item possessing the same significance as any other" (218). To take the example of the March 2011 catastrophes in Japan, it is clear that the sort of historical memory represented by a "japan tsunami 2011" image search-results page—or any aggregate of press photographs

viewed alongside one another, for that matter—differs from what a novel offers by way of representing and reckoning with those events.

In *A Tale*, Ozeki revisits this sentiment when describing a passage of Ruth's free indirect discourse, which centers on one of Ruth's feverish Internet searches for information about tsunami victims. While browsing images of the tsunami's aftermath, including "a ring of soldiers, bowing to a body they've flagged" and "a line of toddlers, waiting quietly for their turn to be tested," Ruth muses: "These images, a miniscule few representing the inconceivable many, eddy and grow old, degrading with each orbit around the gyre, slowly breaking down into razor-sharp fragments and brightly colored shards. Like plastic confetti, they're drawn into the gyre's becalmed center, the garbage patch of history and time" (114). The two ekphrastic images—"a ring of soliders," "a line of toddlers"—are forceful in their depiction of the horrors of nuclear radiation; like the video of Nao's body being violated by her classmates, they seem exactly the types of pictures that might shock a viewer out of her sensory "comfort zone," impel her to stop scrolling, and pay more of her commercially valuable attention to the suffering being depicted.

Yet Ozeki, in the second part of this quote, moves beyond the ekphrasis, doubling back to evaluate not just the content of those images but the *form* in which they have reached Ruth: their very materiality *as data*, or pixels, which are bound to decay and eventually be swept into "the garbage patch of history and time." Ozeki's subsequent simile is telling: these digital images, while "brightly colored" and startling, possess the ephemerality of "plastic confetti," vulnerable to being disposed of when a new event arises to claim public attention. But the subtle, meta-narrative point here lies in the fact that Ruth is actually, throughout *A Tale*, attempting to write a novel herself. Having toiled fruitlessly over a memoir for years, Ruth becomes interested in Nao's diary not solely out of empathy for Nao as a potential victim of the March 2011

catastrophes. Her fascination with the Hello Kitty lunchbox also starts to fuel her thinking about a new project that would center around the mystery of Nao's disappearance and, perhaps, her own relation to it. In this sense, Ozeki is both inserting into the novel her own speculations about how Internet information is apt to decay and, by positioning Ruth as a novelist, using the space of *A Tale* to contemplate the distinct affordances of the novel as a vessel for cultural memory.

So what, exactly, are the formal resources that the novel possesses in relation to mass sufffering, as distinct from primarily digital forms like networked image databases? In critical discourse about the contemporary novel, particularly following the turn toward trauma studies beginning in the 1990s, the novel's capacity to enable forms of "witnessing" and "testimony" is often foregrounded.[24] Such claims about the novel's potential tend to stop there, as though becoming a *witness of* or *testifying to* a traumatic historical event will suffice as a reparative gesture. Approaching trauma and witnessing from another disciplinary perspective, scholars writing on media including Luc Boltanski and Susie Linfield ask questions such as: What does viewing a photograph, video, or virtual simulation of atrocity actually *make us do*? How do we *act* in response to visual representations of distant suffering or events that, most viewers would generally agree, should never be repeated? Linfield weighs differing perspectives on the impact that press photographs depicting political violence can have on viewers and even on geopolitics. She asserts, for example, that photographs of the Vietnam War "didn't foster feelings of moral inadequacy. . . . On the contrary, they mobilized political opposition to the war" (7). Linfield claims here that photographs such as Eddie Adams's of a street-side execution or Nick Ut's of a naked, napalmed girl materially changed the course of how that war was waged and ultimately ended; the photographs, in that sense, *made things happen*. Human rights scholar Thomas Keenan, on the other hand, remains skeptical of the affective charge that photographs of brutality

transmit, and also of claims about the press photograph's potential to generate productive political change. He writes, "Moaning, lowing, crying—expressing one's private suffering—makes no claims on others, remains outside of discourse, humanity, the political sphere."[25] Keenan is not alone in suggesting that even photographs depicting the most graphic human injuries lack the capacity to actually move viewers toward a moral commitment to the situation that provoked those injuries; Susan Sontag expresses similar skepticism in *Regarding the Pain of Others*. This is in part because such images often circulate devoid of context and also in such volume that their undoubtedly disturbing affect—pain that elicits the sounds that Keenan describes—begins to anesthetize viewers who have grown accustomed to witnessing so many comparable images across media platforms.

These questions are surely relevant to any text—photographic, cinematic, linguistic—that attempts to represent violence or disasters almost unspeakable in their extremity. It seems difficult, however, to quantify exactly how a text enables a response and to evaluate whether that response would be productive or, perhaps unwittingly, destructive. Regarding the novel as merely a vehicle through which readers may "witness" tragedy, on the other hand, risks minimizing the potential that the medium holds not just for memorializing tragedy or diagnosing injustice, but also for bringing new imaginative possibilities into being—for foregrounding, in Rita Felski's phrasing, "what [a text] unfurls, calls forth, makes possible" (12). What Ozeki gestures toward in the *MELUS* interview, and what I pursue in depth throughout this chapter, is the horizon of possibility that the novel contains, as a complement to networked digital images. Specifically: how the novel can draw and explore connections between historical events, political movements, human behaviors, processes of ecological destruction and economic oppression, and any number of other categories whose relationships to one another are not immediately obvious.

Even as a novel itself, *A Tale*'s engagement with visual media found on the Internet is absolutely central to this exploration, for Ozeki's phrase "the half-life of information in a digital world" implicitly includes *the visual record* of events like March 2011. The novel puts pressure on what this "information" can signify and explores how the human brain processes it, through passages that describe Ruth's frantic Internet searches that vacillate between temporal narration and ekphrastic descriptions of photographs and videos turned up in her search. The novel tackles this visual record in passages such as the following, in which Ruth sits at her computer, searching for images of the tsunami's aftermath. The passage becomes a catalog of ekphrastically rendered digital video frames, mostly made on cell phones, shakily recorded:

> Sometimes an image would suddenly blur and distort as the photographer fled to higher ground. Sometimes, in the corners and the edges of the frame, tiny cars and people were caught fleeing from the oncoming wall of black water. . . . Sometimes they looked like they were taking their time and even turning back to watch, not understanding the danger they were in. But always, from the vantage point of the camera, you could see how fast the wave was traveling and how immense it was. Those tiny people didn't stand a chance, and the people standing off-screen knew it. (113)

This passage remarkably triangulates three layers of spectatorship: the subjects of these videos being described, tragically proximate to the wave; the mobile videographers, trying to decide whether, and how, to record what they're seeing; and finally, Ruth at her computer across the Pacific, sweeping through the images with her cursor and ethically grappling with what to look at, and how to respond to what she's seeing. The catalog-style listing of these images, four sentences beginning with "Sometimes," communicates the sensory experience of scrolling through an image database, wherein each image is given equal primacy among others without

context or editorial commentary. Translating these images into language, however, allows space for such context and for exploring the viewer's (Ruth's) reactions to them as individual documents. Yet the image itself does important representational work: the referent (the absent video of suffering, which becomes hauntingly present by way of ekphrasis) becomes a forceful complement to literary narrative in addressing the horror of this event. Like Nao viewing the video of herself being assaulted, these videos rupture the "comfort zone" that both characters occupy online for the most part. The passage brings the experience of suffering into imaginative view, while maintaining multiple layers of mediation from it. That distance between the referenced video and the verbal text that we read evokes the physical alienation that Ruth experiences in relation to the zero-point of the catastrophe, a distance for which she feels at once grateful and, as a viewer of the videos, somewhat accountable. The ekphrastic passage opens that distance up for contemplation.

Paying Attention

Thus far I have mapped some of the unique aspects of the Internet as both a textual and visual medium, as well as the challenges that the Internet poses to novelistic representation. I conclude by turning to the broader ethical implications of these formal choices, inquiring: what is the significance of Ozeki's attention to her protagonists' online activities, beyond challenging language to both represent and interrogate how those activities unfold? As I hope to have made clear, these latter achievements—using language to engage with virtual space in all of its complexity—are significant in their own right. Additionally, however, I believe that the character Ruth in particular evinces a set of behaviors that model how we might reconceive our own responsibilities as subjects with visual access to distant others, thanks to the modes of online

spectatorship that I have investigated thus far. Contrary to Birkerts's somewhat dystopian view of processing the Internet versus reading novels, which inspire "reflection" and "contemplation," Ruth often achieves a highly contemplative state online, a plane of deep concentration, focus, and attention. Even if she is shuttling between browser windows and following her curiosity down various Internet rabbit holes, these activities do end up coalescing into a sustained, meditative deliberation over what is occurring in March 2011 Japan.

In addition to hyper-reading online journalism and poring over cellphone videos of the tsunami, Ruth also delves into the non-digital materiality of Nao's diary, handwritten and glued into a deconstructed copy of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. The physical book becomes an unlikely conduit between Nao, writing in purple ink inside "a French maid café in Akiba Electricity Town" in Tokyo, and Ruth, deciphering the contents of the mysterious Hello Kitty lunchbox in British Columbia (3). Just as Ruth wonders about the materiality of digital images, comparing them to "plastic confetti" and "brightly colored shards," she contemplates how a physical book becomes a vessel for another person's physical presence:

> She held the diary to her nose again and sniffed, identifying the smells one by one: the mustiness of an old book tickling her nostrils, the acid tang of glue and paper, and then something else that she realized must be Nao, bitter like coffee beans and sweetly fruity like shampoo. She inhaled deeply again, and then put the book—no, not a schoolgirl's nice pure diary—back on the bedside table, still pondering how best to read this improbable text. (37-38)

"How best to read this improbable text": The line could apply to Nao's diary, Ozeki's novel, or even the Internet in all of its sublime immensity, and *A Tale* slyly invites readers to subject all of these various texts to scrutiny. This inquisitiveness about reading works on two levels: within the

text's diegetic world, Ruth strives to become a responsible receiver for other people's stories; and on a meta-textual level, the book forces readers to undertake a process of *thinking about thinking*—specifically, thinking about the thinking that we do when we scan the Internet, process digital images, or spend months digesting a long work of narrative.

Earlier, I mentioned how the phrase "paying attention" has become literalized in the contemporary global economy, wherein human attention becomes a resource that corporations seek to extract and exploit as core aspects of their business strategies. This has become the new reality, the way to monetize the substantial resources that the Internet affords to its users. Scholars like Terranova continue to do valuable work, in media studies and economics, toward critiquing this newest iteration of multinational capitalism. But "attention," a principal activity of the human mind, has a much longer history as an object of study, and I contend that we should reconceive what "paying attention" might mean in a world where one can, if one wants, watch waves engulf innocent bystanders halfway across the world on a screen. Simone Weil, in one of her final essays, suggests that "pure, intuitive attention is the only source of perfectly beautiful art, truly original and brilliant scientific discovery, of philosophy which really aspires to wisdom and of true, practical love of one's neighbor" (273). Weil's understanding of attention becomes a constitutive part of her philosophy of religion; elsewhere, she figures attention as a way of "waiting for God."[26]

Attention, in this capacity, amounts to holding open the space between receiving sensory input and forming rational thought. The philosopher Nancy Mardas has built upon Weil's work, as well as Emanuel Levinas's, to articulate an "ethics of attention," a way of thinking attention beyond its traditional purview as a strictly phenomenological concept. She writes that attention "has the possibility of inhabiting a pre-reflective space, a space in which the distinction between

self and other is still more fluid than fixed" (181). In this sense, attention follows sensory apperception but precedes deliberate action, and for that reason, the act of paying attention, or holding that space, serves an indispensable role in relating to others and cultivating responsibility within one's lifeworld. *A Tale* explores this state when Ruth presses Nao's diary to her nose, and also when Ruth views videos of the tsunami, recognizing what is present in the videos but also noticing what is absent: "She watched whole towns get crushed and swept away in a matter of moments, and she was aware that while these moments were captured online, so many other moments simply vanished" (113). The simple verb phrase "was aware that" reflects this moment of attention that Weil and Mardas prioritize as a foundation of ethics. As concepts like "the digital sublime" and "the mediated sensorium" suggest, this ability to "be aware" comes under extreme pressure when the mind is immersed in the Internet's overstimulating environment. Ruth's engagements with both the Internet and Nao's diary converge into a practice of paying attention across mediums, and in each of these scenes involving reading and viewing, she becomes a subject poised between attention, reflection, and action.

Action, in response to a catastrophe like 3/11, is a complicated prospect. Even if a cellphone video of "tiny cars and people" facing "the oncoming wall of black water" gives the impression of telesthesia, of course it is far too late to intervene, and the distance that telesthesia artificially collapses cannot be overcome in short order. To distant tragedy, there exists a range of possible responses: donation, advocacy, relief work, pressure on governments to respond differently. But, as Weil and Mardas would affirm, all of these prospects begin with attention, and the phenomena that *A Tale* explores—viewing online archives and reading extended works of narrative—offer readers a chance to begin reconceiving how to pay attention within the sensory environments they inhabit. Ozeki, herself a Zen Buddhist priest who infuses Zen

philosophy into the novel by way of the character Jiko, may have had a famous Zen *ko'an* in mind when portraying her protagonist as she wrestles with her own attention on the Internet: "A student spends years gathering the resources necessary to make a once-in-a-lifetime visit to the wise master of whom he has heard so much. After an arduous journey, he arrives at the monastery, and waits his turn for a moment with the master. When his turn arrives, he bows in humility and asks the master for a word of enlightenment. The master says simply, 'Attention,' and turns away to greet the next in line" (qtd. in Mardas 184).

A Tale doesn't rebuke any of the mediated forms through which events like 3/11 become represented and disseminated beyond their point of origin. Rather, it mobilizes the aesthetic resources of the print novel to explore how representations of disaster travel to and reach us in pixelated form, sometimes inviting merely a flat, decontextualized encounter with those images and the events that they depict. Exploring Ruth's experience of the March 2011 events through ekphrastic descriptions of digitally networked images, alongside novelistic features including overlapping narratives, epistolary correspondence, and explorations of consciousness through free indirect discourse, *A Tale* offers up a mode of viewing a disaster such as March 2011 not merely as an isolated catastrophe, erupting out of our volatile earth habitat. Rather, the text presents March 2011 as a historical flashpoint that shares characteristics with other moments of violence that would not immediately appear to relate—particularly when an isolated digital image or the overwhelming plenitude of an Internet image search becomes the medium through which one receives and views that catastrophe.

The anthropologist Iza Kavedžija, introducing a 2016 special issue of *Contemporary Japan* on "Reorienting Hopes," writes, "Hope, in the Japanese context, is perhaps best seen as a form of the commons, an inherently collective resource that flourishes when shared with others"

(10). Particularly through Nao's diary, *A Tale* portrays this struggle to locate resources for hope in the period of its setting: the book registers the crushing effects of economic recession by acknowledging both "death from overwork" and the depressive state of "*otaku*," or shut-ins such as Nao's father who cannot find employment (81-82, 15). Similarly, the text also engages extensively with both Nao's and her father's suicidal ideation, in Nao's case as a result of the vicious bullying that her classmates capture on video. At the same time, the novel posits multiple models for forging relationships within such an environment, both in person but also through textual correspondence, within Japan and across the Pacific Ocean. Nao learns about Jiko's Buddhist practice by spending a summer at her temple, but she also feels her grandfather Haruki #1 almost coming to life through his letters and photographic portrait. Similarly, Ruth looks to her husband for support when learning about 3/11 on her remote Canadian island, but she also feels as though she is in Nao's physical presence when poring over her diary. Ozeki imagines "hope as a form of the commons" within the novel, asserting that acts of attentive writing, reading, and viewing can establish filiation even across vast distances. The novel, therefore, constructs a metanarrative about literacy and reading, just as it delves at various points into the vast, disorienting, and even isolating dimensions of online image-worlds.

Ultimately, the novel posits ethical modes for viewing, interpreting, and responding to various instances of violence: it incites readers to examine *how we think* as we view and read about that violence from afar, and how we pay attention given the new sensory experiences afforded by ever-evolving technologies of mediation. Ekphrasis as a formal technique links specific moments wherein loss is captured by visual media, but language allows us to perceive something else in those moments, and also to connect them across the text. The architecture of *A Tale*—particularly its multidirectional themes and the connections forged between characters—

draws those linkages out as well. Ultimately, the novel both explores the digital sublime and digs through that excess of imagery to locate narrative throughlines and meaningful historical and global connections. Novels like *A Tale* can supplement the practice of viewing images of suffering by impelling us to reflect on the phenomenon of witnessing mediated violence from afar and, as a result, by inviting us to experiment with new practices of attention as we read.

Chapter 2: Post-Crash Fiction and the Aesthetics of Austerity in Kevin Barry's *City of Bohane*

In the prior chapter, I explored an area of global visual culture characterized by plenitude, excess, and even a version of the sublime: the vast archives of digital text and imagery that enable Internet users to witness catastrophe from afar. At this juncture, I turn to a novel that deploys ekphrastic imagery toward a different end. Rather than attempting to sift through the vast currents of contemporary media culture, Irish writer Kevin Barry sets his debut novel *City of Bohane* (2011) in an estranged projection of Ireland in the year 2053, when technology has all but disappeared save for a few relics, including an antique movie theater that shows clips salvaged from decaying film reels and a "medieval Leica" camera, which captures a violent feud between the city's two main factions and prints those photographs in its only newspaper. The volume of visual materials that appears in *City of Bohane*, therefore, differs markedly from that of *A Tale*, because Bohane as a storyworld contains scant remaining traces of the visual culture that Ozeki navigates in her book. At the same time, however, the influences of film, photography, and even graphic novels shape how *City of Bohane* is written and structured, and its inclusion of ekphrasis plays a vital role in how the novel maps relationships between historical circumstance, visuality, and political agency.

Almost exactly halfway through the novel, Barry presents a collection of photographs that capture moments of this violent feud between Bohane's two rival constituences. One such image reads: "— Wolfie, again, so low-sized, and neck-deep now in Norrie gore" (154). This image is just one out of thirty-two similarly violent snapshots that Barry lists in a section titled "The Darkroom." Throughout this chapter, I aim to bring forward the tensions within Bohane that build to this violent climax, and also to consider what these images signify as an ekphrastic

group within the larger novel. On one level, images of characters "neck-deep" in "gore" might appear almost customary given twenty-first-century media trends, as though Barry were seeking to capture, in language, the vogue for stylized violence seen in films ranging from the *Sin City* adaptations to Quentin Tarantino's neo-Westerns and the Marvel and D.C. Comics franchises. While Western films, steampunk aesthetics, and comic book violence certainly register as influences on *City of Bohane*'s flamboyant style, I contend that "The Darkroom" passage represents not merely an attempt to capture what Sally Bachner has called "the prestige of violence" in contemporary visual culture and even fiction. Rather, *City of Bohane* integrates the influence of visual media as part of the narrative dynamics by which it responds to a contemporary sociopolitical crisis: specifically, how it challenges dominant readings of the 2008 global financial collapse and its material fallout, demonstrates the crisis's deep roots in colonial history, and envisions ways of resisting responses to the crisis that overlook or even erase from view the globe's most vulnerable inhabitants.

City of Bohane generates these horizons of critique and possibility by way of two interlinked formal gestures. First, the text's subtle allegorical valences allow it to "speak otherwise," to use Barbara Johnson's phrase, about past histories and the potential effects of current austerity regimes; and second, the novel's ekphrastic sketches of photographs puncture the narrative to depict exceptionally violent moments of conflict that grow out of economic tension. Ekphrasis as a literary technique interrupts narrative progression and resists integration into a larger textual environment; it generates friction between the movement of narrative and the stasis implied by the visual artifact being described. The relation between a larger text and a passage of ekphrasis embedded within it, as D. P. Fowler has suggested, becomes "inevitably an *uneasy* one," drawing "a connection between textual and political integration" (35). The

ekphrastic moment, in other words, refuses integration, and that moment of refusal can become a site at which alternative political possibilities enter the text. By closely reading the "Darkroom" passage in its narrative and historical contexts, I demonstrate how the passage calls upon the signifying power of language as well as the spectral qualities of photography in order to register a moment of historical emergency, but also to locate the potential for solidarity within a divided political commons. The novel does so by calling upon prior histories of insurgent protest in order to envision different outcomes—other than the hellscape that *City of Bohane* allegorically projects—of the present.

The Age of Austerity

A large-scale banner unfurled in front of the Irish Daíl on October 12th, 2013, read simply, "Austerity kills." The sign was deployed during a protest against the proposed 2014 Irish budget, marking a climactic moment of exasperation with the implementation of budget-cutting policies following the 2008 global financial crisis (Debets). Since 2008, the phrase "age of austerity" has become commonplace in political, economic, and even sociocultural discourse across Europe and the globe. The term austerity originated in World War II Britain, referring to the government-mandated rationing of food, clothes, soap, paper, and other goods: "a world of queues and shortages, . . . darkness and drabness and making-do," according to Susan Cooper, who lived through the time (37).[1] In a 2009 speech, David Cameron, then-leader of the U.K.'s Tory party, reappropriated the term and deployed the phrase "age of austerity" a dozen times throughout the speech. He did so in order to propose not only a fiscal solution to Britain's considerable debt following the 2008 crisis, but also to answer "a philosophical question" about how to respond. "Austerity" would henceforth name the role of the state in, apparently, helping

impoverished people to "break free by tackling welfare dependency, addiction, debt, poor schooling and above all, family breakdown" ("The Age of Austerity"). Cameron, like other fiscal conservatives proposing austerity after 2008, marshaled a moral defense of austerity by transferring responsibility for stabilizing the economy onto vulnerable citizens who, they imply, regularly deplete state funds out of habitual dependency.

Following Cameron's speech, the phrase became not only the clarion call for budget-tightening political strategies deployed in the wake of the 2008 crash, but also a descriptor of the lived reality of millions of citizens across the globe existing under such governmental paradigms. Given the term's increasing ubiquity since the global financial crisis, Rebecca Bramall has written that "austerity discourse is thoroughly embedded in the cultural imaginary," as it "has become the dominant discourse through which the conjunction in the present moment of economic and environmental 'crisis' is being thought, imagined and lived" ("Popular Culture" 17). Bramall's emphasis on austerity as "discourse" reflects a point that economist James Meadway has made about the term's instability of reference: unlike "recession," which can be defined formulaically as a period of two consecutive quarters of negative growth, Meadway observes that "there isn't anything similar for austerity" (Bramall, Gilbert, and Meadway 119). The term thus connotes a "political category": it is policy and ideology, but also a *discourse* that dominates, per Bramall, thinking about our current (and intertwined) economic and environmental crises, a descriptor of the material reality for those who are enduring the effects of austerity-driven governance.

Many economists, including Mark Blyth, John Cochrane, and Alberto Alesina, have written on the political economy of austerity, and cultural theorists such as Bramall, Lauren Berlant, and Ann Cvetkovich have examined the cultural and affective responses to the "age of

austerity" that have reverberated across the globe.[2] Much inquiry into the topic, however, remains to be initiated from a literary studies perspective—from a consideration, specifically, of what literary forms like the novel can provide by way of representation, critique, and imagining alternatives to the status quo. Taking Ireland as my specific area of focus, this chapter reads Barry's novel *City of Bohane* as an exemplar of what I term post-crash fiction: fiction that reckons explicitly with the fallout of the 2008 global financial crash and that takes as its imaginative terrain the state of being that has come to be known as "the age of austerity."[3] In reading *Bohane* as a "post-crash" novel, I unearth what I call an "aesthetic of austerity" at work in the text, which excavates and interrogates the lived reality of human bodies enduring austerity-driven governance. This lived reality gets purposefully occluded by political and business stakeholders seeking to project how budget-cutting policies have nurtured Ireland back to economic stability—hence the necessity for modes of reading that illuminate what those dominant discourses obscure. The aesthetics of austerity, as developed in *Bohane*, are at once stylistic and political, as allegory and ekphrasis conspire to bring to light certain dimensions and potentialities of the current moment that become purposefully overlooked in public discourse.

As a novel, *City of Bohane* invites us to unsettle and expand upon prevalent understandings of twenty-first-century austerity: to its proponents, an expedient political solution meant to reduce debt and stimulate private-sector growth, and to its detractors, a neoliberal mechanism that fails to address the banking crisis at the root of the recession, while causing significant collateral damage to all but the most wealthy. Part of the problem with austerity politics, I argue, is a problem with *narrative*, with visibility and legibility. What counts as economic stability? How do we read data or interpret figures like GDP, interest rates, sovereign

and private debt? More importantly, what modes of human experience lie behind policy and economic figures—in other words, whom do we see, and who counts as a democratic subject?

Viewed from this perspective, austerity becomes an *aesthetic* phenomenon, for its political realization relies on its effects being visibly obscured within the global public sphere. As Jacques Rancière writes in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, "Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak" (8). As a political operation that benefits the already-wealthy at the expense of those living in states of financial precarity, austerity legitimizes itself by morally reframing the political-economic conditions that brought it into being. This legitimizing narrative necessarily obliterates from view the material damage that these conditions of enforced deprivation inflict upon the bodies of vulnerable citizens—in particular, the unemployed, the sick, the elderly, and many children now living in poverty. Even so, political scientists observed a widespread initial acceptance of the austerity measures passed in Ireland in 2010. As a result, Cian O'Callaghan, Mark Boyle, and Rob Kitchin suggested in 2014 that Ireland's sociopolitical landscape was verging toward the "post-political," reflecting a tendency under late capitalism for economic crises to be quickly reinscribed into the logics of economic neoliberalism and consensus-based democracy—for the force of crisis, in other words, not to register as broad systemic failure demanding reform, but rather as a series of projects for technocratic experts to manage back into a normative economic state (123). In post-2008 Ireland, these problems of how to *read* economic crisis and how to respond to it politically are nearly as urgent as they were during the Great Hunger of the mid-nineteenth century, another moment wherein austerity emerged as a political solution to economic crisis and, in that instantiation, resulted in the genocide or compulsory emigration of over a million Irish citizens who could not survive conditions of extreme material deprivation.[4]

As a post-crash or austerity-era novel, *City of Bohane* provides a spur for exploring and critiquing this phenomenon from a humanistic perspective: specifically, by presenting an aesthetic representation of austerity that can supplement and complicate analyses put forth by economists, political scientists, and politicians. As John Marx has written, fiction "has long been a medium for commentary *on* the market," presenting economic crises "as clarifying the need for revised strategies of representation" (11, 13). Rather than a primarily realist representation and critique of the economic present, however, *City of Bohane* presents a hellscape of what contemporary Ireland might look like forty years in the future, in a world endlessly disabled by its past, suggesting that we might read austerity not just as economic crisis but rather as humanitarian disaster with deep roots in the historical operations of colonialism and sectarian division. Set in a fictionalized version of Ireland in the year 2053, the novel's narrator characterizes Bohane as "a small city so homicidal you needed to watch out on all sides" (7). The plot largely revolves around a power struggle between two factions representing different geographic and cultural sectors of the city, and at its heart, this rivalry is a class struggle: a figure named Eyes Cusack leads the Mob, who occupy the rundown tenements in the Northside Rises, while Logan Hartnett commands the Fancy, "city boys" who operate businesses in the Back Trace. Within this atmosphere of economic inequality and open hostility, physical violence in Bohane is excessive, relentless, ranging from the gory, highly stylized murders that Logan Hartnett and his henchmen commit to the ambient thrum of anonymous knifings and beatings that seem constantly to be taking place throughout the city.

City of Bohane appeared in 2011 to great critical acclaim, earning rave reviews and winning the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award in 2013. Among reviewers, there was nearly universal consensus that Barry had produced an exhilarating page-turner, a pyrotechnic

linguistic performance, and a kaleidoscopic portrait of a future city roiling with cross-cultural tensions and always hovering on the edge of total, violent chaos. In the words of a *New Yorker* reviewer, the novel is a complete "genre stew": the text seems indebted as much to TV dramas like *The Wire* and *Deadwood*, the Westerns of Sam Peckinpah and Sergio Leone, and the graphic novel universe of Frank Miller's *Sin City* as it is to Joyce's panoramas of Dublin or Flann O'Brien's literary experiments. In portraying the city of Bohane, Barry's writing is strikingly visual, even cinematic; each time a character is introduced, for example, the text gives a full-body shot of that character's appearance and clothing down to the subtlest detail. At these moments, the text reads like a screenplay: "A dapper buck in a natty-boy Crombie, the Crombie draped all casual-like over the shoulders of a pale grey Eyetie suit, mohair. Mouth of teeth on him like a vandalised graveyard" (4). Certain chapters are narrated montage-style, dipping in and out of various corners of the city and linking short snatches of narrative together with quick transitions. Stefan Kjerkegaard has observed that "being an author during the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st gradually becomes a more and more intermedial concern," and somewhat unsurprisingly, *City of Bohane* was optioned for a film adaptation shortly after its publication (n.p.).[5] Like novels by Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo, *City of Bohane* displays the influence of adjacent media forms in the futuristic, dystopian-noir world that it builds, and in the aesthetic techniques that Barry deploys in portraying it.

Reviewers did not engage much with the novel's relationship to post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, although Greg Londe floated the possibility: "While Irish housing firms were building the estates that now crumble for want of buyers, Kevin Barry was building Bohane. Both are sites of dangerous play, dreadfully intriguing to watch from a distance" ("From Ireland, in the Coming Times"). Other critics disavowed *Bohane*'s relationship to history or politics altogether, focusing

instead on the way it seemingly ingests and novelizes other visual media forms. Pete Hamill, for example, was not alone in reading *Bohane* as a product of globalized media culture, while overlooking—and even arguing against—the novel's engagement with Irish political history. Hamill casts aside altogether the possibility that Bohane's factional violence might be grounded in a longer history of political struggle in Ireland. He notes that Barry name-checks historical and literary figures like Eamon de Valera and Seamus Heaney, yet, in Hamill's words, "All of the rest of Ireland is offstage. The individuals seem trapped by biography, not by history" (n.p.). This *biographical* reading suggests that the novel's universe is bound by a kind of aesthetic unity, sealed-off from—rather than engaged with—any particular dimension of history or politics.

The novel's historical reference points, however, directly challenge this reading and call for an elaboration on how *Bohane*'s futuristic setting is haunted by events from Irish history, and also how the text speaks to Ireland's contemporary status quo, particularly to the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis. In the first academic article to be published on the novel, Maebh Long posits *Bohane*'s relationship to the Famine through a psychoanalytic lens. She detects a pervasive melancholia in the city and argues that its characters ineffectively indulge that melancholia through performative hypermasculinity and by fixating on fetish-objects such as fashion and the female body (82, 92). In what follows, I take a different approach from Long's in considering *City of Bohane*'s reckonings with Irish history. I inquire, rather, about why Barry inscribes the memory of the 1798 Rising into Bohane's geography, and I advance the claim that these inclusions contribute to the allegorical dimensions of Bohane as a projection of contemporary reality. By attending to its rich context, I read *City of Bohane* as an allegorical projection-into-futurity of the austerity policies—causing what is referred to in Ireland as

"enforced deprivation"—that were enacted in the wake of the crisis and that continue to widen income inequality in post-crash Ireland, as in other nations across the globe.[6] In exposing the material realities that gather in austerity's wake, *City of Bohane* impels us to visualize the human and societal fallout of such politics and, in so doing, provokes us to consider austerity as a modality of violence in and of itself. By this I mean that its long- and short-term effects enact extreme forms of deprivation that materially damage human populations. *City of Bohane* suggests, furthermore, that this damage can stoke tensions between economically striated sectors of a population to such a degree that explosions of spectacular violence become a serious threat, gestating amidst the harm being enacted on a consistent, yet often obscured, basis.

Throughout this chapter, I explore how *City of Bohane* generates its own aesthetics of austerity, based centrally around its allegorical world-building and its ekphrastic transposition of violence photographs into language. These formal features distinguish this novel from other Irish texts that confront the post-crash Irish landscape. Donal Ryan's *The Spinning Heart* (2013) and Colin Barrett's *Young Skins* (2013), for example, take primarily realist approaches in registering the effects of the 2008 crisis on lower-income Irish communities, while popular crime novels by Tana French and Benjamin Black set tales of moral and psychological reckoning with financial breakdown in recognizable Irish locales.

By setting *Bohane* in an estranged, futuristic avatar of contemporary Ireland, Barry mobilizes an allegorical heuristic for naming a crisis but also for envisioning a potential emergence from its thrall.[7] In Barbara Johnson's terms for framing allegory, *City of Bohane* speaks "otherwise" about this contemporary global predicament, thus expanding our capacity to read austerity in its deep historical time frame and also to respond politically to its contemporary instantiation. In addressing this complex network of global connections and historical

reverberations, the novel deploys manifold methods for visualizing different—yet deeply interconnected—modes and temporalities of violence: from forms of "slow violence," to use Rob Nixon's term, including environmental devastation and economic oppression, to the displays of spectacular, sensational violence that erupt when tensions in Bohane—as elsewhere in the world—reach a breaking point. Ultimately, the novel's allegorical framing and its ekphrastic passage aligning economic constraint with embodied violence provoke readers to visualize the destructive potential of austerity as a response to crisis. The indelible violence wrought by economic tensions in Bohane functions allegorically to mark 2011 as a moment of political emergency—not a market glitch to be easily "re-inscribed back into the dominant order" via "technocratic management solutions" (O'Callaghan, Boyle, and Kitchin 123). Rather, the novel summons earlier ruptures in Irish history in order to inscribe post-2008 austerity into a longer history of economic inequality and to envision the emergence of a new kind of collective solidarity predicated on resisting the processes of political erasure that austerity demands.

Reading Austerity

Published in 2011, *City of Bohane* was born out of a culture that had been reeling from two decades of uncharacteristic economic extremity. A decade of economic prosperity in Ireland, known as the Celtic Tiger, ended with a punishing recession that the 2008 global financial crisis set into motion. Following the Celtic Tiger years, it became clear that Irish banks had vastly over-borrowed from institutions abroad to support a credit bubble and that, as the global market crashed, the banks lacked the solvency required to repay their liabilities. This required an 85-billion-Euro bailout in 2010 by the "troika," a governing body comprised of the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. As part of the

three-year loan program that facilitated the bailout, the troika mandated that the Irish government impose stringent austerity policies in order to reign in government spending ("Ireland Bailout").

Austerity as an economic program is not new, however, but rather of a piece with processes of enforced deprivation that have characterized Ireland's long history as a British colony and that continue in different forms into the present and, potentially, the future. One can, for example, map lines of connectivity between contemporary austerity and the widespread land seizures of the 16th century, in which British planters confiscated land previously owned by Gaelic clans and Hiberno-Norman families; the Great Famine of 1845-1852, which historians argue could have been ameliorated with adequate British aid; and systemic political-economic discrimination against Irish Catholics in the North, which stimulated the decades-long conflict that has been reductively labeled a "sectarian" or "ethnic" conflict devoid of sound political grievances. What aligns these three historical catastrophes is the way in which populations of Irish people were culturally dehumanized—painted as incapable of self-governance—in order to rationalize their conversion into economic resources for colonizing forces.

Material deprivation and economic discrimination are of course not unique to Ireland; rather, these trends recurred across colonial history and rematerialize in the contemporary, neoliberal global economy. Declan Kiberd, writing about transnational solidarities between Irish republicans and Indian nationalists in the early twentieth century, observes that "these colonies were drained of wealth and food: the famines which plagued India in consequence … were well understood in Ireland" (254). Like Ireland, India in the nineteenth century was beset by famines whose fatality rates were exacerbated by the British Empire's "ill-founded famine policy" and its "entire laissez-faire paradigm" (Hall-Matthews 1212). The ideology of laissez-faire economics, which British colonial administrators propounded in legitimizing the Empire's refusal to supply

aid to Ireland and India, operates in part by deflecting responsibility for a crisis in order to maintain one's own political power and financial stability. For example, writing on "the Irish Crisis" in 1848, the British Treasury assistant secretary Charles Edward Trevelyan blamed the Great Famine on the Irish population's inherent laziness, a characterization that he offered as a rationale for austerity. "The people had no incitement to be industrious," he wrote. "They have already reached the lowest point of the descending scale, and there is nothing beyond but starvation or beggary" (8-9). Therefore, he reasoned, "We have it in our power to strike off the fetters which at present impede every step of their progress" (23-24). The rhetorical tactic of shifting blame onto those who appear most defenseless reemerges in twenty-first-century rhetoric surrounding austerity, particularly in arguments marshaled to defend neoliberal trade policies and debt-relief terms that have been extended to the so-called PIIGS nations, the EU member states that received bailout support at the expense of austerity following the crash.[8] "We have turned the politics of debt into a morality play," economist Blyth observed in 2013, "one that has shifted the blame from banks onto the state" (13).

As Blyth's comment insinuates, part of the problem with the socioeconomic status quo in Ireland, as elsewhere, lies with the power of narrative to shape the way in which contemporary politics can be understood, or read, in the context of history. The Irish government's Department of Finance, for example, presented in 2014 a very optimistic story to the EU and the global financial markets about Ireland's economic "recovery" as the country paid off its final debts to the troika.[9] The austerity-as-success-story narrative is not strictly confined to economic analysis; it also takes discursive shape across various cultural discourses and media. In the context of the contemporary Eurozone crisis, a familiar paradigm has emerged that relies on colonial and xenophobic tropes in order to legitimize austerity as a political solution. The acronym bestowed

upon the nations that required bailout loans—the PIIGS—represents these five Eurozone periphery nations as greedy, undisciplined animals who cannot control their own consumption and need to be managed by more "rational," centralized governing bodies [Fig. 1].

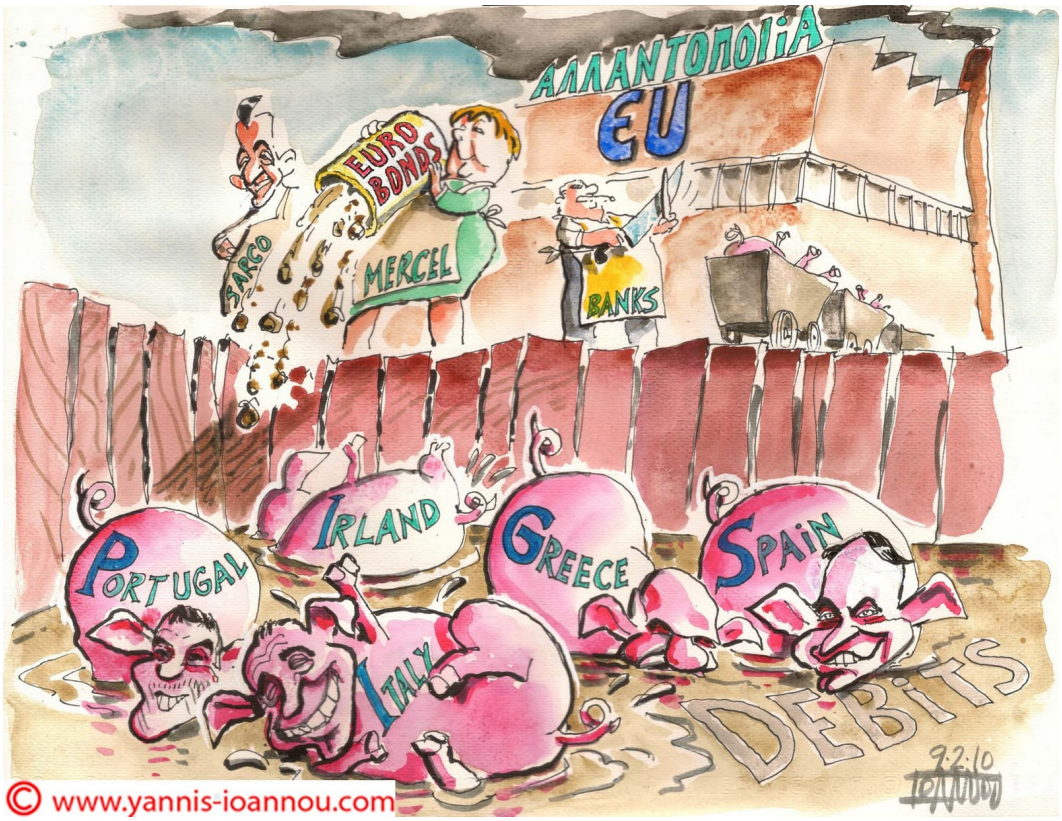

Figure 1. Yannis Ioannou, *PIIGS*, 2010.

This trope recalls the pernicious self/other dialectic that, as Franz Fanon, Albert Memmi, and many others have demonstrated, constructs the colonized "other" as irrational, inferior, and thus incapable of self-governance, a construction that Trevelyan's policy document on the Famine clearly drew upon as well. The notion of sovereignty by national electorates has become deeply compromised in the contemporary Eurozone; as Jonas Van Vossole has argued, culturally framing the PIIGS as responsible for the crisis has "de-politicized" the problem, removing the "political phenomenon from the comprehension of its historical emergence and from the recognition of the powers that produce and contour it" (8). And even despite this racially biased

scapegoating, many economists attuned to the human consequences of austerity (Blyth and Joseph Stiglitz being among the most vocal) concur that austerity has proven a nonviable long-term solution for economic recession.[10] Hardiman and Regan, for example, write that "while it is true that Ireland has been achieving its fiscal retrenchmant targets, . . . it is also the case that the Irish experience confirms what most economic theory has always taught, which is that contractionary budgets produce economic and employment contraction" (9-10). What is less remarked upon, however, is how the spending cuts and tax increases enabling Ireland's bailout exit have disproportionately harmed Ireland's most vulnerable citizens. To look at one indicator, a recent UNICEF study found that between 2008 and 2012—the period of Ireland's supposed "recovery"—the child poverty rate in Ireland rose by over ten percent. As of 2015, that rate hovered around twenty-eight percent, reflecting a status quo that Fintan O'Toole has likened to a form of "child abuse" (O'Toole, "Children").[11]

Even if Ireland has been heralded by corporate and governmental stakeholders as a neoliberal "success story" for its prompt bailout exit, and for maintaining its extremely low 12.5% corporate tax rate even throughout the recession, one can predict what these statistics imply for the nation's economic and social future. Complicating austerity advocates' powerful teleologies of success requires a model of close reading that apprehends austerity *not* as temporally or geographically bounded, but rather as a historically and globally emergent phenomenon. It also requires bringing new representational modes into visibility as we foreground the shocks and ruptures that certain politically and economically motivated narratives are explicitly designed to absorb. *City of Bohane*'s mode of allegorically "speaking otherwise" about crisis impels us to re-read austerity in its contemporary instantiation—and to imagine how to respond to it—through exactly these means.

The Bohane Taint

On the first page of *City of Bohane*, the narrator posits that the city's "homicidal" atmosphere derives not strictly from ethnic or religious factionalism, but rather from the city's unique ecology and the human practices that have manipulated it over the centuries. The opening paragraph of the novel reads: "Whatever's wrong with us is coming in off that river. No argument: the taint of badness on the city's air is a taint off that river. This is the Bohane river we're talking about. A blackwater surge, malevolent, it roars in off the Big Nothin' wastes and the city was spawned by it and was named for it: city of Bohane" (3). The city's name thus comes from the particular quality, or rather the "taint," of its water supply, a detail that grounds the *City of Bohane*—both the material urban space that characters move through and the novel that we're reading—in its unique ecology. The river here gets personified: it's malevolent; it roars; it spawns and names the city. The phrase "the Bohane taint" recurs throughout the text and, and as its meaning is never specified, the phrase becomes a traveling signifier that the narrator calls upon to account for the town's excessive violence. In that sense, the phrase draws connections between different forces and processes that contribute to the city's atmosphere of tightly coiled animosity.

The "taint" comes off the river but also, as we later learn, out of the boglands that have been plundered over the years for their peat, a substance that the Irish have often used as a fossil fuel to generate energy. At one point, the narrator muses about how damage to the bog contributes to the town's atmosphere: "These times, the city of Bohane was powered largely on its turf, and the bog had been cut away and reefed everywhere. Who knew what passages to its underworld had been disturbed? The bog's occult nature had been interfered with, its body left

scarred, its wounds open, and might this also be a source of the Bohane taint?" (116). This metaphor of bog as scarred body highlights the manner in which these human practices have damaged the ecosystem that, in its mutilated state, contributes to the "Bohane taint," the multivalent signifier called upon to account for the town's violence. The image thus places the environment into relation with the human body—the scarred, wounded bog—further cementing the connection between Bohane's natural ecosystem and the human practices that both alter and are affected by it.[12]

The image of the over-exploited bog also mobilizes lines of connectivity between the novel's local context—Bohane, a fictional topos that lies in Ireland—and the global flows of capital that drive the market for fossil fuels like peat. Helen Lojek, writing about landscape in Irish drama, has explained the significance that the bog holds in the Irish historical imagination: "The Irish bogs, which were once seen as 'unimproved' wasteland where 'unregenerate' rebels could evade English authorities, later became a natural resource that could be usefully mined for commercial fuel development" (10). Lojek here suggests that the bogs have functioned in Irish life and history as a natural resource, but also as a kind of mythological repository and a site for subversive political resistance. Given their low-oxygen, highly acidic chemical makeup, peat bogs have preserved artifacts and bodies that have been judged to be up to 4,000 years old and thus function as a kind of cradle for deep cultural conservation. On the other hand, peat's unique chemical makeup has made it vulnerable to usage as a fossil fuel.[13]

Boglands thus hold an important role in the Irish cultural imaginary but also in the global political economy surrounding fuel extraction and trade. In this sense, the Bohane bog functions in two important ways: it holds enormous sway over the hyper-local social and meteorological climate within the novel, but it also maps the novel in relation to Irish history and to the global

political economy. Having noticed a lack of attention to fossil fuels within Marxist theories of production, the geographer Matthew Huber has articulated the concept of "fossil capitalism": "As the current political economy attests, energy issues are at the epicenter of not only the geopolitics of empire and the global climate crisis, but also the more banal, everyday reproduction of capitalist social life" (113). Huber's theory foregrounds the centrality of energy not just on the global trade market, but also in everyday social practices like travel, transportation, and uses of electricity—social practices whose consequences are clearly marked across *City of Bohane*'s strange urban atmosphere. These "energy issues," in fact, lurk right at the heart of the city's problems, as the narrator indicates:

> There was plenty to be bothered about in Bohane at the best of times. The El train must be kept running, and the sodium lights must rise for whatever few hours of the night could be afforded, and occasionally—if only that—the gutters must be swept clear of dead dogs, jack-up works, and mickey-wrappers. The Authority men truly cared that the once great and cosmopolitan city of Bohane should retain at least the semblance of its old civility. (157)

As elsewhere in the novel, this passage makes clear that electricity as we know it no longer functions in Bohane, that "sodium lights" provide a scant amount of illumination to a city that lives in darkness much of the time.

These idiosyncratic methods for generating light—using sodium-vapor lamps, for example, which are energy-efficient yet less bright than other bulbs, lending a crepuscular dimness to the city throughout the night—provoke the question of *why* electricity no longer functions as we know it in 2053 Bohane. Although it is set over forty years in the future, the novel leaves the gap between the present of its writing and the present of its setting strangely

unaccounted for, never naming, as many speculative fictions do, a specific crisis or historical rupture that would account for its current state. Instead, the characters refer to the past as "the lost-time," and, while the novel never directly explains what transpired between the "lost-time" and the present, it becomes clear that some type of catastrophe occurred, thereby rendering "the lost-time" a memory that evokes painful feelings of nostalgia. The city's inhabitants "wished that the lost-time in Bohane might with the years that passed fade into less painful memory," and the lost-time thus becomes a space of fondly recalled yet agonizingly unreachable memory (157). By invoking a time of relative peace and prosperity, memories of the lost-time throw the city's current status quo—with its ceaseless violence, its darkness, and its political factionalism—into painful relief.

Given this juxtaposition, it is essential to consider what this temporal gap signifies, what kind of critical perspective these images of the scarred bog, the tainted river, and the flickering sodium lights might open up onto our global present. Through these passages in particular, the novel makes legible certain processes of slow violence at work in our current world, while simultaneously projecting an allegorical vision of what further damage they might inflict if allowed to persist into futurity. Rob Nixon has distinguished violence that is "customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and erupting into instant sensational visibility" from "slow violence," which "occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2-3). The problem of slow violence, therefore, is largely a problem of visibility: while images of the Twin Towers falling have become iconic, processes like climate change and systemic economic oppression present a more complex hermeneutic challenge and are often thought of within a completely different

conceptual frame. In *City of Bohane*, instances of "fast violence"—the knifings, the beatings, the "homicidal atmosphere"—materialize in concert with the constant darkness, the dysfunctional infrastructure, and the building façades that crack from "decades of freeze-and-thaw" (95). The ekphrastic images in the "Darkroom" chapter, as I will show, join these violences together: the forces that build up slowly, and the insurgent, interpersonal violence that symbolizes those forces exacerbated to the extreme. While the tension between the Hartnett Fancy and the Norrie Mob is the force that, on the surface, appears to propel much of this violence, the text also reveals the ways in which exterior political and economic stresses initially generated and continue to exacerbate the conflict. These slower forms of violence in Bohane would include the plundering of the bog for use as a fossil fuel and environmental damage that has led to strange climate events like "the Murk of Bohane," "a thick seafog that settles each year on the creation and just about smothers us alive" (241). But they would also include what Michael Watts has termed "the violent geographies of fast capitalism," manifesting in economic dynamics and political programs, like austerity, that enact harm on vast swaths of the global population (8).

By closely attending to Bohane's strange meteorology as well as its sociopolitical climate, it becomes clear that the drama of *City of Bohane* is, to a large extent, a drama of austerity. The text hints that global trade circuits still flow through Bohane, that the city is thus imbricated in a broader political economy stretching beyond its borders. For example, we learn that photographic equipment is "brought in from the Lisbon route now, most often" (153). Sentences like this attest to the fact that Bohane still participates in trade beyond its borders, yet other contextual signifiers suggest that relations between Bohane proper and the Nation Beyond (a proxy for the Irish central government) are highly strained, that financial resources have been severely restricted within the country. The narrative unfolds amidst vicious tension between the

local government, the Bohane Authority, and the Nation Beyond, with the latter body enforcing a policy of fiscal restraint that seems to be halting construction on a tram that would link Beauvista, a wealthy neighborhood, to the New Town business district. The project would benefit wealthy residents of that neighborhood while diverting funds away from much-needed improvements to the town's more widely used "El train" system. Dom Gleeson, a newspaper editor who favors the Beauvista tram plan, worries about the inevitable effects of the Nation Beyond's implementation of austerity measures: "NB tight enough with the aul' tit this year," he worries to Logan, referencing the city's need for infrastructure updates but also the nation's refusal to fund them (40). It is unclear whether Barry's fictionalized projection of 2053 Ireland remains attached to a larger, EU-like body of nations, yet the text isn't necessarily concerned with that political relation. Rather, *City of Bohane* makes clear that material resources are badly strained and that the Nation Beyond's solution, whether self-generated or mandated from outside, resembles what we today call austerity.

Under straitened economic circumstances, the question becomes, how will resources be apportioned, and what sectors of the population will ultimately benefit from them? Both Dom and Logan, wealthy power-holders in the political and social world of Bohane, recognize that the tram plan is so divisive that its achievement would likely incite the working-class residents of the Northside Rises to violent action, because it would use government funds to line the pockets of the already-wealthy while neglecting the needs of those who do not live in Beauvista. In her article, Long attests to this simmering class struggle in Bohane: "Real authority lies with the wealthy patriarchs whose names might change but whose system remains" (95). In this respect, recent Irish history serves as a reference-point for Bohane's political dynamic, for post-crash policy measures have focused on retaining Ireland's extremely low, 12.5% corporate tax rate at

the expense of social welfare services, pension payments, widespread emigration, and the imposition of new taxes such as the 2011 Universal Social Charge (Hardiman and Regan 14). *City of Bohane* was prescient in this respect: published in 2011, it registers the class tensions that result from fiscal crisis. It also allegorically projects how those tensions, if left to simmer, might extend forces of slow violence and explode into revolutionary violence. We can read the novel, therefore, as an allegorical projection of the politics that have widened income inequality in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland—and in the global economy as well, for *City of Bohane* allows us to see how slow violence and eruptions of spectacular violence are closely imbricated, often reinforcing one another in causal or mutually destructive relationships. The seemingly constant beatings, knifings, and Feuds in Bohane are inseparable from these larger national, global, and even planetary forces that the novel invokes in building its analogic, fictional version of austerity-era Ireland.

Allegorizing Austerity

In describing *Bohane* as an "allegorical projection" of contemporary politics, I refer to the way in which the novel's strange, futuristic world gives us a way of speaking *otherwise* about phenomena like austerity and climate change, which perpetuate in large part because their effects are more difficult to recognize, read, or visualize than more spectacular forms of violence. Barbara Johnson's definition of postmodern allegory proves useful here. She draws on the Greek etymology of the word "allegory": *allos*, "other," plus *agorein*, "to speak in the open or public square." She writes, "Allegory is speech that is other than open, public, direct. It is hidden, deviant, indirect—but also, I want to emphasize, public. It folds the public onto itself" (61). *City of Bohane*'s context provides exactly the occasion, the necessity even, for this kind of public

speech, given a political atmosphere in which discursive fragments such as data, charts, and questionably sound economic figures threaten to eclipse democratic calls for resistance.

The fact that reviewers largely dismissed Barry's references to Irish history and politics attests to the complexity of the novel's allegorical layers. At one point, in a coy metafictional gesture, the narrator states that "Bohane could be a tricky read," and this statement might apply to the city itself as well as the novel-as-allegory (10-11). The Irish scholar Luke Gibbons, working from Johnson's definition of allegory, highlights the importance of this figural mode, these "tricky reads," as part of a politics that emerges throughout the history of Irish literature. Gibbons writes, "Allegory in an Irish context belongs to the politics of 'the unverbalized.' For allegory to retain its critical valency, it is vital that there is an instability of reference or contestation of meaning" (*Transformations* 20). This notion of "the unverbalized" comes, in large part, from Ireland's history as a colonized state, and Gibbons elsewhere demonstrates how scopic control of the colonized population facilitated the apparatus of colonial governance. In the context of Foucault's notion of the modern bureaucratic state, Gibbons notes how surveillance and the imperative to confer specific forms of visibility upon colonial subjects became an increasingly crucial method for keeping those subjects "docile" or subordinate (*Gaelic Gothic* 31-32). Hence, Gibbons argues, the power of figural modes like allegory, which allow for political articulations that escape the hegemonic gaze, that are "hidden, deviant, indirect."

The instability of reference is part of what makes Bohane somewhat slippery, yet ultimately generative, as a geographic and imaginative space. While its name possesses the bisyllabic ring of Irish city names like Kildare or Athlone, Bohane is a fiction, a no-place that nonetheless takes up certain features of real-life locales. Its gang activity resembles Barry's native Limerick, a parallel that the author has drawn in interviews, yet its geographical

positioning in relation to "the Black Atlantic" suggests that it lies much further north (Spencer). The novel's allegorical elements thus become more capacious, "fragmentary or schizoid," in Frederic Jameson's terms, for the text is constantly unfixing and complicating any signifiers that might otherwise solidify into one-to-one symbolic correspondences (*Geopolitical Aesthetic* 5). That said, certain signifiers do proliferate throughout the text, grounding the narrative in a very specific historical lineage of resistance to unjust power structures. Most notably, Barry situates the novel's most violent episodes in locales known as the 98 Steps and the 98er Square. These areas run adjacent to one another in the city and function as the geographic interface between the Northside Rises and the Back Trace, the areas controlled, respectively, by the Norrie Mob and the Harnett Fancy. This commemorative naming invokes the 1798 Rebellion, during which the United Irishmen—a coalition of Irish Catholics, Protestants, and French sympathizers led by Wolfe Tone—rose up against British colonial rule.

The 1798 Rebellion looms in Irish history and culture as a foundational moment for insurgent, anti-colonial violence, an event that is often summoned as an example of diverse factions unifying to resist injustice.[14] Historians disagree on the effectiveness of the 1798 rising as a military insurrection against British colonial rule; Roy Foster, for example, has famously characterized the rising as "a localized *jacquerie* . . . leading to bloodletting and massacre on an appalling scale" (182). Regardless of the efficacy of 1798 as a military exercise, however, the event's transnational, collaborative ethos galvanized a resistance movement that reached across demographic and religious lines. These fractures had previously hindered anticolonial efforts and would continue to do so to certain extents, yet the collaborative ethos of 1798 called into being an impetus for collective, intersectional resistance that offered a precedent for nineteenth century nationalists and culminated in the 1916 Rising, the achievement of the Irish Free State in 1922,

and eventually the independent Republic of Ireland in 1949. Foster affirms one indisputable achievement of the rebellion: that it "fused together several very disparate strains of resistance" (180). And ultimately, Foster asserts that what motivated 1798 was not simply an ideological commitment to nationalism, but rather the broadly shared conditions of injustice and inequality produced by policies that the British government and the Anglo-Irish landowners had enacted throughout the seventeenth and eighteen centuries. Foster writes, "Land hunger, increased taxes, crisis in the local agrarian economy (notably the grain market) all helped dictate the pattern of the rising" (182).

The 1798 Rebellion has also generated two centuries' worth of literary commemoration, ranging from sentimental, nationalist ballads (such as "The Wind That Shakes the Barley" or "The Wearing of the Green") to sharp political critiques of present-day issues that revive 1798 as a point of reference. W. B. Yeats, for example, famously mourned Wolfe Tone alongside other Irish revolutionary heroes in his poem "September 1913." Yeats wrote the poem and published it in the *Irish Times* during the Dublin Lockout of 1913, when the business tycoon William Martin Murphy dismissed thousands of his workers who had unionized for the first time in order to protest extremely low wages and dismal working conditions in his factories. Yeats asks in the poem, "Was it for this … that all that blood was shed?", implying that the political injustices that motivated the 1798 Rebellion persisted into his present day (159). 1798's mythological status in the Irish historical imaginary surfaces once again as a point of reference in Barry's twenty-first-century novel. By placing the 98er Square as a central nexus in Bohane's geography, Barry literally and conceptually situates the text's violence in a longer historical lineage of Irish resistance to unjust power structures. Contrary to Hamill's claim, then, that Bohane's characters "are trapped by biography, not history," a reading of the novel with closer attention to its

political and historical context recalls a different notion of entrapment: Stephen Dedalus's famous declaration in *Ulysses* that "history is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake." What is most notable about *City of Bohane*'s summoning of 1798, ultimately, is that it calls upon the event not merely as a single, violent, strictly nationalist event, but rather as a historical touchstone for collective action arising out of shared conditions of enforced deprivation, conditions not unlike those exacerbated by contemporary austerity.

Bohane's mode of allegorical world-building, therefore, allows for a prism through which to perceive the specters of history—focalized in the novel's references to 1798—in the present, yet the novel importantly refrains from directly mapping historical divisions onto its fictional landscape. While initially it might be tempting to read the Norries and the Fancy along fixed axes of association (the former as Catholic nationalists and the latter descendants of the Protestant Ascendancy, for example, so that Bohane's violence might correspond to that of Northern Ireland's late twentieth-century "Troubles"), historical echoes of 1798 and resistance in general emerge on both sides of the divide.[15] The Northside Rises contain a section called the "Croppy Boy Heights," a reference to a famous ballad eulogizing the 1798 rebels, yet Logan Hartnett, the gang leader and chief antagonist of the Norrie residents, also feels the presence of Fenian heroes in his area of the city: he hears in the police station "the screeches of age-dead Fenians seep from the walls" (191).[16] These gestures toward the Croppy Boy and the Fenian, two symbols of political resistance in Irish history, are thus dispersed throughout the city's geography, rather than falling specifically on one or the other side of the factional divide. The invocation of the 98 Steps and the 98er Square, therefore, seems to be imputing a collectively agonistic, insurgent character to the violence happening throughout the text. But also, as demonstrated above, Bohane as a material and political space bears traces of global and

planetary dynamics—resource extraction, anthropogenic climate change, economic inequality—that widen its scope well beyond Ireland. The novel's allegorical world-building thus places crisis and protest within a broader frame, opening up an expansive conceptual space through which local, national, and global reference-points are refracted. *Bohane* is working within a deep tradition of speaking *otherwise*, yet still within the public sphere, as part of "a politics of the unverbalized" in Ireland, while also extending that politics beyond the borders of any one national tradition.

The Darkroom

City of Bohane's allegorical imaginary thus offers an angle through which to discern modes of slow violence at work in our global contemporary yet also, in calling upon history, to envision collective sociopolitical formations capable of resisting those modes. I now turn to the chapter called "The Darkroom" that appears halfway through the novel and contains the series of ekphrastic photographs of violence. The chapter's distinctive aesthetic impels the reader to visualize eruptions of spectacular violence that materialize in concert with the slowly accreting forms of economic and environmental violence continually affecting Bohane. The newspaper printing the photographs is notably called *The Vindicator*, a name that associates vengeance or justice with the paper's mission. The prominent role that *The Vindicator* plays in the novel recalls Nicholas Mirzoeff's theory of "the right to look," which "claims autonomy, not individualism or voyeurism, but the claim to a political subjectivity and collectivity." Citing Rancière's definition of "the police," who say, "Move on, there's nothing to see here," Mirzoeff argues that the right to look counteracts "that authority to tell us to move on, that exclusive claim to be able to look" (1-2). The ekphrastic photographs in "The Darkroom" intervene in the

narrative in an explicitly visual way, foregrounding the shock of crisis through an aesthetic technique that both exceeds and complements narrative. The chapter depicts a spectacularly violent confrontation, referred to throughout the novel as "the Feud," between Bohane's two rival factions, the Harnett Fancy and the Norrie Mob. Essentially, the entire first half of the novel builds up to this event: tensions build, "shkelp" knives flash out of pockets, factions gather, and the entire city steels its nerves for the Feud. Half a novel's worth of buildup accrues, and then suddenly the reader is buried in a photojournalist's darkroom, watching him unspool images that he shot throughout the conflict.

What is noteworthy about this chapter is that it breaks almost entirely with the style of linear diegesis that characterizes *Bohane*'s narrative discourse up until this point. In lieu of linear narrative, Barry mediates the Feud's action through a series of ekphrastic descriptions of photographs, each one prefaced by an em-dash and then unfolding as a richly imagistic sentence fragment. These brief sketches are meant to describe the photographs—not visually present in the text, but spectrally summoned into presence by language—that were captured by the photojournalist Balthazar Grimes on his "medieval Leica" camera as he moved throughout the Feud's action. Rather than a play-by-play account of how the violence transpired, therefore, the reader encounters the Feud retrospectively, through these ekphrastic sketches of Grimes's photographs that contain the brutal, bloody record of the conflict. The passage opens: "The images were lifted from the pool and pegged along the line. The hunchback Grimes walked the line, thoughtfully, as the photographs dried, and he made notes for the captions." And the next paragraph is only two words long—"He saw:"—and the rest of the chapter unfolds in short paragraphs that, taken together, form an archive of the images that Grimes perceives as he "walks the line" (153). One particularly disturbing example reads: "Close-up: same boy on his

knees, a moment later, with his face busted open by the sling of a chain, and Wolfie whispering to him as he prepared with a scimitar dirk to slit his throat" (153). The Feud, a central narrative event, thereby haunts the text as a conspicuous absence, narratively skipped over and then thrust before the reader in an onslaught of ekphrastic photographic imagery.

Throughout the Darkroom sequence, it is significant to note that Barry exposes the photojournalist Grimes's thought process as he views the photographs, deciding which images should be published and which are either too underwhelming or too gruesome to print. In staging Grimes's encounter with these photographs of the Feud in his darkroom, the novel explicitly foregrounds the processes of looking at and interpreting a given object of study. The passage opens: "The images were lifted from the pool and pegged along the line. The hunchback Grimes walked the line, thoughtfully, as the photographs dried, and he made notes for the captions" (153). While examining the ekphrastic archive of his photographs, Grimes's consciousness occasionally intervenes as a kind of commentary on the aesthetic descriptions. He'll designate, for example, a photograph as a "prime shot," a "double-page spread," or "a lovely detail" (153-55). The passage thus narrates a prolonged act of viewing and editing, impelling the reader to inspect and evaluate the verbally represented photographs along with Grimes but, furthermore, to contemplate the phenomenon of perceiving violence in a broader theoretical sense.

As demonstrated earlier, the contemporaneous social and political conditions shaping *City of Bohane* have posed a problem of narrative and representation: notably how, in the wake of a global economic crisis, to narrate a supposed recovery; how, in the midst of continual environmental devastation, to perceive the damage done; how to represent a nation's economic and political well-being; or how simple it can be to eclipse the human experience of enforced deprivation by mediating a "success story" with data, statistics, and charts. Placed within the

verbal fabric of *City of Bohane*, these ekphrastic flashes become unruly, subversive, as they flicker into shocking visibility and pile up as a collection that stands out within the novel's otherwise linear narrative, demanding to be seen and considered in their context. The term ekphrasis fuses the Greek stems *ek* ("out") and *phrasis* ("speak"); as a verb, *ekphrazein* means "to proclaim or call an inanimate object by name" (Hentschel 42). If allegory lends a method for speaking "otherwise" yet still within the public sphere about a given topic, then ekphrasis here works as a kind of disruptive articulation that "speaks out" from within the texture of that narrative. Working together in the novel, these two forms respond to the challenges of narrativity and visibility that austerity poses. "The Darkroom" stages this moment where economic tension becomes a political event, in which there is a total rupture of the political order and the need for new possibilities to come to the fore.

James Heffernan has famously defined ekphrasis as "the verbal representation of a visual representation," and because of its doubly mediated character, the technique puts analytic pressure on the nature of representation itself (3). In turning away from the temporal progression of narrative and toward a static visual artifact, ekphrasis invites a reader to probe the implications of that momentary interruption. Heffernan elaborates: "If ekphrasis 'frustrates narrative movement,' it is anything but submissive. It is the unruly antagonist of narrative, the ornamental digression that refuses to be merely ornamental" (5). Here Heffernan is referring specifically to an early genealogy of poetic ekphrasis, which begins with Homer's famous description of Achilles's shield in *The Iliad*. Like the images of violence depicted on Achilles's shield, the moments of photographic ekphrasis in *City of Bohane* stall the pattern of narrative progression that propels the plot up to that point and thus constitute an "unruly" break with the novel's earlier structure. The photographs refuse to be merely ornamental; rather, they capture these

"moment[s] of violence infinitely suspended" that resonate within the novel's world but also within a broader historical and global frame (20). In thinking through what this ekphrastic archive represents both within and beyond the city of Bohane, I will highlight three particular aspects of these images that force us to visualize the nightmarish potential of our global status quo, but also seem to herald the emergence of a collective, transhistorical solidarity related to the novel's allegorical summoning of 1798.

First, and most obviously, the violence that these images display is extreme, excessive, even shocking. Certain images show highly detailed moments of suspended combat, like Wolfie "whispering to him as he prepared with a scimitar dirk to slit his throat" (153). Others show the aftermath of injury: "A gaunt Norrie lad with a dislocated shoulder: lovely, the way his features were caught in a rictus of animal pain" (154). Grimes appreciates the aesthetic qualities of certain images yet judges others to be so graphic that they don't even materialize in the text; rather, they haunt the text as provocative absences. For example, this series: "— A gouging. / — A kicking. / — A shkelping … this one too much … the split innards visible … bin it" (154). The fact that these are *verbally* rendered images, rather than actual photographs, allows for certain poetic techniques to take hold in the passage: anaphora, metaphor, even a kind of loose, dactylic meter. As ekphrasis, the descriptions develop their own horrifying aesthetic, which makes the scenes they are representing seem disquieting in a very particular way. Their status as verbal descriptions also allows for these unsettling aporias: when Grimes judges something to be "too much," the text skips over it, and then the reader is invited to visualize an image worse than, say, a "gore spill" or a face busted open with a boot. The excess of violence in these images lends an extreme, striking affect to the human experience of fighting in the Feud. They also bear witness to how the Feud manifests as a spectacle of violence, yet an eruption that nonetheless

grows out of the city's complex political dynamic. As the narrator explains earlier, "A Feud was like an ember lying low in a tinder of straw—no telling when the spark would ignite" (117). In other words, the Feud emerges as a horrific nightmare of "fast violence" that erupts in conjunction with the "slower" forces—like austerity, inequality, climate change, and resource extraction—that exacerbate tensions between the two sides throughout the novel.

While the rivalry between the Fancy and the Mob is clearly bitter enough to inspire this excess of violence, a second observation is that the novel's language actually draws certain commonalities between the two sides. The first three of these ekphrastic sketches that Grimes views in his darkroom appear as follows:

> He saw:
>
> — The Fancy's mobbed ranks enter the Trace . . . their gobs violently agape as they hollered (per tradition) random names of the Back Trace dead . . . interesting . . . the way they had the look of young crows out for a feed.
>
> —The boy Wolfie Stanners as he led a squall of followers into the 98er Square, his hackles heaped like a rabid dog.
>
> — A Norrie line, barechested, as they hissed and cawed . . . oh and a lovely detail: the way their tongues were held as bits between the teeth to make the sound . . . and upon their scrawny chests crude renditions in charcoal of starlings, their symbol. (153)

The first and third images depict a wide-angle view of the two factions—the Fancy and the Mob—as they prepare to enter the battle. Both sides are rendered here, as they are throughout the chapter, through animalistic imagery: while the Fancy look like "young crows out for a feed," the Norries make the crow's sound, "cawing," almost as though the Norrie image were providing the predicate for the Fancy's subject. This figurative mode—metaphorically comparing the

fighters to the same animal—links them throughout the passage, suggesting a kind of inter-species correspondence that transcends the divide between the factions. The animalistic becomes a sign under which each side is represented, and in this sense the passage aesthetically brings them together as one. The fact that the Fancy fighters are described as "mobbed ranks" draws a further correspondence between the sides, for the Norries are referred to throughout the novel as a mob. The "mob" works as a heteroglossically rich term here: within the text, it unites the two sides, but it also carries cultural resonance as a kind of political formation, "a disorderly or riotous crowd."[17]

A third and final observation works off of this term "the mob," a term whose dual definitions suggest both solidarity and a kind of rabble-rousing political subversiveness. In focusing on this second image—"The boy Wolfie Stanners as he led a squall of followers into the 98er Square, his hackles heaped like a rabid dog"—we might read this sentence fragment as historical allegory: the name Wolfie, when put in a line next to the 98er Square, explicitly calls upon the legacy of the 1798 Rebellion, whose leader, as mentioned earlier, was Wolfe Tone. Tone accomplished a feat that had theretofore seemed historically impossible: uniting diverse, antagonistic factions not just in Ireland but globally, by including French sympathizers galvanized by the success of their own revolution a decade earlier, in order to mount a resistance against the British Empire. Although the Rebellion was violently suppressed by the British army, the legacy of its achievement is symbolic of the possibility of transnational collective action. As much viciousness and venom as there exists between the two factions in *City of Bohane*, the placement of "Wolfie in the 98er Square" between the two images of them makes an explicit historical reference. Wolfie here becomes a kind of messianic figure, summoning the past into this moment to unite, within the ekphrastic catalog, the two warring sides.

In this sense, calling upon Wolfie and 1798 within the ekphrastic archive also heralds an emergence, the catalyst for imagining a new social totality that can claim collective agency in the face of power. The figure of Wolfe Tone, summoned by the character of Wolfie, haunts the novel and the Darkroom chapter in particular, flickering into ekphrastically mediated visibility throughout the sequence. By drawing on the past in this sense, the novel models a practice of "living with ghosts," to use Jacques Derrida's phrase, as a way of keeping in mind "how the past is both absent and present within the now moment, but also how the past can open up the possibilities for the future."[18] Photography, according to theorists ranging from Roland Barthes to Susan Sontag, is an inherently spectral medium, playing as it does between the visibility that emerges on film and the invisibility, the "*having-been-there*," of the subject who held a specific pose in a moment past.[19] This particular quality of photography makes the ekphrastic passage in *Bohane* particularly well suited to reckon with history as a way of conceiving a potential future. In a 1993 interview with Bernard Stiegler, Derrida elucidates that the specter is always both *revenant* (invoking what was) and *arrivant* (announcing what will come), the genesis of a politics of reading that perceives the specter in a text as a way of apprehending history and envisioning futurity with revolutionary justice in mind. Derrida asserts, "As soon as one calls for the disappearance of ghosts, one deprives oneself of the very thing that constitutes the revolutionary movement itself, that is to say, the appeal to justice."[20] Keeping ghosts visible and dwelling among them, in other words, is essential to the project of constellating past historical moments—in this instance, the prolonged period of deprivation that Wolfe Tone and his collaborators experienced in eighteenth-century Ireland—with present crisis. And considering his role within the novel's larger allegorical world, it's possible to read Wolfie here as a fictional character who "stands in allegorically" for a subject living through our contemporary global

crisis, particularly through the neoimperial dynamics of widening inequality in Ireland, as elsewhere. The ekphrastic catalog captures this agony of crisis but also aesthetically brings Wolfie and the two factions together, harnessing the kind of collective, insurgent agency that Wolfe Tone harnessed in 1798. *Bohane* here goes further than simply referencing photography; rather, the ekphrastic archive that it builds instead becomes a central component of its representational and allegorical strategy, accomplishing more than simply moving the plot forward through a surprising gimmick, or experiment in style. This inclusion, rather, gestures beyond the novel's linguistic borders, suggesting a way to verbalize and visualize a crisis that is most legible when considered in its deep historical time frame and its network of global relations.

Finally, the novel's impulse to build affiliation out of chaos manifests on the level of its language as well, as Barry forges a syncretic dialect out of colloquial Irish syntactic patterns ("polis" for "police" references the "Circe" episode of *Ulysses*), musical references to Caribbean dubstep and Portuguese fado, and invented slang expressions such as "shkelp" for knife, and "Ya sketch?" for "You understand?" Through this invented dialect, Barry at first disorients and then progressively initiates the reader into Bohane's linguistic community. Most significantly, the novel's language interpellates the reader into the collective socio-political body of Bohane. The narrator frequently speaks in the first-person plural—"whatever's wrong with *us* is coming in off that river"—while also folding the reader into that "us," deploying the second-person "you" and switching into imperative verb forms that instruct the reader to "see" certain images alongside Bohane's characters: "See the dogs: their hackles heaped, their yellow eyes livid" (3, emphasis added). In this sense, the novel rhetorically summons a collective solidarity within the text, yet

also gestures outward to the reader, implicating us, too, in its modes of reading crisis and speaking, as allegory, "within the public square."

Post-Crash Fiction

As this chapter concludes, tensions over austerity policies enacted in exchange for the troika bailout continue to simmer in Ireland and across Europe. Widespread protests against a proposed household water charge erupted in Ireland in 2014 and 2015; on October 11, 2014, a protest in Dublin drew over 130,000 Irish citizens to resist the tax that the government at the time had proposed. This populist energy coalesced to form a new political coalition, Anti-Austerity Alliance—People Before Profits, which formed in 2015 on an anti-austerity platform and won six Dáil seats in the February 2016 General Election. At the same time, Fine Gael, the party that had been in power since 2011 and presided over the post-bailout austerity measures, lost twenty-six seats. As O'Toole and other commentators have observed, the 2016 general election represented a democratic referendum on nearly a decade of austerity and suggested that new ideas, reforms, and coalitions may reinvigorate Ireland's political landscape as the nation charts its political and economic future ("The Winner"). On a broader scale, Ireland's anti-water-charge protests contributed to the formation of a pan-EU "Right2Water" movement, which pressures the EU and its Member States to implement policies recognizing that "water is a human right" ("Water"). The Right2Water movement represents a transnational coalition uniting discrete constituencies to resist what it perceives to be a violation of human rights.

Signifiers such as "recovery" and "post-recession," however, currently abound in political and journalistic discourse on Ireland and across the world, suggesting that some telos or inflection point has been reached and that the lifespan of crisis is over.[21] There is some statistical

logic behind these statements, as Ireland has generated enough growth to pull out of the rescue loan program, leading investment firms such as Deloitte to proclaim Ireland a "highly successful, open and competitive business environment," the "strategic European base" for over one thousand multinational corporations as of 2015 ("Investing in Ireland"). In this account, adding the "post-" to "post-recession" marks a smoothing-over of crisis, a recapture of the crisis-moment itself by neoliberal techno-management rhetorics that successfully inscribe that crisis-point as something that is definitively "in the past" and "under control." Political scientist William H. Sewell Jr., however, has asked, "What kind of an event is an economic crisis?", concluding that "an uncanny feature of economic crises is how repetitive they are: at a certain level, they seem to signal not fundamental breaks or turning points in history but a kind of societal-level repetition compulsion, the eternal return of the same fundamental capitalist story of greed and irrational exuberance followed by panic and the destruction of value" (304-5). Sewell's framing of crisis as repetition compulsion implies that there is a danger in moving on too quickly, in allowing certain readings of figures like GDP, employment and interest rates, and the presence of multinational corporations to signify the economic "health" of a country.

Post-crash novels like *City of Bohane* demonstrate that the aesthetics of austerity are more complex than those stories would suggest: the novel attests to the fact that economic figures and data points are themselves texts to be interpreted, and that widely telegraphed interpretations of those figures can easily obscure the human experience lying behind them. Furthermore, *City of Bohane* makes visible the cyclical, recursive nature of crisis, mapping connections between eighteenth-century colonial oppression and contemporary material deprivation. It also suggests the potential to be found in aligning those earlier forms of transnational resistance with the kind of collective solidarity that will prove integral in

responding to present-day crisis. As a post-crash novel, *City of Bohane* displays an experimental approach to representing and contextualizing this rupture, which provides an alternative to the more realist, documentary-driven aesthetics of texts by other writers.

As a narrative, *Bohane* ends on a strangely ambiguous note: the violence has not ceased, nor have any of the economic or environmental threats dissipated. Yet its allegorical treatment of these threats provides a valuable heuristic for deciphering a complex sociopolitical phenomenon; in this case, it also invites us to imagine the possibility of moving beyond that crisis in history. Throughout this chapter, I have striven to model a reading practice that reads against the grain of certain ideological discourses and that locates resources for imagining an alternative to present circumstances.[22] *City of Bohane*, for its part, leaves off at a moment of ascension, as the young, canny leader Jenni Ching rides a palomino horse right into the vacuum of power left by the Gant's and Logan's respective defeats. The last line of the novel—"as she saw in the brightening sky at a slow fade the lost-time's shimmering past"— executes a strange inversion of time, suggesting the possibility that, looking forward, a version of the lost-time might be brought back into being once again (277). The novel ends, therefore, with a surreal and fantastical vision, a vision that becomes the starting point for, in Jameson's words on speculative fiction, "transforming our present into the determinate past of something yet to come" ("Progress" 152). Through its aesthetic vision of crisis and the potential to emerge from it, *City of Bohane* opens space for the type of vision that Jenni experiences on its final page: one that conceives the present as a moment in history that can, by first being revisualized, be transformed.

Chapter 3: Bodies in the Dark: Penetrating Spaces of State Confinement in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* and Edmund Clark's *Guantánamo: If the Light Goes Out*

In the previous two chapters, I have explored how the ekphrastic inclusion of visual media in novels works to address phenomena that harm large populations of people yet pose distinct challenges to representation. In *A Tale for the Time Being*, Ruth attempts to navigate large volumes of information about far-off disasters while acknowledging the gaps in that visual record, and *City of Bohane* brings the slow violence of austerity and economic inequality to the fore via allegory and photographic ekphrasis. In this sense, both texts wrestle with a tension between overexposure and obscurity that I outlined in my introduction: visual media allows contemporary subjects to witness violence in its many forms, yet elements of such phenomena always escape the gaze of those who do not experience it directly. In this concluding chapter, I extend this consideration of new media ekphrasis in contemporary novels about violence, specifically novels that address September 11, 2001, and the War on Terror that followed. I also, however, want to emphasize a complementary fictional approach, aporia, that becomes an effective device for confronting the longest and most diffuse global war that the United States has ever instigated.

The chapter begins by reading across an archive of fictional texts that highlight the televisual spectacle of 9/11 and the early photojournalistic glimpses into the War on Terror. Two of these texts, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Dave Eggers's flash fiction piece "On What It Means When A Crowd in a Faraway Nation Takes a Soldier Representing Your Nation, Shoots Him, Drags Him From His Vehicle, and Then Mutilates Him in the Dust," center an American point of view on 9/11 and the ensuing state violence. In so doing, these fictions attest to how 9/11 has been read as an open wound or cultural trauma that, some have argued, has lent moral

justification to the War on Terror's transgressions of legal and martial norms. I challenge that interpretation through my readings of these texts. Other fictions, including Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*, explicitly destabilize such US-centric perspectives on 9/11, placing the attack in different global frameworks and in relation to other catastrophes. They thereby call into question a political calculus that posits victimization at home as justification for excessive violence abroad.

Among ekphrastic renderings of the 9/11 footage, certain aesthetic commonalities emerge, and I engage those features in order to inquire why 9/11 has become such a seductive topic for fiction, while the post-9/11 War on Terror has received comparatively scant treatment in contemporary novels. In probing this disparity, I examine the challenges that the US-led conflict poses to visual and narrative representation. I then move to examine two texts, a novel and an art exhibit, that deploy absence and aporia as means for penetrating the concealed topoi in which the War on Terror is largely waged—particularly spaces of state confinement such as Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. Kamila Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009) begins with one of its protagonists, Raza Konrad Ashraf, being forced to don an orange jumpsuit in a cell, which reads as an explicit reference to the Gitmo military base. The novel backtracks from that moment and ends with Raza's capture and rendition. I contemplate the effect of the novel's chronological bookends—the fact that it begins and ends just as Raza is entering Guantánamo—alongside a recent exhibit of photography by a British artist, Edmund Clark, who gained rare civilian access to Guantánamo. Having done so, he produced a visual rendering of the facility in which the physical body is notably absent. Representing this dimension of the War on Terror through corporeal absence, I argue, becomes an effective way to counteract how those labeled "enemy combatants" have been racially and sexually stigmatized as part of the US's strategy for

maintaining a sense of threat that must be mitigated through unprecedented means. Shamsie's novel suggests one way of responding to the War on Terror, particularly by placing 9/11 into a frame with other moments of historical rupture. Yet my chapter also suggests how the visual arts can draw upon their medium-specific characteristics in order to contribute to a larger effort to reckon, through cultural production, with a conflict that is extremely difficult to narrate in its extensive global and temporal reach.

* * *

In April 2004, Dave Eggers published a flash fiction piece in the *Guardian* with the evocative title "On What It Means When A Crowd in a Faraway Nation Takes a Soldier Representing Your Nation, Shoots Him, Drags Him From His Vehicle, and Then Mutilates Him in the Dust."[1] Just 382 words long, the piece describes an unnamed "man" attempting to go about his day yet finding himself distracted by a series of "somethings" that pull him away from the tasks he is attempting to perform. The mysterious somethings accrue: "there was something outside the window he needed to inspect[,] . . . something in the yard that needed fixing. He needed to drive somewhere, he needed to take a quick run" (n.p.). The story is an exercise in identifying affects—the first sentence reads "There is a man who felt great trepidation"— and then building toward an understanding of their cause. That cause at first eludes the man and then presents itself when the third-person narrator reveals, "The man had seen the picture that morning, in the newspaper."

The picture, it turns out, depicts a soldier's corpse on the ground "in a faraway nation." It suggests the immediate aftermath of the events referenced in the story's title: "a crowd in a faraway nation takes a soldier . . . shoots him, . . . drags him . . . , and then mutilates him . . . ."

Eggers's flash fiction piece, therefore, insinuates that having seen the photograph might be the direct cause of the man's agitation throughout the day, not just for the image's disturbing content but also for the specific conditions of its viewing. It becomes clear, in other words, that the man is struck by the contrast between his own physical location and the dead soldier's.

The story's setting vacillates between the distant topoi of battlefield and armchair, between the faraway country and the man's house. In order to achieve this effect, Eggers uses the same pronoun ("he") and the same verb tense (past) in reference to both men, thus blurring distinctions between their two milieus. That opaqueness becomes evident in the following two sentences, in which Eggers writes, "He lay on his back, his boots almost white in the midday sun, pointing up. The man was sitting in his home, comfortable, wearing warm socks and drinking orange juice from a smooth heavy glass, and was seeing the dead man in the color photograph." The subtle, almost undetectable shift from the subject "He" in the first sentence to "The man" in the second makes that geographic relocation easy to miss. Dramatizing the man's experience of viewing the photograph, on one level, would thus seem to evoke McKenzie Wark's concept of "telesthesia," or perception at a distance, which my first chapter explored in relation to Ruth Ozeki's work. Yet aside from that uncanny movement from smoldering battlefield to bourgeois home, the passage also implies a deliberate interchangeability between the soldier and the man. The man's shock upon viewing the picture stems not from its brutality; as Eggers writes, "If a soldier was killed and mutilated in his own country, the man would not feel this kind of revulsion, this sort of undirectable rage." Rather, the man's "undirectable rage" stems from his identification with the soldier representing *his own* nation—killed, shot, dragged, and mutilated by foreign others in a foreign land.

Despite Eggers's precision in exploring how the photograph warps the man's attempt to go about his day, the promise implied by the title is never delivered. The reader does not learn "*What It Means* When A Crowd in a Faraway Nation Takes a Soldier . . ."; the piece ascribes no meaning to those actions. Ultimately, this work of fiction is not really invested in the violent events themselves or their meaning, but rather in how the image is taken and transmitted—how it reaches and impacts the soldier's distant countrymen, sipping orange juice over breakfast in their warm socks. To float the possibility of meaning, and then to completely abandon it, communicates something crucial about how remotely and imprecisely people can register warfare when observing it from a far-off and highly edited vantage point.

The narrative is a brief yet potent engagement with an ekphrastic rendering of the newspaper photograph, and as with other examples of ekphrasis in fiction that I have examined, the language moves between describing the image itself and relaying the viewer's cognitive reactions as he gazes at the picture. Because the man's setting and the war's location are vague, the story comes to seem more symbolic than specific, purposefully capacious in its ability to signify a certain type of contemporary experience. In this sense, "the man" in the story comes to stand in for millions of news consumers who regularly open their morning papers or Internet browsers and encounter images of carnage whose meanings, motivations, and implications they may struggle to grasp. The story, as I mentioned, was published in April 2004: two years and six months after US forces, along with UK and coalition allies, invaded Afghanistan to oust the Taliban regime, and about one year after the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The spectacle of anonymous soldiers lying dead in "a faraway nation" would likely have been familiar to *Guardian* readers at the time, perhaps already weary with what Dexter Filkins would describe as "the forever war" between America and Islamic fundamentalism. Notably, Eggers deploys the

second-person address in his title as a way of hailing and implicating readers in the man's plight: "A Soldier Representing *Your* Nation." That choice raises questions about how filiation, loyalty, anger, and grief are differently apportioned according to whether the felled soldier is on *your* side or not. Eggers's choice of the second-person appears more ironic than earnest, perhaps meant to foreground and critique those lines of filiation rather than to reinforce them.[2]

These issues of national filiation and differently apportioned expressions of grief also became a central concern of Judith Butler's work following September 11th. To an extent, one could read Eggers's piece "On What It Means" as an illustration of Butler's claim that we only grieve lives that we consider as having been lived, or as lives that we recognize as akin to our own. Butler develops this claim in the first book, *Precarious Lives* (2004), and picks up on it in *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009): that "a life has to be intelligible *as a life*, has to conform to certain conceptions of what life is, in order to become recognizable" (*Frames* 7). Eggers's piece foregrounds that intelligibility by grammatically aligning the man and the soldier: by the subtle shifts between subject names ("the man" to "the soldier"—the solider, too, is a man) and the capacious pronoun "he" to describe both figures. The soldier becomes intelligible to the man as a life lost because, to some extent, the man recognizes *himself* in the soldier's body.

The relationship between foreign otherness and negative affects—"trepidation," "anxiety," and "unease"—circulates through Eggers's flash fiction piece; the man realizes that what enrages him is that the soldier was killed by foreigners, "in a faraway nation," rather than within the borders of his own nation. The penultimate sentence reads: "But in another part of the world, this soldier dragged from his car, this dead, unbloody body in the dust under the truck—why does it set the man on edge, why does it feel so personal?" In recognizing his fellow

countryman's death as worthy of rage, the man perceives the soldier as human—a life that has been lost. Yet he does not extend that perception to *other* lives in whose deaths the soldier has likely been complicit. The soldier's death, rather, feels "personal" because the man perceives a filiation with him, at the very least on account of the national citizenship that they share. While Butler challenges her readers to expand their capacity to recognize and grieve lives across national lines, Eggers's story stops at that initial impasse. It portrays and validates the man's rage, but it terminates before considering whether it might be possible for the man to move beyond his rage, toward a more expansive ethical commitment to the *foreign* lives that are lost alongside that of the soldier representing *his* nation—or representing the imagined *reader's* nation, as the title's second-person address implies.

Eggers's piece thus homes in on the man's affective response to the photograph of the soldier's corpse; toward the end, he feels "violated," and even "punched, robbed, raped." Centering affect as such, the text implicitly foregrounds the War on Terror's unique character as both military intervention and imaginative terrain: that the "war" is putatively waged on a feeling, "terror," rather than on a concrete enemy, state, or even terrorist organization. Michael Richardson, in a book about torture and testimony, suggests how such idiosyncratic framing of war has opened up unprecedented leeway for the US military and executive branch to extend its reach. He writes, "Waging war on an emotion as much as on specific enemies or practices gave the global expansion of the security apparatus of the US and its allies a fundamentally excessive structure: excess fear, excess threat, excess security" (5). Because "terror" is excessive and illimitable, it follows that the US may claim (and has claimed) illimitable powers in its quest to eradicate the feeling of terror from the globe. The war's name is no small matter, for its vague designation and expansive reach have underwritten no less than a fundamental restructuring of

the apparatuses by which the US historically responds to threats from outside forces. The implications of language here are impossible to undervalue, and the war's idiosyncratic character thus demands multiple lines of approach toward uncovering its most morally egregious affordances.

* * *

I begin the chapter with Eggers's short fiction piece because it illustrates a relationship that this chapter will probe between how 9/11 and the ensuing wars are *experienced*, and how they are *seen* in mediated form. Butler's work foregrounds visual identification as part of the mechanism by which "we"—by which she means Americans writ large—decide which lives are worthy of protection, support, and sustenance. The photograph that Eggers's protagonist views in the newspaper presents one example of how images can "frame" war in certain ways for far-off spectators; the man, in fact, is struck by how the picture excludes foreigners entirely from view. Rather, the soldier's corpse appears prominently in the picture's frame while the foreign others remain out of view, and this framing thereby centers the soldier's death while diminishing the relevance of its context. The ekphrastic image in the story, therefore, acts as a metonym for how this process works: American lives foregrounded; foreign lives excluded from view. And the "you" in the story's title hails the reader—assumed to be from America or one of its Coalition Force allies—as complicit in this dynamic. Following the September 11th terrorist attacks, those frames became especially fixed for many American citizens in particular, who mourned the loss of "recognizable" lives like the journalist Daniel Pearl, while looking away from the 175,000-plus body count of civilian Iraqi lives that have been lost since the 2003 US invasion.[3] In this sense, then, her claim gets to the core of the philosophy behind the War on Terror: that nearly any means may be taken in order to achieve the end of protecting American lives.

As Richard Gray has written in reference to 9/11, "crisis is a matter of perception, of feeling, as anything else" (5), and such "perception" and "feeling" of crisis came in no small part to determine how the Bush Administration reacted following the attacks. Based on interviews with senior staff working in the White House following 9/11, journalist Jane Mayer reports that "it is nearly impossible to exaggerate the sense of mortal and existential danger that dominated the thinking of the upper rungs of the Bush Administration during those months" (n.p.). Cheney and other key decision-markers developed an almost apocalyptic view of the terrorism threat, to the extent that "his end, saving America from possible extinction, justified virtually any means" (n.p.). Colin Powell's former Chief of Staff, Lawrence Wilkerson, recalls that Cheney "thought that pefect security was achievable," and declares that while protecting the American people is a laudable goal for a Vice President to pursue, Cheney "was willing to corrupt the whole country to save it" (Mayer n.p.). Stemming from administration officials' affective responses to the 9/11 crisis, these decisions prioritized the security of American citizens at the considerable expense of Middle Eastern lives, which the administration framed as collateral damage in the quest to achieve "perfect security." This moral transaction—rendering foreign lives disposable in order to preempt threats against Americans—extends to national policy the framing process that Butler illustrates in her work.

Over the course of the Bush administration, a cadre of security officials, executive branch members, and lawyers including John Yoo and David Addington essentially rewrote the rules on American war. These evolving norms gave the president leeway to circumvent Congress in taking military action, sanctioned physical and psychological torture against US-held captives, suspended the writ of habeas corpus for detainees, and allowed the government to hold captives "for the duration of the war against terrorism, a struggle for which victory had never been clearly

defined" (Mayer n.p.). Mayer argues that these adjustments to US legal practice were historically unprecedented: more significant in their executive overreach than John Adams's Alien and Sedition Acts, Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus during the Civil War, and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Such aggressive pursuits did not end with Bush's tenure as President. While pledging to end the War on Terror throughout his campaign, Barack Obama executed ten times as many drone strikes as Bush, favoring targeted assassinations of terror suspects in Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen over costly and protracted ground invasions (Purkiss and Serle). Again, the nebulous title "War on Terror" both symbolically and materially pushed the conflict's horizon line farther and farther into the future, for, as long as "terror" persisted, the state of exception claimed by the Bush Administration in 2001 would remain warranted. Much of this conflict has taken place, as a result, in the shadowy spaces of state confinement in which terror suspects are held, often indefinitely and sometimes up until the point of death.

This chapter investigates the status, in fiction, of the modalities of violence, developed and honed throughout the Global War on Terror, modalities that are contingent upon the premise that they remain secret and obscured from public view. In order to manifest, these modes of violence must be conducted entirely outside the sphere of intelligibility to which ordinary observers—without a security clearance or direct experience of combat—have access. My concern here is to foreground the paradoxical tension between hyper-visibility and in-visibility that has come to define the War on Terror: the fact that the conflict has generated an overwhelming archive of visual evidence (of the kind that "the man" encounters in Eggers's piece), while also being waged almost entirely outside of public sight: via drone-operation commands and in sites of extraordinary rendition such as Guantánamo Bay, CIA black sites, and

British control-order houses. Given the ethical compromises that underwrite obscured violence, I will show, fiction and art can deploy absence and aporia as formal strategies to capture that very inscrutability. As drone strikes and indefinite detention suggest, the War on Terror has become an exemplar of asymmetric warfare, wherein a superpower gives itself license to marshal its entire military apparatus toward fighting a diffuse and somewhat improvisatory enemy who lacks comparable means for waging war. Outside of combat, however, a different yet related asymmetry has developed: an imbalance in the visual record of violence—at least in Western media landscapes—that ends up overexposing certain types of harm while obscuring others. As Eggers's flash fiction piece illustrates, the overexposure of harm done to soldiers "from your nation" fuels animosity toward foreign others, which ultimately functions to sustain public tolerance for the war—or at least to give citizens some moral cover to ignore violence taking place under more opaque circumstances.

This visual asymmetry is also evident in the archive of novels written post-2001 that allude to 9/11 or the War on Terror in any way. On the one hand, the iconic status of the 9/11 *imagery* has developed into a trope in recent Anglophone fiction, captured by ekphrastic descriptions in novels by writers as diverse as Ozeki, Indra Sinha, and Don DeLillo. My prior chapters have emphasized the potential of ekphrastic prose in novels to mobilize new methods for visualizing and contextualizing violence within more expansive historical and political frameworks. When faced with the dialectic between hypervisibility and invisibility that has come to define 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror, however, other formal gestures must emerge in order to account for the "obscure violence" that has been waged in response to terror, and which leaves very few traces in visual culture. Because extraordinary rendition in particular is a mode of violence that must be conducted outside of public view (as mentioned above), I suggest that

absence as an aesthetic strategy may be more powerful than the presence that ekphrasis affords to violence within a literary text. To advance this argument, I examine a fictional text, Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009), alongside visual art by Edmund Clark, a photographer who gained rare access to Guantánamo Bay to shoot his series *Guantánamo: If the Light Goes Out*. In doing so, I attend to how Shamsie and Clark use absence and aporia as purposeful challenges to the excessive *presence* of 9/11 in the visual record and, it must be said, in the proliferation of novels that the event has inspired. I thus propose aporia as a complement or alternative to ekphrasis, as a powerful strategy for marking the silencing and obscuring of certain bodies from mainstream discourse and visual culture surrounding the War on Terror.

* * *

Theorists such as Butler, Grégoire Chamayou, and Darius M. Rejali have contributed substantially to the project of understanding detention, drones, and torture within the democratic imaginary. At the same time, journalists including Mayer, Seymour Hersh, and Mark Mazzetti have illuminated the operations of power and statecraft that implement these modalities of violence in real time. While engaging these rich contexts for understanding the War on Terror, I bring into view the imaginative texts that enter these conversations from a different angle. Drawing on the aesthetic resources of each medium, Shamsie's novel and Clark's photographs bring their readers and viewers into engagement with the human bodies and psyches that these violent operations damage, often irreparably. I began the chapter with Eggers's flash fiction piece because it illuminates the dialectical inverse of obscure violence: the vast archive of War on Terror imagery, sublime in its excess, that broadcasts the conflict across mainstream media

channels and regularly penetrates the psychological field of ordinary citizens such as Eggers's "man."

This visual archive begins, of course, with images of the falling towers on September 11th, 2001—the apotheosis of what Wark would call a "weird global media event" because its capture by media ensured that the entire world was able to watch the event happen, both in the moment and in obsessive replay afterward. Jürgen Habermas would assert shortly following the event that, given its nature as mediated spectacle, "the whole world population became a benumbed witness" to the terror attack (qtd. in Borradori 28). The temporality of witnessing 9/11 thus becomes complex and extensive: people happening to watch TV as the towers fell became virtual, real-time spectators, while the footage's iconic status and global reach have extended the temporality of witnessing far beyond the event itself, thanks to the repetitious capacity of digital image archives. With regard to those preserved images, Richard Gray describes how "every moment could be replayed, slowed down, speeded up, put in freeze frame or in a wider or narrower perspective: in short, placed under obsessive, compulsive scrutiny" (7). The 9/11 images—the first plane's shocking appearance in the sky, the falling bodies, the dreaded yet inevitable fall of the second tower, the black clouds of smoke gathering in the blue autumn sky—thus became, thanks to their televisual capture, available for fixation and replay across the globe.

Fig. 1: Freeze-frames from CNN footage, Semptember 11, 2001.

For these reasons in part, September 11th has regularly been characterized as a cultural trauma, a "wound"—to reference the term's Greek etymology—in the national psyche that has provoked symptoms akin to what individual survivors experience in the wake of overwhelmingly unsettling events.[4] Most scholars writing about September 11th integrate trauma theory to some extent in their analyses, occasionally with some degree of suspicion about whether that theoretical framing adequately captures 9/11 and its cultural and political aftermath.[5] Gray, for one, readily embraces trauma theory. He draws on Cathy Caruth's seminal framing of trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled or repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 11). In the case of 9/11, the mediated images played constantly on TV screens across the world for weeks after the event, and the specter of absent or falling towers has become an iconic—and recurring—element of American visual culture in subsequent years

(Stubblefield 3-5). The availability and replay of those images, therefore, resembles Caruth's notion of the "delayed, uncontrolled or repetitive appearance" of a traumatic event in the conscious mind. That dimension of trauma—the repetition compulsion through which a psyche works to integrate an event in its wake—makes it tempting to read 9/11 strictly as trauma.

There are, however, aspects of trauma as defined by both psychiatrists and cultural theorists that, I contend, simply do not fit 9/11 and that comple us, therefore, to seek other ways to understand the event and its aftermath, particularly with the fifteen-plus years of hindsight that we now possess. One shortcoming of reading 9/11 as widespread cultural trauma, as Gray and others do, has to do with the concept of "latency" that is central to the manifestation of trauma in a survivor's psyche—or, if one is speaking of cultural trauma, in the collective consciousness that has been affected by a historical event.[6] Caruth defines latency as "the period during which the effects of the experience are not apparent" (17). This aspect of trauma stems from Freud's initial observation of shell-shock victims and has gained widespread acceptance among medical and psychological experts as a constitutive aspect of trauma's symptomatology. Caruth, working from that definition, observes that "what is truly striking" about a victim's experience of trauma "is not so much the period of forgetting that occurs after the accident, but rather the fact that the victim . . . was never fully conscious during the accident itself: the person gets away, Freud says, 'apparently unharmed'" (17). In other words, when jolted by an event that falls outside the realm of ordinary experience, the brain essentially shields itself from the event's initial force by recording the memory in an atypical region: "in the more primitive amygdala instead of the more highly organized hippocampus," as recent research in cognitive science has found (Moran 163). This means that the traumatic event does not immediately become integrated into narrative memory in the same way that, say, meeting a friend for coffee or taking a test would be

organized into the story of one's day. As Judith Herman puts it, the traumatic story is "prenarrative"—it registers as a rupture in linear memory and therefore does not immediately cohere into a legible sequence of events (175).

For these reasons, trauma theory has become a fruitful resource for understanding extreme historical events (such as the Holocaust, which launched trauma studies as a subfield in the humanities), as well as for analyzing experimental narrative techniques in texts like Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and other accounts of war, violence, and injury that mimic traumatic pathology in their aesthetics. With regards to September 11th, however, the event's fundamentally and instantaneously mediated nature (as described above) averted that period of latency altogether. Because the terror attacks were captured on television as they were occurring, they were available to be recorded, preserved, viewed, and replayed *from the very moment of their occurrence*. This amounts to a structural incongruity with the pathology that psychologists and literary critics deploy when analyzing trauma and its manifestation in the brain or in artistic texts, as the case may be. There was no latency in the experience of 9/11, at least from the perspective of a wider viewing public that had full access to the visual experience of the event from the first moments of its inception. While I would underscore that 9/11 certainly caused trauma in survivors who were in the vicinity or whose loved ones were affected, I want to challenge the broad acceptance of 9/11 as a *cultural* trauma, for such a designation implicitly validates troubling subsequent deployments of the event as justification for disproportionate violence.

Additionally, reading 9/11 as a widespread cultural trauma, which "leaves indelible marks upon [a] group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways," implies that there is no way to truly close that

wound: it changes an entire group "forever" (Alexander et al. 1). With fifteen years of hindsight, and considering how the War on Terror was hastily initiated in response to the attacks, it seems imprudent to suggest that comparable means of reconciliation have taken place across American culture at large.[7] This has to do in large part with the Bush Administration's framing of 9/11 as an act of war—rather than a crime—that necessitated a retaliatory war to be waged in response. In a speech given on September 12, 2011, just one day after the attacks, Bush declared, "This battle will take time and resolve. But make no mistake about it, we will win" (qtd. in Hodges 25). This framing of 9/11 as an act of war rather than a heinous crime, as Adam Hodges writes, "is a discursive achievement" rather than the only available way to interpret the event (23).

Deploying the metaphor of trauma to diagnose a cultural event such as 9/11, therefore, runs into trouble when such structural incongruity appears: in the case of the terror attacks, the "wound" of that day appears still to be open, as the War on Terror's boundless persistence suggests. Peter Brooks, writing shortly after 9/11, drew on Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia to highlight what he termed "the *political* failure of our mourning and thus its failure to bring us the right, sobering lessons about our global responsibilities" (49). By referencing Freud's melancholia, "which behaves like an open wound, drawing to itself cathectic energies . . . from all directions, and emptying the ego until it is totally impoverished," Brooks suggested that the process of mourning 9/11 remained unresolved and, as such, had been conscripted by the Bush administration as justification for open-ended state violence (Freud 14:253, qtd. in Brooks 49). In this sense, Brooks marks the limitations of fetishing 9/11 as a national injury that deserves compensatory violence in response, and he draws attention to the political and moral problems that come with brandishing the term "trauma" to label a phenomenon that displays very little resemblance to the actual pathology of trauma. Abstracting

personal trauma into cultural trauma, with regards to 9/11, has amounted to politically powerful agents (the Bush and then Obama administrations) appropriating individual pain in service of dramatizing a sense of national wounding that would go on to underwrite the historically unprecedented legal allowances marshaled under the sign of the War on Terror.

My reckoning with 9/11—as a real event and an enduring symbol of national injury—serves a specific purpose toward examining contemporary fiction, as well as the volume of attention paid by literary critics to 9/11 itself versus the war that followed it.[8] Why has 9/11 served as such a rich touchstone for both literary production and critical scholarship, while the War on Terror has maintained a more shadowy presence in both realms? The answer likely begins with the relative conspicuousness and visual aesthetics of the two phenomena: 9/11 being a one-time, visually striking event captured on television, and the War on Terror being a protracted and amorphous conflict conducted in a vast number of locations across the world.[9] Because of the extremely different *visual* records that these two arenas of violence have wrought, they pose very different opportunities and challeges for artistic representation. The Eggers flash fiction piece attests to the inscrutability of the War on Terror, or the difficulties that a spectator faces when viewing one image of one death, out of context, and grappling with his own relationship to it.

Given the extensive visual record of 9/11, the ekphrastic gesture of describing the towers falling on TV has appeared in many globally oriented fictions following 9/11, to the extent that it has become something of a trope in many texts set after 2001. Aesthetic and thematic commonalities recur across these passages: the initial moments of incomprehension and confusion, the resemblance of the spectacle to Hollywood disaster films, the collage of falling bodies, the temporal disorientation in that time seems both frozen and fleeting as the second

tower falls. Aside from these commonalities, however, ekphrastic renderings of 9/11 can work to deterritorialize a strictly American perspective on the event, often situating the event in relation to other historical instances of violence in which many lives were lost. Writing about Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Harleen Singh suggests that "unlike the American or the British novel, which may treat 9/11 or 7/7 as the cataclysmic end of civilization and modernity, postcolonial novels arrive at the same juncture having comprehended the world as always conflicted and contradictory" (25). Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007) addresses 9/11 within such a frame. 9/11 intrudes early in the narrative, as Animal—an Indian teenager who suffered disfigurement following the 1984 Bhopal chemical disaster—happens to view the footage on a local television station. Animal narrates into tape recordings, and his language comes off as exuberant and spontaneous, yet the substance of his observation resembles the other ekphrastic passages—in *A Tale for the Time Being* and DeLillo's *Falling Man*—that I will examine shortly.

Animal exclaims: "The big thing that happened in Amrika, when I saw it on the tele do you know what I did? I clapped! I thought, fantastic! This plane comes out of nowhere, flies badoom! into this building. Pow! Blam! Flowers of Flame!" (60). The ekphrasis here is conspicuously filtered through Animal's narrative voice, yet he hits on a common impression that other writers explore: the sense of unreality that characterized images of the planes flying into the building. (Later, Animal tells his friend Farouq, "'Words will come, THE END,'" revealing his initial interpretation of the footage as a blockbuster film [61].) In *Animal's People*, 9/11 emerges briefly here as a collage of images onscreen and then fades, never to be engaged in detail again in the narrative. In this sense, the novel reflects the experience of viewing 9/11 from a vast distance, in a slum located in a postcolony and specifically in a city ravaged by the

careless excesses of multinational capitalism. Animal concertedly places the terrorist attacks in a global perspective. Observing that "stuff like that" doesn't happen "in Amrika," he notes, "Here in Khaufpur it's different. Here in Khaufpur we had that night. Nothing like that has ever happened anywhere else" (61). He thereby places 9/11 in a frame alongside the chemical spill at the Union Carbide plant, which killed thousands and exposed over 600,000 people, like Animal, to dangerous chemicals. In doing so, Animal applies an element of scale to the perception of 9/11: to Animal, the terrorist attacks are surely noteworthy, but in the context of his own city's history, they aren't worth much attention.

In *A Tale for the Time Being*, 9/11 also appears on television to a global spectator, yet with a different degree of scrutiny and in a different relationship to the larger narrative. Nao walks in on her father watching the event on their TV in Tokyo, and Ozeki describes the images on the TV in vivid detail, while also providing Nao's first-person reaction as well as her guesses at what her suicidal father might be thinking while watching. Wondering why her father is sitting on the floor watching TV in just his boxer shorts and undershirt, Nao focuses on the TV and observes the following:

> On the screen was the image of two tall, skinny skyscrapers against a bright blue city sky. The buildings looked familiar, and I sort of recognized the skyline. I knew it wasn't Tokyo. Smoke was coming out from the sides of the buildings. I stood in the doorway and watched for a while. At first I thought it was a movie, but the picture stayed the same for too long and didn't do anything. It was just these two skyscrapers leaking smoke into the air without any music or soundtrack except for the low voices of newscasters in the background. (266)

In this image, Ozeki presents an oscillation back and forth between the still image on the screen and Nao's unfolding interpretation of the image in time. The passage moves between the stasis associated with ekphrasis ("the still movement of poetry," in Murray Krieger's terms [153]) and the propulsive thrust of narrative—here, the moment-by-moment process of comprehending what is actually taking place through the screen, in New York. In this sense, Ozeki narrates the process of stilted, unsure, disbelieving perception through which many spectators, watching TVs from uptown Manhattan to Tokyo, processed 9/11 in real time. Later in the passage, her language becomes more figurative, suggesting Nao's attempts to contextualize what she is seeing in terms that are more familiar:

> Flames and black smoke leaked from the wounds in the building. Bright scraps of paper blew out of the holes and sparkled and twinkled like confetti in the air. Tiny people waved things from the windows. Small dark shapes dropped down the sides of the shining building. I reached for my dad's hand. The shapes were alive, they were people, too. Some of them had suits on. Like my dad's. I saw one man's necktie. (267)

Nao, in her diary, takes artistic license here in comparing the destruction to confetti: sparking, shining, and twinkling. As such, this figurative language could potentially appear self-indulgent and insensitive, though it tracks quite candidly with a common association of 9/11 with film or even performance art. (The composer Karlheinz Stockhausen controversially described the disaster as "the greatest work of art that is possible in the whole cosmos," for example, and Jean Baudrillard wrote that 9/11's "reality . . . has absorbed fiction's energy."[10]) Nao's description articulates the hyperreality of the event—the confusion that many felt when first assuming that 9/11 onscreen was a work of fiction, contrivance, or abstraction, and then coming to understand the spectacle as human tragedy on a massive scale.

On its own, this scene dramatizes the idiosyncratic phenomenon of 9/11 as mediated spectacle, as well as the challenging process of apperception that it posed to viewers. Within the novel's broader context, the 9/11 scene in *A Tale for the Time Being* also dovetails with a few major themes: the novel's engagement with visual media, particularly visual images available for endless fixation and replay on the Internet; Nao's and her father's obsessions with suicide; and Nao's effort to locate herself in relation to America, a place where she grew up and which she idolizes. With regards to suicide, both Nao and her father fixate on Richard Drew's famous photograph of the Falling Man, an image that becomes a dominant motif in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* as well (Fig. 2). Nao's father spends countless hours on their computer, staring at a digital copy of Drew's photograph of the lone office worker falling against the striped façade of a skyscraper. Nao ekphrastically describes this image, too: "You've probably seen him. The photograph shows a tiny man in a white shirt and dark pants, diving headfirst down the slick steel side of the building. Next to that gigantic building, he's just a small, dark squiggle, and at first you think he's a piece of lint or dust on the camera lens that got onto the picture by mistake. It's only when you look closely that you understand. The squiggle is a human" (268).

Fig. 2. Richard Drew, *Falling Man*, 2001.

Here Nao narrates the process by which she first reads the figure as a speck of dust on a camera lens, a coincidental error of technique that would have manifest as eerily lifelike, and then becomes aware that the "squiggle" is an actual human. This initial act of misreading makes one's eventual comprehension of the figure's humanity even more forceful. The passage then leads into Nao's meditation on suicide—an effort to understand her father's depression and her own sense of hopelessness—and a deliberation about whether she and her father would have made the choice that the falling man did. Ultimately, *A Tale for the Time Being*'s ekphrastic description of 9/11 as witnessed through a TV advances the novel's explorations of media in fiction and suicide as an ethical choice.

DeLillo's *Falling Man* takes up the iconic Drew photograph more explicitly and sustains its engagement with the image throughout the novel. *Falling Man* centers on characters who were more directly affected by the event than Nao in Tokyo; Keith, a central character in

DeLillo's novel, has walked out of the Twin Towers with glass shards sticking to his face and thus has witnessed the event first-hand. *Falling Man* investigates more fully the traumatic effects of 9/11 on survivors; its main characters—aside from an Al Qaeda hijacker who emerges late in the novel—mostly reside in New York and thus experience the attacks in a way that global spectators like Nao and Animal have not. Like Ozeki and Sinha, however, DeLillo turns to ekphrasis as a way of figuring the event, and the experience of watching the Towers falling on television becomes foregrounded in the novel, even while Keith has been an actual eyewitness to the event. Lianne, Keith's estranged wife, to whom he returns after the attacks, becomes fixated on the replay of the event on TV, much as Nao's father pores over the photographs online. Like Nao's writing in her diary, Lianne's free indirect discourse turns to metaphor as she attempts to decipher what she's seeing. In a passage composed of a string of fragments, Lianne free-associates the images and her reactions: ". . . first one plane and then the other, the one that was nearly cartoon human, with flashing eyes and teeth, the second plane, the south tower" (134). DeLillo, writing from Lianne's perspective, personifies the plane here, reflecting how Lianne struggles to comprehend the plane's movements and admits that the image appears almost fictional, "cartoonish." Later in the scene, Keith corroborates Lianne's stupefaction: "'It still looks like an accident, the first one. Even from this distance, way outside the thing, how many days later, I'm standing here thinking it's an accident'" (135). DeLillo's description here echoes the widespread impression, voiced controversially by Stockhausen and Baudrillard but acknowledged even by survivors of the attacks, that the spectacle of planes hitting towers was surreal and consciously experienced as a kind of performance.[11]

But elsewhere in the passage, DeLillo's use of ekphrasis comes to serve another function: specifically, to point outward from the images themselves and thus to begin articulating the

ideology that would underwrite America's response to 9/11. As with Nao's father in front of his computer, Lianne becomes fixated on the televisual footage; the spectacle seems to demand her sustained attention. DeLillo writes, "Everytime she saw a videotape of the planes she moved a finger toward the power button on the remote. Then she kept watching. The second plane coming out of that ice blue sky, this was the footage that entered the body, that seemed to run beneath her skin, the fleeting spirit that carried lives and histories, theirs and hers, everyone's, into some other distance, out beyond the towers" (134). In this sentence replete with subordinate clauses, DeLillo demonstrates how Lianne's consciousness jumps from the immediate perception of the onscreen image to projections of what that image signals in a longer-term perspective. Like Ozeki, DeLillo focuses on both the ekphrastic image onscreen ("the plane coming out of the ice blue sky") *and* the character's cognitive experience of processing that image. The still image thus becomes the origin point for speculation about where the attacks may lead, "into some other distance, beyond the towers." At this point, that "other distance" remains vague, but in this passage, we begin to sense the movement from a sensation of injury toward an ethics of response.

In this sense, Stephen Cheeke's work on ekphrasis assists in understanding how an ekphrastic image is not always merely descriptive, confined to the realm of aesthetics and free from ideological slant. Cheeke emphasizes the emplacement of the ekphrastic image within narrative and considers the relationship between the "static" image—in this case, the televisual footage of the Towers falling—and the narrative motion that encircles it. About that emplacement, Cheeke writes: "By saying what happens next the verbal description returns the picture to the world of narrative and agency, often revealing an ethical dimension—a moral pulse, a turn or decision, an occasion of will—that has been suspended in the still moment of the

picture" (5). The passage wherein DeLillo describes Lianne watching the footage is ripe for analysis within this frame, as the language dips into a description of the image and then shifts back to a more sequential narrative pace. Specifically, the free indirect discourse turns toward the image, then away from it and into a contemplation of "the fleeting spirit that carried lives and histories, theirs and hers, everyone's, into some other distance, out beyond the towers." Viewed even from 2007, when *Falling Man* was published, this passage demands to be read within multiple contexts: the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, Bush's conjuring the Axis of Evil to encapsulate the entire Arab world, the restructuring of domestic legal norms in the name of national security, and other such compensations for the sense of collective injury wrought by 9/11. At this point in the novel, Lianne is surely not plotting the course that American foreign policy would take; nonetheless, her affective response to the 9/11 images, as rendered ekphrastically in the novel, evokes that broader acceptance of 9/11 as an agreed-upon turning point in American-led geopolitics. In Cheeke's terms, this shift from ekphrasis back to Lianne's conscious thoughts contains "a moral pulse, a turn or decision, an occasion of will" (5).

Lianne's thinking here thus participates in a broader cultural and political consensus that marks 9/11 as a massive hinge in American history, an apocalyptic moment of national harm that would fundamentally alter the extent to which state-sanctioned violence would be waged abroad. DeLillo's exploration of how the attacks affect his cast of characters registers how 9/11 was a very real tragedy for the thousands of lives that it touched. At the same time, there are moments in the text wherein that widespread sense of vulnerability—and efforts to grasp at a reassuring response—comes to the fore. Anne McClintock ably deconstructs this sacralization of 9/11 in an article that triangulates the event with the United States' nuclear attacks on Japan and the genocide and forced removal of First Nations people from their native soil. McClintock asks,

"The 9-11 attack was certainly a tragedy, but whose tragedy was it?" (819). She highlights the irony of the American government's consecrating lower Manhattan as "Ground Zero," given the nation's hand in "two prior Ground Zeroes, created in Japan in 1945, when the United States obliterated without necessity or warning the densely populated city of Hiroshima, on 6 August, and, a few days later, Nagasaki" (823). The hypocrisy of this naming suggests how easily the atomic bombs recede in national memory, or at least become rescripted as necessary acts of justified war. This dynamic, which McClintock calls "administered forgetting," renders 9/11 the focal point in a discourse of victimhood and retribution that effaces the United States' prior acts of devastation. *Falling Man*, focusing tightly on how 9/11 personally affects witnesses living in New York, verges on participating in that act of centering American injury without addressing how our prior—and, from Lianne's vantage point, future—participation in atrocity would reverberate on scale much wider than the island of Manhattan.

Animal's People, *A Tale for the Time Being*, and *Falling Man* may not be unique in deploying ekphrasis as a means of foregrounding the televisual spectacle of 9/11, yet the aesthetic similarities between these three passages attest to the allure that 9/11 presents as grounds for writing fiction. I attend to these novels in part to demonstrate the ubiquity of that trope, but also to acknowledge how the three novels offer distinctive contexts for how 9/11 might have appeared to viewers across the world—Animal, Nao, and Lianne representing three very different vantage points. Clearly, 9/11 has become an iconic signifier in cultural memory, visual imagery, prose ekphrasis, and literary criticism to a degree that seems overwhelming, particularly in contrast to the diffuse, enduring, multifarious, and largely secretive conflict that it inspired. The Iraq War and invasion of Afghanistan have produced a spate of popular novels written from the vantage points of American military operatives; Kevin Powers's *The Yellow*

Birds (2012), Phil Klay's *Redeployment* (2013), Roy Scranton's *War Porn* (2016) stand out within that genre. These fictions document the moral and emotional ambivalence that American soldiers suffer, particularly upon returning from the field of combat. Yet fictional explorations of the obscure spaces in which the War on Terror largely operates—command centers for drone strikes and spaces of state confinement—remain difficult to come by.

* * *

A major exception, though, would be Pakistani-American novelist Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009), which begins and ends with the moment at which one protagonist, Raza Konrad Ashraf, waits at the threshold of a US military prison that almost certainly represents Guantánamo Bay. According to the novel's chronology, Raza is captured in the winter of 2002, just around the time that the US Defense Department released photographs of newly captured Guantánamo detainees to CNN (Fig. 3). Shamsie's description of Raza's arrival at the detention center, which appears on the first page of the novel, alludes directly to this image: "When he is dressed again, he suspects, he will be wearing an orange jumpsuit" (1). The novel's prologue comprises just four short paragraphs, but it sketches in quick strokes the process of Raza being forcibly disrobed and situated in the cell. Although brief, the passage fixates on Raza's body as it registers its new environment, the cell, and how his body resists its interior: "The cold gleam of the steel bench makes his body shrivel. As long as it's possible, he'll stand." And the prologue ends with Raza wondering, "*How did it come to this*" (1).

Fig. 3. Original caption: "Detainees in orange jumpsuits sit in a holding area under the watchful eyes of Military Police at Camp X-Ray January 11, 2002 at Naval Base Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, during in-processing to the temporary detention …" Photo by Shane McCoy.

The rest of the novel traces the web of historical occurrences that culminate in this moment of Raza's imprisonment, beginning with the suffering of Raza's mother, Hiroko Tanaka, from the fallout from the atomic bomb that Harry S. Truman's administration dropped on Nagasaki on August 9th, 1945. The narrative traces the genealogy of two families, the Weiss-Burtons and the Tanaka-Ashrafs, whose fates intertwine during World War II when Hiroko becomes engaged to marry Konrad Weiss, a German academic who dies in the bombing, and then moves to Delhi to live with Konrad's sister, Elizabeth Burton, née Ilsa Weiss, and her family. In tracing these lineages, the novel alights on four historically significant junctures: Nagasaki on August 9th, 1945; Delhi just before Partition in 1947; Pakistan during a Cold War period of military dictatorships and CIA activity; and New York / Afghanistan between 9/11 and Raza's capture. One of the novel's final scenes finds the Weiss-Burtons' and the Tanaka-

Ashrafs' respective offspring face to face in a fast-food restaurant parking lot in Canada. There, Kim Burton, an American engineer, has revealed her suspicions to the police that an immigrant from Afghanistan, Abdullah, whom she has just smuggled into Canada, might be a terrorist. Raza Ashraf, Abdullah's childhood friend who has agreed to meet Abdullah and Kim at the restaurant, makes a self-sacrificing decision to switch coats with Abdullah, and thus, as a result of Kim's suspicion plus her confusing the two Pakistani men, Raza ends up arrested and renditioned to Guantánamo, where the novel's prologue had left him.

By providing Raza's rich backstory and then leaving him on the threshold of Guantánamo, *Burnt Shadows* truncates in ominous fashion, its epic sweep halting abruptly and thus impelling the reader to imagine what comes next for Raza. Within the logic of the novel's plot—what Peter Brooks describes as "the design and intention of narrative, what shapes a story and gives it a certain direction or intent of meaning"—that truncation comes to shape the entire narrative, appearing as it does both before and after such an extensive exegesis of Raza's life and ancestry theretofore (xi). The novel is bounded by that pivotal moment, for the story reaches fifty-seven years into the past and stretches across multiple continents but remains caught in a circuit that begins and ends with Raza's captivity. In other words, by introducing Raza in his cell and concluding his story as he is dragged away by police (though there is a short coda in which Hiroko and Kim confront one another in New York), the novel seems highly invested in explicating the historical and personal forces that bring Raza to be unjustly imprisoned.

The text, nonetheless, does not move toward imagining the future implications of where the narrative has situated Raza at its conclusion. It is not my aim to scrutinize Shamsie's intentions or limitations but rather to consider the effect of the novel's looped temporality, as well as how its plot thrusts the reader's imagination into an aporetic future that she must conjure

for herself. By refusing to move past Raza's initial intake at Guantánamo Bay, Shamsie directs attention beyond the novel's borders, to the bodies and communities that are quite literally erased from public view in the context of the War on Terror. Raza's aborted life story thus becomes more broadly symbolic of extraordinary rendition, a practice that removes people from public life and then detains them indefinitely without trial. Additionally, as I will demonstrate, the moment of confusion that occurs between Kim Burton and Raza Ashraf in the fast-food parking lot works allegorically to dramatize how American fear after 9/11 can materialize as racial stereotyping and excessive caution, claiming lives like Raza's as collateral damage in attempts to "keep America safe."

As I mentioned above, the visual detail that Shamsie highlights in the prologue, "an orange jumpsuit," plus the date of Raza's capture (winter 2002), allude conspicuously to the so-called "orange series" of photographs that the US Defense Department leaked to media outlets in January 2002, shortly after the first prisoners reportedly arrived at Camp X-Ray in Guantánamo Bay (Fig. 3).[12] To this day, the "orange series" represents a rare moment of information-leakage from inside the Joint Task Force at Guantánamo, a facility whose public image has been painstakingly controlled by the military since its opening in 2002. Unlike the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq—the site from which scandalous photos of prisoner abuse leaked in 2004—Guantánamo has largely avoided the kind of media firestorm that erupted because of the *visual evidence* that the Abu Ghraib photographs contained. Amy Kaplan has described the Guantánamo facility as "a legal black hole, a legal limbo, a prison beyond the law, a 'permanent United States penal colony floating in another world'" (831). Her language uses spatial metaphors—black hole, floating penal colony—in order to illustrate both Guantánamo's legal fungibility and its visual inscrutability to all but those who have been there. Kaplan's description also tracks with the

narrative structure of *Burnt Shadows*, wherein Guantánamo haunts the novel as a space that is gestured toward but never actually penetrated—a "black hole" of its own within the novel's diegetic world.

Fifteen years after its opening, Guantánamo stands as evidence of how the American military is waging a type of obscure violence: violence that relies for its perpetuation on the fact that it can be conducted largely outside of public scrutiny—in dark spaces like Guantánamo, where the state may carry out its "war against Islamic fundamentalism" under the linked camoflages of classification, improvised legal protections, and the geographic distance and visual obscurity that its remote location affords. This concept of obscure violence is not entirely new. Wars have often been waged outside the public's direct line of sight; they have always thus depended for their continuation upon some degree of visual non-exposure, of erasure and concealment. The rise of photography prior to World War I, however, made possible certain new ways of "seeing" conflict, and the subsequent rise of war photography as an aesthetic pursuit, as Susan Sontag and Susie Linfield have shown, entirely changed the relationship between combat itself and the people or citizens on whose behalf combat is putatively waged. A century later, technologies such as unarmed aerial vehicles, which Grégoire Chamayou describes as "an eye turned into a weapon," and advanced interrogation techniques, always conducted in highly secretive locations, increase the ratio of aggression to vulnerability that war has always involved (11). In other words, the technologies and techniques that Coalition Forces deploy in waging the War on Terror enable violence to be committed with relatively little risk to their own security, and with less accountability. The technique of "indefinite detention," in particular, is easy to conceal, and it thus becomes advantageous for military forces that are able to exert their power in those obscured visual spaces.

Obscure violence in the twenty-first century, however does not just involve maintaining cover for operations and detentions. Rather, it negotiates a well-maintained border between visibility and invisibility, a constant flickering between selective representations and normative secrecy. The images of prisoners clad in orange jumpsuits, being led into Camp X-Ray by guards, their faces covered by ski masks and their hands tied, constitute one such representation. These photographs were taken by naval officer Shane McCoy on the first day that Camp X-Ray was open: January 11th, 2002. The images were then released to CNN by the Defense Department on January 18th. The original caption reads: "Detainees in orange jumpsuits sit in a holding area under the watchful eyes of Military Police at Camp X-Ray January 11, 2001 at Naval Base Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, during in-processing to the temporary detention . . . ." (qtd. in Van Veeren 1730). The Defense Department released the images to CNN with the aim of making them widely visible and, thereby, reassuring the American public of their security just four months after the September 11th attacks. The caption contains a few loaded phrases in particular: "under the watchful eyes of Military Police" seems gratuitously descriptive for a caption, an evocative cliché deployed to highlight not only the prisoners themselves, but the synecdoches for military power—the guards—gazing over them. The phrase "temporary detention" seems ironic in hindsight, too, given revelations about the United States' "brazen breaches of both US constitutional law and international humanitarian and human rights law" at the base (Harlow 2). The photographs were clearly meant as a show of strength, of military competence, and of the burgeoning Counter-Terrorism apparatus at work. Yet this act of public relations theater—releasing such clearly staged images to the media—also reflects what Kaplan describes as "an overstretched empire in chaotic decline" (832). The photographs appear overly

compensatory, as though trying to thrust forward a testament to the US administration's sense of having security under control following 9/11.

Formally speaking, there is something highly contrived about the photographs' visual rhetoric: in figure 3 (above), for example, the foreground is sliced with barbed wire, which appears extremely large-scale given its placement in the composition. Because of photographer McCoy's perspective, the two flanking fences and the prisoners lined up inside them converge toward the two guards inside the cage, who stand tall while the detainees bow down. At least five additional guards lurk outside the fence. Because the depth-of-field is quite extensive, one can detect blurred figures in the back left corner that might or might not be guards. These additional figures represent, in visual terms, a modern-day panopticon, wherein the ability for authorities to surveil suspects without being seen has become more robust than ever before.

Aside from these photographs from January 2002, however, images of detainees at Guantánamo are nearly nonexistent, partly because the US believes itself to be upholding the Geneva Conventions in its refusal to show the faces of its captives (Van Veeren 1731). The "orange series," therefore, represents one of a very few "inside the wire" representations of the camp that features the human body inside its material structure. At the same time, a large body of *written* texts depicting Guantánamo's interior has developed, including memoirs, legal briefs, transcribed phone calls, and a limited amount of journalism.[13] One particularly wrenching testimony was written for the *New York Times* by Samir Naji al Hasan Moqbel, a Yemeni man detained at Guantánamo for at least eleven years, who participated in a wave of hunger strikes that began in 2013. At its highest point, 106 of the 166 detainees were on hunger strike, and 45 of them, like Moqbel, were being regularly force-fed.[14] Yet, as the scarcity of photographs

attests, the *optics* of the prison have remained highly sanitzed, and its visual veneer has thus remained largely intact.

In spite of damning reports like Moqbel's, support for the detention center at Guantánamo among Americans remains relatively strong. Fourteen years after its opening, following eight federal and Supreme Court cases challenging its legality and two public hunger strikes, a March 2016 poll found that 56% of Americans—the majority—preferred to keep the facility open. Only 40% of Americans supported shuttering the facility. Among Republicans, support remained high at 83%, a number that actually rose from 76% the previous August (LoBianco n.p.). There are surely a number of reasons why support for the detention center has remained so high, despite evidence that human rights violations under the Geneva Convention have taken place there. Political scientist Elspeth Van Veeren offers one particularly compelling argument: that the carefully managed public image of the prison has sustained support for it. Since its opening, the US government has maintained stringent prohibitions on visiting the facility and, if one gains access to it, on taking photographs or even witnessing prisoners inside. For these reasons, Van Veeren asserts, "the way in which Guantanamo has been framed, not just rhetorically, but visually" plays a crucial role in public consent for its continued operation (1723). Van Veeren goes on to illustrate how the geographic site—its material contours, its mechanisms of operation, its treatment of prisoners—is, from a citizen's perspective, inextricably linked to the visual representations, or lack thereof, that have been released. The name "Camp X-Ray" seems highly paradoxical, too: clearly intended to evoke a finely tuned apparatus for scrutinizing bodies, the name becomes ironic given that the citizens whose security is purportedly being protected do not receive the same permission to gaze inside the space. In

other words, questions of visuality have been central to the legal construction and political understanding of what this "black hole" actually is, ontologically, materially, and symbolically.

Additionally—and this is a point that I believe *Burnt Shadows* attempts to counteract through Raza's backstory and capture—the orange series images can be said to have launched the construction of a new legal category, the "enemy combatant" tailored specifically to the figure of the post-9/11 terror suspect. The labor involved in constructing this category of person, the enemy combatant, involves coding certain bodies as threats, and this stems from a constitutional provision that has been exploited to enable indefinite detention at facilities like Camp X-Ray. The legal grounds for petitions that lawyers file on behalf of Guatánamo detainees almost always center on the doctrine of habeas corpus. A Latin imperative phrase meaning "show us the body," habeas corpus has, since the Magna Carta, stood as a central tenet in liberal jurisprudence.[15] To deny, therefore, that a Guantánamo detainee has the right to a writ of habeas corpus is, in theory, to deny that there is a body to be shown (in court). On the other hand, thoughout the Bush administration, the Justice Department worked mightily to justify the suspension of habeas corpus—as permitted under the "Suspension Clause" of the US Constitution. Article One, Section 9, Clause 2 asserts that "the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus shall not be suspended, *unless when* in cases of rebellion or invasion the public safety may require it" (qtd. in Kaplan). The task before the Administration, therefore, was to prove that Guantánamo detainees amounted to "cases of rebellion or invasion." And hence the category of "enemy combatant" emerged, and an enormous amount of legal, bureaucratic, and public relations work was instigated in service of cementing the sense that any detainee at Guantánamo—not having received a trial—counted as an enemy combatant. Intentionally operating outside the borders of US constitutional law, the Defense and Justice Departments had

to work extremely hard in the less regulated spheres of public and media relations in order to construct this archetype of "the enemy combatant," to gain moral permission for branding these suspects as already-guilty purely on account of having been captured in the first place—often, like Raza and Samir Moqbel, under extremely arbitrary circumstances.

In terms of their clearly staged visual rhetoric, there are two specific problems with how the detainee's body is displayed in the January 2002 photographs. First is a point that Rumsfeld clearly meant to make by showing the American citizenry "what a terrorist looks like." Even though the faces are hooded and the bodies more or less obscured (in accordance with the Geneva Conventions), they are racially homogenized: because the jumpsuits and hoods cover most of their faces and bodies, all that the viewer can see are small areas of brown skin and dark hair. The photographs thus present the men as an indistinguishable cluster whose individual identities are obscured or even negated entirely by their membership in this visual group. Neelika Jayawardane has explained the implications of this framing: "Exposure to such images not only taught us to associate specific material markers with otherness and to conflate those markers of otherness with terror, but also gave materiality to an otherwise unnamable terror, creating a recognizable terrain of unease around a certain (often vague) set of characteristics" (93). The second problem stems from a nonconsensual sexualization of the detainees' bodies, a point that both Jasbir Puar and Scott McClintock have made—Puar in general reference to constructions of "the unsettling, monstrous terrorist corporeality" and McClintock specifically to these photographs (14). The gaze upon the prisoners is nonreciprocal; while the prisoners' eyes are shielded, the guards' "watchful eyes" are figured as panoptic, while as viewers, we have bird's-eye access to the prisoners' hunched bodies. McClintock goes so far as to label the images pornographic; he writes that "the visual semiology of the detainees in the photographs is replete

with pornographic associations, the pornography of power." The images, he writes, "evoke the visual syntax of sadomasochistic pornography" (154). Representing the detainees in this way situates both the guards and the viewer in positions of dominance, with the jumpsuited figure available for control or violation at will.

It is these images that Shamsie references with the line, "When he is dressed again, he suspects, he will be wearing an orange jumpsuit." The qualifier "he suspects" jumps out specifically, because it reveals that Raza has likely seen the orange jumpsuit photographs and, therefore, associates that clothing specifically with the detention facility in which he has landed. Beginning with this brief prologue, *Burnt Shadows* works extensively to deconstruct this archetypal image of the jumpsuited terror suspect being monitored "under the watchful eyes" of military personnel. The novel does so through a few formal commitments: by making Raza a multiracial, polyglot figure who can easily move between communities, languages, nations, and allegiances—a flexibility that becomes both professionally advantageous and ultimately the cause of his capture; by portraying Raza as a complex character who commits certain errors of judgment but remains extremely loyal to his friends and family members, to the extent that he sacrifices himself at the end of the novel to save a childhood companion; by registering the post-9/11 panic among American citizens and the burgeoning counter-terrorism state following the Patriot Act; and by positing Kim Burton and Raza as symbolic of, respectively, the paranoid American state focused on preemptive, self-preservative security measures and the innocent foreigner who, by certain accidents of fate, ends up suffering as a result of those very measures.

With regards to Raza's identity, the text alludes to his multiracial background through various perspectives: Raza himself is aware that he "didn't look nearly all-American enough to cross the border without being stopped" (306), and Steve, an American military contractor with

whom Raza works as a translator in Afghanistan, and who ultimately reports him without cause to the CIA, refers to him this way: "'Surrounded by Paks and no one knows he's one of them'" (286). These references to Raza's appearance foreshadow the climactic moment at the end of the novel, when Kim Burton mistakes him for his childhood friend Abdullah, who had spent time in a mujahadeen camp in Afghanistan as a teenager and thus became an FBI suspect after emigrating to America. The reason Raza ends up in the fast-food parking lot in Canada is that he has smuggled himself out of Afghanistan. He does so because Steve suspects him of having facilitated the death of Harry Burton, a man whom Raza regarded as a father-figure and with whom he worked as a translator for a "private military corporation" in Afghanistan. When Steve confronts Raza about Harry's death, Steve executes exactly the type of racial and religious profiling that the Patriot Act enables: "'Oh, you can explain everything, I'm sure. But here's the bad news for you: I saw you signal the gunman and I saw you duck just before he opened fire. That's sufficient evidence in my world. . . . I know what you're all about'" (311-12). The word "evidence" appears a few times over the next few pages, as Raza starts to realize that anything can be made to look like evidence for a crime he did not commit if no due process is to be followed. Raza is thus faced with an impossible dilemma: stay in Afghanistan and wait (without access to a lawyer) for the military to interrogate him, or gamble on an attempt to return to the US to attend Harry's funeral. Having chosen the latter, Raza actually makes it all the way to Canada but, because of Kim Burton's paranoia and inability to distinguish Raza from Abdullah, he ends up captured.

In this sense, Kim comes to stand in for an American subject who, fearful after 9/11, has already internalized the visual signifiers that comprise the "enemy combatant" archetype. She becomes suspicious of Abdullah during a tense conversation in her car while crossing the

Canadian border, but later, in attempting to defend herself, she admits her bias to Hiroko. Referring to her training as a civil engineer who mitigates threats to buildings, Kim explains, "'I trusted my training. Don't you understand? If you suspect a threat you can't just ignore it because you wish—and I really really wish this—you lived in a world where all suspicion of Muslims is just prejudice, nothing more.'" Hiroko replies, "'And there it is,'" identifying the reductive cultural profiling behind Kim's decision to hail the police (368). Hiroko, who has lived through the atomic bomb, the partition of India, the Cold War, and now 9/11, does not share Kim's sense of danger and fear, even though Hiroko also resides in Manhattan. Shamsie's situating 9/11 as just one historical catastrophe among many—particularly in contrast to the Nagasaki bombing that Hiroko directly experienced—calls into question the impulse to dwell upon the fall of the Twin Towers as a legitimate warrant to commit violence against people like Raza. In the fast-food parking lot, Kim enacts two gestures that together become symbolic of preemptive counter-terrorism at work: imputing violence to a Muslim man based on a small misunderstanding, and then feeling confident enough in her terror to unleash the authorities on a man—the wrong man—based upon the man's visual appearance.

Burnt Shadows, therefore, dramatizes the potential fate of suspected "enemy combatants" through the figure of Raza, a character who has committed no terror-related crimes but ends up captured for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In doing so, Shamsie deconstructs the enemy combatant stereotype, as well as the mechanisms of suspicion, fear, and impulsive retaliation that characterize how the War on Terror is waged. As Harleen Singh writes, *Burnt Shadows* intervenes in "this crisis of representation by adding depth and meaning to such stories and thus tell[s] the tale, to use Jasbir Puar's phrase, 'beyond the ocular'" (174). The rich backstory and web of interrelations that Shamsie develops for Raza certainly achieve this depth.

Yet it is also, I believe, important to note that Shamsie, in writing "beyond the ocular," also *foregrounds* the ocular in the four paragraphs that comprise the novel's prologue. And so, at the end of the novel, we find Raza in handcuffs, headed for the cell in which he began, where "the cold gleam of the steel bench makes his body shrivel" (1).

* * *

Earlier in this chapter, I noted the striking visual presence that ekphrasis brings to 9/11 in novels by Indra Sinha, Ruth Ozeki, and Don DeLillo. By contrast, *Burnt Shadows* addresses the violences—physical, psychological, and moral—that occur in the "prison beyond the law" at Guantánamo Bay by way of aporia: by alighting briefly inside the facility, backtracking fifty-five years, stopping right at the precipice beyond which Raza will have to negotiate captivity as a terror suspect, and leaving the reader to imagine what will occur after he is left naked in a cold cell. As I explored above, however, very few people—aside from detainees themselves and the military personnel who work there—have actually witnessed the inside of Camp X-Ray. Because the January 2002 photographs are among the only images that exist of prisoners' bodies inside the camp, Shamsie's reference to them attests to how this deliberate public relations move has proliferated in shaping the category of the "enemy combatant." The orange series has thus become a central visual reference point for how the detained body is acted upon by state power at the facility. And given the overt gestures to racialize and sexually debase the detainees' bodies in those iconic photographs, art that explicitly moves away from the body might serve as a more effective ethical vehicle for provoking the viewing public to understand Guantánamo's violations of human rights. At this juncture, I move away from Shamsie's novel, in search of a visual vocabulary that might capture what awaits Raza when the guards return to his cell. I do so in an

attempt to locate other ways of understanding what occurs within the facility's walls, beyond what is offered by images that the US government selectively releases.

It is into this context that Edmund Clark, a British artist, stepped when he gained rare civilian access to the facility around 2009 to photograph the premises. Clark's photographs, collected as a series titled *Guantánamo: If the Light Goes Out*, abstract the human body entirely and rather foreground the material technologies of state control and violence deployed within the prison. There are obvious reasons why no human faces or bodies feature in Clark's work; as I mentioned, the Joint Task Force is extremely strict about what it allows visitors to see. Nonetheless, Clark's images evoke the body through its visual absence in ways that instigate a different kind of ethical reckoning with the prison as a material and symbolic space. Clark's work uncovering and photographing the traces of life under state control at Guantánamo Bay provides a generative companion to *Burnt Shadows*. Viewed together, these literary and artistic documents expose how Western state power sustains itself by erasing the visual traces of certain lives. Drawing on the resources of their particular mediums, both texts deploy absence and aporia as vital strategies for excavating the mechanisms of obscure violence. In what follows, I examine four images from *Guantánamo: If the Light Goes Out* that represent Clark's approach to representing the space.

In this first image, we see what appears to be a metal bench topped with two or three thin green mats, above a shaded underside and a brightly lit foreground. On this linoleum floor, a black arrow points slightly to the left, disrupting the horizontal, linear composition of the rest of the visual field. Under the bench, in the darkly shaded area, lurks a small metal ring protruding from the floor—one could almost miss it in the shadow if the arrow weren't there. Because of their nearly identical coloration and their alignment in the image, the arrow and the ring seem linked, as though the arrow were pointing directly to the ring.

My initial interpretation, when I viewed this large-format photograph in a museum in London, was that the arrow was functioning as a kind of institutional signpost, perhaps there to indicate the location of the ring to a guard. I found its semiotics confusing, frankly, but intriguing. The wall caption, however, revealed that the image's title is "Camp 4, arrow to Mecca and ring for ankle shackles." The arrow, then, functions as a makeshift Qibla, a scuffed-up marker to help orient Muslim detainees in prayer. The ring serves as an anchor for prisoners' shackles while they are spending time in the room, perhaps while praying.

Viewed in light of that information, the image becomes deeply ironic, placing two loaded symbols into an uncomfortable visual relationship with one another. Because of how Clark angled his camera and composed the photograph, the arrow is now literally pointing to the shackle ring, and the image thus comes to symbolize the interminable, dead-end state of confinement that plagues Guantánamo detainees. Although there is no human body in the image, all of these objects—the bench, the mats, the ring, and the arrow—evoke the absent body and its potential movements, and also the spiritual life of a prisoner whose ankles may be fastened to the ring. Furthermore, the room that the photograph depicts, according to the wall text, is a TV room in Camp 4, where "more compliant detainees lived communally."[16] This additional information lends an even more haunting aspect to the image. Its stark, antiseptic palette and its rigid composition makes it hard to imagine as a space for multiple bodies, perhaps watching TV and conversing with each other. And meanwhile, the small, black ring waits ominously under the bench.

This second photograph depicts the ankle shackles referenced in the prior image; these would be the confines placed around the detainee's leg and fastened to bolts like the one under the TV room bench. The wall text explains that "detainees were regularly shackled to rings set in the floor when out of their cells." Seeing this pattern-like image of the shackles, and knowing that information, conjures the image of a detainee, literally in chains, while trying to pray. Looking closely at the objects in this photograph, one also perceives the creases and stains that develop when any item is worn excessively. The detainee's body, therefore, marks the image even though it is absent. The shackles come to stand in metonymically for the prisoners themselves—a chilling thought, particularly given how the photograph depicts the objects in an anonymous, nearly indistinguishable mass. Even though it involves no bodies, you could read this as an image of violence.

The next photograph has a similar logic to the previous one; it's called "Immediate Response Force equipment" and features "equipment for the small teams of guards tasked with

coercion and responding to detainee resistance with force." Its composition evokes portraits of military or police phalanxes, though again, the guard's bodies are absent. It is an image of physical conflict poised to take place, of violence as potential energy, and it asks the viewer to imagine what might happen when the equipment is donned.

The final image alludes to testimony by detainees, such as Samir Moqbel, about being force-fed while engaging in a hunger strike. Clark reports that this was the most difficult image to take, because he had to show his digital camera to the guards every night before leaving the prison. He recalls having to negotiate extensively with the guards in order to photograph this force-feeding chair (and, quite frankly, it's somewhat surprising that they let him do so).[17] We see a background of streaked, stained concrete walls, with what looks like a recently constructed,

pristine white cinderblock staircase, leading down to a chair that serves to restrain detainees "for the insertion of nasal feeding tubes." Clark shot this photograph slightly from below, so the chair looms a bit, lending it an almost dramatic stature within the frame. The image is essentially a portrait, its entire composition arranged to feature the chair as its signature visual element. If one looks closely, one can notice what looks like a spattering of blood in the immediate foreground. The straps slouch this way and that, suggesting that they may have recently been used, and then hastily rearranged. If it is a portrait, it's a portrait of an instrument of torture, of the technology by which the state inscribes itself upon the body of a person over which it has total control. In Foucauldian terms, this is governmentality at its logical limit: the material product of a painstakingly produced form of power—counter-terrorism—that has worked its way through juridical, political, and moral loopholes, that has built this architecture of confinement, and that, finally, lies here in wait for a body to discipline.

The passive verb "to be disappeared" is regularly used with reference to Guantánamo detainees, as it has been historically with relation to state-sanctioned violence in Latin America, Ireland, Sri Lanka, and elsewhere. Entirely free of human subjects, Clark's photographs dramatize—quite literally—detainees' bodies "being disappeared." Yet those bodies are also, in the images, spectrally present: in objects like the prayer mats, in the stained shackles, in the blood spatter in front of the force-feeding chair. The materiality of the body is everywhere, even if a recognizable human subject is not. As Roland Barthes wrote, "Death is the *eidos* [the form, or essence] of the photograph," and the specter of death haunts all of these images in different ways (*Camera Lucida* 96). It is striking that Clark had to run these images by the guards every night. The guards, therefore, did not see them as threatening the image of Guantánamo as "safe, humane, legal, and transparent"—(which is the Joint Task Force's official mission statement).[18]

There is a kind of slyness to the images then, in the sense that they were not deemed worthy of censorship but are, at least to my mind, quite damning of the practices they depict. Taken together, the work resonates with Nicholas Mirzoeff's theory of the "right to look": the possibility of visual representation that contests the "official" visual field that a powerful body like the US Department of Defense authorizes.

Clark's work avoids stigmatizing, stereotyping, or sexualizing the detained body, while inviting the viewer to fill in the absence that the photographs explicitly stage. It is politically productive, I'd argue, to shift the focus of thinking away from the mediated body itself, and toward these mechanisms of governmentality that do material harm to bodies and stand as proof of America's anxiety about its own sovereignty after 9/11. Those anxieties, as Butler has written about the War on Terror, manifest as massive upsurges in biopolitical technique, culminating in shackles, riot gear at the ready, and nasal feeding tubes.[19] There's something ethically powerful, in other words, about foregrounding those material technologies of torture that harm the body, and forcing the viewer to fill that space with her imagination of bodies injured, debased, erased, stripped of rights, and, in some cases, evacuated of life altogether.

* * *

Early in *Burnt Shadows*, when discussing her experience of the Nagasaki bombing with her friend Ilsa Weiss, Hiroko asks a series of questions to which she returns, later in the novel, after her son Raza is captured. She says, "'And the thing is, I still don't understand. Why did they have to do it? Why a second bomb? Even the first is beyond anything I can . . . but a second. You do that, and see what you've done, and then you do it again. How is that . . . ?'" (100). The ellipses here reflect Hiroko's struggle to find language adequate to illustrate the atrocity, and even to formulate that last question about the US's decision to detonate the bomb. Immediately

following the attack, Shamsie confers a visual marker upon Hiroko's body that serves as a testimony to what she can hardly put into words: because she was wearing a silk kimono, the bomb's blast sears bird-shaped scars into her flesh, and she thereafter carries the physical trace of the bomb on her body: "Urakami valley has become her flesh. Her flesh has become Urakami valley" (28). Hiroko thus carries testimony from the bombing that is both verbal and visual, materializing in intimate conversations with her friends and as markings on her skin.

This question "Why a second bomb?" becomes the moral crux of the novel, distilling in just a few words the ethical problem of violence that gets repeated even after its first instance registers as having done harm. Hiroko reprises this theme in the last scene of the novel, when she realizes why Kim reported Abdullah to the Canadian police and thus enabled her son's imprisonment: "'[B]ecause of you, I understand for the first time how nations can applaud when their governments drop a second nuclear bomb'" (370). These two moments in the novel link violences that are drastically different in location, duration, and methodology—the Nagasaki bombing and the post-9/11 security state—but that share a willingness to ignore the fallout of prior actions. The question "Why a second bomb?", in the metaphorical sense that Hiroko intends it at the end of the novel, could also apply to the other violences that this dissertation has considered, and to atrocity that continues to occur across the globe under the guise of political necessity.

As a literary scholar, my intention has not been to develop or revise foreign policy but rather to examine the role that both narrative and visual representation play in how we apprehend, interpret, and respond to catastrophes that are partially visible to us, but always also largely obscured. Another phrase from Hiroko's meditation on the nuclear bomb stands out in this respect: "'You do that, and see what you've done, and then you do it again'" (100). The

phrase's chiasmus, placing perception in between two actions, interests me most, and by reading across novels and visual documents of violence, I have striven to emphasize the importance of looking at violence—giving it our attention—in order to enlarge the period of reflection that follows a political agent "doing that." As subjects who are beholden to and also involved in shaping governmental bodies that wield the power to destroy lives, we must continue to hold open the space that follows violent action, in the hopes of mitigating its future replication.

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Notes:

Introduction:

[1] As Donald Trump's staff attests, his encounter with the images not only elicited sympathy and outrage; the images also instigated a complete reversal of the administration's prior policy on Syria. A day before Trump's air strike, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson had effectively endorsed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad remaining in power, declaring that "the longer-term status of President Assad will be decided by the Syrian people"—a statement laced with either irony or ignorance, referring as it did to a country ruled by a dictator without free and fair elections. Quoting Trump's statement following the airstrike, Barbie Latza Nadeau contemplated Trump's pivot on Syria, wondering why Trump had just recently discovered "the slaughter of Syria's 'beautiful babies'" and concluding that "now Trump appears to be reacting to grim, glossy pictures, not the very messy problems behind them" (Nadeau n.p.).
[2] See also Blatt, *Pictures Into Words*, and Williams, *Confounding Images: Photography and Portraiture In Antebellum American Fiction.*
[3] See Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics."
[4] Rey Chow said this in the question and answer portion of her keynote address, "The Remains of Our Day: Evolving Conceptual Frames," at The Global/Contemporary Symposium.

Chapter 1: The Digital Sublime, in Print: Visualizing and Narrating Catastrophe in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*

[1] Google Image Search, "japan tsunami 2011," Google, March 10th, 2016.
[2] See National Police Agency of Japan, "Damage Situation and Police Countermeasures associated with 2011 Tohoku district—off the Pacific Ocean Earthquake."
[3] Debjani Ganguly has also recently incorporated ekphrasis into her analysis of contemporary world novels. She makes "a case for the transformation of the novel in our time into a dynamic morphological space-time entity in which text and image interpenetrate in unprecedented ways" (34).
[4] Media theorists have disagreed on the most effective metaphor for the 21st-century media environment. Daniel Punday, in *Writing at the Limit*, outlines distinctions between "system," "field," and "ecology," ultimately settling on the latter and thus agreeing with Ursula Heise and others. I agree with Punday's choice of ecology as a metaphor for the media environment in which contemporary novelists find themselves; as Punday writes, "the ecology metaphor provides a nuanced image of novelists consciously engaged with media without fully controlling their circumstances" (14).
[5] See Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," Addendum A, and Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory.*
[6] Following the Fukushima nuclear spill, Ruth monitors the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Update Log, published by the International Atomic Energy Agency: "On April 4, the Update Log reported that Tepco received permission from the Japanese government to release 11,500 tons of

contaminated water into the Pacific Ocean. That much water is roughly equivalent to the contents of five Olympic swimming pools." Ozeki, *A Tale*, 197.

[7] See "Internet," *West's Encyclopedia of American Law*, The Gale Group, 2005, available online at http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/the_Internet.aspx.

[8] See Aarthi Vadde, "Universal Communication or the Emoji-Novel."

[9] Ozeki does include a few visual images in the novel, though they mainly contribute to the novel's more mystical plotlines, involving a crow that Ruth keeps seeing in both her dreams and waking life. She does not include any digital images in their visual forms in the novel.

[10] Interestingly, Ozeki name-checks Palumbo-Liu in the novel, when Ruth writes to a professor at Stanford and mentions that she knew "Professor P-L" while she was the writer-in-residence in the Comparative Literature Department at Stanford—a post that Ozeki herself held from 2005-2006. Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being*, 91, 305.

[11] N. Katherine Hayles and Allen Bye Riddell have critiqued the equivalencies that Manovich, using semiotic theory, draws between database and the paradigm and between narrative and the syntagm. That flaw aside, however, Hayles acknowledges that Manovich's formulation "captures the overall sense that the temporal ordering crucial for narrative is only virtually present in the database, whereas spatial display is explicit." Hayles, *How We* Think, 181.

[12] Heffernan has defined ekphrasis as "the verbal representation of a visual representation," writing: "If ekphrasis 'frustrates narrative movement,' it is anything but submissive. It is the unruly antagonist of narrative, the ornamental digression that refuses to be merely ornamental" (5).

[13] Ganguly also writes about how the novel has adapted to address new perceptual technologies in *This Thing Called the World*. She writes, "The novel more than any other genre is future-oriented and semantically open-ended, ready to absorb within its polymorphous, heteroglossic ambit the indeterminacy of the present; it is a genre that, in Mikhail Bakhtin's words, has a 'living contact with the present, still evolving contemporary reality" (3).

[14] On the second index, see Stalder and Mayer, "The Second Index: Search Engines, Personalization and Surveillance."

[15] For an extensive description of these different modes of reading, see Hayles, "How We Read: Close, Hyper, Machine," chap. 3 of *How We Think.*

[16] In making this point, Mosco also acknolwedges Johnson, *Interface Culture*.

[17] I do not mean to imply that access to technological devices is uniform; rather, differences in embodiment, geographical location, access to financial resources, and other factors imply that the use of technology varies widely across the world. Along with scholars at the Centre for the Study of the Networked Image, I am contemplating how images, networks, and databases affect *specific* users of those techologies. Hayles has written about how early cybernetic studies had a tendency to rehabilitate the "liberal subject" with its "notorious universality," rather than attending to the specificities of embodiment along lines of race, gender, and ability. She writes that "one could argue that the erasure of embodiment is a feature common to both the liberal humanist subject and the cybernetic posthuman." Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 4. See also Alan Roulstone, *Disability and Technology*.

[18] The Centre for the Study of the Networked Image, "About," 2016, http://www.centreforthestudyof.net/, accessed 3 September 2016.

[19] See Henry and Powell, "Sexual Violence in the Digital Age: The Scope of Criminal Law."

[20] In Japan, the Diet passed a law in 2014 titled the Act on the Prevention of Victimization Resulting from the Provision of Private Sexual Images, which outlaws "revenge porn" in a similar manner. The law postdates the novel's publication date of 2013; the activity, therefore, of recording and distributing sexual images without Nao's consent would have been legal at the time of her abuse. Some instances of TFSV, including the Stubenville rape case in the United States and the Abu Ghraib photographs taken by American military officers, have gained worldwide attention; less publicly, this practice occurs frequently and has been criminalized in jurisdictions across the Philippines, Israel, Canada, the UK, New Zealand, the US, and Japan. See Matsui, "The Criminalization of Revenge Porn in Japan."
[21] There are, for example, a number of contradictory terms used in scholarly and legal literature to refer to TFSV: Henry and Powell mention "revenge porn," "involuntary porn," and "non-consensual pornography," each of which presents complications for defining abuse such as Nao's, where revenge against an ex-partner is not relevant and the claim that a video of attempted rape counts as "pornography" seems dubious to say the least.
[22] It turns out that Nao's father wins the auction, out of a desire to protect his daughter.
[23] On the "attention economy," and how attention has become a scarce resource for which technology companies compete, see Davenport and Beck, *The Attention Economy*. For a more critical approach, see Crogan and Kinsley, "Paying Attention: Towards a Critique of the Attention Economy."
[24] See, for example, Richardson, *Gestures of Testimony*; Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*; and the work in literary studies that followed Cathy Caruth's seminal study *Unclaimed Experience*. All of these studies do valuable work toward considering how literature, particularly fiction, is uniquely equipped to respond to and process atrocity. I am skeptical, however, of witnessing or testimony as ends in themselves and am interested in how we may read texts as moving beyond documentation.
[25] Keenan, "Where Are Human Rights . . . ? Reading a Communiqué from Iraq," n.p., qtd. in Linfield, *Cruel Radiance*, 27.
[26] See Weil, *Waiting for God*.

Chapter 2: Post-Crash Fiction and the Aesthetics of Austerity in Kevin Barry's *City of Bohane*

[1] On post-2008 British austerity, see Clarke et. al., *Austerity and Political Choice In Britain*. For World War II-era British austerity, see Zweiniger-Bargeilowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939-1955*.
[2] On the affective and cultural dimensions of austerity, see Bramall, *The Cultural Politics of Austerity*; Berlant et. al.; Cvetkovich. On economics, John Cochrane and Alberto Alesina are prominent defenders of austerity; Mark Blyth opposes it and describes the affirmative case thus: "Austerity is a form of voluntary deflation in which the economy adjusts through the reduction of wages, prices, and public spending to restore competitiveness, which is (supposedly) best achieved by cutting the state's budget, debts, and deficits. Doing so, its advocates believe, will inspire 'business confidence' since the government will neither be 'crowding-out' the market for investment by sucking up all the available capital through the issurance of debt, nor adding to the nation's already 'too big' debt" (2). Cochrane adds this point to the argument against

government stimulus: "Every dollar of increased government spending must correspond to one less dollar of private spending. Jobs created by stimulus spending are offset by jobs lost from the decline in private spending" (n.p.). Blyth's book thoroughly counters this argument and also demonstrates the manner in which politicians have cast the 2008 recession as a "sovereign debt crisis," caused by states spending too much, while in fact "these problems, including the crisis in the bond markets, started with the banks and will end with the banks" (5). My point here is not to settle a very technical and extensive debate between economists on the issue, but rather to suggest how texts like *City of Bohane* offer an opportunity to scrutinize this pervasively relevant phenomenon from a humanistic, literary studies perspective.

[3] Justine Jordan used the term "post-crash" in Oct. 2015 to describe Irish novelists, including Kevin Barry, who have been reckoning with the Irish recession in their fiction. I used the term with regards to *City of Bohane* in a paper titled "Novel Images: Photographic Ekphrasis and the Spectral Traces of Violence in Kevin Barry's *City of Bohane*," at the American Comparative Literature Association Conference, March 2015.

[4] Francis A. Boyle, a Professor of International Law at the University of Illinois—Champaign, was commissioned by the New York-based Irish Famine/Genocide Committee in 1996 to write a report on whether the Irish Famine amounted to genocide. Referencing the 1948 Convention on the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide, to which the United States is party, Boyle wrote, "Clearly, during the years 1845-1850, the British government pursued a policy of mass starvation in Ireland with intent to destroy in substantial part the national, ethnical, and racial group commonly known as the Irish People, as such. In addition this British policy of mass starvation in Ireland clearly caused serious bodily and mental harm to members of the Irish People within the meaning of Genocide Convention Article II(b)" (n.p.). Some historians, such as Cormac Ó Gráda, disagree. For more on the Irish Famine, see Kinealy and Gray.

[5] In an interview with the *Guardian*, Barry stated that he is writing the screenplay for a film adaptation of *City of Bohane*. See "Paperback Q&A: Kevin Barry on *City of Bohane*," *The Guardian*, 27 March 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/mar/27/paperbook-kevin-barry, accessed 1 July 2017.

[6] The term "enforced deprivation" is, according to the *Irish Times*, technically "defined as being unable to afford at least two basics, such as replacing worn out furniture or an afternoon or evening out in the past fortnight" (O'Brien, "Over a Million People"). In January 2015, the Central Statistics Office reported that 2013, over a million people in Ireland suffer from enforced deprivation, a figure that has doubled since 2008. The term could refer more broadly to austerity policies that restrict state services and thus enforce a form of enduring deprivation.

[7] By using the phrase "an *estranged*, futuristic avatar of contemporary Ireland," I draw on Darko Suvin's seminal description of science fiction as "the literature of cognitive estrangement" that operates via a dialectic of cognition (or recognition) and estrangement (372). *City of Bohane* shares certain "family resemblances," in Wittgenstein's terms, with texts that are speculative in nature.

[8] See Van Vossole 8. Quoted with the author's permission.

[9] Department of Finance, "Ireland's Stability Programme: April 2014 Update." See especially slide 2, "Key Figures," and slide 21, "Remain on track to exit EDP next year." Even these "positive" indicators have been contested, however. For example, economists contend that the GDP figure is artificially inflated, because multinational corporations outsource their manufacturing labor to other countries yet record their profits in Ireland. And recently, Dirk

Philipsen has called into question the use of GDP as a benchmark for economic and political success, arguing that the statistic has become an "article of faith" propounding that "growth is [always] good," no matter its cost (1).

[10] Drawing on Keynesian economic theory in analyzing recent history, Blyth and Stiglitz observe that a reduction in public services impels consumers to dramatically restrict their spending. The economy thus ends up slowing down or growing sluggishly, making it even harder to settle public and private debt. See Blyth, *Austerity*, and Stiglitz, "Austerity."

[11] See also "UNICEF Report." The percentage of citizens living in "consistent poverty"—that is, those with an income below the poverty threshold who are also experiencing enforced deprivation—doubled between 2008 and 2013, rising to eight percent of the population (O'Brien, "The Economy Is Growing"). Food poverty has also remained high in Ireland, with eleven percent of households reporting anxiety about where the next meal will come from. See "Survey: More than half of teachers see children arrive hungry to school." Ultimately, cutting public services and reducing wages has actually led to less-than-expected growth and a doubling of the country's sovereign debt since 2009.

[12] The image of the plundered bog has also been was central to Seamus Heaney's poetic excavations of the Irish soil and, by way of that metaphor, of the cycles of conquest that have characterized Irish history from the Viking invasions through the political conflict in the North. See Heaney, *North*, esp. "North," "The Bog Queen," and "The Grauballe Man."

[13] While peat continues to be used for small-scale consumption in individual households in Ireland, the natural resource gained prominence in the international energy market beginning in the 1970s, when instability in the Middle East and rising oil prices forced European nations to locate alternative sources of energy. These more aggressive practices of resource extraction have led to a decrease in the number of pristine bogs across Northern Europe, spurring local resistance efforts such as the Irish Peatland Conservation Council.

[14] Kiberd considers the legacy of the 1798 Rebellion, mainly in terms of its place in the Irish cultural imaginary, at various points in *Inventing Ireland*, esp. 21-25.

[15] The novel suggests at various points that the religion practiced by the Norries resembles Catholicism. See, for example, the chapter titled "Baba-love," which describes the Norries' fervent worship of the "Sweet Baba Jay," an avatar for the baby Jesus (223-27). The mansion that Logan Harnett inhabits seems to reference the paradigm of the Irish Big House, a domestic construct largely associated with the Anglo-Irish and the Protestant Ascendency.

[16] "The Croppy Boy" began to be circulated in broadsides following the uprising, and James Joyce references "The Croppy Boy" as a motif throughout *Ulysses*. For lyrics, see "The Croppy Boy."

[17] The Oxford English Dictionary gives two definitions: "A large crowd of people; esp. a group of people sharing distinctive characteristics or a common identity or occupation" and "a disorderly or riotous crowd, a rabble." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "mob, n.2," http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/120464?rskey=UzjD5k&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid (accessed July 3, 2015).

[18] María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, "Introduction: Conceptualizing Spectralities," in *The Spectralities Reader*, 14. Quoting Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, xviii.

[19] Barthes's meditation on the form in *Camera Lucida*, written in the wake of his mother's death and shortly before his own, is preoccupied with mortality. With regards to a photograph of a prisoner about to be executed, for example, Barthes envisions that subject's (and, by proxy, his

own) future death, writing, "Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe." And earlier: "Death is the *eidos* [the form, or essence] of the Photograph" (96).
[20] Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, "Spectographies," in Blanco and Peeren, eds., *The Spectralities Reader*, 46.
[21] For detailed analyses of post-recessionary political discourse and economic policy, see Mercille and Murphy, *Deepening Neoliberalism, Austerity, and Crisis*; and Coulter and Nagle, eds., *Ireland Under Austerity*.
[22] My language (and methodology) here references Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak's approach to deconstructing dominant colonial narratives, and also Rita Felski's recent work on "post-critique," which seeks to move beyond deconstruction and rather urges critics to attend to "what [a text] unfurls, calls forth, makes possible." See Spivak, *In Other Worlds*, 201, and Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, 12.

Chapter 3: Bodies in the Dark: Penetrating Spaces of State Confinement in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* and Edmund Clark's *Guantánamo: If the Light Goes Out*

[1] First published online as "On What It Means When A Crowd In A Faraway Nation Takes A Soldier Representing Your Nation, Shoots Him, Drags Him From His Vehicle, and Then Mutilates Him In The Dust," *The Guardian*, 17 April 2004. Later collected in Eggers, *How We Are Hungry* (2015).
[2] The irony seems likely given Eggers's longstanding interest in using storytelling as a way of highlighting human rights abuses, as evidenced in his *Voices of Witness* book series and his collaboration with Sudanese "Lost Boy" Valentino Achak Deng on the book *What Is the What*.
[3] These figures can be found at Iraqbodycount.org.
[4] See Gray, *After the Fall*, 8.
[5] See Miller, *Transatlantic Literature and Culture After 9/11*, 7, and Greenberg, *Trauma at Home*.
[6] In his introduction to a collection of essays titled *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Jeffrey Alexander provides a definition of the term: "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (1).
[7] While I question teleological applications of trauma theory in literary studies—when, for example, a critic reads the possibility for trauma to be "overcome," "healed," or "surmounted" through narrative—I do acknowledge that real-life therapy can do valuable work toward helping a survivor integrate trauma into narrative memory and thereby to find some degree of psychic relief.
[8] The University of Virginia library, for example, contains at least twelve anthologies and monographs that titularly address 9/11 literature, in contrast to one that considers "fictions of the War on Terror" and another that addresses torture more broadly.
[9] Daniel O'Gorman elaborates on this difference in *Fictions of the War on Terror*, 9.
[10] Charles Paul Freund's article "The Art of Terror" quotes Stockhausen. Baudrillard, "The Spirit of Terrorism," 28.
[11] See Stubblefield, *9/11 and the Visual Culture of Disaster*, 76.

[12] It is important to note that the US military's relationship with Guantánamo Bay did not begin in 2001. As Amy Kaplan points out, Guantánamo actually represents a much longer legacy of American conquest in the Caribbean. Contrary to the common association of Guantánamo with the War on Terror, Guantánamo Bay has actually operated as a crucial outpost of American Empire since as far back as 1898, when the US occupied Cuba in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. See Kaplan, "Where Is Guantánamo?"

[13] For extensive engagements with this archive, see Harlow, "'Extraordinary Renditions,'" and Jayawardane, "'Scandalous Memoir," about Mahvish Rukhsana Khan's memoir *My Guantánamo Diary*.

[14] See "Gitmo Hunger Strike: Timeline," *RT.com*, 19 October 2013, https://www.rt.com/news/guantanamo-bay-hunger-strike-399/, accessed 1 July 2017; and Moqbel, "Gitmo Is Killing Me." Moqbel explains how, prior to his capture and rendition, he had been earning no more than $50 a month in a factory in Yemen when a childhood friend told him he could earn more money in Afghanistan. So he moved there and then fled to Pakistan following the US invasion in 2001. "The Pakistanis arrested me when I asked to see someone from the Yemeni Embassy," Moqbel explains. "I was then sent to Kandahar, and put on the first plane to Gitmo."

[15] Habeas corpus is the doctrine that says, if a person is confined, then she deserves her day in court; therefore, much of the legal activism surrouding Guantánamo has to do with habeas claims that are filed because detainees do not get tried.

[16] All wall text quotations come from *Edmund Clark: War of Terror*, a retrospective at the Imperial War Museum that combined work from five of Clark's projects, including *Guantánamo: If the Light Goes Out*.

[17] Clark recounted this story to Guy Lane in "If the Light Goes Out: Edmund Clark's Pictures of Guantánamo Bay," *The Guardian*, 3 November 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2010/nov/03/guantanamo-photographs-edmund-clark-gallery, accessed 1 July 2017.

[18] See the JTF-GTMO website: http://www.jtfgtmo.southcom.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/.

[19] See Butler's chapter "Indefinite Detention," in *Precarious Life*, 50-100.