# Becoming With: Writing Ourselves in the Chthulucene

Meagan Arthur

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Washington

2018

Committee:

David Crouse

Maya Sonenberg

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

English

University of Washington

**Abstract**

Becoming With: Writing Ourselves in the Chthulucene

Meagan Arthur

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
David Crouse
Creative Writing

After the passing of her mother, Carrie Fischer's daughter Billie appeared on The Ellen Show, with headlines advertising the segment claiming Billie Lourd Talks Life after Leia—on camera, however, all Billie has to say on the subject is, "there's no way to really explain it". Kurt Vonnegut echoes this sentiment in his introduction to Slaughterhouse Five, prefacing his anti-war novel with the claim, "there's nothing intelligent to say about a massacre". It's something that we all, if innately, know—that certain tragedies, things that can be fully known and experienced within the scope of human existence, cannot be put into words. Thoughts know things words don't. Human consciousness can understand the depth of things that language can barely scrape at, most succinctly put the way that a friend of mine recently announced the death of his mother: words fail. The project of this thesis is to examine the ways in which fiction can capture a consciousness that is fragmented, imagistic, and illogical: exploring works by Susan Steinberg, Ted Chiang, Amelia Gray, Louise Erdrich, and others, I argue through the lens of Donna Haraway that this consciousness has its origins in the collective nature of thought matter.

"Words failed me. And yet."

-Nicole Krauss, The History of Love

***Poo-tee-weet?***

After the passing of her mother, Carrie Fischer's daughter Billie appeared on the Ellen Show, with headlines advertising the segment claiming *Billie Lourd Talks Life after Leia*—on camera, however, all Billie has to say on the subject is, "there's no way to really explain it". Kurt Vonnegut echoes this sentiment in his introduction to *Slaughterhouse Five*, prefacing his anti-war novel with the claim, "there's nothing intelligent to say about a massacre" (19). It's something that we all, if innately, know—that certain tragedies, things that can be fully known and experienced within the scope of human existence, cannot be put into words. Thoughts know things words don't. Human consciousness can understand the depth of things that language can barely scrape at, most succinctly put the way that a friend of mine recently announced the death of his mother: words fail.

I've tried a fair few anti-depressants over the years. When I was in college I can remember having a bad reaction to a drug that made me sit for hours and stare at the ceiling of my dorm, trying to count the notches in the stucco. It was a single-bed room in the part of the campus where the official capital-T "They" put troublemakers—there was a girl across the hall in another single who'd been moved because she had bulimia—and in it I spent a lot of time by myself in this medication-induced state. It was

sort of like a profane version of counting sheep, except for that I was awake, and the counting took on its own form of narrative that my mind subsisted on for the weeks before I went off this particular medication. My own experience might be comparable to what some experience on a drug trip, or others with dissociative disorders experience more fully on a daily basis. The point, that I realized then and have since come to know more fully, is that the range of human consciousness, healthy or otherwise, goes a lot wider than our cultural illusion of normalcy would like to think. This makes its way into our fiction. Even classic works of 'consciousness', like Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground* are focused on explaining consciousness to us in words and phrases in an order we understand as logical, as if consciousness were a linguistic act, a man sitting in a room talking to himself, aloud or in his head. My own experience as the underground man—alienated by a religious university and put away in a room—wasn't one that could be explained with words I know how to use, and I think this is key. When things happen that feel unattached from humanity, it doesn't make sense to use our own language to explain them. It's the same thing as me, sitting down trying to write an essay about something difficult to put into words, coming out with a collage of fragmented ideas. When things are difficult to explain, and we have only our own words to try to explain them, certain unanswerable questions come into the foreground: what do thoughts 'say'? How do we write ourselves when so much of what we are is beyond our words?

If we're trying to nail down the ways in which fiction (read: poetry, prose, art) try to describe what we are—our essence of being—we're naturally led into a conversation

about *consciousness*, the elusive theoretical that we call our eyes-closed internal experience. In his book *The Stuff of Thought,* Steven Pinker calls human beings "verbivores"—a term that defines us as a species that lives on words in order to survive. "The psychology of word magic," he says, "is a constituent of our emotional and linguistic makeup" (20). If art is meant to understand the being-ness of human existence, we first need to determine that consciousness is not synonymous with having spoken language. As Virginia Woolf asserts in *Three Guineas*, "Think we must" (qtd. in Haraway, "Anthropocene..."). There is no write we must, or speak we must, or love we must—though seemingly difficult to enact, there exists the possibility of a human life devoid of all of those things. Whatever it is that make up our thought stuffs, the matter inside of our minds, it is the closest to our essence (what is means to *be*). Pinker classifies language as a digitized version of an analogue matter; within this analogy, it isn't difficult to understand why so much is lost in translation. We have, from our beginning as a species, used words to construct a shelter (read: illusion) of meaning for ourselves. It may be the case that it is difficult to imagine thought without words because we are so dependent on words to interpret our environment. It's the re-examination of Berkeley's puzzle of existence unperceived: we can conceive of space without objects, but we can't conceive of objects without the space to exist in (Campbell 127). Similarly, we can't conceive of thoughts without the words to describe them, even if we know that thought matter eludes linguistic definition. To be able to do so would violate our verbivorian dimension of being. It is this cage that terrifies us.

When I brought a story about a man in the mental ward of a county hospital into our graduate fiction workshop, the feedback I received mostly settled around the narrator being a confusing combination of thought processes. *At times, his thoughts are lucid, logical,* my cohort said, *and other times he is thinking manically, in pictures that don't make sense. Is he crazy? Is he not crazy? We need to know*. The narrative's own weaknesses aside, this is the very thought process the story was meant to question: is the slipping along a range of lucidity not the experience of being human? Aren't we all not crazy and not not crazy? It evidences our desire in fiction to have our narrations follow The Thought Process: the logical, canonized, "SOC" consciousness we've come to depend upon in order to make sense of our fictional worlds. I'll argue here that this consciousness is a) linguistically limited, b) constructed by the dominant, ableist definition of thought, and c) almost entirely controlled by sociopolitical power. Instead of following along, we must explore the bits of ourselves and our human experience that feel indefinable: the ways our thoughts think that surpass our own language's ability to describe them. This is the consciousness that I believe the best literature captures: the bits of self that are not made of language cannot be shaped by the colonizer, or controlled by our own rhetorical communities. How that—the nonlinguistic version of our consciousness—can be captured through fiction (a cage built by language) is what interests me. If we cannot escape the cage, the writer instead seeks to revolutionize the cage-building, to drive its course. So, to make an argument for a genre without a name, that literature which attempts to describe the bits of human existence that defy language's influence on consciousness is the sort that I am interested in

writing. In order to undo language's grasp on the way we think, our fiction needs to undo the structure of its own language: here I will explore the ways in which literature makes use of the juxtaposition of disparate images and a non-sequential understanding of time in order to depict a consciousness that is closer to the one that is stitched within our genetic makeup, the knowing of things inside of humanity that words fail to grasp. In exploring the how we will get to the why: that in the nuclear age a western-centered model of consciousness in writing is no longer sufficient, nor is a human-centered model. The isolated massacres that shaped the consciousness of the twentieth century have now morphed into everyday massacres; our collective consciousness, and therefore our art, must follow suit. The world is the war; writers are the birds; what we are saying is *poo-tee-weet*?

***A Thousand Words***

The story of the Voyager missions is one that everyone knows: Carl Sagan curates a committee to combine disciplines in order to craft a message that will accompany an unmanned mission into deep space, in the hopes that should extraterrestrials come across the Voyager ships, such beings might be able to understand what we have to say about ourselves. The message sent on Voyagers 1 and 2 resembles most closely the experience of thought matter—at least, the experience of human thought on earth. Including pictures of women breastfeeding, sounds of rainstorms, and illustrations of DNA, the voyager phonograph records make use of every

possible method we might have to communicate who we are—absent of any sort of common language. These bits of communicative matter floating through darkness mirror our thoughts that come in flashes of image, sound, and heartbeats. I'll call these *thought pictures*, images that are not entirely visual but operate on all levels of our physical existence.

Written words are the lowest level of our linguistic communication (that is, communication that employs human language to the fullest of its ability). A level above this would probably be hearing words spoken over a recording or through a phone, whereas words spoken face to face have an almost infinite capacity for meaning. Reading words on a page is a flat experience compared to other kinds of communication, and therefore to be successful at depicting human consciousness, the flatness of written work relies on our other senses. We ask how we can communicate the tone of a voice through words on a page, how we can write an image, how we can put a brainwave into a sentence. Many genres rely on logical description of colors, sounds, and feelings to achieve this, but literature that attempts to depict a non-linguistic consciousness must try to play with words in order to bring up thought pictures that will allow the reader to feel connected to what is on the page without understanding it linguistically. Take the image of the whale is Amelia Gray's story, "The Heart". The goal is not to make meaning from the image as it relates vehicle (a whale's heart in the living room) to the implied tenor (the grief of a departed family member)—that connection is clear and plain on the page ("He says its there because of Mom" [120]). Rather, the project is to experience the image for what it is, a whale heart "cold

and dry...[seeping] a little onto the carpet, not blood but something else, thicker" (121). In service of this, Gray doesn't include descriptions that might lead us to view the heart as grief—rather, we're in the thick of it with our narrator, plunging the knife into the whale's heart day after day and filling buckets with rubbery flesh. Thought pictures, then, don't make meaning through metaphoric connection, or through symbolism—they make meaning through being felt, seen, and experienced. This kind of meaning is comparatively less grounded and potentially nonsensical, but, I would argue, the meaning interpreted is fuller, more life-like, and closer to the kind of meaning we think with.

The most adequate metaphor I can think of for my own thoughts: infinite sentences being typed out on the same line of a typewriter, simultaneously. What comes out would obviously be unreadable; a scribbled bundle of ink that eventually forms a black rectangle. Thoughts function in a way that is adverse to our methods of recording language. Think of The Infinite Monkey Theorem (the idea that a monkey hitting random keys forever would eventually type out the entire works of Shakespeare) but with words, a person sitting alone in an isolated room writing not to describe consciousness but using words that come closest to the consciousness as it actually occurs. Carl Sagan was thinking along the same train: in order to communicate what it means to be human, the best way would be to record onto a single disk all of our senses at once, the pictures, the sounds, and also the automatic sensations we've come to ignore, like the way our blood pumps, the way our genes are shaped. A linguistic

metaphor for this simultaneity is the typewriter: that what I experience in my head would come out as multitudes of thoughts occurring in one instant, being typed over each other. If I can put it more clearly:

[redacted]

Trying to keep track of your own thoughts for any given amount of time is uncomfortable: like breathing, thinking is a task that our body performs automatically, and trying to think too hard about that process makes it difficult to actually perform it. Still, if you sit and think about the thoughts that pop into your head for as little as five minutes, you'll probably log simultaneous trains of your own language—i.e. multiple concurrent thinking words that make meaning as they echo around your brain. You'll probably also log many images, because we think in images. If you try to imagine your earliest memory, most of us might conjure an image in our heads (mine is of my grandparent's house). But it would be reductive to classify thoughts themselves as thinking words or thinking pictures, because we also think in feelings, and smells, and sounds, and sensations. In fact, we think using all of our physical senses, and we imagine using our physical senses. In relation to the Voyager's Golden Disk, the only commonality we would have with an alien species is physics: we assume that life works the same way no matter where we are in the universe. In order to communicate more fully on earth, fiction and art might employ a similar strategy.

Classic works of consciousness like Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* pave the way for this kind of understanding of a physical consciousness that is grounded both in the mind and in the body's experience of physical properties. For example, upon Peter's visit

Clarissa Dalloway finds herself, “in an abrupt voice, under the pressure of an emotion which caught her heart, made the muscles of her throat stiff, and contracted her lips in a spasm” (46). This focus on physical reaction to stimuli was contemporaneously unique, and should now be interpreted as a move to view a collective human consciousness that is based on common physical experience. The literature seeking to move further beyond linguistic boundaries is one that uses exaggerated images, often to an end that seeks to compile all sensory information into one moment. Language is logical, orderly, and compartmentalized (English even more so)—it has distinct objects, subjects, and a strict rationale. To speak of literature that would attempt to think outside of language would be to write these sensory impressions without the logical compartments we wish to put them in. It is these impressions that go further than a description of an image (say, Clarissa’s look to Peter as it “settled on him tearfully...and rose and fluttered away, as a bird touches a branch” [46]) to a composition of disparate images and senses that form an impression beyond linguistic explanation. Take the first lines of Louise Erdrich’s “Saint Marie”: “So when I went there, I knew the dark fish must rise. Plumes of radiance soldered on me.” When I asked my students about these lines, they all agreed: they don’t make sense, and that’s what makes them so special. We don’t have a full grasp of what the dark fish rising should mean, nor the plumes of radiance, and through the lack of logical explanation our propensity for meaning is opened—the words can penetrate. Here, all we have is vehicle, and only a hint of tenor. This fits well with Marie’s portrayal of her own consciousness: “Something howled in my mind. Loss and darkness. I understood”. This how thoughts work—our minds howl. Marie spends much of her

narration internally, imagining and remembering. Instead of translating her thoughts for us as the underground man does, we experience them with her. Making meaning through disparate sensory details and a lack of logical sense is what thought pictures do—the fiction that employs them doesn't need to spend so much time in the translation of thought to word, but rather, communicates through a closer rumination on the analogue moments in our internal experience without trying to fully explain them.

When applying for the University of Washington's MFA program, my personal statement read, *I want to portray the capabilities of the human mind to stretch, change, and shift; the characters I create are those that are mentally and spiritually limited by their environments.* I was trying to avoid the term mental illness, or to question it: how might we sit down and write 'crazy' if our goal is to undo the term, 'crazy'? Much of my writing comes from my own experience with consciousness, but I still feel a tug in the direction of societal preference: If I'm writing a character experiencing dissociative episodes, or paranoia, I find myself communicating this through an obviously untrue perception of that character's environment. In class we discuss this tactic as the use of an unreliable narrator, which brings me to question unreliability as a fictional tool. Sure, we're meant to read Humbert Humbert as unreliable, but how does that term apply to characters less maliciously ill? How can we deem a character's perception unreliable when in our own reality perception is all there is? If there is a person who sees a hurricane that no one else sees, and that person is an honest person, does that

hurricane exist? If I write a story in which there are rats, and there is a person I write who sees those rats, what is the purpose of questioning whether or not those rats are in fact, real? Fiction should, then, shift the question of unreliability: instead of asking whether or not there are rats, we should ask something else. I'm not going to say what it is we should ask, but, in order to make an argument for the illogical, I will say that asking whether or not Billy Pilgrim has been abducted by aliens is quite obviously the wrong question, and in turn asking whether or not we believe our characters and their perceptions of our images would be linguistically limiting the purpose of the image, and in turn, its literary autonomy.

In his book, *Theory of the Lyric*, Jonathan Culler theorizes that literary forms are unique in that they are reversible: cultural differences are governed entirely by a specific time and place, but literary trends are ahistorical. It's impossible to reproduce the physical or cultural conditions of the past, but we can return to and reproduce literary styles spanning thousands of years. And while our genres have changed over time, they are simply tools in an artist's arsenal, to be returned to again and again. If literature is a linguistic device for translating our determinate matter (matter that thinks, feels, and determines our reality) into art, may not literature that eludes logical compartmentalization be all the more timeless?

As Culler points out, we are living in an anti-genre age. The common complaint against any genre word is that it means different things at different times and in different contexts. To invent a genre word for the kind of literature I'm talking about

might be to change the definition of genre itself, because the fiction I'm speaking of is lyrical, psychological, speculative, etc. More so than making an argument for a genre, I'm making an argument for purpose. To think of literature as an establishment, held in place by a foundation of word worlds, is to give language more power than we have ourselves; to get caught up in genre is to believe the purpose of discussing literature to be an argument over whether a piece is successful—instead, the question should be, successful for what purpose?

Even so, genres resist the logic of history—we can revive old systems of thought without the historical conditions that gave them rise. As Culler puts it, "if literature is more than a succession of individual works, it is at the level of genre that is has a history: the modifications of genres, the rise of new genres, and the eclipse of the old" (89). Our genres function as the space for our thought impressions to exist within, and in that way, they are necessary illusions. The genre experiment—the process of breaking the rules—should always coincide with context, and the use of disjointed images fits within a time when randomness doesn't seem to exist, when there could very well be a logical thought process that begins with walking down the street and ends in a nuclear apocalypse. A line of my own poetry serves as a good example of what I mean by this: *it is my fault, it is not my fault, and have you seen the shape of the universe?* This is an image making meaning not through logical description, but through juxtaposition, through unpredictability, through an illusion of chance. Maybe the root of the argument for this kind of meaning-making is that images with neat explanations or easily-followed connections give the writer and reader an illusion of control that, in our current cultural

existence, we don't have in reality. Our meaning needs to come from a wider range of possible events, images, and, in part, from randomness, because in our day to day lives, we understand the possibility of the universe losing its shape without warning. In the Trumpian era, it doesn't make sense to make sense.

The term 'Stream of Consciousness' was coined in 1890 by psychologist William James. As it turns out, the metaphor of a river or a continuous *stream* to describe the way our thoughts work isn't all that accurate according to the science. We perceive the world through our brain waves, which resemble more closely pulsating rhythms than a continuous stream. We think, quite literally, in fragments: our brains process in rhythmic thought pictures (or, more like impressions, imagistic feelings). "From the brain's perspective, experience is not continuous but quantized" (Hickok). If our goal in writing fiction is to capture our own experience, writing meaning through the juxtaposition of disparate images would be the way of doing so that most closely captures our brain experiences. Viewing this kind of prose as a method of capturing that which is at the periphery of our human line of eyesight is to fail to remember that we are, scientifically, thinking through impressions and not through logic.

"What I know: when I met you, a blue rush began" (Nelson 31). Images, feelings, senses—the blanket term thought pictures—make meaning through the common experience of the elements that surround us, an experience that is scientifically fractured. Maggie Nelson's book "Bluets" is structured in a list of fragments, resembling a collection of small blue objects, or scrapbook of times the speaker's eyes have seen

the color blue. A more appropriate name for the kind of writing that allows for a free stream of thought might be Flashes of Consciousness, or a Collection of Consciousness—Nelson's work operates under the assumption that meaning is made through the collectivity of blue thought pictures, not through a logical list of experiences of the color blue. Why, then, do we interpret fragmented thought processes—those that don't follow a line to an end—as a sign of unreliability? I don't know how to classify a blue rush in other words, and yet the feeling she describes is one I know I've felt. Our earth languages, no matter how much they evolve or differ, will most likely always have an acknowledgement of gravity; they will all understand the feeling and texture of blood on skin; they will all know the joy of seeing a loved one's blue eyes. Likewise, they will understand that our brains work with rhythmic flashes, that our thoughts move around and outward, not just forward. We live in a system of commonalities, and we understand each other, it may be, because no matter what words we use to describe a blue sky, we feel from our brainwaves to our sun-warm cheeks that it is blue.

The only things known for sure (a working definition of truth) are thoughts, to each of us in turn. We are sure of our memories; we are sure of our own images of what our bedrooms look like, or how we experience any given Tuesday. What could be closer to a pure and actual truth than our own surety of our existence? If a picture is worth a thousand words, a thought might be worth a thousand pictures—or an infinity of pictures, depending on our stance on Berkeley's issues with unperceived objects. Encyclopedic entries meant to distinguish what kind of matter is moving about inside of

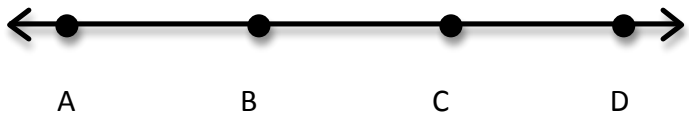
our heads call our thought pictures *covert symbolic responses to stimuli.* To define nonlinguistic (or perhaps anti-linguistic) fiction might be to change the definition to overt responses; i.e. art-making is nothing but our symbolic response to our existence, except that we do it outwardly rather than inwardly. Thoughts, then, are art pieces, just those that we haven't shared with the world yet. What does it mean, that imagistic fiction tries to depict the peripheries of consciousness (mental illness and/or otherness), and yet these fragmented impressions function in a way that is truer, scientifically and spiritually, to our biological being?

***Time Travelers***

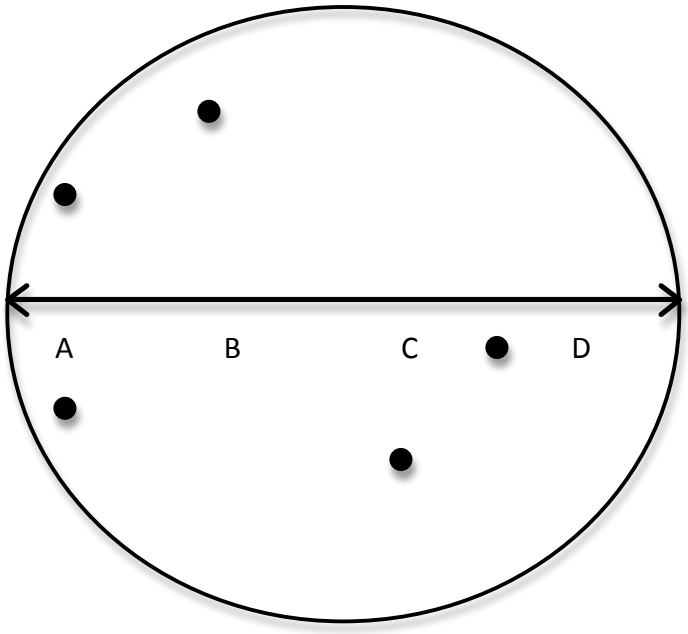
Ted Chiang's "Story of Your Life" follows a linguist named Louise whose task is communicating with alien visitors. The aliens—called Heptapods—communicate with a semasiographic writing system, or a writing system that conveys meaning without reference to speech patterns. This writing system, entitled 'Heptapod B', doesn't rely on sequence in order to be read. The pictographs that make up the written language can be read all at once, allowing the reader to understand sentences simultaneously, as opposed to reading words in any given order. For Louise, learning the non-sequential language Heptapod B unlocks her own brain's ability to experience memory in a similarly simultaneous fashion, understanding her life as a whole rather than a sequence: her consciousness "becomes a half-century-long ember burning outside time" (140).

Linguists would link this with the concept of linguistic determinism: the idea that our native language *is* the way we think, and therefore that it determines the kinds of thoughts we can have (hence, the whole of human consciousness). Pinker calls this 'crying Whorf', an oversimplification named after the theory's champion. In opposition to this we have nativism, the idea that there are innate qualities to our being that develop before or separate from our language—this is the innate consciousness that literature should seek to find. So, we can view Chiang's story as Whorfian, but we can also speculate that imagining interspecies communication (human to Heptapod) suggests a collective consciousness made of something other than our linguistic preferences. If our literature is to think outside of its own language, we can dream of how useful a simultaneous language might be. The typewriter metaphor works because it is both illogical and instantaneous: our thoughts, like the Heptapods, don't make meaning in order like language does, and therefore, if literature is to more closely reflect our innate consciousness, it too should seek to understand itself outside of time.

In *The Art of Time in Fiction* Joan Silber comes to the conclusion that time draws the shape of all stories. The best way I can think of to explain the way time operates in traditional fiction (what Silber calls classic time) is to imagine a story's movement along a two-dimensional plot line:



Forward moving stories begin at point A and progress to point B, but a switchback model story might begin at C and then move to A, then B, before arriving at D. This model of time also allows for the time between A and D to be summarized, including events from B and C, but never arriving there in-scene. Making meaning from the timeline is what we are used to doing when we read fiction: no matter the order we get the events in, we understand that what happened at A probably influenced C, and C in turn caused D to occur. This cause-and-effect is how we think about time because this is generally how we conceive of our own physical experience. Humanity, of course, can only move forward, and at a consistent rate, but it isn't difficult for us to think of the past and the future as elements of a two-dimensional sequence. What if, though, time in fiction weren't imagined as a sliding rule, but as a three-dimensional shape? We can think of this theory of time as a circle drawn over our line:



In this story, we might occupy a moment at A above the circle, while simultaneously occupying another moment below the circle. Instead of being confined to strict future/past/present switchbacks, we would be able to move freely throughout the events in a story without making meaning from their relation to one another, at least not as they occur in a sequence. Silber gives fabulous time as blanket term for nontraditional ways of incorporating time into stories, and classifies this method as an element of the fantasy genre. I would argue that all kinds of fiction, realistic or fantastical, can explore this circle as a necessary element of its ability to grow outside of its sequence-based linguistic foundation. This is done through scenes that aren't confined to a single moment, through the repetition of thought images, through associations, and through other meaning-making avenues that avoid the cause-and-effect tradition. In these stories, we might experience a moment at A, and then a moment at C, but the difference here is that the meaning we make from moment C is not contingent on what happens at moment A—or, that it is not necessary to know that A happened before C (the timeline is not relevant). While stories are always going to be engaged with the idea of time, fiction isn't limited to the passage of time in the way that events actually occur, and therefore, our meaning shouldn't be dependent on a past-present-future view of cause and effect. Hence, while thought pictures and disparate images are a way of more accurately depicting our physical experience on earth, employing fabulous time within a non-sequential narrative gives us the power to transcend our physical reality, coming even closer to the kind of consciousness that might exist apart from our linguistic understanding. In its way, our own language's art-

making might be our power: stories can experience a dimension of time movement that we, as beings, can't. Hence, stories are time travelers.

*Arrival*, the 2013 movie adaptation of Chiang's story, tries to visually conceive of a language that doesn't rely on direction or sequence to be read. The result is a glyph that is at once a word, a sentence, and a paragraph, making meaning through each curve and graphic variation in its form. Louise generates this language on a computer in order to use it to commune with the Heptapods—when one Heptapod disappears, Louise asks (generating the correct graphic), "Where's Abbott?" To this the other Heptapod replies, "Abbott is death process". It's a slight variation on the way we might say it ('Abbott is dead'), but the deviation is significant. Perhaps the way we understand death—as a fixed state that occurs at a specific time, the effect of a known or unknown cause—is determined by the way we phrase 'is dead'. Heptapods, beings whose consciousness isn't fixed to a point in time like their physical beings are, wouldn't think of death as a moment, using a fixed verb tense, but instead would conceive of it as an ongoing state of being. Therefore, perhaps the way we understand reality is governed by the words we have developed to talk about it. Or, perhaps we need only to think outside our words in order to experience a different reality. Might we write in the same way that the Heptapods speak? What does that do to our interpretation of literature? Stephen Pinker puts it simply:

> "Our mind's eye is also sentenced to live in a world of time. Just as we can imagine an empty space devoid of objects but cannot imagine a set of objects

> that aren't located in space, we can imagine a stretch of time in which nothing happens but cannot imagine an event that doesn't enfold in time or take place at a given time" (155).

While Pinker argues that our interpretation of time is unable to think outside of the first dimension, I would argue that fiction (or poetry, storytelling) is a tool that, if it cannot transcend dimensions, can at least open an inter-dimensional window for us to look through, or provide a rough sketch of what an existence without an understanding of time might feel like.

In Susan Steinberg's story, "Supernova", there are certain plot events the reader can track: a plane crash, a memorial service, the narrator lying in the snow, the narrator speaking to his/her father—but the way we're introduced to them is outside of any sort of sequence. "When the plane crashed, I was all messed up," begins the first paragraph, moving elsewhere before coming back again on the same page, "When the plane crashed, I was on a couch...I was in this place" (35). Moments in Steinberg's writing are written again, are flipped over, and are presented to us outside of consequence, which is her story's intention: "I wanted to be between living and not living. Just for the time it would take to walk the tightrope. Just for the time it would take to make it to the other side. Or for the time it would take to fall" (39). "Supernova" is a story about things that happen, or don't happen, and their causes, or non-causes. This is most brilliantly explained through the narrator's assertion, "It was no one person's fault, the world. Nothing that small was ever to blame for something that big. I said, Then whose fault is

it. And he said, Not mine" (43). For a generation teetering on a tightrope between war and peace, Steinberg's writing is perfectly fitting; you can be on a plane or you can not be on a plane, and as it crashes Steinberg's story doesn't assert meaning, it tries (and sometimes fails) to find it amidst the rubble. This is the writing that is fitting for uncertainty, for the collective consciousness of the new millennium in which we will either destroy ourselves, or we will not. The way this story functions, devoid of continuation or sequence, is how the reader achieves meaning through the searching. As Michael Miller puts it in his 2013 review, "Cumulatively, [Steinberg's] sentences are not team players; they compete, interrupt one another, execute sharp turns in logic" (185). The meaning is found in the questioning, in the confusion, in the fiction's ability to call attention to its own artifice. The pinnacle lines in "Supernova" repeated over multiple times in different ways tell us as much: "It wasn't technically a crash. It was technically an explosion. It was technically a fireball. Technically, it was a lot of things. What I mean is, it was meant" (37). The meaning in the story is found in the events themselves, not in the interpretation of them as they relate to one another within narrative time.

It is in this way that modern proponents of a neuroscientific view of literature differentiate themselves from their predecessors. In my copy of *Mrs. Dalloway* (bought used), the previous owner had read the first paragraph (ending in, "what a morning—fresh as if issued to children on a beach"[1]) and written in pencil underneath, *does Clarissa think in similes?* to which my answer would be, probably not. We don't think 'bright' when we open the door to find a sunny day; we squint our eyes. It is here that

the project of depicting consciousness, in all of its iterations, has evolved. While Woolf's writing aims to question her contemporaries' views on the mind, to do so she depicts the constricting forces (language, time) instead of crafting words that might escape those forces. Woolf's characters think things to themselves much in the way they would describe them to an outsider: consider Doris Kilman telling Elizabeth, "'I don't pity myself...I pity'—she meant to say 'your mother,' but no, she could not, not to Elizabeth" (148). Reflect also on Clarissa exclaiming, "'How delightful to see you!'" and then remarking to herself, "She said it to everyone. How delightful to see you! She was at her worst—effusive, insincere" (188). The thought processes in *Mrs. Dalloway* are described to readers as if we are a third party, an invisible presence on the shoulders of the characters to which they whisper their true intentions and feelings. Septimus's character certainly thinks more lyrically, particularly in his 'madness'—"Every power poured its treasures on his head, and his hand lay there on the back of the sofa, as he had seen his hand lie when he was bathing, floating, on the top of the waves, while far away on the shore he heard dogs barking" (157). In this moment, one that mirrors Clarissa's thoughts earlier in the novel, we're still able to see the movement of Septimus's thoughts as logical and sequential: he think first of the bananas, then his thoughts move to the birds singing, then to his hand, then to his memory of the sea. Septimus is logical until his suicide, thinking first of the window, and then of not wanting to die, and then of waiting until the opportune moment. All of the conscious minds in Woolf's novel are operating within strict sequence, their thoughts moving on to new things sequentially. It seems to me that this was her intention: time in *Mrs. Dalloway* is

personified, the sonic boom of Big Ben being our only marker structuring the book (there are no chapters or sections). *Mrs. Dalloway* is infinitely concerned with cycles and the imprisonment that is existing inside of them: "So on a summer's day waves collect, overbalance, and fall: collect and fall; and the whole world seems to be saying 'that is all'" (42). Clarissa and Septimus are locked inside of time, unable to escape it, and each new stream of consciousness is remarkably sequential, relating to each object at a time, each new part of the day marked. So while the project itself—to depict the sameness of human consciousness regardless of social barriers—is remarkably similar to writers like Steinberg, or Erdrich, Woolf's novel is structured in order to place the focus on the cage itself, rather than an attempt to be set free. This is not to say that awareness is not a step in resistance: the hyperawareness of time and of social artifice in *Mrs. Dalloway* have perhaps set a precedent that contemporary writers can make use of, but to move forward we might think of the ways in which narrative time can step outside of Big Ben's chimes and onto Steinberg's tightrope.

In order to try to help my students conceive of writing outside of time, I had them read "Supernova" and then write from a list of prompts that were meant to encourage them to play with time the way that Steinberg does, by imagining the three-dimensional circle as the boundary instead of the two-dimensional line. These prompts included, *write a scene that is looking itself in the mirror, write a scene that is rewinding like a cassette tape,* and*, write a scene that turns off and on like a faucet.* I participated in the free write, writing the image of a door opening and then writing a mirror of that

image, where everything looked the same but meant something different. The moral of the story, I told my students, is that writing outside of time is difficult because it is against our linguistic nature to make meaning from chaos.

A student in the same class wrote a story about a young girl whose close friend experienced a death in her family. It was incredibly advanced in its imagery, but when we discussed it in class, I along with other students expressed frustration at the arrangement of the sentences, which was at times incredibly creative, but other times difficult to follow. This led to a conversation between the student and myself about our experiences with language and time. Writing in Korean, the student explained, differs exponentially from writing in English: the biggest difference is in the languages' forward movement, because the Korean language has sentences without verbs, and sentences where adjectives can function as verbs. *It's not so much about action,* she said, *or at least, the actions are not as easily defined.*

The English language (SAE in particular) is one that is built on events and actions. Our verbs usually signify causality: I see the boy cry. With my students I like to choose sentences such as this one to teach a lesson in rhetorical intent, such as in our lesson about passive voice (I see the boy cry, the boy was watched as he cried, the boy cried). Regardless of how we play around with verbs in order to manipulate a sense of fault, the English language is made up of actors. I am seeing, the boy is crying. The way we think is governed by this causality, which is why the most skilled rhetoricians need to change "the police man shot a black boy" into, "there was a shooting related incident" (Assar)—we can try to hide our sense of cause and effect, but it's ingrained into our

language. It's difficult to imagine the way the English-speaking consciousness might evolve if our language weren't so interested in time and space. Benjamin Lee Whorf (of 'crying Whorf') wrote about this in his analysis of Hopi, a Uto-Aztecan language spoken by the Hopi tribe native to Arizona that uses the same words for gerunds (i.e. swimming) and past-tense verbs (i.e. swam). The temporal nature of the event is not important in Hopi, though it would be in English. In this way, our languages compete for dominance: the reliance on causation in traditional literature is a factor in defining what makes up a canonical 'stream of consciousness'. Therefore, writing our thoughts in a logical and causative way influences a normative way of depicting thought matter that is born of and in the process of upholding sociological power structures.

***Thoughts Think Thoughts***

In his book *The Fine Line*, sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel compares the distinctions we make between the essences of different things to the experience of wearing a cracked pair of glasses. Take off the glasses, he says, and the cracks in your vision will disappear, causing everything to flow into everything else. Of course, it is human nature to try to categorize; the Creation story, for example, begins by distinguishing light from dark, then heavens from earth, then land from sea, and so on. Humans like to name things in order to try to understand their essences more fully—but this act of categorization necessitates an earlier step, a completely legitimate human form of existence where nothing is distinct from anything else, and meaning doesn't function on

the backs of our inclination to distinguish; in other words, meaning from *proverbial chaos.*

I'm obsessed with edges. The landscapes that my work revolves around are the earth's most violent and extreme, and situate themselves at the physical edge: where cliffs and mountains meet ocean and sky. The violence of the natural world, for me, provides a way into talking about the violence of consciousness, our continuous desire to compartmentalize and force ourselves into linguistic and cultural cages. So, while I write about what we consider the 'edge' of what our thoughts think about, I find solace and similarity in writing about the earth's edges: volcanoes, cliffs, jumping, waves on rocks. Both the land's edges and the edges of our sense of normative consciousness are violent and destructive, while at the same time inhabiting an inevitable part of the universe, and in their way, encompassing a powerful and grounded innate beauty.

My preference for physical edges has been shaped by the landscapes I've gotten to call home: the dramatic mountain-forest-sound landscape of Seattle, the cliffs of the Oregon Coast, and Malibu's mysterious canyons and endless beaches. This same idea can be applied to our mental edges—that maybe, to take off the pair of glasses that give us the illusion of distinctions, we need to find that our consciousness finds its home at the edge. It's in seeing that others are wearing the glasses that allows us to recognize their illusory quality: that the capital They might view us as distinct in artificial some way, and that we might be othered for a distinction we are able to recognize as an illusion. These are the edges that are worth discussing, and the edges that create the false binary between *normative* and *deviant*.

When I say edges, though, I also mean to question our own bodies (read: minds) as distinct beings, as separate from. *We are consistently entangled with*—meaning there is no true other, and viewing human existence as if it is separate from the existence of all life on earth would be to create an illusion of power, and also of powerlessness.

In a way, the aesthetic preference for imagistic fragmentation is a refusal of robust individualism, favoring instead a view that recognizes the plurality of all matter. Our bodies, after all, are communities of organisms, just as our species are communities of bodies. It is this train of thought that leads to books like *Reality Hunger* that view the natural succession of the novel to be a dialectic free for all. This is not to say that the process of mixing cannot be a communal resistance—rather, that mixing, in its true essence, doesn't exist, and can't, because it denotes the existence of otherness.

In order to discuss what is meant by deviance in relation to thought matter, it is first important to note that of all definitions the word consciousness, there isn't a unified enough theory of the stuff of thought to label any iteration 'deviant'. Rather, there is a formulaic way that traditional fiction tends to describe consciousness that is governed both by a preference for colonizing languages in their use of sequence and classical logic as well as by a strict view of mental illness as deviant from a 'norm' that doesn't exist. As discussed, the English language is focused on causation, whereas imagistic writing has the ability to float into a sense of fabulous time. We prioritize stories that form narratives in the way our language does, a preference that is influenced by and also formative of our canon. So, while there is no deviant

consciousness, there are thought processes that are othered by the norm, and it is these thought processes that can be described by thinking outside of word cages. It is of the utmost importance to acknowledge that the idea of the collage, a fragmented sense of consciousness, is not a novel concept but a tradition of consciousness that may be linked to a number of cultures that are often drowned out by the western canon. Consider this statement from Ocean Vuong:

> "We traditionally privilege congruency and balance in fiction, we want our themes linked, our conflicts 'resolved,' and our plots 'ironed out.' But when one arrives at the page through colonized, plundered, and erased histories and diasporas, to write a smooth and cohesive novel is to ultimately write a lie. In a way, I'm curious about a work that rejects its patriarchal predecessors as a way of accepting its fissured self."

As Voung notes, fragmented works, works that play with time and image, portray a consciousness that lives and breathes within the traditions of colonized cultures, such as Vuong's own portrayal of his Vietnamese heritage. Calling the use of collage to describe massacre a revolutionary idea is a blatant erasure of the cultures that have been championing fragmented art throughout their histories. And, again in turn, we see impressionistic fiction being used to describe a consciousness that is othered for being non-western, disjointed, and collective in nature.

Canonical works of consciousness—like *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Notes from Underground*, *Ulysses*—have existed and are embedded in the foundation of our literature's modern framework. However, as it is with evolution, we're developing new tools. Whereas Virginia Woolf's novel found resistance in pointing out the cages that contain the writer (and the mind), modern works—like Steinberg's stories, Gray's, David Shields' *Reality Hunger*—work with fragmented structures meant instead to break us out of these constraints. The important thing to acknowledge when writing ourselves out of the word cages that have been built for us is that these tools aren't new: the storytelling in Native American cultures, for example, is rooted in the fragmented nature of the oral tradition. This makes its way into modern works of Native American fiction; within the fabric of Erdrich's *Love Medicine* exists the fragmented soul of June Kashpaw, the departed matriarch "dancing a two-step for wandering souls" (37). June in this novel *is death process*: her existence is not confined to her time on earth, but is told through the generational memories of her family members, and, more significantly, the generational trauma of the Ojibwe tribe. Writers appropriate these tools because they're effective—and that is not to say that they should not do so, but rather, that there needs to be an acknowledgement of ownership, or lack thereof. Shields justifies the writerly evolution in an article entitled "I Can't Stop Thinking Through What Other People Are Thinking", ironically published in the journal *The White Review*:

> "Originally, feathers evolved to retain heat; later, they were repurposed for a means of flight. No one ever accuses the descendants of ancient birds of

> plagiarism for taking heat-retaining feathers and modifying them into wings for flight."

But, of course, plagiarism and cultural appropriation are not one in the same: saying that the documentary *Grizzly Man* was not appropriating when it took from Timothy Treadwell's footage is not the same is arguing that quoting women of color in a work without crediting them is, in any form, a method of resistance. Using Social Darwinism in this context (even to talk about the evolution of the novel) places one form of existence over another—i.e. We (better birds) have evolved using their (the othered party's) tactics, and We should not be claimed as plagiarists, because it is the natural process of evolution. Shields' article is acknowledging the collectivity of human consciousness, but through cracked glasses. It is this thinking that needs to be halted in order for us (collective in all senses of the word) to use the tools put forth by those outside of the western canon in order to write closer to our thoughts. And it is a process of evolution: poet Adrienne Rich addresses Woolf's legacy in such a manner, claiming,

> "In rereading Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* for the first time in some years, I was astonished at the sense of effort, of pains taken, of dogged tentativeness, in the tone of that essay. And I recognized that tone. I had heard it often enough, in myself and other women. It is the tone of a woman almost in touch with her anger, who is determined not to appear angry, who is *willing* herself to be calm, detached, and even charming in a roomful of men

> where things have been said which are attacks on her very integrity. Virginia Woolf is addressing an audience of women, but she is acutely conscious—as she always was—of being overheard by men…She drew the language out in an exacerbated thread in her determination to have her own sensibility yet protect it from those masculine presences. Only at rare moments in that essay do you hear the passion in her voice; she was trying to sound as cool as Jane Austen, as Olympian as Shakespeare, because that is the way the men of the culture thought a writer should sound" (170).

Writers are allowed to break certain genre rules, always governed by context, but not others. In writing consciousness, an entity that is fragmented, imagistic, sensory, and nonlinguistic, modern writers must continuously resist the voices that might tell us to write in a way that pleases a Them (a colonizer, a patriarch, an oligarchy)—particularly those of us that identify within the sphere of the academically acceptable. Keeping in mind always that the academic sphere does not exist in an intellectual vacuum, we forge a new path, one that acknowledges its origins and moves toward a collective identity.

At this point in the argument you might be thinking, *it isn't right to compare being mentally ill* (my own experience of being othered) *to being colonized* (Voung's experience, Erdrich's, et al.)—that is, if you're thinking linguistically, which you probably are not. To this I would respond: I'm not comparing the two, or at least, not exactly. Maybe the term 'mental illness' is not the one I should be using, at least not to denote

the legitimate medical portion of illness, but rather the portion of the mind that deals with the illness, that tries to make sense of it, or attempts to make it fit in with the western canon's depictions of The Thought Process, the way our thoughts think. The only similarity here is in the othering, the useless 'deviant' label that we thrust upon consciousnesses that refuse causative logic in their connections and also work to make meaning through biological associations and time jumps. The fragmented image is ingrained into the art of certain colonized cultures, mentioned here collectively not to simplify but instead because that's the point: naming other and othered is not helpful. When we use tools that think outside of the English language and a colonizing cultural normative consciousness to describe our mental states, we are, in essence, practicing cultural appropriation. In our othered state (i.e. crazy) we're finding solace in the art of those of us who have traditionally been othered, and using colonized tactics to try to describe our own otheredness.

If my use of pronouns here is confusing (I, we, they, us) it is because it should be. If all power relations are coded by previous power relations, then the idea that there is no mixing leads us to the *always already*: there are no pure forms to mix. A mixing of peoples or consciousnesses is not an adequate resistance because a mixing implies the illusion of a separation that is not there in the first place. Maybe our desire to nail down Thought into one succinct Process comes from our understanding that our consciousness is collective—or, we want it to be, and in our own natural way of exclusion, we're trying to make it simpler than it is. Does this idea fit in with the necessary implication of the colonizer, or the just-as-necessary view of colonization as a

purposeful and intentioned act? I don't know. Perhaps this view of a collective consciousness is the dominant mindset seeking to define thought on its own terms. But there is a deeper, biological understanding of image and fragmentation that comes from our shared evolutionary history. In discussing the crafting of fiction, why would we focus so much on the how before truly understanding what shapes our tools—the thought matter that both makes and unmakes? In the words of theorist Donna Haraway:

> "It matters what we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories."

So much in literature is framed in terms of a *reaction to*, when really, a more appropriate shift in artistic strategy would be a *becoming with*.

Speaking of alien movies: Luc Besson's film adaptation of the French comic book *Valerian* (released only one year after *Arrival*) begins with a montage spanning hundreds of years in which the human race gets to know different alien species aboard a giant interplanetary space station. The sequence begins with humans meeting other humans and sharing a friendly handshake: when the first aliens show up, the humans put out their hands and the aliens, seemingly perplexed, follow suit. Each new species mirrors the humans' gesture of peace, even those without hands. In a cultural moment

seemingly thinking outside of our own species, the beginning of the movie interestingly illustrates the way we imagine alien communication mirroring our own. Even in our intercultural dreams (*a city of a thousand planets*) we view humanity as the center. Here, there is no becoming with—there is a becoming like.

The movie doesn't stop there with the scope of its linguistic imagination (at one point a protagonist communicates with a giant jelly fish by putting it on her head), but it does beg the question: why is human communication our linguistic boundary, and more importantly, why do we need to imagine aliens in order to think of interspecies communication? If the literary goal here is to write a consciousness outside of our own language: why are humans the boundary?

Anthropologists (dating back to the Soviet Union in the 1960s) have named our current geological epoch the *Anthropocene*, or in other words, the period of significant human impact on the geology of the earth. Activists instead argue that we are currently in the *Capitalocene*, a term coined by Andreas Malm and Jason Moore that is meant to depict the ecological toll of the parasitic system incited by the Industrial Revolution. Haraway recognizes the limitations of these terms and instead champions her own: the *Chthulucene*, a term named "after the diverse earth-wide tentacular powers and forces and collected things", meant to denote a past, present, and future in which people are a part of multispecies assemblages and within which *ongoingness* is the commodity at stake. The most important part of a theory of collectiveness is to recognize that all matter is, indeed, made of the same—this includes our consciousness, our thought matter. *Anthropocene* is the wrong term in that it mistakenly prioritizes human

existence and communication. This is not an indication of our detachedness but of our linguistic nature: humans prioritize their own languages. *Chthulucene* is more helpful because it defines the world based on our nonlinguistic connections, the connections between thoughts, and the thought matter that makes up existence, sans edges. So to write consciousness is a task that leads us to the edges of our languages, the edges of our cultures, the edges of our species. To depict our consciousness, the experience of earthlings, is to defy the edges, and language is a digital substance that has distinct boundaries. Why do words fail? Words have edges, and we don't. To write through our experience of collectiveness is to use a bounded toolbox to undo our own bounds.

I, like many who suffer from anxiety, have a difficult time compartmentalizing things. To ask myself what kind of fiction I like to write is to ask myself why fiction, which is to ask myself why write, which is to ask myself, what is it that we write. If I try to write in a lyrical, fragmented, imagistic style in order to communicate my own understanding of perception, truth, or consciousness, I first need to consider where my consciousness comes from, how my own focus on deviance is shaped and undone by illusory systems of power that categorize. To write through otheredness in order to resist the capital-T Them is not to champion a deviant consciousness but to recognize that the categories that build institutions like Theirs—institutions that need not be named, for they too are skin changers—are categories seen through a cracked pair of glasses, focusing on fractures that don't exist. To explain why writing that challenges linguistic boundaries is more suitable for the 'othered' consciousness is a useless task

unless we first resist the idea that consciousness is not also an entanglement, a shared experience, a thought stuff that is not separate from.

What does *Sympoeisis* (Donna Haraway's term that, in so many words, means "making with") have to do with writing fiction? The answer is everything. Literature has, for so long, tried to define what it means to be human. Through a continuous shifting and entangling our fiction inevitably moves towards an increased subjectivity: we are now taking the idea of human and broadening it, imagining a consciousness within all sorts, within our existence, within the broadest definition of our. To try to capture in language the 'human plight', as we might say when teaching students how to talk about literature, is to try to walk through a jungle of our own linguistic constructs, through a tangled web of cultural assumptions, and to arrive, hopefully, in the *Chthulucene*, finally ready to question our experience of entanglement in a more substantive and also indefinable way. To make the aesthetic argument for disparate images or for a lack of concrete sequential grounding is to acknowledge collectivity: to write illogically is to recognize that that we can and should make meaning through the physical associations embedded into our collective consciousness. More important than the examination of the tools is the question of the purpose of writing through experiences that can't be put into words, and why it is necessary to write through the nonsense of tragedy, especially here, and now. We are more than the stuff of thought. To define my own fiction, our own fiction, our own thought, is a conversation that eludes edges, and so all we can really do is try to see beyond them, and perhaps acknowledge the ways in which we might also convince those with more cracks in their glasses to do so.

Works Cited


Assar, Vijith. “AN INTERACTIVE GUIDE TO AMBIGUOUS GRAMMAR.” *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, 3 Sept. 2015, www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/an-interactive-guide-to-ambiguous-grammar.

Besson, Luc, director. *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets*. EuropaCorp, 2017.

“Billie Lourd Talks ‘Surreal’ Life Without Mom Carrie Fisher and Grandmother Debbie Reynolds.” Performance by Ellen DeGeneres, *The Ellen Show*, YouTube, 11 Sept. 2017, youtu.be/Mp6Ty0mOFa0.

Campbell, John. “Berkeley's Puzzle.” *University of California Berkeley*, pp. 127–144., philosophy.berkeley.edu/file/70/Berkeley.pdf.

Culler, Jonathan D. *Theory of the Lyric*. Harvard University Press, 2017.

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from Underground*. Translated by Mirra Ginsburg, Bantam Books, 2005.

Erdrich, Louise. *Love Medicine*. Harper Perennial, 2009.

Erdrich, Louise. “Saint Marie.” *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 29 Sept. 2016, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1984/03/saint-marie/376314/.

“The Golden Record.” *NASA*, NASA, voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/golden-record/.

Gray, Amelia. *Gutshot*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015.

Haraway, Donna. “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Staying with the Trouble.” Anthropocene: Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet. 9 May 2014, opentranscripts.org/transcript/anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/.

Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press, 2016.

Heisserer, Eric. *Arrival*. Paramount Pictures, 2016.

Hickok, Gregory. “It's Not a 'Stream' of Consciousness.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 21 Dec. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2015/05/10/opinion/sunday/its-not-a-stream-of-consciousness.html.

Krauss, Nicole. *The History of Love*. Norton, 2005.

Miller, Michael. “Susan Steinberg: Spectacle.” *The Literary Review*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2013, p. 184+., eds.b.ebscohost.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=e85c315a-9beb-4529-961f-30e07e172986@sessionmgr120.

“Ocean Vuong: Interrogating the Canon While (Literally) Riding a Bicycle with No Hands.”*Literary Hub*, lithub.com/ocean-vuong-interrogating-the-canon-and-literally-riding-a-bicycle-with-no-hands/.

Shields, David. “I Can't Stop Thinking Through What Other People Are Thinking.” *The White Review*, Nov. 2013, www.thewhitereview.org/feature/i-cant-stop-thinking-through-what-other-people-are-thinking/.

Shields, David. *Reality Hunger: a Manifesto*. Hamish Hamilton, 2011.

Silber, Joan. *The Art of Time in Fiction: as Long as It Takes*. Graywolf Press, 2009.

Steinberg, Susan. *Spectacle: Stories*. Graywolf Press, 2013.

“Story of Your Life.” *Stories of Your Life and Others*, by Ted Chiang, Vintage, 2016, pp. 91–145.

Vonnegut, Kurt. *Slaughterhouse Five*. Dell Pub., 1991.

Whorf, Benjamin Lee. “Science and Linguistics.” *MIT.edu*, web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/whorf.scienceandlinguistics.pdf.

Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. Knopf, 1993.

Zerubavel, Eviatar. *The Fine Line: Making Distinctions in Everyday Life*. University of Chicago Press, 1993.