Writing the Apocalypse: Pedagogy at the End of the World

A dissertation presented to

the faculty of

the College of Arts and Sciences of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2018

This dissertation titled

Writing the Apocalypse: Pedagogy at the End of the World

by

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has been approved for

the Department of English

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ABSTRACT

MAY, TALITHA, Ph.D., May 2018, English

Writing the Apocalypse: Pedagogy at the End of the World

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Beset with political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental degradation, along with the imminent threat of nuclear war, the world might be at its end. Building upon Richard Miller's inquiry from *Writing at the End of the World*, this dissertation investigates if it is "possible to produce [and teach] writing that generates a greater connection to the world and its inhabitants." I take up Paul Lynch's notion of the apocalyptic turn and suggest that when writers Kurt Spellmeyer, Richard Miller, Derek Owens, Robert Yagelski, Lynn Worsham, and Ann Cvetkovich confront disaster, they reach an impasse whereby they begin to question disciplinary assumptions such as critique and pose inventive ways to think about writing and writing pedagogy that emphasize the notion and practice of connecting to the everyday. Questioning the familiar and cultivating what Jane Bennett terms "sensuous enchantment with everyday" are ethical responses to the apocalypse; nonetheless, I argue that disasters and death master narratives will continually resurface if we think that an apocalyptic mindset can fully account for the complexity and irreducibility of lived experience. Drawing upon Zen, new materialism, and Yagelski's theory of writing as a way of being, I call attention to the affective dimensions of capitalism, anti-apocalyptic thinking, and environmental writing pedagogies that run contrary to capitalist-driven environmental disaster.

DEDICATION

To Greyrock trail and forest floors.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dr. Sherrie Gradin always encouraged me to explore my ideas and experience the joy of creating new connections for myself. She fostered my curiosity and introduced me to the important work of Richard Miller, Rita Felski, and Ann Cvetkovich among others. Dr. Gradin helped with rhetorical aspects of writing that I never new existed. Furthermore, her comments on my draft were insightful and constructive. Ever encouraging and professional, Dr. Gradin modeled what it means to be an exemplar academic and teacher.

I owe special thanks to my committee members Robert Miklitsch, Talinn Phillips, and Wolfgang Sützl for providing useful advice during my prospectus and dissertation defenses. Robert commented on my manuscript in depth and Talinn's comments were insightful. Wolfgang was generous with his time and shared useful resources.

Aside from my committee, many mentors, friends, and students helped me with my project. I want to thank Ohio University Professor Emeritus Ray McKerrow whose help always came at the right time like trail magic. Dr. Andrew S. Mathews' permission to use his image of an ancient chestnut tree stump gave Chapter 5, "Disconnected: A Polemic" far more clarity than my words alone could. Designer L.S. Boldsmith illustrated how the magic of interdisciplinary collaboration opens new possibilities for writing instruction. I am also grateful to the students of my writing about sustainability classes for their insights and statement position papers that gave me a sense of what Miller calls "critical optimism."

I am thankful for the advice, friendship, cheerfulness, and strong sense of community from my colleagues: Don Dudding, Amanda Hayes, Paul Christian Jones, Matthew Nunes, Lana Oweidat, Carrie Ann Verge, and Matthew Vetter. Don's advice regarding dissertation writing helped me numerous times and I often thought of his story of the wizard and the monkey.

The Ohio University English department provided generous funding over the years, which gave me the opportunity to meet Robert Yagelski at several conferences. His work has had a profound influence in my scholarship and pedagogy—it all started with a book review I wrote for *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*. I also had the opportunity to meet Kurt Spellmeyer and Richard Miller whose scholarship has likewise influenced my dissertation.

Furthermore, I am grateful for Ken Matwiczak, Angela Evans, and Donna LeCourt for their mentorship in my early academic career.

Finally, I would like to thank Cactus May for his unyielding support and encouragement to help me pursue my life-long goals and studies. Our conversations, walks, bike rides, and lost city explorations made all the difference. Last, but not least, Coco deserves gratitude for curling up next to me.

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INTRODUCTION

> Human life in its capacity to think, create, enjoy, or endure is precipitated into a condition worse than misery itself: a stupor, a distractedness, a horror, a hopeless torpor.
>
> —Jean-Luc Nancy, *After Fukushima: The Equivalence of Catastrophes*

Beset with political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental crises, along with the immanent threat of nuclear war, the world might be at its end. The end of the world is not just the stuff of characters who occupy busy sidewalk corners and shout into their megaphones about the apocalypse to impassive pedestrians. To me, the Trump administration has demonstrated repeatedly the fragility of democracy and the looming threat of authoritarianism. At the same time, however, the administration has inadvertently illustrated the importance of the everyday. Scholars have theorized the ubiquitous everyday and yet it remains ambiguous. Maurice Blanchot, for example, maintains the "everyday escapes" definition; however, in the context of my project, I borrow Wolfgang Sützl's characterization of the everyday as the "unremarkable place where we are most of the time" (18). As such, the everyday involves ordinariness, habit, and home. Not unlike Rita Felski's definition of the everyday, my project views the temporality of the everyday as *repetition*, the spatial ordering as *home*, and mode of experience as *habit* (*Doing Time* 81).

Felski points out Henri Lefebvre views the world with "ambivalence" insofar as the everyday is not only "a sign of current social degradation under capitalism, but it is also connected to bodily and affective rhythms and hence retains a utopian impulse" *(Doing Time* 79). Although this project discusses how capitalism chips away at personal agency and cultivates a culture of isolated individuals who are unable to connect their

individual struggles with larger social issues, it also discusses how attentiveness to our sensate selves in the world can serve as a way to counter the negative affective dimensions of capitalism including despair and chronic depression (Giroux, Cvetkovich).[1] Despite exploring what Jane Bennett calls "sensuous enchantment with everyday" in her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* you will not find a "utopian impulse" in these pages (xi; Felski, *Doing Time* 79). In fact, what you will find is a dark dissertation that looks at the apocalypse squarely in the face—just words that reside in a shadowy, nightmarish space. As such, under Felski's terms of repetition, home, and habit, the everyday could become the repetitive din of bombs; an unsafe, crumbling home; and the renewed repetition of waking up to new terrors.

Facing the apocalypse is not a discursive trick, but a lived experience that goes beyond fashionable academic declarations of wanting to disrupt or problematize this or that. When I was diagnosed with a life threatening illness that could have left me paralyzed from the neck down, I wanted straightforward talk from my neurosurgeon—not an imagined, magic-bullet solution, or a prevailing happily-ever-after cultural narrative—I wanted to know what I was facing. While in the hospital, I interviewed two neurosurgeons to determine who would perform my operation. One neurosurgeon calmly entered my hospital, then sat down on a chair at the end of my hospital bed. Clad in a pristine lab coat that could rival the whitest snowflake, he smiled often and confidently

[1] We live in such isolated times that England's Prime Minister Theresa May has appointed a minister of loneliness tasked with developing nation-wide strategies to counter loneliness.

discussed a detailed plan and clear-cut solution—delivered with calm affect, he offered a comforting narrative.

Contrary to this neurosurgeon was another who hurriedly walked into my hospital room wearing surgical scrubs. Red hair peeked from under his surgeon's cap; he had angular facial features, a furrowed brow and never sat down. His tense demeanor and hurried speech gave me the impression that after he would answer my questions, he was on his way to a life threatening surgery. This unemotional neurosurgeon did not have a detailed plan that outlined what he would do every step of the way—instead, he said that he would remove my lamina, slice open my spinal cord, and make a decision based on what he saw at the moment. He did not have a coherent, predictable, and organized plan for the future; instead, I found his speculative approach to be contextual, mindfully focused on the present—and, inconclusive.

Trying to choose between two neurosurgeons to perform a delicate, life-threatening surgery was agonizing; however, I chose the latter to be my neurosurgeon not because he gave me a comforting, predictable narrative that agreed with my expectations, but because he focused on the present problem. I knew he would be prepared for the unexpected—nothing could catch him by surprise if he did not have a specific plan. I felt liberated with my decision even with the knowledge that I could become paralyzed the rest of my life. The next day, I underwent surgery and woke up to a world damaged by the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, and not being able to feel or move my legs and feet.

Even though the everyday can be a site of terror, it can paradoxically also become a site of social transformation and community. The notion of community is likewise paradoxical insofar as collectivities can norm "nefarious ideologies" or spark revolutions; nonetheless, my project came to the notion of connection as a form of social hope (Butler "A 'Bad Writer'"). My hospitalization was transformative insofar as I learned how deep-seated independence was to my identity. Needing help for every action and movement—from drinking, showering, adjusting a pillow, to brushing my hair was dispiriting, so as I gained strength, I set a goal to get out of my hospital bed independently. A nurse finally admonished me and threatened that if I resisted her directive to seek help, she would "strap [me] down to the bed." This experience illuminated the centrality of independence to identity in American, capitalist culture—so much so that collaboration, community, and connection threaten agency. Once after being in the hospital for nearly a month, a couple of staff workers helped me to my wheelchair and rolled me out to see the super moon. The windy, cool night air was intoxicating, the stars had gem-like sparkle, and I became lost in the orbit of the luminous moon. This world is remarkable and the everyday precious, I thought.

With such a perspective, I find an inquiry from Richard Miller's book *Writing at the End of the World* compelling. Miller asks, "is it possible to produce [and teach] writing that generates a greater connection to the world and its inhabitants?" (*Writing at the End* 25). With an understanding of how collaboration, community, and connection ought to supersede capitalist competition, individualism, and isolation in apocalyptic times, my project investigates how might this understanding inform writing and writing

pedagogy? To answer this question, my project takes up three strands: the personal, political, and pedagogical and entangles them so they overlap, crisscross, and connect in unexpected ways—at least for me.[2] I have consciously adopted a conversational writing style because my project is for the everyday—therein lies our hope in these apocalyptic times. All of my chapters begin by addressing daily disasters, are punctuated with unsettling emotions, and settle inconclusively.

In Chapter 1, "The Only Rational Response," I initially survey the flurry of activity from the first week of the Trump administration, which in my experience, serves as the basis for a pervasive, local cultural feeling of political exhaustion. To mirror the administration's chaos along with my sense of exhaustion, despair, and urgency that runs through my dissertation, this chapter likewise mentions one executive action after another that exacerbates our environmental crises. These executive actions signal a slow-motion apocalypse, which has spurred not only protests both in the U.S. and Europe, but also an apocalyptic geopolitics in which the threat of nuclear war looms at a tweet's notice. Considering U.S. neoliberal capitalist culture in which anxiety and depression make up the fabric of daily life, it is easy to affirm English studies scholar Richard Miller's question in his text *Writing at the End of the World* in which he asks "why bother with reading and writing when the world is so obviously going to hell?" (16). Miller also asks if despair is our only recourse—certainly, following the presidential election, many Council of Writing Program Administrators Listserv (WPA-L) members expressed

[2] The title of my dissertation similarly demonstrates such combination. My title references Richard Miller's book *Writing at the End of the World* and Kurt Spellmeyer's book *Buddha at the Apocalypse: Awakening from a Culture of Distaster*.

hopelessness and political disappointment. Their responses echo the Zen perspectives of English Studies scholars such as Kurt Spellmeyer in his book *Buddha at the Apocalypse: Awakening from a Culture of Destruction*, Roy Scranton in his text *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*, and cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek in "Lessons from the 'Airpocalypse'" who confront the catastrophe rather than turn to escapist dreams of a solvable future. These scholars suggest perhaps something new can result from failure.

Although Chapter 1, "The Only Rational Response" points to how writing has the capacity to become a way to connect with others and co-create different ways of being and living, I take an unexpected twist and argue that writing is implicated in our apocalyptic moment—especially in terms of the administration's authoritarian executive actions. As such, I conclude with my central dissertation question, in which I take up Miller's inquiry whether it is "possible to produce [and teach] writing that generates a greater connection to the world and its inhabitants" (*Writing at the End* 25).

In Chapter 2, "Writing (With) the Apocalypse," I take up compositionist Paul Lynch's notion of the apocalyptic turn from his article, "Composition's New Thing: Bruno Latour and the Apocalyptic Turn" and suggest that when compositionists confront global and daily disasters, they reach an impasse whereby they begin to question familiar disciplinary assumptions and pose inventive and creative ways to think about writing pedagogy and writing that emphasize the notion and practice of connecting to the everyday.[3] Questioning the familiar is an ethical response to the apocalypse; nonetheless,

[3] My scholarship overlaps with Paul Lynch's assessment regarding how compositionists confront disaster in their scholarship and question disciplinary assumptions.

we will continue encountering disaster after disaster if we think that our habitual, familiar ways of thinking can fully account for the complexity of lived experience.

I initially discuss how a growing number of English studies scholars address "gloomy inventories" of various global and daily disasters in their scholarship (Owens, *Composition and Sustainability* 11). Miller and Kurt Spellmeyer describe global catastrophes whereas Robert Yagelski discusses climate change on a personal level in his text *Writing as a Way of Being: Writing Instruction, Nonduality, and the Crisis of Sustainability*. Slavoj Žižek says the airpocalypse in China has become a prolonged event that has normalized terror. When unacceptable events such as the airpocalypse become normalized in culture, I argue that personal agency and democracy are at stake. In his text *Dangerous Thinking in the Age of New Authoritarianism*, Henry Giroux points out that in the U.S., totalitarianism has become normalized and has taken on a public form of pedagogy whereby terror and fear become infused with daily life. Such normalization of environmental and political crises dangerously chips away at agency and circumscribes how we experience the world. Accordingly, I argue that these crises command pedagogues to re-examine the role of composition and its connection to the everyday.

In Chapter 3, "Writing the Everyday," I question what would happen if compositionists would "elevate lived experience to the status of a critical concept—not merely in order to describe lived experience, but in order to change it" (Kaplan and Ross 77). Conceived in this way, writing can be more than textual production; it can be a "transformative or creative act" (Kaplan and Ross 79). As such, writers might develop the affective capacity to recognize, express and resist the everyday feelings of

capitalism—writers could compose better lives. In his text "Earthworm Hermeneutics," Derek Owens calls this creative act "poesis," which is "the project of writing the world, again and again, from scratch, each time" (11). Although Miller cynically asks why we should be concerned with writing if the world is going to hell, his critical optimism commands us to "look beyond the latest incarnation of the apocalypse to the creative work of rebuilding and reimagining that is ever present in the world" (*Writing at the End* xi).

I argue compositionists of the apocalyptic turn recognize the limitations of mainstream writing instruction, and in turn, advance and practice forms of pedagogy and inventive, reparative writing that help writers recognize and make sense of the complex feelings and tensions between their lived experience and larger social structures. Such ways of thinking about writing point to how writers might reclaim agency and the possibility to compose better lives and communities.

I initially discuss how Spellmeyer, Miller, Owens, and David Orr argue that the academy falls short in helping students think synthetically and make sense of their struggles with the everyday.[4] In terms of writing pedagogy, although a turn toward personal narrative and memoir might serve as a productive way for students to make sense of their feelings and struggles with the complexities of the everyday, Lynn

[4] I draw upon David Orr's work *Dangerous Years: Climate Change, the Long Emergency, and the Way Forward* along with his collection of essays titled *Hope is an Imperative: The Essential David Orr*.

Worsham, Miller, and Yagelski argue that such reflexive forms of writing are not inherently curative and could slip into counterproductive, fetishized narratives.[5]

Despite the limitations of reflexive writing, this chapter argues that Yagelski's book *Writing as a Way of Being: Writing Instruction, Nonduality, and the Crisis of Sustainability,* and Patricia A. Sullivan's article "Composing Culture: A Place for the Personal" illustrate another dimension of writing—namely, writing the self and writing as a way of being. Writing has the capacity to generate self-understanding, intensify one's awareness of oneself and connection with others, and foster understanding of how cultural and social tropes can replace lived experience. Yagelski and Sullivan widen what it means to write self-reflexively and point to the positive effects of what can happen if compositionists shift their attention from thinking about writing as textual production to the possibility of composing a better life.

Drawing upon Spellmeyer, I then argue that the humanities can draw upon its roots of creativity whereupon writers can compose better lives. I point to how Miller, in his book *Writing at the End of the World* and Ann Cvetkovich in *Depression: A Public Feeling* experiment with inventive forms of personal narrative that, like the everyday, account for the complexity between affect and social structures. I then draw attention to how Yagelski, Owens (in *Composition and Sustainability: Teaching for a Threatened Generation*), Spellmeyer, and Cvetkovich argue that an awareness of our sensate self in relation to the world help writers not only foster a connection with the everyday, but

[5] I draw upon Lynn Worsham's text "Composing (Identity) in a Posttraumatic Age," which she published in 2006.

helps writers recognize limitations of the everyday to thus spur social change. Sensate awareness and curiosity call attention to how we can compose different lives.

Drawing upon some previously discussed concepts from writers of the apocalyptic turn, Chapter 4, "Teaching the World's End" is critically self reflexive and attempts to make sense of my personal experiences of teaching writing courses focused on environmental sustainability. Rather than prescribe an expected pedagogy of the apocalypse, it tells crooked, un-fetishized fragments of twists and turns and describes my personal and pedagogical struggles of addressing the trauma of teaching environmental collapse. This chapter confronts my struggles, yet resists the urge to generalize the lessons learned from my experiences or transform them into a magical, silver bullet or a one-size-fits-all pedagogy. Turning to Miller's text *Writing at the End of the World*, I modify and build upon his question about whether it is possible to produce writing that produces a greater connection with the world, and I question if it is possible to *teach* such writing. Is it possible to teach writing that can harbor the possibility of stopping environmental collapse? If not stop the disaster, how it is possible to teach under the weight of daily trauma?

In the previous chapters, I attempt to convey my sense of political exhaustion and despair regarding one executive action after another that has exacerbated our political and environmental catastrophes. In Chapter 5, "Disconnected: A Polemic," my exhaustion reaches a crisis point in which I re-evaluate the central question of this dissertation. I assume the role of a negative narrator who becomes wary of the notion and practice of connection. I don the role of a polemicist to illustrate how political disappointment feels.

Such a reversal regarding the worth of my central dissertation inquiry not only illustrates the narrator's emotional turmoil, but also exposes the duplicitous nature of connection itself.

Throughout this project, I framed connection exclusively in positive terms; however, this chapter turns this idea on its head and acknowledges that the notion and practice of connectivity can not only cultivate detached relationships but also subjectivities defined by capital. As such, dissatisfied with the practice of connection, I reach an impasse and embrace a running master narrative of death in English studies from the reaches of Friedrich Nietzsche's death of God, Roland Barthes' death of the author, Miller's end of the world, to Scranton's imperative that we must learn how to die. I question whether to likewise declare the death of writing and the pursuit of connection. As such, the chapter takes a negative turn and scratches the surface of negating different types of connection—even Web 2.0 connections. This critique, however, is short-lived when I recognize that apocalyptic thinking has reared its ugly head.

Although Nietzsche's declaration of death was meaningful for his time, I recognize and argue that death and creation narratives, in the context of today's political and environmental moment, characterize apocalyptic logic, which is embedded in the crisis of sustainability. Recognizing such apocalyptic thinking, however, does not compel me to return to my naïve and positive reading of connection or eclipse alternative ways of thinking—instead, with help from Andrew S. Mathews' research "practices of walking, looking, and wondering" and speculative attention that he discusses in his text "Ghostly

Forms and Forest Histories," I recognize the complexity of connection and its irreducibility to mere creative or destructive tendencies (G145).[6]

[6] The page numbering of Mathews' text reflects the numbering of the flip-over book *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* edited by Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt.

CHAPTER 1: THE ONLY RATIONAL RESPONSE

> Being cannot be anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the with and as the with of this singularly plural coexistence.
>
> —Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*

> Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world.
>
> —Fredric Jameson "Future City"

The political exhaustion resulting from the first week of Trump's unimaginable presidency felt like a year to me. Similarly for *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, the first week felt "like a century" prompting him to wonder if Trump can "keep up this pace of news and business and conflict without just exhausting everybody?" (PBS NewsHour). During his first week, and subsequent one hundred days, for example, the president signed ninety executive actions regarding a variety of issues. The administration began to ban travel to the U.S. from seven Muslim majority countries, and block family-planning funds to foreign organizations that give abortion counseling (Diamond). Furthermore, the administration defended the White House Press Secretary's lies regarding the size of Trump's inauguration attendance as "alternative facts" yet characterized the *New York Times*, and other news outlets such as ABC, CBS, CNN, and NBC as "fake news," and the "enemy" of Americans (NBC News; @realDonaldTrump). The busyness does not end here, but extends to many largely unreported policies including those affecting the environment.[7]

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[7] The events of the first week may seem outdated; nonetheless, the effects of these pressing political, social, economic, and environmental crises far extend the scope of a week.

Claiming that "environmentalism is out of control," climate change deniers Trump and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt gagged the EPA and purged the White House website of references to climate change (Trump qtd. in McKibben, "A Bad Day"; Davenport). The administration also aimed to stop President Obama's Clean Power Plan, revive construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, and order "an end to protracted environmental reviews" (Baker and Davenport). Furthermore, the administration aimed to expand drilling in the Arctic and assess whether or not it can search for energy in Pacific and Atlantic marine sanctuaries (Eilperin, "Trump Signs"). Claiming what he characterizes as "another egregious use of government power," regarding the protection of national monuments, Trump instructed Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to review the designations of any national monuments since 1996 (qtd. in Eilperin, "Trump Orders"; Eilperin, "Trump Orders").[8] Additionally, Republicans have targeted the influence of the Endangered Species Act resulting in immediate endangerment for species (Brown). Trump's Interior Department, for example, blocked protections for the rusty patched bumblebee, whose range once extended throughout the east and upper Midwest of the United States to Canada (Natural Resources Defense Council).

In continuation of environmental targeting, from the small and specific rusty patched bumblebee to the large and abstract, Trump announced U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord. Nearly a month and half after his announcement, iceberg A68,

[8] As a result of Zinke's review, Trump reduced the size of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments, resulting in the "largest elimination of protected land in American history" (Patagonia).

which is approximately the size of Delaware, broke away from the Antarctic Peninsula (Liptak and Acosta). The effects of climate change are not distant dystopian futures. Former NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies Director James Hansen, whose career over the years has focused on global climate change, maintains that the near-term effects of climate change are indeed "apocalyptic" ("Game Over"). The Western United States, for example, will develop semi-permanent drought and the Midwest will become a dust bowl (Hansen "Game Over"). In his latest study, Hansen predicts sea level will rise by ten feet in just fifty years. Aside from Hansen's studies, news sites are teeming with reports about ocean acidification; coral bleaching; forest dieback; frequent, larger, devastating, and catastrophic hurricanes; the moving West of American Eastern forests[9]; burning California; and countless events with negative short and long-term effects. With midnight signaling the apocalypse, the Doomsday Clock has advanced to two and a half minutes before midnight. According to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, never before has the clock advanced largely due to one person—namely, Trump (Krauss and Titley).[10]

In this chapter, I initially survey the flurry of activity from the first week of the new administration, which in my experience, serves as the basis for a pervasive, local cultural feeling of political exhaustion. To mirror the administration's chaos along with my sense of exhaustion, despair, and urgency that runs through my dissertation, this chapter likewise mentions one executive action after another that exacerbates our

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[9] Scientists Songlin Fei et al. discuss tree responses to climate change in their report "Divergence of Species Responses to Climate Change."

[10] Critical pedagogue Henry Giroux looks beyond blaming one person when he says, "the real issue that needs to be examined is what kind of society produces a Donald Trump?" (*America at War* 32).

environmental crises. These executive actions signal a slow-motion apocalypse, which has spurred not only protests both in the U.S. and in Europe, but also an apocalyptic geopolitics in which the threat of nuclear war looms at a tweet's notice.

Protests such as the G20 Summit protests and the 2017 Women's March indeed call attention to fissures and openings, which are markedly about affirming agency and cultivating a sense of connectedness with one another. The 2017 Women's March swelled in a pink sea of protesters wearing various hues of pink pussyhats who carried signs painted with conspicuous messages signaling that feminism is and always has been entangled with a variety of issues.[11] Among the signs protesters carried were: "Does Conversion Therapy Work on Bigots?" and "Maybe if it was called Father Nature, Republicans would CARE ABOUT IT." In addition to the protesters' signs, writing was present in the form of Pussyhat knitter's notes. Knitters from across the U.S. had donated pussyhats for the march with enclosed notes for anonymous pussyhat recipients. The knitters wrote about issues of concern to them as women. The protester signs and knitters' notes illustrate that writing is implicated in the fledgling knowledge of how social hope for the commons lies with connecting with others in a material way. Joyous connection is not about liking someone's online post, but seeing someone's face, hearing his or her voice, and maybe extending a helping hand—it is a matter of embodied communication.

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[11] The knitted pink hats signified a bold, visual statement for "solidarity for women's rights"; however, some critics have pointed the racial divide in women's rights (Pussyhat Project, "Our Story). African American activist Angela Peoples, for instance, said the march "definitely felt very white" and that many black women at the march "felt like they were alone" (qtd. Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood 647).

Although this chapter points to how writing has the capacity to become a way to connect with others and co-create different ways of being and living, I take an unexpected twist and argue that writing is implicated in our apocalyptic moment—especially in terms of the administration's authoritarian executive actions.

Welcome to Hell: How Capitalism Feels

If our environmental crisis and the Doomsday Clock alone are insufficient to signal the slow-motion apocalypse, then the terror evoking, "G20: Welcome to Hell" anti-capitalist protests; 1000 Gestalten one-dimensional zombies shuffling the streets in Hamburg, Germany; Lucifer's[12] sweltering heat and raging wildfires across Europe; and Trump's apocalyptic geopolitics of "fire and fury" regarding North Korea should be enough, in the words of English studies scholar Ann Cvetkovich, to show "*how capitalism feels*" on a daily basis (Trump qtd. in Baker; Cvetkovich 11).[13]

On July 6, 2017, at least 13,000 "Welcome to Hell" and 1,000 black bloc protesters marched against Trump and other world leaders who met for the G20 summit. "Welcome to Hell" organizer Andreas Blechschmidt maintains the motto of the protest is "a combative message" and advances that "G20 policies worldwide are responsible for hellish conditions like hunger, war, and the climate disaster" (qtd. in *The Business Times*). During the day of hell, protesters chanted slogans and marched alongside a white van draped with a black banner with white lettering, which read, "We are fucking ANGRY" (Durden). In other areas, pink clouds from smoke bombs billowed around a

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[12] The Deutscher Wetterdienst nicknamed the 2017 summer heat wave in Europe Lucifer.
[13] As the "G20: Welcome to Hell" protests rage, U.S. lawmakers have considered bills to criminalize protests in twenty states, including one bill that protects drivers who unintentionally injure or kill activists who block roads (Jackman).

giant, inflatable black block, which was surrounded by protesters who held signs such as "Resist Police Brutality." Riot police fired water cannons and pepper spray into crowds of protesters; in the evening, some subversives set barricades on fire as skirmishes continued into the night.

In addition to the nearly 1,000 black bloc protesters, the 1000 Gestalten performance had an anti-capitalist message for the G20 leaders. Over a thousand volunteers from all reaches of Europe came together for a ninety-minute performance that took months of preparation. The 1000 Gestalten collective consists of over one hundred people with backgrounds in art and communication that came together for their G20 performance. Covered in grey clay, a procession of impassive figures walked in slow motion toward a central square in Hamburg, Germany. Even though they moved collectively, they did not interact with one another; their individual isolation was their only mark of community. With the exception of "metal clatter" coming from little boxes they held in their hands that sounded like the clinking of bamboo chimes in a soft breeze, the figures were silent as they shuffled and clawed the streets as onlookers went about their day (1000 Gestalten, "The Performance"). In some photos, it seems difficult to distinguish the figures from the living, which suggests habitually experiencing exploitative capitalist influences of the everyday transforms us into the living dead.

It is easy to turn to Richard Miller's prescient and relevant text *Writing at the End of the World*, which was published in 2005, and extend his assessment of events such as Chernobyl, violent school shootings, terrorist attacks, and the crisis of the humanities to our current political, economic, social, and environmental crises. The central question of

Miller's book is what role might the humanities serve in helping teachers and students reimagine a better future when catastrophe comprises the daily fabric of our culture. Miller grapples with the question of why even teach writing when the world is clearly falling apart and coming to an end. Miller says, "apocalyptic visions" have created and confirmed "a sense that despair is the only rational response to the world we have before us" (ix). Such despair was evident among writing instructors across the nation who shared their thoughts about the results of the presidential election on the Council of Writing Program Administrators Listserv (WPA-L). WPA-L is an international listserv consisting of over four thousand members for academics of all levels who are involved with writing program administration at the university, college, and community college levels.

The O'Malley Director of the University Writing Program at the University of Notre Dame John Duffy began a thread on the listserv expressing his political disappointment about the presidential election when he wrote, "I am still processing the shock and sadness I feel about Tuesday's election results" ("Trump"). Duffy turned to listserv members for advice regarding how to support faculty and students post election. Mirroring Duffy, writing instructors expressed feeling "sad," "discouraged," "fearful," and "stunned" (Van Duyne; Christoph; Macauley; Yagelski, "Re: Trump"). Chris Anson shared a coping poem from creative writer Dorianne Laux that only seemed to reify the collective response:

> We know we are doomed,
>
> done for, damned, and still the light reaches us,

falls on our shoulders even now,

even here where the moon is

hidden from us, even though the stars are so far away. (qtd. in Anson)

Asao B. Inoue likewise expressed such a response when he said,

> I broke down in a few meetings, choked up, got tearful, but so did others. I am still a bit tearful. I yelled and cried at the walls last night with my wife. I got most of it out, out of me, but then it builds back up. I'm still yelling and crying today. I'm hurt because I know what this means to so many others around me, some I know, many I don't. I'm also a bit more fearful than I was before. ("Re: Trump")

Inoue's palpable response continues with, "it really hurts in my stomach. It wells up into my throat and I choke on it. It floods out of my eyes and blinds me. ("Re: Trump"). Such emotional WPA-L responses are rational considering the executive actions that flame the wicked problems of these dark, traumatic times.[14]

Zen

The WPA-L responses seem to echo the perspectives of writer Roy Scranton and Kurt Spellmeyer who do not look to the future for answers, but remain in the present and confront catastrophe head-on. Roy Scranton blends memoir and critique in his text *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization*. Scranton discusses how after leaving the Iraq war as a U.S. Army private, he thought he left

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[14] David Orr explains that wicked issues "'are those that are ill-defined, complex, systemic, and purportedly unsolvable,' entailing 'multiple constituencies with conflicting agendas and… comprised of seemingly unrelated, yet interdependent elements, each of which manifest as problems in their own right, at multiple levels of scale" (*Dangerous Years* 38).

terrorism behind when he returned to America. Once he came back, however, he realized that a far greater threat than ISIS and Al Qaeda awaited—the terror of global climate change. After discussing the extent of our environmental crisis, Scranton succinctly characterizes our predicament: "We're fucked. The only questions are how soon and how badly" (16).

In his text *Buddha at the Apocalypse: Awakening from a Culture of Destruction*, compositionist Kurt Spellmeyer likewise accepts the catastrophe of our times. Spellmeyer paints a gloomy future when he points out how even if every U.S. business would eliminate its carbon footprint, global disaster would be postponed just beyond a century (*Buddha at the Apocalypse* 85). Drawing upon Zen literature, biblical analysis, and popular culture, Spellmeyer argues that the West's focus on the future at the expense of the present actually shapes the Western apocalyptic mindset. The habit of postponement illustrates how we place our hopes in the future to solve our environmental crises. Such a habit, for example, is similar to how I might deal with my chipped tooth—maybe if I postpone going to the dentist, the ache might go away. Maybe chewing on a clove might do the trick—or maybe I can tolerate a bit more pain; nonetheless, when it comes to our environmental crisis, postponement or spontaneous solutions will not serve as remedies—they serve the apocalyptic mindset.

In her text *When Things Fall Apart,* which questions how to live when our lives are marked with repeated obstacles, American Tibetan Buddhist Pema Chödrön argues, "if we're willing to give up hope that insecurity and pain can be exterminated, then we can have the courage to relax with the groundlessness of our situation" (41). Chödrön

continues, “Begin the journey without hope of getting ground under your feet. Begin with hopelessness” (41). Arguing along the same lines of Chödrön, Scranton and Spellmeyer suggest letting go of hope. Spellmeyer accepts, for example, “once we have given up on saving the world, we can replace it with a ‘solidarity,’ that goes far beyond that word’s conventional meaning” (*Buddha at the Apocalypse* 82). Similarly, Scranton turns to Montaigne’s assertion that “to philosophize is to learn how to die” (qtd. in Scranton 21). As such, Scranton explains, “We have entered humanity’s most philosophical age, for this is precisely the problem of the Anthropocene. The rub now is that we have to learn to die not as individuals, but as a civilization” (21).

In light of our doomsday, Scranton and Spellmeyer seem to suggest merely giving up; however, their acceptance of the disaster suggests otherwise. Scranton’s imperative of learning how to die, might suggest merely giving up; however, this assessment is far from his intentions. Scranton explains, “by learning how to die though, we can connect with and open up new possibilities for the human future” (26). Such connectivity arises when “we must suspend our attachment to the continual press of the present by keeping alive the past, cultivating the info-garden of the archive, reading, interpreting, sorting, nurturing, and, most important, reworking our stock of remembrance” (Scranton 108). Scranton continues, “we must inculcate ruminative frequencies in the human animal by teaching slowness, attention to detail, argumentative rigor, careful reading, and meditative reflection. We must keep up our communion with the dead, for they are us, and we are the dead of future generations” (108). For all his suggestions, Scranton argues

for dynamic interrelationships with the past and future. Although Spellmeyer likewise suggests action, he argues for mindful action that focuses on the present.

Spellmeyer places hope in what he characterizes as mindful action rather than in postponement or doing nothing (*Buddha at the Apocalypse* 146). To illustrate his point, Spellmeyer draws attention to a famous Zen story about a quarrel over a temple cat. Disrupting their meditation, two groups of monks were arguing about a cat when finally Master Nansen interrupted their quarrel and challenged them to "say some word that would demonstrate an awakened mind" (Spellmeyer, *Buddha at the Apocalypse* 85). Nansen held the cat and said, "'If you can give an answer, you will save the cat. If not, I will kill it'" (qtd. in Spellmeyer, *Buddha at the Apocalypse* 85). Even though the cat's life and Nansen's karma were at stake, the monks said nothing, so Nansen cut the cat in half. Upon learning about the incident, Nansen's senior student Joshu responded to the challenge by taking off his sandal and placing it on his head. Upon seeing Joshu's response, Nansen said, "'if you had been there, you would have saved the cat'" (qtd. in Spellmeyer, *Buddha at the Apocalypse* 86). Likening our environmental crisis to the cat, Spellmeyer maintains we are like the monks who are paralyzed and have no answer; however, Joshu's response demonstrates "any answer may have saved the cat"—"the most important thing was to try" (Spellmeyer, *Buddha at the Apocalypse* 86).[15]

Scranton, Spellmeyer, and Chödrön's sense of facing groundlessness bring to mind the film *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, in which Slavoj Žižek examines how several popular films reinforce prevailing cultural ideologies. When Žižek discusses the

[15] At the same time, however, Spellmeyer asks, "haven't our efforts to save the world actually pushed it to the very edge?" (*Buddha at the Apocalypse* 86).

notion of failure, he seems to evoke a Zen perspective. When considering the value of post-catastrophic films as well as the Mojave, California Airplane Graveyard, Žižek sits alone in an abandoned plane and asserts, "maybe something new only emerges through the failure" (*Pervert's Guide to Ideology*). Taking an aerial look at the devastating graveyard via Google Earth might suggest otherwise; however, Scranton, Spellmeyer, Chödrön, and Žižek call attention to fledgling knowledge. It appears that for them, catastrophe and creation are messily entangled.

Being-With: A Singularly Plural Existence

In the face of our dark times, unknown possibilities seem to have emerged from the "Welcome to Hell" G20 protests. The Gestalten 1000 art performance has called attention to an opening that began with a procession of zombies that walked, shuffled, and clawed toward a central square in Hamburg, Germany, whereupon, gathering in the square, they underwent a transformation. The transformation began with one figure, who, upon reaching the square, began rubbing his face and head. He then extended both arms in a tee and then began looking around in shock at the surrounding zombies. Turning away from the zombies, his torso writhed aggressively as he struggled to unbutton his jacket. Upon throwing his jacket to the ground, followed by his tie and vest, the figure finally revealed a bright blue t-shirt, which emerged from a grey, dusty cloud of clay.

He extended his arms in a victory stance, and then turned to a zombie lying on the ground. He touched her, helped her rise from the ground, held her hands, and extended them to touch his face. After she touched his face, they embraced, and she likewise took off her grey jacket, yet revealed a bright green t-shirt. Subsequent figures followed the

same affirmative sensory transformation of a new identity—soon, a purple t-shirt emerged, then turquoise, red, and soon the square billowed with a grey cloud of clay dust surrounding re-corporealized, colorful figures who began to scream, dance, laugh, and embrace each other in a colorful, Dionysian celebration. The figures began to literally and figuratively lighten up as they forged a new existence.

The performance seems to embody Spellmeyer's notion of Zen connectedness. When considering the joy of feeling connected to the world, Spellmeyer explains, "the boundaries between ourselves and others between mine and yours and even between the animate and inanimate, these are also merely fantasies" (*Buddha at the Apocalypse 65)*. To feel the joy of connection, "all we need to do is reconnect" (Spellmeyer, *Buddha at the Apocalypse* 76).[16] John D. Caputo suggests that Friedrich Nietzsche is "the great philosopher of the disaster" (*Against Ethics* 48). As such, Nietzsche's text *The Birth of Tragedy* is relevant to the celebratory connectedness of the Gestalten 1000 art performance as well. Nietzsche explains, "in spite of fear and compassion, we are the fortunate living beings, not as individuals, but as a *single* living being, with whose joy in creation we are fused" (*The Birth of Tragedy* 91). Spellmeyer and Nietzsche's notion of connection is a golden thread that characterizes fledging knowledge emerging from the ruins.

The 1000 Gestalten collective's performance brings to mind Spellmeyer's notion of connectivity when they claim, "another existence is possible and one is enough to start this change. The hotbed of the future is the scope between you and me" ("The

[16] The 1000 Gestalten celebration illustrates Henri Lefebvre's assessment that festivals "tightened social links" (qtd. in Merrifield 14).

Performance"). To break away from our shells, the hardened structures and hierarchies of neoliberal capitalism, the 1000 Gestalten collective maintains their performance symbolizes that "many people do not want to put up with the destructive impact of neoliberal capitalism any longer" ("1000 Gestalten at G20"). The collective continues, "what will save us in the end is not our account balance but someone who will offer their holding hand" ("1000 Gestalten at G20"). The notion of a holding hand might seem cliché and quaint; however, this simple act is far more threatening than one might think.

In his text *America At War with Itself*, critical pedagogue Henry Giroux can illuminate why the 1000 Gestalten performance of togetherness is so threatening. In this text, Giroux discusses America's shift toward abusive forms of political power and examines forms of social control. Neoliberal capitalism fosters isolationism as a form of social control. Giroux explains, "this neoliberal-driven culture of consumption, commerce, financialization, and self-interest also functions to depoliticize people by encouraging market-driven ideas of unrestrained individualism and self-reliance" (*America at War* 10). The 1000 Gestalten art performance of solidarity and the celebration of difference certainly threaten neoliberal capitalist strategies of isolation.

If capitalism shapes who we are, then we also have the capacity to forge epistemologies into new configurations. It is easy to turn to intellectual historian Michel Foucault whose theories about and interests in "practices of the self" provide new ways of thinking about subjectivity. Foucault explains, "from the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as

a work of art" ("On the Genealogy of Ethics" 262). Because our bodies and our environments are coextensive, we likewise have the capacity to create a better world.

If self and world fashioning seems like an aesthetic project, it is. As such, it makes sense to turn to aesthetic philosopher Jacques Rancière who argues in his text *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* that representative, ethical, and aesthetic regimes of art pervade our conceptual mappings of the world. Rancière argues that what is at stake when considering aesthetics is how "our world is given to perceiving itself and in which the powers that be assert their legitimacy" (15). In other words, how we perceive ourselves is implicated with our relationship to power—it becomes a matter of whether or not we want ourselves to be subject to destructive neoliberal capitalism. The 1000 Gestalten message of the transformative effects of "healthy relationships" and reimagining our agency likewise extends to the "Welcome to Hell" protesters who resisted "in a collective and self-empowered way" (1000 Gestalten "The Performance"; "Welcome to Hell! Call to Action").

This creative, collective action brewing amid the pink clouds from smoke bombs of the "Welcome to Hell" protests was similarly evident among the "over one million" protesters of the January 21, 2017 Women's March in Washington, D.C. who wore pink pussyhats (Stein, Hendrix, and Hauslohner).[17] At its core, the collective movement of the Pussyhat Project was about "meaningful, respectful connections" ("Pussyhat Project

[17] Identifying the connections among the different protests is not an attempt to reduce the uniqueness of their contexts or messages. As Giroux maintains, "struggles will only succeed if more progressives embrace an expansive understanding of politics, not fixating singularly on elections or any other issue but rather reemphasizing the connections among diverse social movements" (*America at War* 260).

Global"). Even consciousness-raising knitters nestled knitters' notes in the hats they made for anonymous marchers. In the notes, knitters discussed women's right issues of importance to them and some knitters even included their contact information. The pussyhat knitters reveal that writing is implicated in this fledgling knowledge that arises from creative connection. Writing has the capacity to become a way to connect with others and foster transformative, creative, and experiential spaces amidst everyday, systematic environmental catastrophes.[18] Writers and readers have the affective capacity to become co-creators of new ways of being and living. Despite the gravity forces of neoliberal capitalism, the 2017 Women's March demonstrates that women's bodies can still move—we can creatively reclaim our agency, and remember the power of collective resistance because capitalist culture is not static even though we may tell ourselves a different fiction.

Just as with the protests, a similar emphasis on connection and solidarity seems to have emerged from the writing instructors in the WPA-L community who responded to Duffy's inquiry about how to support faculty and students post election. To reiterate, many instructors responded with despair and yet several instructors expressed hopeful stances and stated that the conversation itself was supportive. Susan Miller-Cochran stated, for instance, "this conversation is needed by so many of us right now," and

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[18] When I address environmental catastrophe, I don't narrowly define or frame it as a stand-alone issue or as an empty backdrop to humans; it is entangled with social, economic, and political issues. Professor of Communication Studies at Northeastern University and Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Environmental Communication* Matthew C. Nisbet explains that framing climate change as more than a pollution problem affords a "broader climate movement that includes labor, business leaders, and the investor class" (qtd. in Montenegro).

Andrea Lunsford remarked the "conversation has helped [her] stay focused on what [she] can do in a positive way"—namely, spending "as much time as [she] can with students" ("Re: Trump"; "Re: Trump"). Robert Yagelski added, "being able to listen in to this conversation among such thoughtful colleagues from around the country has been comforting and enormously helpful" ("Re: Trump).

Aside from the conversation itself, writing instructors responded in kind regarding Duffy's inquiry about how to support faculty and students. In the vein of Scranton and Spellmeyer's askew sense of hope, the writing instructors began to consider new possibilities focusing on connecting with others. Elizabeth Kleinfeld, for example, was the first instructor to respond to Duffy—she stated that she would make a poster from a thirteen-line Instagram post and hang it outside her office door and the writing center she directs ("Re: Trump). The post essentially expresses solidarity with various identities such as women, refugees, LGBTQ, and veterans, and concludes with, "If you need me, I'll be with you. All I ask is that you be with me, too" (Marie). Lastly, Macauley's response of, "I am still fearful, but I am not fearful alone" illustrates the poster's message and the listerv's message of the importance of meaningful community to create collaborative strategies of living ("Re: Trump").

Emerging from Duffy's thread, a growing group of writing instructors began to shift from being politically disappointed to professionally motivated beginning with re-thinking their work in composition. Julie Nelson Christoph, for example, stated, "I'm already thinking about how to retool my fall first-year seminar course" and Winifred Wood wanted to "get down to business" ("Re: Trump"; "Re: Trump). Bronwyn T.

Williams referenced his writing center blog entry written partly for himself, his writing staff, and community, in which he rethinks the role of education in political discourse and the roles of educators in the writing center ("After the Election"). Williams suggests combining the re-examination of composition work and the practice of connection when he says, "we will continue to work toward writing that connects our minds and our shared humanity" ("After the Election").

Enhanced by political, economic, and environmental crises, the public discourse of the G20 protesters, Women's March, and WPA-L online community call attention to how writing and connection with others fosters new possibilities. Yagelski's (un)timely text *Writing as a Way of Being: Writing Instruction, Nonduality, and the Crisis of Sustainability* seems to have anticipated the important relationship between writing and connection that is so prevalent among various communities. Yagelski's central argument addresses how mainstream writing instruction is implicated in the crisis of sustainability. As such, Yagelski argues it is necessary to rethink our various writing pedagogies and understand that the crisis of sustainability is not just environmentally based—it is also ontologically based. The crisis of sustainability is rooted in Western Cartesian dualism, a limiting mindset, which fosters isolation from the world.

The project of Yagelski's text is to think of writing as "a way of being together in the world—as a way to understand ourselves and our connection to what is around us; in this formulation, we write *with* the text rather than to produce a text" (*Writing as a Way* 8). Yagelski's notion to "write *with*," is a "way of being together on the earth and a

vehicle for imagining and creating a just and sustainable future together" (Yagelski, *Writing as a Way* 8).

Writing and Apocalypse Entanglement

Yagelski maintains, "writing can be a means by which we imagine and create a better future together," and yet writing is implicated in our apocalyptic moment—just consider, for example, the aforementioned administration's authoritarian executive actions that not only serve neoliberal capitalism, but also aim to vengefully roll back countless Obama Administration policies affecting the public commons (xi). Writing is not only implicated, but has let us down— not even a letter to the U.S. Senate signed by four hundred and fifty former EPA employees, both Republican and Democratic alike, denouncing Trump's EPA chief nomination of Scott Pruitt could stop his confirmation. Maybe Scranton is right when he says, "we're fucked" (16). When Geoffrey Sirc published *English Composition as a Happening* in 2002, he seems to have anticipated our current predicament and his statements remain pertinent today. Sirc argues, "we don't really believe in the power of a composition to change the world" (*English Composition* 50). Sirc maintains writing is implicated in the ruins of neoliberal economics because the composition classroom serves foremost the capitalist needs of preparing a workforce (*English Composition* 48). Writing, writing instruction, and the everyday take on a paradoxical role insofar as they are implicated in the ruins of capitalism, and yet they can still re-imagine a different future.[19]

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[19] My claim regarding the paradoxical role of writing is consistent with Yagelski's insightful characterization of English education as "paradoxical normative-transformative" ("English Education" 298).

As the G20 Summit protests and WPA-L writing instructors suggest, something else can grow from the ruins of capitalism, even if, just now, we cannot reimagine. It already exists on what Carl Sagan calls our fragile, precious, "pale blue dot" "suspended in a sunbeam"; however, we do not yet have the affective capacity to experience it as long as neoliberal capitalism circumscribes our identities and experience of the world (6). Spellmeyer argues along similar lines when he says, "but what if paradise is already here, just not the form we were raised to expect?" (*Buddha at the Apocalypse* 75). John Cage's anecdote about a gardener who overlooked the beauty of what he had is particularly apt when considering Spellmeyer's point. Cage explains,

> George Mantor had an iris garden, which he improved each year by throwing out the commoner varieties. One day his attention was called to another very fine iris garden. Jealously he made some inquiries. The garden, it turned out, belonged to the man who collected his garbage. (qtd. in Sirc, *English as a Happening* 11)

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing argues along similar lines when she proposes rethinking the value of our surroundings in her text *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Tsing investigates how despite capitalist destruction, the matsutake mushroom thrives within overlooked, collaborative networks of multispecies landscapes. She suggests that "we might look around to notice this strange new world, and we might stretch our imaginations to grasp its contours" (3). If language/schooling shapes our identities and relationship with the world, then we can reimagine a sustainable future whereby writing has the capacity to forge a new

relationship with the everyday.[20] As Yagelski explains, "given the central role of writing in conveying the fundamental ontological and epistemological assumptions that form the basis for contemporary schooling, that project can usefully begin with writing instruction" (*Writing as a Way* 20).

[20] Compositionist James Berlin explains this assumption: "for social-epistemic rhetoric, the subject is itself a social construct that emerges through the linguistically-circumscribed interaction of the individual, the community, and the material world" (679). He does not reductively claim, "individuals never act with complete freedom"; however, "we are lodged within a hermeneutic circle, although not one that is impervious to change" (Berlin 679). Simply put, Berlin maintains we are in a loop whereby we create culture and culture creates us.

CHAPTER 2: WRITING (WITH) THE APOCALYPSE

> Then a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. Some evil spell had settled on the community: mysterious maladies swept the flocks of chickens; the cattle and sheep sickened and died. Everywhere was a shadow of death.
>
> —Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

> Do not look at the flash or the fireball—It can blind you.
>
> —Guam's Joint Information Center, "Fact Sheet: In Case of Emergency"

Just as Latourian litanies are a conspicuous hallmark of object-oriented theorists, it is impossible not to miss the many writing scholars in English Studies such as Derek Owens, Richard Miller, Kurt Spellmeyer, Robert Yagelski, Henry Giroux, Lynn Worsham, and Ann Cvetkovich who have either catalogued or described disaster after disaster in their scholarship. Perhaps some readers might dismiss their descriptions as alarmist, but to the careful eye, this apocalyptic trend signals a threat to maintaining business as usual. Although his book was published in 2001, compositionist Derek Owens' text *Composition and Sustainability: Teaching for a Threatened Generation* can explain the significance of this recent trend.

Because composition courses are inherently interdisciplinary, Owens argues compositionists can easily develop sustainability-based pedagogies. Specialized courses about Milton or macroeconomics already come with predetermined subjects; however, composition courses always address a variety of topics, so it is not out of place for an instructor to adopt a lens of sustainability. Taught with such a lens, composition can serve as a way for students to understand their "personal and academic needs" (Owens, *Composition and Sustainability* 6). For their personal needs, students can study how their environs have composed their identities (Owens, *Composition and Sustainability* 6).

With regard to the apocalyptic trend in composition scholarship, Owens explains that a number of titles across environmental fields contain "gloomy inventories of global bad news" that "attempt to grab one's attention and establish motive, justifying the inevitable sense of urgency running throughout the remaining argument"; nonetheless, Owens remarks these "preambles come across more as a requiem than as a call to action" (*Composition and Sustainability* 11). Perhaps risking a requiem himself, but more accurately going face to face with the disasters that compelled him to write his book, Owens compiles a list of his own of environmental crises in his appendix of "Bad News: A Compilation of Observations and Forecasts" (*Composition and Sustainability* 11, 165).

Owens remarks that knowing about such ecological crises cause him at times to have sleepless nights in which he worries about his son's monstrous future (*Composition and Sustainability* 9). Jacques Derrida maintains that the monster has no normative precedent, so the future is terrifying. As he explains, "a future that would not be monstrous would not be a future; it would already be a predictable, calculable, and programmable tomorrow" (Derrida 387). We have no familiar frames of intelligibility to think about current and impending ecological disasters—monsters haunt not only our future, but also inhabit our immediate present.

In this chapter, I take up compositionist Paul Lynch's notion of the apocalyptic turn and suggest that when compositionists confront global and daily disasters, they reach an impasse whereby they begin to question familiar disciplinary assumptions and pose inventive and creative ways to think about writing pedagogy and writing that emphasize the notion and practice of connecting to the everyday. Questioning the familiar is an

ethical response to the apocalypse; nonetheless, we will continue encountering disaster after disaster if we think that our habitual, familiar ways of thinking can fully account for the complexity of lived experience.

I initially discuss how a growing number of English studies scholars address gloomy inventories of various global and daily disasters in their scholarship. Miller and Spellmeyer describe global catastrophes whereas Yagelski discusses climate change on a personal level. Slavoj Žižek says the airpocalypse in China has become a prolonged event that has normalized terror. When unacceptable events such as the airpocalypse become normalized in culture, I argue that personal agency and democracy are at stake. Henry Giroux points out that in the U.S., totalitarianism has become normalized and has taken on a public form of pedagogy whereby terror and fear become infused with daily life. Such normalization of environmental and political crises dangerously chips away at agency and circumscribes how we experience the world.[21] Accordingly, I argue that these crises command pedagogues to re-examine the role of composition and its connection to the everyday.

When compositionists confront global and daily apocalypse, they reach an impasse whereby they begin to question familiar disciplinary assumptions that foster isolation from the everyday. Questioning the familiar is an ethical response to the apocalypse; nonetheless, I finally argue that we will continue to encounter disaster after

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[21] The nightmare of plastic, for instance, is so ubiquitous that it lines our lives and landscapes. Locals in Santa Fe, New Mexico claim that plastic bags should be the state flower because landscape cacti are covered in plastic bags (Carbone). Similarly, Christine Quinn, former speaker of the New York City Council states, "people joke that the New York City flower is a plastic bag stuck in a tree" (*Bag It: Is Your Life Too Plastic?*).

disaster if we think that our "stable frames of intelligibility" can fully account for lived experience (Worsham, "Composing (Identity)" 174).

Under Some Evil Spell: From Global to Everyday Terror

Cataloguing crises that mark the end of the world is not exclusive to Owens—as Paul Lynch points out, a noticeable number of writing scholars mark what he terms "an *apocalyptic* turn, in which the end of the world looms ever larger in our disciplinary and pedagogical imagination" (458). Such writers of the apocalyptic turn address and catalogue environmental, political, social, and economic crises in their scholarship; just consider, for example, Owens, Miller, Spellmeyer, and Yagelski, who point readers to unprecedented global problems. In his text "In the Coming Apocalypse," for example, Miller observes, "the most pressing problems of our time are all global in scope: in addition to the economic collapse, there is global climate change, the global 'war on terror,' the global energy crisis, and the ticking global population time bomb" (144). Spellmeyer echoes Miller's acknowledgement of the global scope of catastrophe and draws our attention to environmental crises in his texts *Arts of Living: Reinventing the Humanities for the Twenty-first Century* and *Buddha at the Apocalypse: Awakening from a Culture of Destruction*, which underscore the problems of global climate change and species extinction (*Buddha at the Apocalypse* xii, 3; *Arts of Living* 244).[22] Spellmeyer points out, "the next hundred years will probably see the greatest mass extinction since the dinosaurs. If the current trends continue, the polar bear, elephant, rhinoceros, and

[22] Spellmeyer's text *Arts of Living: Reinventing the Humanities for the Twenty-first Century* essentially argues for the humanities to end its culture wars and instead shift its focus to pressing political and environmental issues.

tiger will all be gone from the wild" (*Buddha at the Apocalypse* 3).[23] Spellmeyer suggests we have the time to rubberneck "a slow, steady, and irreparable deterioration of the natural order" (Spellmeyer, *Arts of Living* 244). With their haunting descriptions of global catastrophe, Miller and Spellmeyer share the company of other scholars such as Robert Yagelski and Slavoj Žižek.

Yagelski likewise points to climate change, but he frames it in a personal, localized context as opposed to a global and abstract description. Rhetorician Carl G. Herndl explains the problem of abstraction when he remarks that a challenge to sustainability involves its invisibility due to the concepts of time and space. Not only is it impossible to see the future, but the "consequences of action are often far removed in space" (Herndl xxiv). Yagelski's first-hand experience of hiking Gannett Peak in western Wyoming seems to collapse time and space and consequently render visible the invisibility of ecological disaster. Yagelski recalls, for example, that he saw "firsthand what seemed to be concrete evidence of the deeply troubling impact of climate change" (xii). Recalling his first hiking trip to Gannett Peak in 1999, Yagelski explains, "the mountainside was covered by what had always been a permanent snow field"; however, in a subsequent trip he took in 2002, he witnessed a bare and snowless mountainside (*Writing as a Way* xii). Furthermore, upon comparing his view of the peak to photographs in 1970s climbing guidebooks, Yagelski observes,

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[23] Spellmeyer's take is optimistic. In their recent study, scientists Gerardo Ceballos, Paul R. Ehrlich, and Rodolfo Dirzo illustrate, "dwindling population sizes and range shrinkages amount to a massive anthropogenic erosion of biodiversity and of the ecosystem services essential to civilization. This 'biological annihilation' underlines the seriousness for humanity of Earth's ongoing sixth mass extinction event" ("Biological Annihilation").

> where glacial ice had once been we saw huge, dry troughs of rock and dirt; the glaciers now began several hundred yards farther up the mountain than they did in the photos. To compare the glaciers in front of us to those in the old photos was to see a transformed landscape—and not for the better. (xii)

Yagelski is not alone in drawing attention to disturbingly changed landscapes—Žižek likewise writes about change, but in the form of the 2016 airpocalypse in China.

Normalized Terror

In major Chinese cities where half a billion people were affected, the dense smog of the airpocalypse forced thousands of financially secure people to escape into the blue-skied country. For those who could not afford to leave the smog-filled cities, Žižek likens their everyday to "life in a post-apocalyptic movie: people walking around with large gas masks in a smog where even nearby trees were invisible" ("Lessons"). Chinese authorities normalized the airpocalypse by establishing procedures whereby people did not need to think about changing their daily life—people could simply put on their gas masks and proceed as usual. Derrida's understanding of normalization is relevant in this context when he says, "however monstrous events or texts may be, from the moment they enter into culture, the movement of acculturation, precisely, of domestication, of normalization has already begun" (386). Nothing escapes normalization—even disaster.

Such normalization of catastrophe suggests that the apocalypse threatens one's agency to think critically and live otherwise— authorities, for example, evaded personal responsibility for the airpocalypse and considered re-categorizing the airpocalypse as "an act of nature" (Žižek "Lessons"). Normalizing catastrophe threatens agency and

preserves unsustainable thinking that created the airpocalypse in the first place. Critical pedagogue Henry Giroux asserts what is at stake is not only agency, but also democracy when we "surrender to the normalization of a dystopian vision" (*Dangerous Thinking* 25). He points to how agency and democracy are entwined when he comments, "there is more at work here than what might be called the atrophy of critical thought, self-reflection, and theory; there is also the degeneration of agency itself" (*Dangerous Thinking* 25).

Giroux asserts that in these dark, apocalyptic times, agency and democracy are at stake because America is under the threat of totalitarianism—and totalitarianism holds utmost contempt for environmental sustainability (*America at War* 259, 20). Totalitarianism rears its ugly head in the everyday fabric of American, market-driven, celebrity culture, which serves as "a form of public pedagogy central to creating a formative culture that views thinking as a nuisance at best, or at worst, as dangerous" (*America at War* 70). As such, totalitarianism becomes unrecognizable and repackaged as what is familiar and normal. Lynn Worsham echoes Giroux's assessment of totalitarian, formative culture when she remarks that American popular culture is "dominated by the military-entertainment complex," which disguises the presence of everyday trauma ("Composing (Identity)" 181). Worsham explains this repackaging when she says, "this economy ensures that the everyday realities of racism, sexism, and economic disenfranchisement—what [she] might call the 'macropolitics' of traumatic experience—go unrecognized for what they are" ("Composing (Identity)" 181).

When considering that disinformation machines seek to normalize totalitarianism in all its forms, Giroux suggests that agency is at risk because people can become ideologues and let abstractions do their thinking. Giroux defines disinformation machines as:

> a set of cultural apparatuses extending from schools and mainstream media to the new sites of screen culture, social media, and a public pedagogy that functions primarily to weaken the ability of individuals to think critically, imagine the unimaginable, and engage in thoughtful and critical dialogue. (*Dangerous Thinking* 74)

Disinformation machines seem to operate much like Louis Althusser's notion of the ideological state apparatus whereby interpellated bodies lack agency and become passive recipients inscribed by ideology.

Although Giroux maintains totalitarian, public culture threatens agency, Žižek turns this notion upside down and suggests that bodies *willingly* embrace ignorance and renormalize catastrophe—false consciousness does not exist. As Žižek remarks, the "direct will to ignorance" demonstrates that society willingly "become more blindered, rather than more focused on the crisis" ("Lessons"). Disinformation machines do not take away our agency—we become complicit agents of disaster, and proud of it. When considering both Giroux and Žižek's positions about agency, it is clear that neoliberal subjects can both lack agency and become complicit in the disaster—such is a recursive process and akin to James Berlin's notion of a "hermeneutic circle" (679).[24] Regardless

[24] I borrow the term "neoliberal subject" from Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber (59).

of Giroux and Žižek's positions regarding agency, both seem to agree that catastrophe exists as a part of everyday life. As the recent (August 12, 2017), violent events of the White Nationalist rally of Charlottesville, Virginia illustrate, "terror and fear are deliberately infused into everyday life" —unabashed and un-hooded (Giroux, *America At War* 15).

Everyday Trauma

Rather than grapple with the abstractions of time and space, the apocalypse has become ordinary and a part of the everyday. Upon pausing at a stoplight on the way to the local grocery store, for example, it is difficult not to miss broken, crooked bodies holding "half-written signs of personal/public disasters. The daily sightings of the homeless haunt the solidity of things with the shock of something awful" (Stewart 60). In response to a muffled "God bless," the disguised request for money, the actions of either rolling up a car window and averting eye contact or shaking one's head side to side with a guilty "no" does not end the interaction—the disaster lingers.

In her text *Ordinary Affects*, which calls attention to the affective dimensions of everyday life in a series of vignettes, affect theorist and anthropologist Kathleen Stewart points to Columbine in her vignette "Teenagers Who Kill." She concludes that we look for causes and lessons learned regarding the disasters of the everyday in an attempt to make sense of senselessness. Stewart points out, however, "these stories don't end in a moral but are left to resonate with all the other ways that intensities rise out of the ordinary and then linger, unresolved, until memory dims or some new eruption catches our attention" (74). Stewart explains that these events merely point to the "more ordinary

disturbances of everyday life" whereby we are left with lingering, unresolved, daily trauma (74). Even though we might attempt to create a narrative to make sense of these senseless acts, the rhetoric of disaster resists any meaning.

Not unlike Stewart's position, Michael Bernard-Donals suggests in his text "The Rhetoric of Disaster and the Imperative of Writing" that the disaster displaces any intelligibility or points of reference. Bernard-Donals turns to Maurice Blanchot who explains that the disaster is "'the limit to writing,' a limit that 'de-scribes,' or unwrites the object of writing" (qtd. in Bernard-Donals 73). Focusing on the Shoah as the disaster, Bernard-Donals maintains the rhetoric of disaster is troubling because we have no frames of intelligibility to understand it.[25] Donals points out that even witnesses of the Shoah displace the event in their narrative accounts (84). In a similar vein as Stewart who remarks that our disasters hold no meaning, Bernard-Donals says, "a rhetoric of disaster suggests that writing works against knowledge at the same time it tries to inscribe it. For us and for our students, who were not there, we can't possibly write into knowledge an event to which we have no access or experience, let alone understand it well enough to connect it conceptually to other experiences to which we do have access" (91-2).

Recognizing the existence of everyday trauma, Lynn Worsham wants to do more than let the disaster linger; instead, she wants "to wrest meaning from senselessness" (Composing (Identity) 12). In her text "Composing (Identity) in a Posttraumatic Age," Worsham essentially argues that compositionists are implicated in a posttraumatic age.

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[25] The World Holocaust Remembrance Center Yad Vashem prefers using the term Shoah (destruction) over Holocaust (sacrifice) for the murder of European Jewry ("The Holocaust").

Trauma, she argues, "forms the most fundamental rhetorical situation in which we operate as scholars and teachers of composition" (Composing (Identity) 171). As such, compositionists must recognize how trauma complicates our familiar ways of thinking about personal writing. We live "in the overwhelming shadow cast by the unspeakable atrocities of war, genocide, mass murder, and terrorism" whereby global and personal catastrophe are entwined ("Composing (Identity) 170). Turning to social psychology to diagnose our apocalyptic age, Worsham asserts that the twenty-first century has produced a collective and individual mood of posttraumatic stress—trauma is the stuff of our everyday.

Ann Cvetkovich argues along the same lines about collective trauma in her text *Depression: A Public Feeling*. The central argument of her text traces how depression is a collective public feeling that constitutes the everyday lived experience of neoliberal capitalism (11, 157). Cvetkovich contends the violence of capitalist culture systematically produces depression (15, 5). For many people, "everyday life produces feelings of despair and anxiety, sometimes extreme, sometimes throbbing along at a low level, and hence barely discernible from *just the way things are* (Cvetkovich 14). Depression, Cvetkovich argues, is not an underlying medical condition—instead, it consists of "the affective dimensions of ordinary life in the present moment" (Cvetkovich 11). Even though capitalism systematically produces pervasive negative feelings, not all is lost. Bad feelings have the transformative capacity to become a source of power and resistance to open new possibilities.

Feeling bad offers individuals a potential source for political action (Cvetkovich 2). When Worsham and Cvetkovich depathologize negative feelings, they call attention to how larger and broader power structures cultivate and perpetuate trauma and depression. In other words, they make visible the capitalist structures that circumscribe how we feel. Cvetkovich implies that the general manifests in the particular (the everyday) when she says that her book attempts to explain "the relation between the macro and the micro and new forms of description that are more textured, more localized, and also less predictably forgone in their conclusions about our dire situation" (12).

It may appear that Cvetkovich is striking up a structural argument whereby agency is lost to larger social structures; however, she argues that ordinary bodies have the creative capacity to move and feel differently. In fact, among her goals is "to generate new ways of thinking about agency" (2). She suggests that subjectivity is always in process even though multiple cultural discourses attempt to control bodies. Stewart aptly characterizes agency along the same lines as Cvetkovich when she says, "agency can be strange, twisted, caught up in things, passive, or exhausted. Not the way we like to think about it. Not usually a simple projection toward a future" (86). When individuals recognize that larger social structures mediate their feelings, they can reclaim their agency and resist passivity. Cvetkovich advances an intervention of everyday resistance through feelings; such resistance, however, can only begin by reexamining habit—that which goes along silently.

From Apocalypse to Revaluation: An Impasse

Without a doubt, writers of the apocalyptic turn have confronted environmental, political, social, and economic crises in their texts. They explore not only global, but everyday trauma, which is becoming normalized. Such normalization of environmental and political crises dangerously chips away at agency and circumscribes how we experience the world. Accordingly, I argue that these crises command pedagogues to re-examine the role of composition and its connection to the everyday. Lynch puts it well when he says, "the apocalyptic turn raises fundamental questions about the focus and scope of our work: what, finally, can composition do to ameliorate these threats?" (458).

Trump's election seems to have brought some compositionists to an impasse whereby they began to question not only what to do, but what does composition do? When Duffy turned to members of the WPA-L listserv for advice regarding how to support faculty and students post election, for example, compositionists offered immediate advice, which centered on solidarity. Some compositionists, however, were at an impasse and did not rush to any answers. Inoue and Miller-Cochran, for instance, did not immediately jump to any conclusions, but suggested the need for the time to process the election results and mourn. Inoue stated, "I haven't had the presence of mind to figure out what to do. I've been trying to tend to me. You all have helped me" ("Re: Trump").

The notion of an impasse might suggest a dead-end; however, affect theorists Lauren Berlant and Cvetkovich turn this idea on its head. They might suggest that Inoue and Miller-Cochran's moment of uncertainty points to what Berlant terms "temporary housing"— "a holding station that doesn't hold but opens out into anxiety, that dog-

paddling around a space whose contours remain obscure" (Berlant 5, 434). For Berlant, an impasse

> is a stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things, maintain one's sea legs. (5)

Simply put, Berlant suggests that an impasse commands slowing down time to reflect on the groundless present. As Judith Butler remarks, it is necessary to "live in the anxiety of that questioning without closing down too quickly"; "anxiety accompanies something like the witnessing of new possibilities" (qtd. in Olson and Worsham 728). Cvetkovich echoes the importance of focusing on the moment and not rushing into action or critique when she says it is "important to let depression linger, to explore the feeling of remaining or resting in sadness without insisting that it be transformed or reconceived" (20, 14). What Caputo observes of deconstruction holds accurate for the notion of living with the difficulty and anxiety of an impasse. Caputo explains,

> deconstruction does not put up a stop sign that brings action to a halt, to the full stop of indecision; rather, it installs a flashing yellow light, warning drivers who must in any case get where they are going to proceed with caution, for the way is not safe. Undecidability does not detract from the urgency of decision; it simply underlines the difficulty. (4)

Berlant and Cvetkovich are not alone in their similar characterization of the impasse and its focus on the present—Spellmeyer likewise discusses the notion of

impasse in such terms. Spellmeyer explains, for example, "when we stay with our uncertainty long enough, we stop counting on a better tomorrow. What we gain is a chance to inhabit this 'now' in a profoundly different way" (*Buddha at the Apocalypse* 11). Furthermore, Spellmeyer explains, when we cannot be present, "it's because we don't know how to extricate ourselves from our dreams about a better future world" (*Buddha at the Apocalypse* 148). In other words, when we place our hopes in certainties and the future, we deprecate the present and substitute it with abstractions.

If we rush to an answer, we might rush to a space of cruel optimism, which not only strikes up affective structures that sustain our fantasy but also becomes doubly cruel insofar as we become content with the fantasy even though the situation might be threatening (Berlant 2).[26] Not unlike Berlant's sense of cruel optimism, Spellmeyer's assessment of apocalyptic thinking demonstrates how "some of us may dream of a utopia and some may be waiting for the trumpets of doom—but […] both these illusions might do violence to the world as it is here and now" (*Buddha at the Apocalypse* 4).

Cvetkovich, Berlant, Butler, and Spellmeyer are not alone in recognizing the importance of impasse—Bernard-Donals likewise recognizes its relationship to the rhetoric of disaster. Bernard-Donals explains that writing about the disaster presents an impasse because the disaster has no forms of intelligibility. He explains that when students attempt to write about the Shoah by connecting it to their personal lives, they produce universal knowledge despite the incommensurability of experience and

[26] The notion of cruel optimism contrasts with cynical reasoning where for, the latter, one *knows* the futility of the situation, but continues to act as though nothing is wrong.

understanding.[27] Students should defer making sense of the event and instructors must "make it clear to students that even the best writing produces impasses as much as it produces insights" (88). The best that instructors can hope is for students to "produce writing that makes clear the gap or impasse between the representation and represented, and see their response to such incongruities as the site of knowing and teaching that keeps horror itself recognizable" (Bernard-Donals 88). Cvetkovich, Berlant, and Bernard-Donals demonstrate that the notion and practice of an impasse becomes a moment whereby one does not rush to meta-commentary, but recognizes the importance of letting the disaster linger.

The political apocalypse of the election certainly did not open the WPA-L listserv to cruel optimism or universalizing moves—in fact, it opened Duffy's thread to another level of questioning that led to an impasse. This time, questioning shifted to the heart of composition work. Gerald Nelms contributed to Duffy's inquiry by recounting his experience with a Hillary Clinton campaigner who visited his house. The campaigner told Nelms that she was initially a Republican, but after visiting Clinton's website and afterwards researching Clinton's politics, the campaigner changed her political affiliation. Nelms expressed that he wished he had the campaigner as a student in his classes because she exhibited "a genuine emotional commitment based on research, analysis, and sound

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[27] Although Bernard-Donals is critical of students' logic of identity, Barbara Schneider remarks that *instructors* must bear responsibility for such moves. Schneider maintains, "if our students' readings of these texts are naïve because they are, at base, narcissistic, we have to look to our own practices for at least some of the responsibility. In our attempt to build common ground through common texts, we very often end up collapsing important and productive differences" (924).

inference and reasoning" ("Re: Trump"). Nelms stated that after such wishful thinking, he became depressed and asked,

> what am I doing to educate the students I have to become students like her? And that got me thinking, forgive me, what are any of us doing? What is the whole educational system doing? We have failed miserably to educate an electorate in the thinking skills needed to sustain our democracy. ("Re: Trump")

Nelms continued, "if college-educated voters ended up being crucial to Donald Trump's success in the election […] does not some of the responsibility for the election of Trump lie with higher education?" ("Re: Trump). Keith Rhodes seemed to think so when he stated, "the astonishing hubris of even imagining that we were teaching cultural critique has blown up in our faces" ("Re: The Way Forward"). Not unlike Yagelski when he argues, "writing both shapes and reflects our sense of who we are in relation to the world around us," Nelms and Rhodes suggest that writing is an ontological act (*Writing as a Way* 3). Nelms and Rhodes interrogate and conceptualize pedagogy to account for the everyday.

Isolation From Everyday

The intersections of an impasse, pedagogy, and the everyday are not new—in fact, Spellmeyer recounts such an example regarding discussions based on the "Qualls Report," post 9/11, at Rutgers University. Barry Qualls, who was Rutgers English department chair at the time, directed a committee that maintained students were graduating "without an adequate understanding of their society, their world, and their times" (242). Accordingly, the committee began discussions to explore what was

essential for students at Rutgers University to know. The committee could not agree upon what counted as essential cultural literacy. Finally, "after many fruitless hours stuck at this impasse," the committee shifted from thinking about static knowledge, to thinking about what kind of problems students would face in life—not as "doctors or lawyers or Indian chiefs, but as ordinary citizens" (Spellmeyer, *Arts of Living* 242). This shift from E.D. Hirsch-type, conservative, cultural literacy to thinking about the everyday and the ordinary is profound because "teaching has lost its value precisely because the humanities no longer see their fate as linked to the future lives of ordinary citizens" (Spellmeyer, *Arts of Living* 245).

In this context of English studies, teaching seems to have turned its back on the everyday. Worsham says that the primary purpose of composition should be "to compose a life" and yet as Miller notes, "schools currently provide extensive training in the fact that worlds end; what is missing is training in how to bring better worlds into being" ("Composing (Identity) 172). Spellmeyer notes it is "the sheerest superstition" to think that a brush with Plato, historiography, Shakespeare or the New York Fluxus artists will help students "make better decisions" and improve the world (*Arts of Living 244*). Not only could this be superstition, but as Miller notes about the humanities in general, perhaps a "labored way of passing time" (*Writing at the End* 6).

Rather than being in touch with the everyday, Spellmeyer and Owens maintain English departments are isolated from the community. For Spellmeyer, English departments do not measure their "success according to [their] impact on the surrounding community, or by assessing the circulation of [their] written output in some larger public

sphere. The results would be too depressing" (*Arts of Living* 18). Owens goes so far to argue the most "radical decision" educators can make "both pedagogically and artistically, is to remain convinced that they and their students can literally reconstruct their local worlds for the better" (*Composition and Sustainability* 19). Owens explains his discontent with the disconnection of English studies when he says,

> To be sure—and this will probably sound irresponsible to more than a few readers—there are days when I think that introductory courses in biointensive gardening, permaculture, off-grid living, and techniques for community networking would be a far more effective use of time than the majority of core college courses currently being taught, including those in English Departments. (18)

In addition to isolation from the everyday, Owens points out repeatedly that curricula and courses are monocultures that lack cross-pollination (*Composition and Sustainability* 141). Owens insightfully observes, it is "necessary to think like bees" and strive for synthetic thinking whereby "we can make connections transcending disciplinary borders" (*Composition and Sustainability* 141, xv). Not unlike Owens, Sirc points out, "strict boundaries have become maintained in Composition, a separation of (profession-oriented) academy and life, one discipline from another, the specific discourse from a broader lived reality" (*English as a Happening* 9). Isolationism—whether from the everyday or among disciplines only fosters crisis after crisis at all levels. Just consider, for example, global responses to Trump's "sovereignty" expressed

at least twenty-one times during his debut speech to the United Nations in which he provoked North Korea.

Nelms, Rhodes, Spellmeyer, Miller, Worsham, and Owens acknowledge that instructors take part in shaping students and understand the capacity of writing for positive transformation. They recognize, however, that the project for human flourishing is impossible if the humanities and composition are taught in isolation from the everyday. Yagelski theorizes that the culprit for this isolation is Cartesian thinking, which is like "Poe's purloined letter: hiding in plain sight and obscured by its ordinariness" (*Writing as a Way* 44).

Cartesian Thinking and Ontology

In his book *Writing as a Way of Being: Writing Instruction, Nonduality, and the Crisis of Sustainability*, Yagelski argues that mainstream writing instruction is implicated in the crisis of sustainability. Our ecological crisis is environmentally and ontologically based. The crisis of sustainability is rooted in the social problem of how we understand ourselves in the world, which is based on the Western tradition of Cartesian thinking. Descartes' famous phrase, "I think; therefore I am" represents the fiction of an autonomous self, which exists separately from the world. In contrast to Descartes, Jean-Luc Nancy points out "*ego sum = ego cum*" in his book *Being Singular Plural*, which theorizes that being is not singular, but plural (*Being Singular Plural* 31). As Nancy explains, "the truth of the *ego sum* is the *nos sumus*; this 'we' announces itself through humanity for all the beings 'we' are with, for the existence in the sense of being-essentially-with, as a Being whose essence is the with" (*Being Singular Plural* 33).

Despite the simplicity and necessity of Nancy's notion and practice of *ego cum*, English studies continue to foster isolation in the world.

Three assumptions regarding the self, knowledge, and language underpin Cartesian thinking. For one, Cartesian thinking assumes the writer's sense of self as an isolated, autonomous, thinking being that "exists separately from the earth" (Yagelski, *Writing as a Way* xiii). Even the notion of a community becomes "a collection of discrete, autonomous individuals rather than a complex network of beings who are inherently connected" (*Writing as a Way* 17). Secondly, knowledge becomes a "function of reality that is external" from us (*Writing as a Way* 47). Finally, language is simply a conduit for thought.

Although Descartes aimed to liberate reason from religious dogma in his *Meditations*, he ended up drawing a stake between himself and the world. Descartes became an isolated self who viewed reality as existing separately from himself. Orr explains Cartesian philosophy well when he says Descartes "separated man from nature, stripped all intrinsic value from nature, and then proceeded to divide mind and body" ("The Problem of Education" 234). This separation becomes clear when Descartes denounces the senses as a hindrance to disembodied universal truths:

> I will now shut my eyes, stop my ears, and withdraw all my senses. I will eliminate from my thoughts all images of bodily things, or rather, since this is hardly possible, I will regard all such images as vacuous, false and worthless. I will converse with myself and scrutinize myself more deeply and in this way I

> will attempt to achieve, little by little, a more intimate knowledge of myself. I am a thing that thinks. (24)

Clearly, as a thinking thing, Descartes privileges the mind over the body and isolates himself from the world (Miller *Writing at the End* 19). Disconnected from the sensuous world, he has wandered "off into the dreamy world of argumentation" and is more alone in the world than when he began his meditations (Miller, *Writing at the End* 19). Although it might be easy to dismiss Descartes, Cartesian thinking is omnipresent in our typical characterizations of the environment. As Owens remarks, "clearly we need to pay more attention to how external or 'outside' conditions are never really completely outside us at all, but inextricably woven into our own health and behavior" (*Composition and Sustainability* 8).

Turning to the final tenet, Yagelski explains the Cartesian mindset views language as a vehicle for thought, which reinforces the positivist notion that knowledge exists apart from the knower. This idea of language as a conduit strikes up the form vs. content binary in writing pedagogy, which separates writing skills from being a "knowledge making" technology (Yagelski, *Writing as a Way* 20). This conceptualization reduces writing as simply a technical matter and overlooks how writers can learn from writing rather than learn to write (Yagelski, *Writing as a Way* 145). The focus on formalism slips into prescriptive, skills-based curricula that prepare students to be good consumers yet estranged workers (Giroux, "Attack on Higher Education 13). Not only do writers become estranged, but also the concept of audience becomes a "construct, not as lived" (Sirc, *English as a* Happening 10).

Rather than view writing as mere convention, Worsham and Cynthia Haynes propose writing as a way to question habit. Worsham explains, for example,

> our emphasis should shift from the notion of writing as a mode of learning to that of writing as a strategy, without tactics or techniques, whose progress yields "unlearning." This result does not mean that writing produces ignorance; rather, it produces a sense of defamiliarization vis-à-vis unquestioned forms of knowledge. ("Writing Against Writing" 101-2)

Haynes likewise rejects reducing writing to a matter of technique when she says, "we know (don't we?) that writing should be strange, that we should feel alienated, removed, and detached from our *standard* habits of reading and thinking" (64). Yagelski, Sirc, Worsham, and Haynes point out that teaching writing as mere technique only reifies habit and forecloses the possibilities of writing as a technology for producing new ways of thinking and being. As Yagelski points out, writing can paradoxically take on a normative rather than transformative role ("English Education" 298).

Dis-Astrum: Losing One's Star

In her text *The Homesick Phone Book: Addressing Rhetorics in the Age of Perpetual Conflict*, Haynes draws attention to the normative role of writing when she discusses the problem of pedagogies rooted in what she terms "*ground* metaphysics" (63).[28] Haynes suggests that we must abandon the fiction that pedagogies rooted in ground metaphysics can make any sense of these traumatic times. Pointing to 9/11,

[28] I draw the following discussion from Haynes' chapter 2, "Writing Offshore (Heidegger's Hütte, Todtnauberg, Germany)." This chapter is waterlogged with conspicuous metaphors drawn from her experience of travelling into the Arctic Sea in a small boat.

refugee camps and more, Haynes admits that she is dissatisfied with teaching argumentative writing as reason "when *so much defies reason*" (62). Indeed, moment-to-moment, the everyday defies rationality—just as I write this sentence, for example, the top story in Google news is "North Korea Accused Trump of Declaring War" (Cohen).

To understand Haynes' sense of ground metaphysics, it is important to flesh out metaphysics and its relationship to writing. Metaphysics is a system of thinking that searches for foundations that are universal, presupposed, and unchanging. In such a light, viewing writing as mere technique is a form of metaphysics that strikes up any number of reductive dichotomies such as good/bad, neat/sloppy, active/passive, strong/weak, organized/disorganized, coherent/incoherent, concrete/abstract, developed/undeveloped, brief/lengthy, and clear/unclear. Upon opening the covers of most composition books, it is easy to find commonplace concepts such as organization, development, coherence, clarity, concrete language, and the active voice. Although it might seem simple to understand how uncontested technical aspects of writing can come across as grounded in metaphysics, Haynes takes a controversial step. Conflating reason, argumentative writing, and critical thinking as the unquestioned bedrock in the field of composition and rhetoric, Haynes argues that, together, they form the cornerstones of ground metaphysics.

Rather than remain grounded in argument, Haynes draws upon the guiding metaphor of the sea (Haynes 104). She argues, "composition and rhetoric must relinquish its role in teaching students to rest rather than dance, to reason rather than detach, to face the eroding coastline of ground metaphysics rather than the open sea" (74). Spellmeyer argues that words and ideas are not our only ways of navigating the world. Not unlike

Haynes when he discusses how to become connected with the world, Spellmeyer explains, "instead of looking nervously to the sun and stars, or to the buoys as they float away, we can depend on the sea itself" (*Buddha at the Apocalypse* 79).

Haynes' perspective might seem tantamount to discursive swashbuckling, because once we cast off ground metaphysics, the risk of disaster awaits. Residing in ambiguity, dancing, detaching, and disrupting might ring empty if one is awake enough to feel—to feel the despair of living. As Caputo notes, "life is a disaster" and "to suffer a disaster is to lose one's star (*dis-astrum*), to be cut loose from one's lucky or guiding light" (6). Contrary to just being concerned with discursive daring, however, Haynes suggests turning away from argumentation and critique because they are antithetical to the everyday.

The everyday is unpredictable and complex, perspectives are irreducible, and rushing to a settled, definitive truth is impossible.[29] Stewart characterizes the complexity of the everyday when she says, "the ordinary is a shifting assemblage of practices" and "ordinary affects are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give the everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergencies" (2). Indeed, Spellmeyer points out how:

> our differing perceptions don't have to agree. In the early morning mist a tree might look blue. At noon it could be a radiant green. As the sun sets it might turn

[29] Upon writing this sentence, I recall how a couple of my favorite poems, Alfred Tennyson's "Flower in the Crannied Wall" and Pablo Neruda's "Ode to Salt," point to how the simplest things are complicated. Perhaps not as ubiquitous as Tennyson's, but just as equally compelling, consider Neruda's following lines: "the least/ wave/ of the saltshaker/ teaches us/ not merely domestic purity/ but also the essential flavor of the infinite" (*Pablo Neruda: All the Odes* 580).

> deep brown. Instead of selecting only one account as true, we can see each of them as moments in time. (Spellmeyer, *Buddha at the Apocalypse* 96-7)

Ordinary affects rebuke enclosure and are "committed not to the demystification and uncovered truths that support a well-known picture of the world, but rather to speculation, curiosity" (Stewart 1).

For Haynes, critique and argument foreclose creativity, curiosity, exploration, and eventually reside in a definitive, settled position (Haynes 106). Not unlike Haynes, when he discusses creativity, Miller suggests a "tolerance for ambiguity, as cultivating informed curiosity, as encouraging connective thinking about multivariate real-world problems" ("The Coming Apocalypse" 150). Accordingly, he is "more interested in creative thought than in critical thinking" (Miller, "The Coming Apocalypse" 148). Drawing upon Zen, Spellmeyer maintains that rushing to a solution is impossible because "behind every veil there will be another one—yet another image that our conscious minds make up to deal with the complexity. Veil will follow veil ad infinitum, and no resolution can ever be reached, not even if the universe itself should end" (*Buddha at the Apocalypse* 117). Rather than search for resolution, Spellmeyer explains that it is important to understand where our revelations are coming from. Unlike the West's guiding story of the Apocalypse in which there is a "clear-cut resolution" and "one conclusion," our story ends "*inconclusively*" (Spellmeyer, *Buddha at the Apocalypse* 10, 13).

Lynch maintains critical thinking and some forms of critical pedagogy function on revelatory logic and expose the hidden truth behind the shadows (459). The world

apocalypse means "revelation" or a "lifting of the veil"—as such, critique operates on apocalyptic logic, which rests on the "critical logic of ultimate revelation" (Lynch 459, 469). When Lynch says that the writers of the apocalyptic turn "ultimately suggest a turn away from critique," I think he is insightfully touching upon how apocalyptic writers seek *a greater connection with the everyday*. As Lynch remarks, "in the apocalyptic turn, contemplation, connection, and cultivation supersede critique as the discipline's central values" (464).

Yagelski, Worsham, Haynes, Spellmeyer, Miller, and Stewart are critical of pedagogies that foreclose possibilities of sense and meaning. They reject reductive, formalist composition pedagogy that is rooted in what Yagelski terms Cartesian thinking and what Haynes calls grounded metaphysics. Instead of seeking a pedagogy grounded in transcendental truths, these writers acknowledge the complexity of the everyday—a complex everyday that rebukes enclosure and simple solutions. Lynch argues that writers of the apocalyptic turn such as Miller, Spellmeyer, and Owens "ultimately suggest a turn away from critique"—this is accurate when critique slips into a form that limits the everyday.

Counterargument

A turn away from critique might seem counterintuitive on various levels. Critique is a cornerstone of composition and rhetoric because it is socially transformative and fosters democracy. For Butler, critique is "really about opening up the possibility of questioning what our assumptions are" (qtd. in Olson and Worsham). Such questioning never ends—as Foucault points out, for example, "the work of profound transformation

can only be done in an atmosphere which is free and always agitated by permanent criticism" (qtd. in McKerrow 484). Furthermore, contrary to Lynch's assertion, critique and various forms of critical pedagogy do not necessarily operate under the logic of ultimate revelation. Critical pedagogue Giroux, for example, acknowledges that theory can become weak and oppressive, but it also has the capacity to be "critical and subversive, always employing modes of self and social critique necessary to examine its own grounds and those poisonous fundamentalisms in the larger society haunting the body politic" (*Dangerous Thinking* 24). Considering Giroux's perspective, we should *always* question the grounds on which we speak because critique merely offers another perspective rather than reveals a transcendental truth. When Yagelski, Worsham, Haynes, Spellmeyer, Miller, and Stewart turn away from critique, they don't reject critique—instead, they suggest turning away from a particular, limited orientation toward the everyday.

Rita Felski's text *The Limits of Critique* likewise takes up a parallel argument regarding literary critique. Felski argues that literary scholars have settled into predictable modes of criticism that have become the norm. Critique becomes a matter of reproducing default interpretations that foreclose different possibilities of thinking, writing, and being. Despite the reproduction of the same, Felski maintains a pervasive attitude among scholars is that anything "*not* critical must therefore be *un*critical" (*Limits of Critique* 2).

Aside from limiting different approaches to literary studies, a "spirit of disenchantment" drives critique resulting in particular affective stances toward the world and texts. Predictable stances such as "vigilance, detachment, and wariness" snap into

place—in other words, a prevailing "rhetoric of againstness" becomes the norm (Felski, *Limits of Critique* 2, 3, 17). Such a mood fosters a particular orientation toward the world: "guardedness, irony rather than reverence, exposure rather than tact" (Felski, *Limits of Critique* 21). Rather than a "hermeneutics of trust, of restoration, of recollection," scholars instead opt for a negative disposition toward the world. Furthermore, such an orientation "calls into being" a particular world—in other words, our affective stances fashion the world (Felski, *Limits of Critique* 23).

In addition to critiquing the ethos of critique, Felski maintains critique cultivates affective distance with our texts. Rather than look behind texts for hidden truths, she suggests "we might place ourselves in front of the texts" and view texts as co-creators of meaning (*Limits of Critique* 12). In place of viewing texts as things subject to our disinterested gaze, she wants to rethink the literary value and vitality of a text without separating it from life.

Felski's position of affective distance is not unlike Giorgio Agamben's views regarding modern aesthetics in *The Man Without Content*. Agamben explains that for the man of taste, art becomes the occasion in which he can exercise critique. The spectator becomes concerned with a form of critique that carries habituated interpretations that we pass along as natural. The man of taste becomes "an evanescent ghost" that "takes him from the life tissue of society to the hyperborean no-man's land of aesthetics" (Agamben 16). Considering Felski's position that critique cuts texts from life along with Agamben's view that the critic becomes a ghost, it becomes easy to see how both man and art do "not need, substantially, any content" (Agamben 35). As such, this affective distance and loss

of vitality signals the loss of the world, or what Agamben would call the silent, opaque, shadowy space of "*terra aesthetica*" (56). Agamben's notion of aesthetic distance is not unlike Felski's understanding of how the affective distance of critique can separate texts from life.

Revolutionary Change

Thus far, I have argued that when compositionists confront global and daily crises, they reach an impasse whereby they begin to question familiar disciplinary assumptions that foster isolation from the everyday. Questioning the familiar is an ethical response to the apocalypse; nonetheless, I finally argue that we will continue to encounter disaster after disaster if we think that our "stable frames of intelligibility" can fully account for lived experience (Worsham, "Composing (Identity)" 174).

For Caputo, a deconstructive ethics necessarily exposes us to disaster when we lose our metaphysical anchors (5). Paradoxically, then, to face the disaster it is necessary to take on deconstructive ethics to question what passes along as familiar because "there's more hope in the world when we can question what is taken for granted" (Butler, qtd. in Olsen and Worsham "Changing the Subject" 731). Collectively, the writers of the apocalyptic turn question the usefulness of ground metaphysics along with Cartesian thinking (an aspect of metaphysics). Countering the gravity of metaphysics is no easy task—this is tantamount to revolutionary change. As Spellmeyer explains, "it's not about coal power plants or cars, the way we grow our feed or run the government. Instead, it's a problem with our total way of life—and it seems to call for nothing less than a truly revolutionary change" (*Buddha at the Apocalypse* 85).

Michael Bruner and Max Oelschlaeger point to systemic change in their landmark text "Rhetoric, Environmentalism, and Environmental Ethics" in which they propose a culturally transformative rhetoric of ecology. Bruner and Oelschlaeger argue that a rhetoric of ecology might draw upon culture-forming architectonic rhetoric to create "new symbols, myths, and metaphors" to influence new Western narratives (393). Their perspective seems naïvely optimistic considering that the prevailing Western narrative of apocalypse has "helped build a mental architecture that continues to shape modern life unconsciously" (Spellmeyer, *Buddha at the Apocalypse* xii 147). Bruner and Oelschlaeger suggest we can forge new stories in which cooperation and community supersede competition and individualism. Creating new stories to live by, however, may indeed be the problem. It might be time to pour water on our campfire stories.

MIT scientists Donella Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and Dennis L. Meadows advocate a sustainability revolution in their text *Limits to Growth*, which warns that limitless consumption and growth is leading toward environmental disaster. Meadows, Randers, and Meadows maintain that they have tried many tools to prompt change including "analysis, data gathering, systems thinking, [and] computer modeling" and yet these tools fell short. Eventually, they realized that "visioning, networking, truth-telling, learning, and loving" were promising, socially transformative tools; nonetheless, they were reluctant to share their unscientific findings to a cynical public (75).

For Meadows, Randers, and Meadows, the sustainability revolution will "arise from the visions, insights, experiments, and actions of billions of people. The burden of making it happen is not on the shoulders of any one person or group. No one will get the

credit, but everyone can contribute" (74). Particularly at a time when we think technological fundamentalism can steer us away from our headlong collision into global disaster, the notion and practice of connection can indeed be revolutionary. Caputo underscores this idea when he embraces a non-transcendental form of obligation:

> I have in mind instead a very earthbound signal, a superficial-horizontal communication between one human being and another, a certain line of force that runs along the surface upon which you and I stand: the obligation I have to you (and you to me, but this is different) and the both of "us" to "others." Even the notion of "others" must be spread out and disseminated, so as to include not only other human beings but what is other than human—animals, e.g., or other living things generally, and even the earth itself. (5)

For the writers of the apocalyptic turn, it is vital that we cast off the net of metaphysics and connect with one another, or at least recognize our entanglement with one another in creative ways—that we write with. Nancy's notion and practice of being singular plural is a productive way to re-conceive ontology—when we think "from the 'with' *as the proper essence of one whose Being is nothing other than with-one-another*" (*Being Singular Plural* 34). To protect our natural commons, Žižek says we must "impose universal solidarity and cooperation among all human communities" and cast off state sovereignty and capitalist expansionism ("Lessons").

If writing has the capacity to shape and reflect "who we are in relation to the world around us," then compositionists have the affective capacity and obligation to rethink pedagogies steeped in Cartesian thinking that merely fosters disconnection with

the world (Yagelski, *Writing as a Way* 3). Owens states, “perhaps the most radical decision that educators can make, then, both pedagogically and artistically, is to remain convinced that they and their students can literally reconstruct their local worlds for the better” (*Composition and Sustainability* 19). Sustained reconstruction might begin when we recognize the singular “I” has always been the plural “we.”

CHAPTER 3: WRITING THE EVERYDAY

> To fail to criticize everyday life today means accepting the prolongation of the present thoroughly rotten forms of culture and politics, forms whose extreme crisis is expressed in increasingly widespread political apathy and neoilliteracy.
>
> —Guy Debord, "Perspectives for Conscious Alterations in Everyday Live"

Following a meeting with military leaders, Trump told reporters during a photo op, "You guys know what this represents? Maybe it's the calm before the storm" (Johnson). A reporter willingly took the bait and asked, "what storm, Mr. President?" leaving Trump to expectedly reply, "you'll find out" (Johnson). Talking heads have puzzled over how to make sense of his senseless remark, especially in light of his Twitter provocations with North Korea, rebuke of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's efforts of diplomacy, and assertion that "only one thing will work" (@realDonaldTrump). Meanwhile, two U.S. B-1B bombers carried out missile drills and China's foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying called for easing escalating tensions over the "highly complex and severe" situation (Tan). Some commentators assert that Trump's cliffhanger comments are characteristic of a reality show, which leaves little doubt that when the U.S. government treats cultural anxiety about nuclear war as spectacle and entertainment, we live in what in other contexts Worsham and Giroux call "a culture dominated by the military-entertainment complex" (Worsham, "Composing (Identity)" 181; Giroux, *Dangerous Thinking* 75). The stakes are high with such a culture—if we are what we eat, we certainly have the capacity to become what we behold.

Affective Dimensions of Capitalism

In a topsy-turvy political moment when the U.S. president undermines diplomacy in favor of nuclear war and burdens the public with his insecure, bellicose tweets rather

than take the necessary time for democratic discussion and debate, it is not surprising when trauma and depression become the stuff of the everyday. Capitalism breeds a culture of individualism and depression, which Cvetkovich characterizes not as a medical condition, but as the "loss of connection—to the body, to a meaningful sense of work, to relations with others" (192-3). These affective dimensions of capitalism prevent any collective action for social change in these perilous times. As such, not only is personal agency at stake, but also social hope.

Giroux asserts that when individuals are concerned merely with economic survival, they are unable to connect their personal struggles to larger public struggles (*Dangerous Thinking* 35, 21). As a result, being detached from any concept of the common good, individuals must face an uncertain world alone (Giroux, *Dangerous Thinking* 35). Such isolation leaves little doubt why depression comprises the affective structures of neoliberal capitalism. Joining a long discussion thread on the WPA-L listserv regarding the economic hardships of adjunct instructors who are homeless and live in their cars, an adjunct instructor who went by the name Andy poignantly describes how such isolation feels: "With increasing debt loans and an inability to raise the family you already have, suicide is an option I think about. The emotional labor of comp is draining, and I fall into debt more and more each day, and there's no occupational payoff" (Cramer).

Miller asks "why bother with reading and writing when the world is so obviously going to hell?" (*Writing at the End* 16). This question is dead-on when considering that both students and writing teachers face unstable economic times. It is easy to slip into

cynicism and despair, and yet fragile hope exists. As Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross explain, "even at its most degraded, however, the everyday harbors the possibility of its own transformation" (78). For Kaplan and Ross, social change is like the purloined letter, which in its obviousness is tucked away in the ordinary—in the everyday (78). Social change resides:

> in the contradictions of lived experience, in the most banal and repetitive gestures of everyday life—the commute, the errand, the appointment. It is in the midst of the utterly ordinary, in the space where dominant relations of production are tirelessly and relentlessly reproduced. (Kaplan and Ross 78)

Kaplan and Ross' simple turn to the everyday may seem indifferent and even paradoxical; however, Cvetkovich, who herself has struggled with depression, underscores their position and explains that daily, ordinary activities are un-heroic, slow, "modest forms of transformation" (Cvetkovich 80). She was even unaware of the healing, transformative habits of everyday activities like adopting a cat, visiting the dentist, or writing (Cvetkovich 82, 192). The "utopia of ordinary habit" helped her realize that transformation is not revolutionary, but "a slow and painstaking process, open-ended and marked by struggle, not by magic bullet solutions or happy endings" (Cvetkovich 159, 80). Not unlike Cvetkovich's notion and practice of the utopia of ordinary habit, Kathleen Stewart explains that writing about ordinary affects "does not find magical closure or even seek it" (Cvetkovich 159; Stewart 5). For Cvetkovich, chronicling the "banal attention to detail" of her sensate self in relation to the world became a hopeful first step in countering her political depression and connecting with the world (80). Rather than

rush to reflection to unpack the meaning of her experiences, she instead described her sensations in vivid detail. This daily practice of writing helped her understand how the everyday affected her being (Cvetkovich 158). As Cvetkovich explains, "in crafting a life that moves with and through despair like swimming laps in a pool, I am learning to trust the knowledge that comes from salmon, river, tree, and heart" (73).

In this chapter, I question what would happen if compositionists would "elevate lived experience to the status of a critical concept—not merely in order to describe lived experience, but in order to change it?" (Kaplan and Ross 77). Conceived in this way, writing can be more than textual production; it can be a "transformative or creative act" (Kaplan and Ross 79). As such, writers might develop the affective capacity to recognize, express and resist the everyday feelings of capitalism—writers could compose better lives. Derek Owens calls this creative act "poesis," which is "the project of writing the world, again and again, from scratch, each time" ("Earthworm Hermeneutics" 11). Although Miller cynically asks why we should be concerned with writing if the world is going to hell, his critical optimism commands us to "look beyond the latest incarnation of the apocalypse to the creative work of rebuilding and reimagining that is ever present in the world" (*Writing at the End* xi).

In this chapter, I argue compositionists of the apocalyptic turn recognize the limitations of mainstream writing instruction, and in turn, advance and practice forms of pedagogy and inventive, reparative writing that help writers recognize and make sense of the complex feelings and tensions between their lived experience and larger social

structures. Such ways of thinking about writing point to how writers might reclaim agency and the possibility to compose better lives and communities.

I initially discuss how Spellmeyer, Miller, Owens, and Orr argue that the academy falls short in helping students think synthetically and make sense of their struggles with the everyday. In terms of writing pedagogy, although a turn toward personal narrative and memoir might serve as a productive way for students to make sense of their feelings and struggles with the complexities of the everyday, Worsham, Miller, and Yagelski argue that such reflexive forms of writing are not inherently curative and would slip into counterproductive, fetishized narratives.

This chapter argues that Yagelski (*Writing as a Way of Being: Writing Instruction, Nonduality, and the Crisis of Sustainability*) and Sullivan ("Composing Culture: A Place for the Personal") illustrate another dimension of writing—namely, writing the self and writing as a way of being. Writing has the capacity to generate self-understanding, intensify one's awareness of oneself and connection with others, and foster understanding of how cultural and social tropes can replace lived experience. Yagelksi and Sullivan widen what it means to write self-reflexively and point to the positive effects of what can happen if compositionists shift their attention from thinking about writing as textual production to the possibility of composing a better life.

Drawing upon Spellmeyer, I then argue that the humanities can draw upon its roots of creativity whereupon writers can compose better lives. I point to how Miller and Cvetkovich experiment with inventive forms of personal narrative that like the everyday, account for the complexity between affect and social structures. I then draw attention to

how Yagelski, Owens, Spellmeyer, and Cvetkovich argue that an awareness of our sensate self in relation to the world helps writers not only foster a connection with the everyday, but helps writers recognize limitations of the everyday to thus spur social change. Sensate awareness and curiosity call attention to how we can compose different lives.

Training in the World's End

Compositionists of the apocalyptic turn echo Cvetkovich and Giroux's assessment that we live in dark times. Spellmeyer, for example, remarks that our cultural problems are sweeping and complex and Worsham argues that trauma has become the rhetorical situation for compositionists because we live in "an especially catastrophic age characterized by unprecedented historical trauma that has produced a pervasive and generalized mood corresponding to posttraumatic stress disorder" (*Arts of Living* 246; "Composing (Identity)" 170). Accordingly, composition carries significant ethical import, which is "the effort to compose a life, a sense of identity, place, and purpose—in other words, the effort to wrest meaning from senselessness" (Worsham, "Composing (Identity)" 170). Worsham is not alone in such an ethical charge for compositionists—Spellmeyer and Miller similarly argue for pedagogies of responsibility. Spellmeyer argues that compositionists must help students make sense of a complex, "perpetually shifting real-world terrain" (*Arts of Living* 245). Likewise, Miller points to the necessity to teach students how to address "multivariate real-world problems ("The Coming Apocalypse" 150).

Despite the need for such training, however, Spellmeyer, Miller, Owens, and Orr argue that the academy falls short in helping students make sense of their struggles with the everyday. It is easy to agree with Giroux when he says individuals "are left to face alone a world of increasing precarity and uncertainty" (*Dangerous Thinking* 35). When considering that students take specialized courses across the university, for instance, Spellmeyer maintains, "the only coherence they can take away from their education is a coherence they have made for themselves" (*Arts of Living* 247).[30] Miller similarly argues, "schools currently provide extensive training in the fact that worlds end; what is missing is training in how to bring better worlds into being" (*Writing at the End* x). The coherence and training that Spellmeyer and Miller suggest is synthetic thinking, which Owens asserts is grossly missing from the academy—particularly in composition, although in its flexibility of classroom topics, is the most fecund for interdisciplinary thinking (*Composition and Sustainability*).

Orr similarly argues that to think synthetically is "increasingly rare" because "to see things in their wholeness is politically threatening"—just consider, for example, Rachel Carson who casts public doubt on the safety of profitable pesticides (*Hope Is an Imperative 253,* 254). Carson made visible the invisible threats of capitalism to public safety. Orr points to Carson's ability to ask an "ecolate question" when she inquired into the relationships among people, declining bird populations, and pesticides (*Hope Is an Imperative* 253). Others failed to ask this question because their myopic thinking

[30] Conversely, some themed programs may have the capacity to limit a student's creative ability to think synthetically and make meaning for him or herself. Moreover, such programs may push a particular view of the world while blotting out others.

prevented them from thinking about the complex relationships among birds, farms, farming practices, the food system, and natural systems (Orr, *Hope Is an Imperative* 253). Not only does the academy overlook the importance of synthetic thinking, which can offer ways to think about the effects of capitalism on the everyday, but also overlooks writing that "provides a therapeutic outlet for the author" (Miller, *Writing at the End* 42). Even as a cornerstone of the academy, argument and analysis fall short.

Spellmeyer, Miller, Haynes, and Orr assert argument and analysis limit possibilities of sense and meaning. Cynthia Haynes, for example, states argument consists of the predictable, "formulaic problem/solutions" format and Orr asserts analysis "goes limp before the mystery of creation" (Haynes 106; Orr, *Hope Is an Imperative* 228). Stewart points out feelings "are not the kind of analytic object that can be laid out on a single, static plane of analysis" (4). Similarly, Agamben explains, we cannot "behave unconsciously like a medical student who has studied anatomy only on corpses and who, faced with the pulsing organs of the patient, must mentally refer back to his dead anatomical model in order to orient himself" (43). If argument and analysis cannot account for the vitality of feelings, then personal writing might be a productive outlet. As Joseph Harris convincingly explains, the aims of expressivists Peter Elbow and Ken Macrorie "were aggressively and self-consciously political" in a dehumanizing culture (36).

Although a turn toward personal narrative and memoir might unintentionally serve as a productive way for students to make sense of their struggles with the everyday, Worsham, Miller, Patricia A. Sullivan, and Yagelski argue that such forms of reflexive

writing are not inherently curative and can become inadvertently counterproductive for writers. To make sense of our "terror in an overwhelming world," Worsham explains it is understandable that writers turn to personal narrative and pedagogies of self-disclosure because of their perceived curative power ("Composing (Identity)" 171). Miller notes, for example, memoir writers repeatedly return to scenes of violence and darkness to make sense of their experiences (*Writing at the End* 22). Nonetheless, Worsham and Miller argue that personal writing is not inherently reparative despite composition scholars who suggest the contrary (Worsham, "Composing (Identity)" 179-80). As Miller explains, "the genre of the memoir is no more likely to compel a writer to make peace with the past or to find some sense of connection with others" than are other forms of writing including the memo or policy statement (*Writing at the End* 25). Aside from not being intrinsically reparative, for writers who need a therapeutic outlet, Worsham argues that personal narrative could become counterproductive for writers when it slips into narrative fetishism.

Worsham argues compositionists might unintentionally invite students to fetishize narrative rather than engage in the difficult work of mourning. She argues that narrative fetishism may exacerbate the trauma of the writer. Narrative fetishism refers to when writers purge their writing of all traces of trauma and replace it with the pleasures of story telling. In contrast to narrative fetishism, Freud claims the work of mourning is difficult and requires "'working through,' of elaborating and integrating the reality of the traumatic event into consciousness" (Worsham, "Composing (Identity)" 178). Accordingly, when writers fetishize narrative, they protect their psyche and sidestep the

necessity for mourning insofar as the "*pleasure* of narrative" imposes "order, sequence, causality, coherence, and completion" (Worsham, "Composing (Identity)" 178). Worsham explains, once fetishized, "narrative serves as a symbolic strategy for undoing the need for mourning by simulating a condition of wholeness, often by locating the site or origin of trauma elsewhere" (Worsham, "Composing (Identity)" 178). For Worsham, narrative fetishism protects the psyche, avoids the difficult work of mourning, reproduces the textual moves of narrative, and displaces trauma. As such, narrative fetishism may be harmful to writers who seek the curative powers of writing. Furthermore, as Sullivan suggests in her article "Composing Culture: A Place for the Personal," such writing could leave biases against personal writing intact if student writing did not matter beyond the classroom (46).

Textual Production

Yagelski argues along similar lines when he asserts mainstream writing instruction is concerned with textual production over meaningful writing. For Yagelski, narrative should be about "writing *with* text rather than writing *the* text" (*Writing as a Way* 147). In other words, it is a matter of "learning from writing rather than learning to write" (*Writing as a Way* 145). Although he does not mention narrative fetishism, Yagelski's discussion of writing as textual production suggests Worsham's assertion that personal narrative can impose coherence to fulfill textual and cultural expectations. When writers focus on meeting expectations, Yagelski points out personal narrative can become devoid of the experience it is purportedly about. Not only can writers displace their

trauma, but can even lose all sight of the experience itself. As such, writers simply use the occasion to replicate prevailing cultural tropes and narratives.

Yagelski discusses the limitations of personal narrative as a form of textual production in his insightful case study of a student named Chelsea who enrolled in his teaching writing seminar. For an assignment in which students had to write about something meaningful to them, Chelsea chose to write about the painful divorce of her parents who had been married for many years. Similar to the moves of narrative fetishism that Worsham describes, Yagelski explains Chelsea began to fit her experience into "a narrative format that is consistent with not only prevailing cultural values and myths but also with the technical expectations for narrative texts in general" (*Writing as a Way* 152). As a result of adopting the predictable moves of narrative fetishism, Chelsea wrote a predictable cultural narrative that superseded and erased her lived experience (Yagelski, *Writing as a Way* 150, 153). Her experience was lost to the negligence of writing as textual production and narrative fetishism.

Rather than value the text over Chelsea's experience, insofar as pointing out specific textual revisions that would have fulfilled the formulaic requirements of personal narrative, Yagelski and Chelsea instead discussed her writing about her parents' divorce several times. Through their collaborative inquiry, not only did Chelsea become aware of her unacknowledged, problematic feelings about her parents, but Yagelski likewise began to think about his own marriage (*Writing as a Way* 155). As Yagelski remarks, "I began to think in different ways about long-term marriages and the responsibilities such relationships place on each partner in terms of my own marriage. Both of us, I believe (I

hope), gained insight into ourselves and into complex aspects of human life" (*Writing as a Way* 155). Yagelski explains that he and his student discussed writing "as a means of reflection in the context of the challenges of living together in an uncertain world" (*Writing as a Way* 156). As such, Yagelski valued Chelsea's writing not as matter of textual production, or narrative fetishism, but as a way of connecting writing with how we experience ourselves in the world (*Writing as a Way* 157). As Yagelski insightfully argues, "if we value only the text, as mainstream writing instruction tends to do, then we devalue those insights and we teach students that it is the text, not the writing, that matters" (*Writing as Way* 160). We also teach students that their insights don't matter to us. As Sullivan argues, compositionists overlook "the everydayness" and lived experiences of student writing because "we regard students merely as learners, not as knowers who stand to persuade or educate us" (45). Just as Yagelski's experience prompts careful reconsideration of this commonplace assumption, so too does Sullivan's experience with one her students named Ellen.

Ellen's writing disrupted the field's "bifurcation of personal writing and academic discourse" on many levels (43). Sullivan asserts compositionists teach the personal essay because it affords writers authority, familiarity with the genre, an opportunity for reflection; however, Ellen dismissed it all (43). For one of Sullivan's response assignments, for example, Ellen rejected any personal reflection and relied on an impersonal writing style in which she was conspicuously absent from the writing. Despite her affectless response, Ellen explained that she hid behind her style because she did not want to revisit her traumatic past and current struggles with alcohol (Sullivan 43).

Even though Sullivan's case study may point to the limitations of reflexive writing, Sullivan maintains Ellen inadvertently undermined her argument against personal writing because she relies on the "intimate terms of lived experience" as supporting evidence (44). This example not only supports the merits of personal writing and illustrates how writers can protect themselves in more ways than just the pleasures of storytelling, but also points to how writing can intensify the consciousness of our experiences. Although Sullivan read Ellen's resistance as an argument for self-expression, I think Ellen's resistance also demonstrates an expression of self. Yagelski's experience of teaching writing to resistant inmates illustrates the subtle difference between self-expression and expression of self.

Writing as Expression of Self Being

In 1990, Yagelski taught basic writing to medium-security prison inmates (108). He assigned an essay that asked students to write a vivid description of a familiar place for someone unfamiliar with the place (*Writing as a Way* 108). Even though the writers had always completed their work, when Yagelski asked them to share their drafts one week later, many of them had uncharacteristically not completed their assignment. After asking why, he learned that he essentially asked his students "to experience their hated surroundings more intensely by writing about them" (*Writing as a Way* 109). Some students had even directed anger at him for assigning that particular assignment. Yagelski explains that they resisted because "as we write, we engage in a moment of intensive meaning-making related to the larger, ongoing process of making meaning of our experience of ourselves in the world" (*Writing as a Way* 115). Yagelski explains, "the act

of writing underscores—indeed, *enacts*—the deeper relationship between our consciousness and the world around us" ("A Thousand Writers Writing" 13). Conceived in this way, writing "becomes an expression of the self (as distinct from the common understanding of writing as self-expression), in a reciprocal relationship with the world, as the locus of meaning-making; it is an expression of the self *being*" (Yagelski, "A Thousand Writers Writing" 13).

Although Sullivan read Ellen's personal response as an argument for self-expression, when she studies personal narratives as a "form of cultural pedagogy," she views writing as expression of self (46). Sullivan maintains the predictable moves of personal narratives are not moves to dismiss unthoughtfully, but are worth studying. Even though personal narratives are told within predictable cultural frames, Sullivan explains "if we make these frames visible, we can gain an understanding of how social and cultural relations work to then construct what we take to be our 'selves'" (46). Sullivan takes up Giroux's assertion that "'educators need to analyze how ideologies are actually taken up in the voices and lived experiences of students'" (qtd. in Sullivan 54). Accordingly, in predictable narratives, Sullivan can insightfully detect a "profound question" hiding in a silence and tease out "larger cultural, psychological tensions" that go far beyond discussions of the self (47). Moreover, what Sullivan finds interesting in studying these "ordinary and banal writings as forms of cultural pedagogy is what students find significant enough in the everyday to write about" (46). After all, Sullivan argues, "our students are composing our culture; they are writing the stories that become

our lives; they are essaying the very ways meanings are born and given life in this world" (54).

Although Worsham, Miller, and Yagelski illustrate that reflexive writing is not inherently curative and can slip into narrative fetishism and textual production, Yagelski and Sullivan illustrate another dimension to writing—namely, writing the self and writing as a way of being. Yagelski and Sullivan point to how writing has the capacity to generate self-understanding; connect with others; intensify awareness of one's experience and understanding of how cultural and social relations can not only construct our selves, but also replace lived experiences with familiar and normative tropes, thus replacing difference with violence of the same. Yagelski and Sullivan widen what it means to write self-reflexively and point to the positive effects of what can happen if compositionists shift emphasis from thinking about writing as textual production to the possibility of composing a better life.

Arts of Living

Spellmeyer maintains the field of humanities has long neglected its roots in the "practice of art making" and knows "almost nothing yet about art as a way of being that allows our participation in the world's own creativity" (*Arts of Living* 172). Rather than engage in art-centered aesthetics, Spellmeyer wants to widen what it means to live an artful life. Writers have the capacity to imagine and compose different selves and lives—as Foucault explains, "we have to create ourselves as a work of art" (*Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism* 237). Foucault asserts,

> what strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is relegated only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life? (*Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism* 236)

Similarly, Cvetkovich explains that creativity is not exclusive to artists, but "is embedded in everyday life"—such creativity offers social hope in these dark times (21).

With his characteristic sense of "critical optimism," Miller asserts, "this is anything but an apocalyptic moment. It is a time that invites invention, creativity, improvisation, and experimentation" (*Writing at the End* 27; "The Coming Apocalypse 149). Spellmeyer likewise asserts, the "uniqueness of our time requires us to devise new understandings of ourselves and the world" (*Arts of Living* 246). Similarly, Cvetkovich hopes to "reinvigorate forms of humanities writing that are based in creative and speculative thinking and feeling" (26). She does not necessarily know what such "performative writing" might look like; however, she is driven by forms of writing that "offer alternatives to critique and new ways to describe feelings—or the intersections of mind and body that encompass not just more cognitive forms of emotion but the embodied senses" (24).

The move toward such inventive writing may signal yet another careerist and fashionable turn; however, far more is at stake for these writers and pedagogues of the apocalyptic turn. Social power, transformation, and solidarity come from the ability to act creatively and "recreate again and again" (Spellmeyer, *Arts of Living* 165). Such social

power is not the stuff of the latest super-hero movie because "in this fallen world, there are no stories of decisive victories; there is only movement toward and away from an ever-receding goal and the ceaseless—some might say mindless—work of building on the ruins of the past" (Miller, *Writing at the End* 84).

Experiential Writing

Despite the limitations of personal narrative and response, Yagelski and Sullivan illustrate these forms of writing can expose social structures at work in texts and help writers understand tensions between their feelings and larger social structures. Miller and Cvetkovich experiment with inventive forms of personal narrative that weave and blend these two tendencies of exposure and understanding. Miller and Cvetkovich seem to conceptualize writing in a way that calls attention to everyday life studies. Cultural studies theorist Ben Highmore, whose research expertise is in everyday life maintains everyday life studies "is situated *between* the kinds of attention that would focus *either* on subjective experience *or* on the institutional frames of cultural life" (31).[31] To me, Cvetkovich and Miller locate their writing in such an everyday space insofar as the tendencies of the personal and institutional have traces of one another. Their synthetic writing collapses the distinction between the tendencies, making it even difficult to distinguish the blended categories of personal and institutional.

In her book *Depression: A Public Feeling*, Cvetkovich argues that depression and political depression are not symptomatic of an underlying medical condition, but manifest how the everyday feels. To best describe her lived experience, Cvetkovich turns to the

[31] Ben Highmore's book *The Everyday Life Reader* is a collection of texts that take a cultural studies approach to everyday life.

genres of memoir and criticism. What results is a two-part narrative beginning with her memoir "The Depression Journals," which chronicle her daily activities and thoughts, followed by a set of critical essays that connect her personal struggles with larger social and cultural structures. Her book results in what she terms "a diptych, a narrative that uses two different strategies for writing about depression" to reflect upon which strategy was best suited for writing about depression (Cvetkovich 17). Alone, these genres were unsatisfactory for her project, and yet together they helped her explain how depression emerged from her daily life (17).

Instead of critiquing where memoir fails, Cvetkovich focused on memoir's value as an experimental forum, a methodology to explore her ideas, and a space to present her understanding of how depression emerged from the everyday (17). As a methodology, she could describe her everyday feelings of depression and explore the everyday, which forged new thoughts and ways of thinking for her critical essays (Cvetkovich 81). Even though Cvetkovich asserts she created a diptych, which suggests two separate genres, the journal entries and the critical essays contain traces of one another, in which the borders are porous and the frame bleeds into the everyday.

Although he does not write a diptych, Miller likewise attempts to collapse the unproductive debate between academic and personal writing in his book *Writing at the End of the World*. In chapter two "The Nervous System," Miller discusses and illustrates the tensions among the personal and academic with his poetry, reflections about his father's second suicide attempt, and critical discussions of what it means to be seen/unseen and heard/unheard. Mirroring the complexities and unexpectedness of

everyday lived experience, Miller performs the interplay between the personal and institutional. The result is an irregular textual weaving, where short, thin horizontal lines at the end of each section visually draw attention to the text's conceptual knots and entanglements. What comes to mind at times is Stewart's book *Ordinary Affects*, which she describes "is written as an assemblage of disparate scenes that pull the course of the book into a tangle of trajectories, connections, and disjunctures" (5). At times, for example, Miller's arguments may seem to navigate in one direction, but in an unexpected and perhaps mischievous and playful turn, readers then find themselves in new waters. In the beginning of the chapter, for example, Miller seems to initially pit lived experience against academic writing yet unexpectedly engages in the interplay between the two (31). Miller explains his moves:

> I want to explore the extent to which it is possible to escape the confines of this debate in order to see if its polarized positions can, perhaps, be reworked to produce an idea with which we can think anew about writing as a place where the personal and the academic, the private and the public, the individual and the institutional, are always inextricably interwoven. (*Writing at the End* 31)

Referencing Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Miller points to how we can read the "relationship of the personal and the academic through the materiality of the body" (*Writing at the End* 34). What passes for individual, embodied taste, for example, is just arbitrary, socially constructed taste. Even the embodied senses become socially constructed and yet we think our tastes are our own. English studies foster particular tastes and even shapes (and contort) bodies to

prefer one way of living and composing over another (*Writing at the End* 36). These institutional tastes, however, limit alternative ways of thinking and experiencing the world; thus, Miller argues it is necessary to:

> confront the sheer necessity for acquiring a kind of multivocal fluency, an ability to hear things previously shut out or ignored, to attend to matters that might otherwise be overlooked or dismissed as irrelevant, to accept, in effect, the fact that learning to speak in such a way that one gets to hear is a lifelong project that involves, perhaps paradoxically, first learning how to listen better to others. (*Writing at the End* 50)

Perhaps we could even develop the affective capacity to hear multiple points of view within ourselves. Cultural tastes foreclose possibilities of sense and meaning leaving individuals unseen and individual voices unheard.

Miller explains institutional forces can silence individuals and leave them, like his father, to battle "a set of internal and external systems that had once again made the decision to live untenable" (*Writing at the End* 49). Nonetheless, Miller explains his father will need "to learn how to tell the stories he has never told in order to escape the terrible power they have over him" (*Writing at the End* 49). The act of composing can become a site to investigate and revise "the ways that institutional forces manifest themselves in the realm of personal experience" (*Writing at the End* 40). In other words, writers must develop the affective capacity to compose differently because their lives depend on it. Writers must learn how to make themselves seen and "heard in a variety of contexts" and "test out their theories about what it means to live a good life" (*Writing at*

the End 47). Such a "revisionary practice" can "generate material for constructing a more human and hospitable life-world" (*Writing at the End* 50).

Unfortunately, however, we do not have the affective capacity to hear some voices until it is too late. Gemma Fiumara explains, "'we hear *nothing* until the damage inflicted by our deaf logic…concerns the planet we inhabit. There must be some problem of listening if we only hear from earth when it is so seriously endangered that we cannot help paying heed'" (qtd. in Dobson 63). Just consider, for example, how people began to notice the coral reefs off of New Caledonia when they began to fluoresce in purple, blue, and yellow. They emitted chemical sunscreen in their *last* attempt to deflect heat and protect themselves before fading into white (*Chasing Coral*). A cast member of the film *Chasing Coral* characterized the fluorescing coral as a "beautiful phase of death" leaving one to wonder why our culture finds beauty in violence and death, often elevating it to art (*Chasing Coral*).

Even though Cvetkovich and Miller write inventive, reparative texts that defy genre to make sense of the complexities of the everyday, inventive forms of writing can inadvertently slip into the limiting forms of textual production they seek to contest. Multimodal texts, for example, can re-inscribe formulaic and conservative ways of thinking, giving gravitas to graphic artist Ed Fella's one liner, "looks good and seems to mean" ("One Liners"). All forms of writing have the capacity for self-transformation. Foucault, for example, explains that he writes "books of exploration" because he does not yet know about his subject of interest (*Remarks on Marx* 28, 27). By exploring his topic of interest, Foucault explains:

> the book transforms me, each new work profoundly changes the terms of thinking which I had reached with the previous work. In this sense I consider myself more as an experimenter than a theorist […]. When I write, I do it above all to change myself and not to think the same as before. (*Remarks on* Marx 27)

Likewise, we can "read as an experience that changes us, that prevents us from always being the same, or from having the kind of relationship with things and with others that we had before reading it" (Foucault, *Remarks on Marx* 41). In this capacity, writing can be an "'experience-book'" whereupon lived experience can shake up the same. Foucault explains, "and no matter how boring and erudite my resulting books have been, this lesson has always allowed me to conceive them as direct experiences to 'tear' me from myself, to prevent me from always being the same" (*Remarks on Marx* 32).

The Sensate Being: Sensational Stories

Writers of the apocalyptic turn such as Miller, Yagelski, Owens, Spellmeyer, and Cvetkovich argue that an awareness of our sensate self in relation to the world helps writers not only foster a connection to the everyday, but also recognize the limitations of the everyday to spur social change. The double bind of the everyday points to how the everyday can limit agency and yet the everyday can be a site of resistance. It is possible to rewrite the fiction that neoliberal capitalism is immutable.

Yagelski and Miller theorize an ontology of writing that examines "*the experience of the self in the act of writing*" (*Writing as a Way* 107). Rather than focusing on what the reader experiences, for example, Miller shifts his attention to what a writer experiences at the moment of writing (*Writing at the End* 36). When readers read descriptions of their

lived experience, this is a moment of disembodiment; however, Miller is interested in the act of writing at the moment of production (*Writing at the End* 40). When considering a poem he wrote, for example, Miller explains that as he wrote a line, tears ran down his face. Regardless of a reader's response to his poem, Miller explains, "I want to see if it is possible to use a writer's reaction to the composing process as the starting point for an investigation into the ways that institutional forces manifest themselves in the realm of personal experience" (*Writing at the End* 40). Miller subsequently demonstrates how critique can wring away any bodily discomfort leaving "the mind touched, the body left unsullied" (40). We need new affective ways of listening— *really listening* to such writing.

Yagelski likewise theorizes an ontology of writing that shifts focus away from the text, but to the writer in the act of writing. In chapter four of *Writing As a Way of Being*, Yagelski reflects upon his experience of writing in a coffee shop whereupon he explains, "as I write, I *am*—but not *because* of the writing; rather, the writing intensifies my awareness of myself, my sense of being, which is prior to but, right now, coterminous with this act of writing" (104). He explains that being attentive to his attentiveness intensifies his sense of connectedness with "this moment and those other moments" and others as well (Yagelski 104). In addition to being "keenly aware" of himself, Yagelski asserts that the "details of the scene, for example, are somehow more vivid, more available to [his] consciousness" while he is in the act of writing (105). Yagelski explains, "until *this* act of writing, at this very second, those details have been outside my awareness. Yet at this moment, as I am writing, they are present. And *I* am present in the

same moment. And so are you, whoever you are" (105). The act of writing intensifies our consciousness of ourselves and sense of connectedness to the world and others.

In his text *Buddha at the Apocalypse: Awakening from a Culture of Destruction*, Spellmeyer writes a lengthy, vivid scene in which you go for a drive and

> find yourself staring at a field of wildflower in late summer bloom. The sky overhead is clear and bright blue, the air is warm, and all around the cicadas are humming. Across the field some grazing horses look at you, swishing their tails to keep away the flies until they go back to the work of chewing grass. (74)

Spellmeyer says, that as you keep watching, "in some way you don't even want to understand, the fields, the insects, and the slow-moving clouds have become a part of you" (*Buddha at the Apocalypse* 75). Spellmeyer goes on to explain, "the flowers, the fields, the summer breeze—we know they can produce feelings of well-being and connectedness. But the same experience could occur in a very different setting" (*Buddha at the Apocalypse* 75). Indeed, Yagelski's visit to a coffee shop points to how connection can occur in the most ordinary of places. For Yagelski, writing is implicated in such connection that focuses on the present.

Cvetkovich explains that her notion and practice of "the *utopia of ordinary habit* can include the practice of writing" (192). The practice of regular writing is "about paying attention to what is immediately present and hence about valuing the ordinary and the detail" (Cvetkovich 192). Cvetkovich points out that the utopia of ordinary habit "is forged out of the loss of connection—to the body, to a meaningful sense of work, to relations with others—that characterized depression" (192). The "Depression Journals"

became a space in which she could track how the world affected her senses. She explains how her ordinary, *sensational* actions such as just going to the grocery store illustrate how "it can be hard to tell the difference between inside and outside—between what's inside your body and what's out there […] between your heartbreak and the misery in the world beyond" (Cvetkovich 159).

Nonetheless, "daily life in all its ordinariness can be a basis for the utopian project of building new worlds" if we develop the affective capacity to understand that alternative ways of being in the world exist (Cvetkovich 191). Drawing upon David Foster Wallace, Cvetkovich learns,

> but if you really learn how to pay attention, then you will know there are other options. It will actually be within your power to experience a crowded, hot, slow, consumer-hell type situation as not only meaningful, but sacred, on fire with the same force that made the stars: love, fellowship, the mystical oneness of all things deep down. (qtd. in Cvetkovich 206)

Cultivating attentiveness is arduous work; however, "cultivating the 'freedom' to see sacred meaningfulness even in the grocery line is the hard work (or art) of daily living" (Cvetkovich 208).

Extending such attentiveness to writing about sustainability, Owens argues that instructors must cultivate student attentiveness to where they live and how their environments make them feel and have composed their identities (*Composition and Sustainability* 6). Owens explains, "without this fundamental awareness of why places are the way they are, and why they have these effects upon us, it will be difficult to

imagine ways of reconstructing them" (*Composition and Sustainability* 70). Owens asserts academia can promulgate "placeless discourse" in which publications seem to be "composed as if by disembodied entities detached from any specific locale" (*Composition and Sustainability* 36). He asks how might our readings of these texts be affected if we had insight into how writers felt about where they lived (*Composition and Sustainability* 36). Cvetkovich explains, "feelings have a corporeal location"—as such, it is worth investigating the ways in which our environments compose our identities and make us feel. Toxic waste dumps have the capacity to become our mindscape.

Owens begins his writing courses with an assignment in which students must write what he calls a "place portrait" using photographs and writing to inquire about where they live. Owens assigns the place portrait because "an awareness of sustainability cannot exist without developing an awareness of the conditions and limitations of one's immediate environment" (*Composition and Sustainability* 36). Furthermore, Owens explains, "who we are and what we have to say is in so many ways interwoven, directly and indirectly, consciously and unconsciously with our local environs" (*Composition and Sustainability* 37). Owens wants students think of their local environments not as separate from themselves, but as coextensive (*Composition and Sustainability* 75).

Owens' students explore why their environs make them feel the way they do, and many of them are unhappy with where they live (*Composition and Sustainability* 50). His students write about violence, boredom, and neglect, which is co-extensive with the conditions of their environments (*Composition and Sustainability* 50, 51). Although some of Owens' students write portraits in which they are satisfied with where they live, the

majority of portraits express despair about their communities (*Composition and Sustainability* 64). A recurring theme among the place portraits is the connection between place and hyperboredom. Sean Desmond Healy maintains, "'hyperboredom is the escalating apprehension of the void; the nihilism of the masses; the largely unconscious, unacknowledged sense that the bottom has fallen out of the world'" (qtd. in Owens, *Composition and Sustainability* 68). Owens explains that the root of hyperboredom is the Cartesian "misconception that self and world are separate, and as long as a 'self/world dichotomy is maintained,' hyperboredom isn't going to go away" (*Composition and Sustainability* 68).

Owens asserts that responsible educators must help students cultivate curiosity in their world to counter "cynicism and hyperboredom of contemporary, consumer culture" (*Composition and Sustainability* 70). He asserts educators must "make accessible the secrets that remain hidden, repressed, censored. The strange zones of activity in between the boundaries, those glitches in the grid, those sites of shared strangeness unfamiliar to all of us require our attention. One obvious zone is the earth" ("Earthworm Hermeneutics" 14). Similarly, Miller wants to redefine pedagogy as "cultivating informed curiosity," and as a form of pedagogy itself, Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* is committed to "curiosity" (Miller, "The Coming Apocalypse" 150; Stewart 1).[32] Fostering curiosity can help students make sense of the world and transform it.

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[32] On the back cover of *Ordinary Habits*, Lauren Berlant asserts Stewart's book is "a profoundly pedagogical book." I think Stewart's text resists "evaluative critique long enough to find ways of approaching the complex and uncertain objects that fascinate" (Stewart 5). Instead, she cultivates curiosity, open-endedness, and possibilities for feeling differently, which can redefine mainstream pedagogies.

To foster curiosity, Owens explains that educators must provide opportunities for students to express the positive and negative aspects of their environs. Furthermore, educators must help students develop an awareness of what makes them "miserable, bored, angry, tired, scared, and depressed" in their environments (*Composition and Sustainability* 70). In other words, educators must help students develop ways to write about the complexity of their feelings in relationship to larger social structures. Owens asserts without such awareness, imagining social change is impossible. As Giroux articulates it, when students are unable to connect their personal struggles with larger struggles, any consideration to the common, public good is lost. Nonetheless, curiosity and awareness call attention to new ways of being.

Although interdisciplinary professor and cartoonist Lynda Barry is not a writer of the apocalyptic turn, her text *Syllabus: Notes From an Accidental Professor* crowded with colored pencil-drawn flaming cars, demons, dragon heads, and monsters might qualify her as one. Her text discusses/illustrates her pedagogy of helping students maintain an observation notebook to carry them into what she calls the "image world—a place we all know, even if we don't notice this knowing" (4). The image world is our everyday, which is overlooked in its ordinariness and when we lose our sense of curiosity to hyperboredom. Barry explains "daily practice with images both written and drawn is rare once we have lost our baby teeth"—nonetheless, the daily habit of drawing can bring attention to our connectedness with the everyday (115). What goes in the notebook "are things that you noticed when you became present—that is to say when the hamster wheel

of thoughts and plans and worries stopped long enough for you to notice where you were and what was going on around you" (Barry 61).

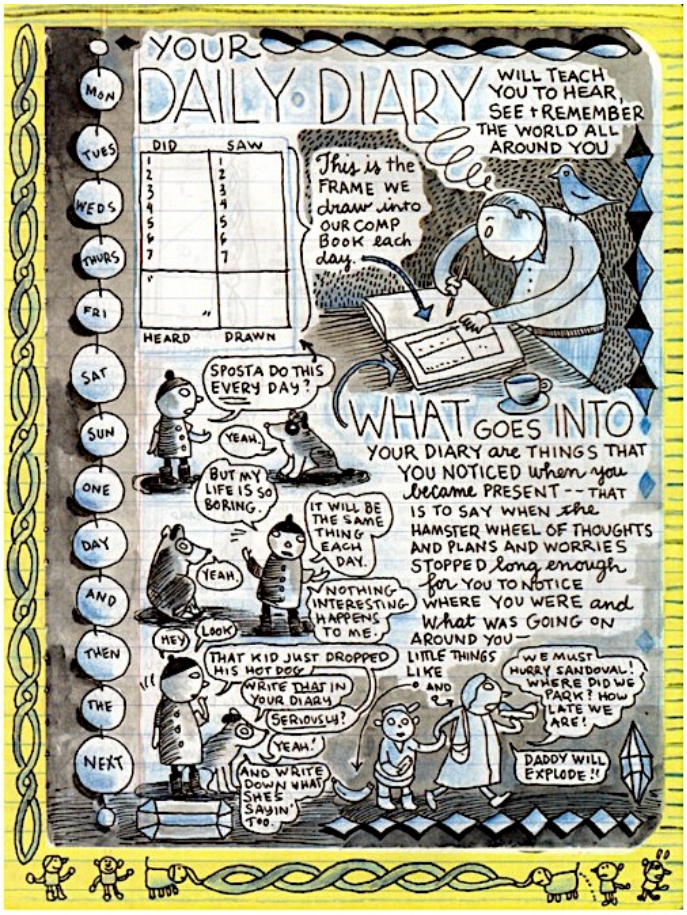

Figure 1. "Your Daily Diary" from *Syllabus: Notes From an Accidental Professor*. Copyright Lynda Barry, used with permission from Drawn & Quarterly.

Drawing upon artist Marilyn Frasca, Barry's goal for the notebook is to cultivate sensory attentiveness to the world and being present—as such, Barry's crowed pages are spilling with notebook/diary exercises aimed at teaching students how to "hear, see + remember the world all around you" (4, 61). She encourages students to carry their composition notebooks everywhere and fill it with their sensory details of their day and

night (60). This “accumulated shape of action—a record of sincere contact with the image world” helps students notice what they notice and understand “the watching part of ourselves” (Barry 192, 83, 182). Just as Cvetkovich, Barry attempts to cultivate the daily practice of describing the sensate being in the world. Such sensory attentiveness affords the possibility to become aware of what we notice and perhaps even change it.

CHAPTER 4: TEACHING THE WORLD'S END

> No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves.
>
> —Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

> I am signaling you through the flames.
>
> —Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *Poetry as Insurgent Art*

For several semesters at Ohio University, I kept a careful eye on the opportunity to teach ENG 3100J: Writing about Environmental Sustainability (ENG 3100), an undergraduate, junior-level writing course aimed at students from all majors; nonetheless, I approached this class gingerly. Although Yagelski argues that all education is implicated in sustainability, I was apprehensive to teach a course about environmental catastrophe. For me, teaching is deeply emotional as well as invisible work on many levels—even designing a course requires careful thought about the numerous contingencies and needs of future students. From considering their workload and enjoyment of the course, to considering whether or not the timing of assignments will conflict with unexpected school events and holidays, disappointment can rear its head at any moment. I questioned if I could overcome the emotional weight of teaching a traumatic subject because it is difficult to maintain affective distance especially since I am biased about conserving the environment. Many films about environmental sustainability such as *Sonic Sea*, a film about the horrendous effects of ocean noise on marine mammals, can leave me with unshakable despair.

During the semesters in which I taught other composition and rhetoric courses, I judged my readiness for teaching ENG 3100 by assigning both required and personally selected sustainability-themed texts. In my first semester of teaching, for instance, Ohio

University's English Department required writing instructors to teach a text selected by Ohio University's Common Experience Project on Sustainability, which is an interdisciplinary faculty and student program aimed at expanding campus-wide sustainability literacy. Members of the Common Experience Project on Sustainability chose Cathy B. Glenn's "Constructing Consumables and Consent: A Critical Analysis of Factory Farm Industry Discourse" to spur conversation among entering freshmen students regarding a common text. Glenn argues that discursive constructs of factory farming not only perpetuate misrepresentations of romantic human relationships among land and animals, but also promote the fiction of a benevolent farming industry to veil the industry's violent treatment of farm animals.

Teaching this article to freshmen was a disaster, but in an unexpected way. Class discussion spurred comments from many students who synthesized the text with texts they had read earlier in the semester. Some students became aware for the first time about factory farming and double-speak—several students, for example, were unaware of what veal is and were alarmed about the treatment of animals. Although the article's focus on discursive constructs challenged the freshmen students, the students wrote well-developed summaries that addressed most of the main points of the text. To any reader, the aforementioned discussions and awareness do not raise any red flags; nonetheless, their written responses yielded troubling comments for me. Many students expressed that as a result of reading the text, they were going to become either vegans or vegetarians—regardless of how such a decision would affect their relationships with potentially resistant family members and friends.

As a vegetarian, my reaction might seem unexpected and even counterintuitive; however, something was missing. Where was student resistance to accepting one voice from a single text? Where was the investigative spirit of collecting many perspectives, laying them on the table and dissecting each one with a discerning eye? What happened to Joseph Harris' characterization of the classroom as a city populated by the competing voices of a heterogeneous population? Rather than a "community of strangers," I observed in the words of Harris, a "community of agreement" (155). Polyphony was conspicuously absent from the students' responses, and I thought I knew why—I knew who the culprit was. Glenn's thick descriptions of whimpering pregnant sows, shocked hens with infected wounds, pigs with bleeding stumps for tails, and small piglets whose heads are slammed on the floor, killed the spirit of my beloved *critique*, which was the heart of my class and other courses throughout my teaching career. Not unlike Felski who points out how critics assume "that whatever is *not* critical must therefore be *un*critical," I too felt that if the students did not trouble, problematize, resist, or disrupt the text, they were uncritical (Felski 2).

Rather than evade responsibility and blame Glenn's affective, thick descriptions for my students' responses, perhaps I must consider that they recognized my bias and were partial to affirming my position. As savvy rhetorical readers of both their classrooms and instructors, students can sense bias even though we might think we are wearing cloaks of ideological invisibility. This was not the case, however—the students' responses instead helped me understand *my* discomfort about what I perceived to be their lack of critique. Furthermore, I *felt* like my politics were more than overt even though I

never told students how I felt. Nonetheless, once the text was no longer a required reading, I hastily eliminated it from my syllabus, and turned to texts that held many different and competing perspectives, and addressed rhetorical issues other than double-speak. Ironically, by eliminating the reading, I too silenced the marginalized voices of factory farm animals. I perpetuated discursive violence by assigning polyphonic texts to shadow my worries about the perceived lack of critique from students and the possibility of normalizing my perspective. A democratic classroom, after all, is not necessarily harmonious, but full of dissent. As critical pedagogue Peter McLauren explains, for instance, "knowledge is forged in histories that are played out in the field of social antagonisms" (qtd. in hooks 31).

After eliminating Glenn's text about double-speak, I turned to other rhetorical concepts including framing and ideological critique. For lessons about framing, for example, I assigned a text from SeedMagazine.com, "Is There a Better Word for Doom?" from writer Maywa Montenegro who asked a panel of six experts including geoscientist Michael E. Mann, climate scientist Gavin Schmidt, and others their perspective about how to frame global climate change to an uninformed public. To discuss ideological presuppositions, and complement a multimodal composition unit, I turned to the graphic novel and environmental policy satire *As the World Burns: 50 Simple Things You Can Do to Stay in Denial* by green activist Derrick Jensen and cartoonist Stephanie McMillan. Various mini-plots of the satire weave into a central story about U.S. environmental policy, thus giving students a rich constellation of ideologies to analyze.

Owens, in *Composition and Sustainability: Teaching for a Threatened Generation*, points out that composition courses are inherently interdisciplinary, so assigning sustainability-themed texts throughout my testing period was not out of place in the courses or for the students. After semesters of testing various texts, and facilitating repeated classroom discussions regarding a variety of controversial sustainability topics, I finally felt ready to teach a course about the world's end. Prior to finally undertaking the decision to teach the course, it was no longer a matter of feeling ready to face the disaster; I felt an ethical tug and a sense of responsibility to teach the course. With teaching, I hoped to cultivate critique, curiosity, and care for our world—and writing about environmental sustainability could fulfill these purposes.

Drawing upon some previously discussed concepts from writers of the apocalyptic turn, this chapter is critically self reflexive and attempts to make sense of my personal experiences of teaching writing courses focused on environmental sustainability. Rather than prescribe an expected pedagogy of the apocalypse, it tells crooked, un-fetishized fragments of twists and turns and describes my personal and pedagogical struggles to address the trauma of teaching environmental collapse. I take up the concept of struggle because far too often, composition journals contain inspiring articles, which are no doubt needed, about triumphant and heroic writing pedagogies. When I read such texts, I imagine innocuous Clark Kent compositionists who are ready to rip off their shirts at a moment's notice and confront unimaginable and unprecedented dangers. Similarly, at professional conferences, I regularly see presentations about victorious pedagogies, but I want to tell abandoned stories and describe the negative feelings that do not get heard

around the campfire. Perhaps some instructors might know all too well what it feels like to sometimes walk home after teaching a wrecked writing class, replay or reflect upon what went wrong, followed by the meticulous process of fine-tuning. Still, some instructors may never consider the traumatic import of their pedagogies and repeat violence again and again.

This chapter confronts my struggles, yet resists the urge to generalize the lessons learned from my experiences or transform them into a magical, silver bullet or a one-size-fits-all pedagogy. You will read an ordinary story of my composite experiences—a monstrous amalgam absent of all heroic feats, features of narrative fetishism and self-indulgent characterizations of myself as a teacher fulfilling the role of hero or healer. On the contrary, you will find a broken narrative peppered with the violence and trauma of my everyday practices of teaching writing. Turning to Miller's text *Writing at the End of the World*, I modify and build upon his question about whether it is possible to produce writing that produces a greater connection with the world, and I question if it is possible to *teach* such writing. Is it possible to teach writing that can harbor the possibility of stopping environmental collapse? If not stop the disaster, how it is possible to teach under the weight of daily trauma?

Confronting the Apocalypse

News sites are littered with stories about promising turns of sustainable business practices. A few weeks ago, for example, PBS reported that even companies such as Walmart, a company that may never come to most minds when considering the notion of corporate sustainability, recognize the profitability of using solar panels on their

buildings and have set goals to reduce emissions in their supply chains.[33] Just yesterday, PBS aired a story about industrial indoor, organic food production in San Francisco and Amsterdam. Images of lush, vertical growing gardens and robust, red cherry tomatoes could enable some viewers momentarily to forget global food insecurity. Today, PBS aired a story about Hawaii's advances with renewable energy from ocean waves.

Despite these and a groundswell of other promising advances, however, disaster brews quietly in the background as the White House generates one controversial story after another to divert public attention from substantive issues. Trump repeatedly characterizes policies and people he disagrees with as "disasters" and yet disaster looms in his own cabinet.[34] Pruitt, for example, has appointed various people in positions at the EPA who have conflicts of interest such as former coal industry lawyers and lobbyists. Adding to what former EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman characterizes as "a slow-rolling catastrophe in the making," Pruitt has even collected what he calls a "red team" of dissenting scientists who refute climate change (Whitman). So much is at risk—just consider, for example, how numerous Superfund sites are located in floodplains. Just recently, hurricane Harvey flooded nearly twelve Superfund sites in and around Houston, Texas, and at least three toxic spills occurred at U.S. Oil Recovery. If Pruitt's red team

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[33] Environmental theorist Adrian Parr is not so quick to laud Walmart's practices. Parr explains, "the ecobrand uses the affective charge of sustainability culture to increase the power of the Wal-Mart brand, all the while continuing to contribute to the junkspace any activist involved with environmental and social justice issues works so hard to dismantle" (26).

[34] George Lakoff argues that Americans can reclaim power through "disaster branding—associating real disasters that Trump is responsible for perpetuating or creating with the Trump brand" ("Disaster Branding").

and risky toxic waste sites do not signal trouble, then the "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice" manifesto may prompt a short pause.

Over 15,364 scientist signatories from 184 countries recently published "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice," on the twenty-fifth anniversary of a previously published first notice signed by nearly two thousand scientists. Among the many threats to the planet, the first manifesto calls attention to climate change, marine life depletion, forest loss, and then cautions readers, "a great change in our stewardship of the Earth and the life on it is required if vast human misery is to be avoided" (qtd. in Ripple et al.). Referencing this call to safeguard Earth, Oregon State University professor of ecology William J. Ripple and the signatories argue that "humanity has failed to make sufficient progress in generally solving these foreseen environmental challenges, and alarmingly, most of them are getting worse" ("World Scientists'"). The scientists warn, "soon it will be too late to shift away from our failing trajectory, and time is running out" ("World Scientists'").

To teach a writing course addressing environmental sustainability means far more than discussing the optimistic turns of green capitalism, which nonetheless still support hyper-consumption and commodity fetishism under the pretenses of improving our collective affective state—it also means confronting environmental collapse and the mental architecture that brought us to this impasse.[35] Rather than turn away from another

[35] The good feelings that sustainable culture generates are also implicated in capitalist logic (Parr). Parr explains, "what we are buying is the feeling of power that an ecobrand image gives us, not the object itself. And where sustainability culture once was involved with constructing a new mode of mainstream activism, these selfsame political

opportunity to teach ENG 3100J: Writing about Environmental Sustainability course, I finally plunged into knee-high toxic sludge equipped with gas mask and Geiger counter, ready to go. Adopting what Scranton and Spellmeyer might characterize as Zen-like readiness for the catastrophe, I rolled up my sleeves to confront hopelessness and embrace the responsibility of teaching sustainability—or so I thought.

Sustainability Readers and Buoys

Aside from the readings and lessons that I had tested, I didn't know how to teach a course in doom. To use Worsham's phrase, I had no "frames of intelligibility" to address our failing trajectory so I turned to what was available (Worsham, "Composing (Identity)" 174). I could have turned to the numerous environmental literature readers or texts in the field of English studies such as the comprehensive *American Earth: Environmental Writings Since Thoreau*; however, I wanted a reader *intentionally* aimed at compositionists such as myself so I could have a firm sense of grounding. The field of composition has four readers about environmentalism and sustainability—each compelling in their own way that reference the term composition nestled in back covers or introductory notes. I collected the readers in a variety of ways—from guiltily taking the last copy of a reader from a begrudging book representative at a conference to visiting textbook sites. To reference Haynes' ground metaphysics, I was not yet ready to teach writing entirely offshore, so I kept one leg firmly grounded in the familiarity of my field of composition. I imagined the composition readers serving as buoys as I tried to navigate the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

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subjectivities are now on the verge of disappearing in the delirious landscape of corporate capitalism and green-oriented commodity culture" (30-1).

Published in 2005, the oldest sustainability composition reader that I consulted was Christopher Hallowell and Walter Levy's *Listening to Earth*. Hallowell and Levy's collection of texts from a variety of genres and periods was absorbing on many levels—first and foremost, they explained that an organizing principle of the text is the "ceaseless flux of pros and cons" (3). Although they acknowledge their bias for environmental preservation, they recognize the importance of exploring contradictions. Their reader also includes a historical chronology and context, beginning with 1861, that points to landmark publications such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), passed acts such as the Endangered Species Act (1973), and disasters such as *Exxon Valdez*, the supertanker that released 11 million gallons of oil (1989). Published in 2010, *The Fountainhead Press V Series: Green* editors Brooke Rollins and Lee Bauknight use the term composition broadly and explain that their text suits instructors interested "in deeply exploring environmental issues" (n.p.). *Green* includes an image from graffiti artist Banksy, lyrics, memoirs, poetry, and other genres of personal writing. Four years later, Carl G. Herndl published *Sustainability: A Reader for Writers*—a text which became one of my personal primers about sustainability. The reader has numerous thoughtfully chosen, timely, and diverse texts.

Published just one year later, the most recent sustainability reader is Christian R. Weisser's *Sustainability: A Bedford Spotlight Reader*, which I finally chose as my reader for two courses that I taught in one semester. My familiarity with many of the chosen texts guided my decision along with perceived ease in which it would complement my staple text—Mark Garrett Longaker and Jeffrey Walker's *Rhetorical Analysis: A Brief*

Guide for Writers, which is a rhetoric that effortlessly seams classical and postmodern rhetorical theory. Furthermore, I settled on Weisser's text because a portion of the book proceeds goes to Surfrider Foundation USA, an organization I once supported prior to becoming a low-income graduate student. Moreover, I had comfort in knowing that the reader's first chapter, aptly titled, "What are the Foundations of Sustainability?," would safely ground my class.

Although I might find it easy to characterize my decision to teach the apocalypse as Zen-like confrontation, or myself as the protagonist of this chapter, my decision was not the stuff of superheroes, but merely an unimpressive reliance on stability and foundational thinking. I was not teaching offshore—not even one foot was in the boat—in fact, I had both feet firmly planted on *terra firma*. Unlike Haynes and Spellmeyer who depend on the sea rather than ground metaphysics, buoys, or stars, I turned to what was familiar. From gingerly approaching the class, testing texts, turning to composition readers, and finally settling on a text that might complement my rhetoric and crab-hold attachment to the foundations of sustainability, I was not in danger of losing my lighthouse or, as Caputo would put it, my "lucky or guiding light" (6). My lighthouse shined brighter than the harvest moon.

Reading Green

During the second time I taught two sections of ENG 3100, my students were not going to suffer any deconstructive setbacks. Many of my students tested out of freshman composition, so some of the most vocal students came to an upper division sustainability writing class assuming they would read green literature, don their Sherlock caps and turn

to the clues of objective correlatives, allusions, symbols, and personification to crack the texts. Aside from not taking first-year composition and learning that composition is dramatically different from high school English, my students anticipated reading the texts of Henry David Thoreau because English studies foster particular tastes and expectations (Miller, *Writing at the End* 36). If I normalize my experience, it is impossible to conceive that an English course about environmental literature would exclude Thoreau from the list of required readings.

Furthermore, some students seemed to have anticipated Heather E. Bruce's compelling notion of "reading green," a concept that Bruce explains in her text "Green(ing) English: Voices Howling in the Wilderness?" Because the language arts and ecological literacy overlap in important ways such as thinking critically, observing, and listening, and so forth, Bruce argues English instructors are well equipped to teach literature with an ecological lens. Moreover, literature has ample texts to draw from, which lend themselves easily to such a reading.[36] When considering Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, for example, Bruce points out that instructors might ask students to "contemplate the deep ecological conflicts portrayed among animals (both human and nonhuman) and the natural world" (17).

Reinforcing student expectations of "reading green" by assigning Thoreau's "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For" from Weisser's foundations chapter was

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[36] With regard to American literature, American environmentalist Bill McKibben points out, "An argument can be made that environmental writing is America's single most distinctive contribution to the world's literature" ("Introduction" xxii-xxiii). In many of his texts, Orr references Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* as an exemplar—particularly regarding the hubris of technological fundamentalism.

counterproductive and seemed to have distanced the urgency of our environmental crisis. I read *Walden* when I was sixteen years old, and curiously once again, I was reading the same text rather than read about today's pressing environmental issues. What relevancy did Thoreau have in light of a presidential candidate who tweeted that China created the hoax of climate change? Why did reading and discussing Thoreau's text *feel* like dredging the river?

Furthermore, reading John Muir's "The American Forests," published in 1897, did little but remind students that neoclassical economic interests will always privilege "stock-flow" over the environment's "fund-service" resources (Traer 44). I will always remember how a crestfallen student stated "nothing has changed" when once he read aloud in class a passage from "American Forests" in which Muir asserts, "even in Congress, a sizable chunk of gold, carefully concealed, will outtalk and outfight all the nation on a subject like forestry, well smothered in ignorance, and in which the money interests of only a few are conspicuously involved" (45). Indeed, nothing has changed—even Canada's boreal forest is under threat from destructive logging despite providing irreplaceable fund-service resources such as absorbing carbon dioxide. By having students read texts from Thoreau and Muir, my "expectations of education remain[ed] frozen in time, preserved like some prehistoric insect in a golden drop of amber" (Miller, "The Coming Apocalypse" 144). The urgency of our environmental catastrophe was conspicuously absent because I felt compelled to begin with foundational texts from the 1880s. My ship was nearing a dangerous reef, but I would not veer from my charted navigation. These texts were my buoys.

I would be hard pressed to argue that Thoreau's texts cannot speak to our current time with regard to topics such as hyper-consumerism and our toxic information age. Furthermore, I am not writing a polemic against the importance of teaching Thoreau's texts in English departments; instead, I am arguing a conservative logic of *with/and*.[37] Environmentalist Bill McKibben argues, "as we set about the work that faces us now—the work of reorienting our lives to ward off the apocalypse that science now predicts—we must continue to find further images, further metaphors" ("Introduction" xxv). It is not a matter of continually legitimating or negating what we already know, but as McKibben suggests, to be additive and find *further* possibilities of meaning. In other words, it is a matter of thinking-with rather than thinking-without.

In his text *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*, Scranton looks to history and argues that we must keep the past alive. For him, curating and remixing the past can foster new interpretations of sense and meaning. Scranton explains,

> we must suspend our attachment to the continual press of the present by keeping alive the past, cultivating the info-garden of the archive, reading, interpreting, sorting, nurturing, and most important, reworking our stock of remembrance. We must keep renovating and innovating perceptual, affective, and conceptual fields through recombination, remixing, translation, transformation, and play. (108)

He continues, "we must keep up our communion with the dead, for they are us, as we are the dead of future generations" (108). Scranton's point about remixing and cultivation is not unlike the *Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0* notion of curation, which is a process of

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[37] I borrow Deleuze's logic of the "and."

"becoming engaged in collecting, assembling, sifting, structuring, and interpreting corpora" (UCLA Digital Humanities 9). Although Scranton's argument is promising insofar as we can recombine and juxtapose ideas, we might not have the affective capacity to recognize something new because our terministic screens deeply stain our perceptions. A peacock taught me this lesson.

Once when I was dining at a restaurant for my wedding anniversary, my spouse pointed out a white peacock who was grooming himself in the gardens outside our window. Prior to his observation, however, I mistook the peacock to be a white, plastic bag stuck in the clutches of a rose bush. The presence of a conspicuous plastic bag at such a restaurant was confounding. I had no reason to think what I saw was a white peacock, because I was unaware of their existence. Ironically as an instructor who advocates challenging our habituated modes of interpretation, the peacock exposed my unrecognized inattentiveness. As Michael Pollan explains, "we perceive each multisensory moment through a protective screen of ideas, past experiences, or expectations" (*Botany of Desire* 166). Accordingly, actions such as remixing, collecting, and sifting can inadvertently reinscribe the sensibilities that we seek to contest if we do not have the senses to perceive. Curation means nothing if all we perceive and create from our senses are white, plastic shopping bags. Something new can go along on quiet peacock feet undetected. I am still chewing on that.

Good Taste

Thoreau's text dragged behind it an expected way of reading, commanding readers to don the role of the man of taste. The previous sentence has a tinge of irony

especially since Thoreau was critical of counterproductive habits of mind. Just consider, for example, Thoreau's critique when he says, "by closing the eyes and slumbering, and consenting to be deceived by shows, men establish and confirm their daily life of routine and habit everywhere, which still is built on purely illusory foundations" ("Where I Lived" 33). Nonetheless, Thoreau's text seemed to cultivate a particular type of criticism in class, characteristic of men of taste standing before works of art. Agamben explains that art can become the occasion in which the spectator can exercise his good taste. The man of taste becomes concerned with a type of criticism, which establishes habituated interpretations that are passed along as universal and natural. In this context, aesthetics becomes a formal exercise whereby both the art object and spectator become devoid of meaning. Agamben explains that the disinterested spectator does not identify with the vitality of the art; instead, the spectator represents art "according to the critical framework furnished by the aesthetic judgement" (40). As such, the man of taste becomes, in Agamben's judgment, "an evanescent ghost" that "takes him from the life tissue of society to the hyperborean no-man's land of aesthetics" (16).

Although Scranton's argument has merit, Thoreau's text seemed to have commanded a type of reading that turned its back on the everyday. Such a statement might seem contradictory and ironic, especially since Thoreau does not deprecate the world for abstractions. His texts are scattered with claims such as, "Olympus is but the outside of the earth everywhere" ("Where I Lived" 25). In parallel to Spellmeyer's "Qualls Report," I felt as though the text was not helping students understand or change "their times"—it was pushing them in that "bizarre twilight world" that Spellmeyer

characterizes as being isolated from the everyday (Spellmeyer, *Arts of Living* 18, 242). Furthermore, class discussion was cultivating an epistemological space of men of taste, which only seemed to reduce Thoreau's text to an empty matter of technique, which Yagelski would characterize as none other than Cartesian thinking.

Dragonflies, Mosquitoes, Potatoes

To confront the apocalypse, I realized that I had to take great care in choosing course texts that should shake up habitual ways of reading and teaching. Haynes remarks, "we should feel alienated, removed, and detached from our *standard* habits of reading and thinking" (64). Considering the insights of feminists who theorize new materialism might help us re-conceptualize our standard habits, it is worth considering humanities scholar Marilyn M. Cooper's encounter with a blue dragonfly. Her encounter impels her to consider that "listening to strange strangers will entail transforming our habits in a way that enables us to entertain new positions" (Cooper 20).

In her text "Listening to Strange Strangers, Modifying Dreams," Cooper recounts when she was driving on a gravel road, a three-inch long, blue spangled dragonfly flew in from the open passenger window of her car and landed on her thigh (18). Before she could panic, the dragonfly flew out the driver's window and yet she remained surprised. Cooper explains, "I was startled, and the encounter left a lasting impression. It drew me out of myself […]. I was still thinking about it hours later" (18). For Cooper, a "new ontology of persuasion" means more attentive encounters with strangers/other beings that "can infect us with new propositions" (28). These attentive encounters with what object-oriented theorist Timothy Morton terms "strange strangers" urge us to first develop the

affective capacity to listen to others on their own terms. Cooper was not the only compositionist whose experience with a strange stranger drew her out of herself—for cartoonist and compositionist Ivan Brunetti, it was a mosquito (Cooper 28).

It may be a stretch for the field of composition, but I characterize Brunetti as multimodal compositionist because in his text *Cartooning: Philosophy and Practice*, Brunetti fuses writing and drawing and asserts, "cartooning primarily involves composition" (22). His text serves as a self-directed "course" that helps students explore complex ideas and engage in self-discovery (Brunetti 11). Students can follow Brunetti's activities in which they "record their observations, experiences, and memories in a sketchbook and then translate this material into various pictographic narratives of varying lengths" (11). His required course materials are simply "paper, pencil, life" (16).

Although Brunetti might offer students the means for self-discovery, he recounts a personal experience of self-discovery from a mosquito whose death exposed how he unknowingly suffered from severe myopia. Brunetti explains his experience:

> This became apparent to me one day while driving on a desert highway, when a mosquito smashed into my windshield, directly into the self-constructed "anchor" point of my vision. My universe instantly exploded into disassembled shapes that had no connection or discernible relation to each other, like a paint-by-number of a Jackson Pollock canvas, and it took me a few panic-stricken moments to piece it all back together again into something that jelled as coherent scenery. (7-8)

Just as a peacock exposed my inattentiveness, and a dragonfly drew Cooper out from herself, for Brunetti, it was a mosquito. The encounter with the mosquito revealed how

Brunetti over-naturalized his perception of "a very flat world" (7). Just imagine what other new propositions exist if we could develop our capacity to listen to strange strangers. For Cooper and Brunetti, inconspicuous insects brought the terms of their existence in the world into sharper focus for themselves, but for one of my classes, it was a potato.

Among the readings that I brought into several of my freshman and ENG: 3100 courses were a few chapters from Michael Pollan's text *Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World*, which was published in 2001. Blending memoir, history, and science writing, Pollan tells the story of how the apple, tulip, marijuana plant, and potato developed an evolutionary strategy of survival by satisfying our four respective desires of sweetness, beauty, intoxication, and control. It might seem that our domestication of other species points to our dominance over nature; however, Pollan argues that it might in fact demonstrate just the contrary. He questions our over-naturalized divisions of the world into subjects and objects whereby we always cast ourselves in the role of subject who acts upon objects. Rather than view plants as passive objects, Pollan turns this view upside-down and explains, "all these plants, which I'd always regarded as the objects of my desire, were also, I realized, subjects, acting on me, getting me to do things for them they couldn't do for themselves" (xv). It was Pollan's new materialist, topsy-turvy view of subjects and objects that cultivated student attentiveness and helped students feel "detached from [their] *standard* habits of reading and thinking" (Haynes 64).

Always trying new ways to spur discussion, I once had freshmen break into small groups to share with the class a compelling or unexpected concept or quotation from

Pollan's "Introduction: The Human Bumblebee." Each group repeatedly characterized a particular passage in which Pollan questions his agency when choosing plants for his garden as "weird," "strange," "different," "odd," and "anthropomorphic." The passage that caught their attention occurred when Pollan asks, "Did I choose to plant these potatoes, or did the potato make me do it? In fact, both statements are true. I can remember the exact moment that spud seduced me, showing off its knobby charms in the pages of a seed catalog. I think it was the tasty-sounding 'buttery yellow flesh' that did it" (xv). The students seemed simultaneously intrigued by and dismissive of Pollan's upside-down perspective whereby he acknowledged the influence of non-human actants. Pollan did not stop with his gardening example—he went so far to argue that even his book was the strategy of plants that made him think for them (xxi).[38] Although some puzzled students may have characterized the potato's agency as "strange," Pollan's co-authorship garnered quizzical affect and responses such as "super weird."

New materialist and feminist Stacy Alaimo points out the difficulty of considering the passivity of matter and nature's agency in other than anthropomorphic ways; however, Jane Bennett argues the contrary and embraces risky anthropomorphism ("Trans-Corporeal" 245). In her text *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Jane

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[38] Similarly, Jane Bennett explains that the sentences of her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, "emerged from the confederate agency of many striving macro- and microactants: from 'my' memories, intentions, contentions, intestinal bacteria, eyeglasses, and blood sugar, as well as from the plastic computer keyboard, the bird song from the open window, or the air or particulates in the room, to name only a few of the participants. What is at work here on the page is an animal-vegetable-mineral-sonority cluster with a particular degree and duration of power. What is at work here is what Deleuze and Guattari call assemblage" (23).

Bennett argues "we need to cultivate a bit of anthropomorphism—the idea that human agency has some echoes in nonhuman nature—to counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world" (xvi). Bennett argues that agency is not exclusive to humans, but is distributed among non-human agents. To minimize the difference between subjects and objects, she advocates the notion of vibrant matter, which could help us understand how "political events might change if we gave the force of things more due" (viii). Bennett asks, for example, "how would patterns of consumption change if we faced not litter, rubbish, trash, or 'the recycling,' but an accumulating pile of lively and potentially dangerous matter?" (viii). Rather than separate the world into subjects and objects, she calls attention to how all bodies are "inextricably enmeshed in a sense network of relations. And in a knotted world of vibrant matter, to harm one section of the web may be very well be to harm oneself" (13).

Bennett's text becomes compelling and convincing to me when she draws attention to the importance of "sensuous enchantment with everyday" (xi). She argues that when we consider matter dead, it merely feeds "human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption. It does so by preventing us from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies" (ix). Writers of the apocalyptic turn such as Miller, Yagelski, Owens, Spellmeyer, Cvetkovich, and cartoonist/compositionists Barry and Brunetti argue that an awareness of our sensate self in relation to the world helps writers foster a connection, or remember our connection with the everyday. Such awareness could, in the words of Bennett, cultivate "greener forms of human culture"

whereby we could understand the ethical implications of our actions within networks of relationships rather than just our immediate implications for ourselves alone (x).

To cultivate attentiveness among my students, I tried many exercises; however, none were close in the magical qualities of an ordinary bag of hot chili pops and assorted flavor lollipops that I brought to class. After distributing lollipops to the students, I asked them to describe their experience of consuming their candy in a bulleted list or paragraph. They could, for example, write about what the plastic wraps sounds like when ripping it from the lollipop, the smell of the lollipop and so forth. Consuming the lollipops—or the lollipops themselves—fostered student awareness of their chemical senses and numerous childhood memories as the lollipops disappeared/dissolved into their bodies.

Once, a student surprised me when she exclaimed with a beaming smile, "This is the hardest thing I've been asked to do!" What anthropologist Michael Taussig explains about sense constitutive of the everyday holds true for the student's response about generating sensate knowledge:

> Surely this sense includes much that is not sense so much as sensuousness, an embodied and somewhat automatic "knowledge" that functions like peripheral vision, not studied contemplation, a knowledge that is imageric and sensate rather than ideational; as such it not only challenges practically all critical practice across the board of academic disciplines but is a knowledge that lies as much in the objects and spaces of observation as in the body and mind of the observer. (141-2)

Because sensate knowledge challenges practice across disciplines, it makes *sense* that the student would find the exercise challenging.

In another class, one student said he was unable to describe the taste of his lollipop, so he read the wrapper of the lollipop to tell him what flavor he tasted. Even though the class laughed about his inability or indifference to characterize what he tasted, his reliance on the authority of the wrapper was troubling because it circumscribed his experience. Discursive violence is always ready to rear its ugly head even in the most ordinary experiences and efface our sensuous attention to the materiality of the everyday. If experience cannot resist discursive identification, then what are the ethical implications of our relationship to the world—to the everyday?

On Critique and Pedagogical Violence

Aside from attempting to cultivate upside-down thinking to question unchallenged habits and fostering sensuous attentiveness, I turned to critique—the foundation of every writing class that I have taught. In all of my classes, students were savvy at identifying continual green-washing ads from unrelenting disinformation machines.[39] They were adept at recognizing how capitalism recasts passive consumerism as patriotism and frames forbidden economic critique as socialism.[40] The students recognized how neoliberal capitalists, adept at critical rhetoric, repeatedly frame arguments in false binaries such as jobs vs. the environment to control the terms of the

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[39] Corporate Watch explains greenwashing is "the phenomenon of socially and environmentally destructive corporations attempting to preserve and expand their markets or power by posing as friends of the earth" (qtd. in Parr 16). Parr further explains greenwashing abuses the "affective power of sustainability culture to camouflage otherwise unsustainable business practices" (16).

[40] The "make America great again" Halloween and Christmas hats are a prime example.

argument and divert our attention from the hard work of sustainable thinking. Adept at exploring multiple perspectives of an issue, the students realized that our environmental crisis carries no clear-cut resolutions. They immediately recognized how their food choices fed a system at odds with their personal philosophies of how to treat animals and the environment.

Over and over again, critique exposed the interconnectedness of one disaster after another and how capitalism circumscribes their experience of the world. The joy of critique lost its shine and the trauma of neoliberal capitalism became difficult to shake off. Why repeatedly learn that a "sizable chunk of gold, carefully concealed, will outtalk and outfight all the nation"? (Muir 45). What has changed since the 1800s, however, is how deception is no longer concealed. Critique's apocalyptic move of revelation lacks potency in the face of our transparently fascist times under the new administration.

When I first taught ENG 3100J, depression quietly crept in the classroom. I felt it too when I prepared for class—learning about and discussing ecological disaster after disaster made the classroom space feel like the set of a dystopian film. This was agonizing for me because I attempt to cultivate a reassuring and enthusiastic classroom. Once, before class started, when I asked one of my students how she was doing, she slouched in her chair, sighed heavily, then remarked how she "felt depressed," "overwhelmed and helpless." Her response alarmed me and she began to question what she was learning in other classes and how "disconnected it [felt] from reality." After asking other students if they felt the same way, they nodded their heads in agreement and echoed her response with unique examples. The students were not uncritically striking

the false binary of "real world" versus the academy—I felt they had valid and sophisticated critiques. During the conversation, one student remarked that our environmental crisis is so overwhelming that he questioned if we had no choice but to surrender to dystopia.

I do not recall my reply, but I do remember listening and taking comfort in knowing that the classroom could be an epistemological and affective space whereby students could express an ecology of doubts, worries, despair, and anger about unprecedented environmental disaster. Having a harmonious classroom was always a priority for me; however, I learned that day that a course about environmental sustainability means becoming sensitized to a range of emotions—even anger. Cultural studies theorist Ben Highmore maintains, "ordinary life is the arena of fear and threat as much as it is of reassurance and safety. In other words it is a highly charged political arena" (*Ordinary Lives* 20). The classroom became the space of ordinary life, which marked the affective dimensions of critique.

In other classes that I have taught, I witnessed anger and a complex entanglement of emotions from students during class discussion of Pollan's op-ed "Power Steer," which discusses how industrial beef is a detriment to people, animals, and land. Students wholeheartedly agreed with Pollan and commented on the treatment of steer and the nature of the beef they eat with statements such as, "this is disgusting" and long-drawn out affective responses such as "ewwwww." In addition to their ineffable disgust and anger, they lamented that they could not afford local, farm-raised, grass-fed beef. They recognized that they were trapped in a system they deeply resented. This context is not

unlike Giroux's position about the relationship of individual economic survival to the greater good. Giroux asserts that when individuals are concerned with economic survival, they are unable to connect their personal struggles to larger public struggles (*Dangerous Thinking* 35). As Giroux explains, neoliberalism's culture of individualism "has no interest in connecting private troubles to larger public issues" or for producing an "ethical imagination that enables one to find a place in the world" (*Dangerous Thinking* 21). My students explained that they felt detached from any concept of the common good when they themselves where "just trying to survive" in uncertain economic times. They pointed out how sustainability culture is often implicated with asymmetrical relationships of power and class determines who has access to organic food and has the privilege to live in environmentally safe areas.

Once in my class, a student nonetheless helped the class resist feelings of anger and helplessness when he drew attention to local farms. He explained that it was possible to purchase affordable, local, farm-raised, grass-fed, organic beef. Knowing that a local farm could address industrial farm dysfunction spurred discussion about what other local businesses were doing to affect the environment. Soon, students began discussing ways to affect the local environment themselves. In a sense, they began "to think of their local environments not as separate, incidental landscapes but as extensions of themselves" (Owens, *Composition and Sustainability* 75). They could support sustainable practices that would in turn provide them sustenance.

This strange excitement also began to brew when my student had expressed hopelessness and depression. The student who kicked off the discussion about being

"depressed" began to discuss involvement with local issues regarding our environment. She observed that hope for a sustainable future included rhetorical critique but also meant engaging with our local environment. As theorist Rosi Braidotti argues, sustainability calls for "a regrounding of the subject in a materially embedded sense of responsibility and ethical accountability for the environment she or he inhabits" (qtd. in Alaimo, *Exposed* 174). I recall the student feeling hopeful after discussion; however, I knew a single conversation could not shake off the throbbing despair that reared its head again after a discussion about climate destabilization. In fact, despair was unshakable when we discussed other environmental issues.

The Trap of Narrative Fetishism

When I reread a section that I had written at this point of the chapter, I deleted it and realized that my writing slipped into a linear "pleasure of narrative" about how the class reached an impasse, how we had let it linger and then worked through the trauma of learning about environmental disasters (Worsham, "Composing (Identity)" 178). In other words, apocalyptic logic guided the chapter about teaching environmental sustainability into a straightforward and predictable narrative restricting an alternative narrative and doing violence to the present. Although my class realized the accuracy of Cvetkovich's assessment that "we live in a culture whose violence takes the form of systematically making us feel bad," the class never reached a single impasse and settled on a happy ending (15).

Not unlike how Spellmeyer's assertion that apocalyptic thinking is seductive, I too struggled with imposing the assurance of "order, sequence, causality, coherence, and

completion" and attempted to reframe trauma so this chapter would fulfill the expected, predictable, lesson-learned move of a dissertation (Worsham, "Composing (Identity)" 178). Just as I had exhibited apprehension about the future of the course in terms of trying to determine the best way to approach the course, I too demonstrated apprehension about this chapter. It *had to* culminate in a story in which the class reached an impasse, and yet we creatively worked around the impasse to finally witness a break in the dark clouds upon the horizon.

In her text "Teaching Writing in Hawaii after Pearl Harbor and 9/11: How to 'Make Meaning' and 'Heal' Despite National Propaganda," Daphne Desser maintains that the move to reframe trauma with argumentation lends itself to culturally accepted meaning-making. She instead argues for a writing pedagogy that relies on a "deconstructive type of meaning making that is incomplete, partial, and deferred and that comes out of and contributes to a critique of dominant cultural production" (86). Her deconstructive pedagogy interrogates national propaganda master narratives and calls for intellectual healing that is "politically aware" (87). Rather than give in to pressures to emotionally heal students, because we lack such training, Desser argues for a redefinition of healing through our expertise in rhetorical inquiry and civic response (92).

Contrary to her deconstructive pedagogical practice, Desser maintains "interpretation, analysis, and argumentation" can fall into a trap and "make the 'seemingly incomprehensible' safe for consumption by transforming it into material that is manageable, orderly, civilized, and palatable, ignoring trauma's inevitable inability to be fully defined, processed, or understood" (85). Even though Desser and Worsham

argue that writing instructors "need to be wary of the pressure to push our students toward an artificial and too-easy resolution in their writing about traumatic events," I realized that as an instructor I too must be vigilant about reframing my classroom and teaching experiences because it reproduces writing and packages classrooms into ideological sites of fetishized cultural narratives (Desser 88). Instructors are not immune to apocalyptic narratives—it is worth questioning what insights go unnoticed with the suffocating drive toward the habit of writing fetishized apocalyptic narratives that bring us comfort. The uncertainty of writing offshore eclipses our conscious break from apocalyptic logic.

Even though I tried to unfold an apocalyptic story of how my classroom experience culminated a single impasse resulting in creative resolution, for me, teaching environmental sustainability commands facing one impasse after another. In other words, this course necessarily lacks resolution because one disaster follows another.[41] Furthermore, it is impossible to foresee how disasters and emotions intersect—they do so in unpredictable and complex ways. Teaching environmental sustainability also means being comfortable with volatile emotions and relinquishing the role of an emotional manager—the sustainability classroom is a space of emotional flux. Complex, unpredictable feelings give way to student inquiry and exploration and, likewise, exploration gives way to complex feelings. Understanding the emotional flux that teaching a sustainability course entails eliminates anticipatory anxiety and the need to fetishize apocalyptic thinking and writing.

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[41] Disasters even hide in the most unexpected of areas—just consider, for example, how the 2017 tax plan authorizes drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Such understanding also gives insight about why I once asked the sustainability award-winning ChicoBag Company if they could donate eco-bags to the students in my sustainability class to complement my unit about the nightmares of plastic. Their generous donation fit into my inadvertent narrative of teacher as superficial healer. I realize, however, that it is not a matter of choosing an eco-bag over plastic—it is also about considering all the little disasters that go in the bag—in other words, the ecology of disasters. Going further, rather than take comfort in being a good consumer, maybe directing our attention to changing environmental policies may serve as the systemic change we need. It troubles me how those with the least resources have to take on the burden of environmental sustainability while corporations on equal ontological status (if we accept Bennett's flat ontology) as individuals are unaccountable.

With the understanding that in the sustainability classroom we will face disaster after disaster, it is possible to relinquish the authorial and hierarchical role of the writing teacher as future healer and be open to new possibilities emerging from the moment. For me, relinquishing the fetishized role of healer became an act of self-healing whereby I could focus on the present moment. Recognizing the ease in which narratives can slip into apocalyptic logic can develop an awareness of overlapping discursive and affective resistance. Even though I stopped the chapter from slipping into a fetishized apocalyptic narrative, the sustainability writing classroom nonetheless had moments punctuated by joyful connection.

Panoramic View of Pedagogical Hybridity

I once invited a guest speaker who was an award-winning graphic artist to be a guest speaker for a multimodal unit. We discussed the course and multimodal pedagogy and collaborated on a multimodal unit in which students would design a public service announcement in the form of a print advertisement in a major magazine with an accompanying process book. The students would transform the research they had conducted for their previous project regarding the multiple positions of their chosen environmental sustainability issue into a fully designed ad with headline, short body copy, and accompanying graphics. It was my hope that students would distribute their ads to inform the public about their sustainability issue.[42]

Teaching a course in doom with no frames of intelligibility combined with depression and the risky move of teaching collaboratively felt like potentially adding gas to the flames. What emerged, however, from my collaboration were not flames, but pedagogical hybridity. Pollan maintains hybridization "brings newness into the world" and my collaboration did just that (43). Owens in *Composition and Sustainability: Teaching for a Threatened Generation* maintains writing about environmental sustainability requires us to "train the eye toward one's chosen realms of study while not losing sign of the degree to which one is embedded within other information flows (140). As such, collaborating with the graphic artist for my multimodal unit proffered a panoramic view.

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[42] In all the sustainability classes that I have taught, students always become self-motivated sponsors of ecoliteracy. They always tell me about how they write letters to their parents about what they learned and how their friends, family, and roommates change their habits as a result.

Among my various reasons of inviting the risky artist-collaboration included my attempt to complement one of the course readings, which was physicist Fritof Capra's text "Ecology and Community."[43] To build sustainable communities, Capra argues that we can learn lessons from the organizing principles of ecology including how relationships are interdependent (and not mere assemblages), the importance of visualizing and mapping patterns, how communities learn from mistakes through feedback loops, and how cooperation and partnerships are more important in nature than competition. Capra draws attention to the overlapping functions of artists and ecologists who both work with environmental relationships. Art complements ecoliteracy's central feature of "visualization and the study of pattern" (227).

Once during a workshop day in which students worked on their ads in the computer lab, the graphic artist and I met together with each student to discuss their work in progress. Aside from our conversations, however, the classroom became vibrant with students discussing their projects with one another. Students were involved with giving one another advice regarding copy, colors, and craft—I witnessed a rich, magical-like enthusiasm of cooperation and connection where they discussed with one another their rhetorical and affective choices. Their ads became more than individual and private assignments that, once turned in to an instructor as a final, mysteriously transform into end-of-semester hallway trash. Instead, their assignments became acts of co-creation;

[43] Although I have frequently taught a multimodal unit relying on the theoretical underpinning of multimodal *compositionists*, I wanted to experience how a professional artist's perspective would bear upon my pedagogy.

similarly, so did my teaching. I saw a creative community emerge from the dynamic exchange of ideas, enthusiasm, and care.

On the last day of class, I took a group photo and then with blurry eyes watched everyone leave the room one by one. Each student walked away in a different trajectory. Our community dissolved back into the everyday.

CHAPTER 5: DISCONNECTED: A POLEMIC

> We are prone to tinker at the edges of the status quo and then are puzzled when things don't improve much and even larger disasters occur.
>
> —David Orr, *Dangerous Years: Climate Change, the Long Emergency, and the Way Forward*

> If you would be a poet, create works capable of answering the challenge of apocalyptic times, even if this means sounding apocalyptic.
>
> —Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *Poetry as Insurgent Art*

> Curiosity is an attunement to multispecies entanglement, complexity, and the shimmer all around us.
>
> —Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt, *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*

Thus far, I have attempted to convey my sense of political exhaustion and despair regarding one executive action after another that has exacerbated our political and environmental catastrophes. In this chapter of twists and turns, my exhaustion reaches a crisis point in which I re-evaluate the central question of this dissertation as it arose from Richard Miller's book *Writing at the End of the Word*: "is it possible to produce [and teach] writing that generates a greater connection to the world and its inhabitants?" (25). Here, I assume the role of a negative narrator who becomes wary of the notion and practice of connection. Furthermore, I become a polemicist to illustrate how political disappointment feels. My reversal regarding the worth of my central dissertation inquiry not only illustrates the narrator's emotional turmoil, but also exposes the duplicitous nature of connection itself.

Throughout this project, I have framed connection exclusively in positive terms; however, this chapter turns this idea on its head and acknowledges that the notion and practice of connectivity can not only cultivate detached relationships but also

subjectivities defined by capital. As such, dissatisfied with the practice of connection, I reach an impasse and embrace a running master narrative of death in English studies from the reaches of Friedrich Nietzsche's death of God, Roland Barthes' death of the author, Miller's end of the world, to Scranton's imperative that we must learn how to die. I question whether to likewise declare the death of writing and the pursuit of connection. As such, the chapter takes a negative turn and scratches the surface of negating different types of connection—even Web 2.0 connections. This critique, however, is short-lived when I recognize that apocalyptic thinking has reared its ugly head.

Although Nietzsche's declaration of death was meaningful for his time, I recognize and argue that death and creation narratives, in the context of today's political and environmental moment, characterize apocalyptic logic, which is embedded in the crisis of sustainability.[44] Recognizing such apocalyptic thinking, however, does not compel me to return to my naïve and positive reading of connection or eclipse alternative ways of ways of thinking—instead, with help of Andrew S. Mathews' research "practices of walking, looking, and wondering" and speculative attention, I recognize the complexity of connection and its irreducibility to mere creative or destructive tendencies (G145).

Seven Months Later

Seven months after the presidential election, I was curious to know how other writing instructors were coping with their political disappointments in their classrooms and scholarship. I wondered if members challenged their assumptions about writing

[44] In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche declares the death of God, which signifies a death of metaphysical thinking.

pedagogy—not only in the aftermath of the election, but during our slow-motion political apocalypse. The political exhaustion that I experienced after the first week of the presidency became chronic and I was certain that I was not the only writing instructor feeling the weight of Trump's discursive and material violence. It was not enough to just ignore Trump's Twitter feed—news sites and PBS began to air screen shots of his tweets, repeat his tweets, discuss his tweets, and analyze his tweets. His nightmarish tweets began to exceed the boundaries of his Twitter feed and contaminate the everyday. Tweet after tweet after polluting tweet.

Given the solidarity and creativity WPA-L members expressed post election, along with Gerald Nelms' hopeful declaration of proposing to his provost two additional first year courses for students with "one in politics and civics (teaching how government actually works—e.g., through negotiation and compromise and respect and reasoning and rhetoric) and one in critical thinking and critical reading/listening," I looked forward to learning about the hopeful changes that were brewing among the listserv members (Re: Trump). As such, I emailed the WPA-L community the following inquiry, "John Duffy turned to the listserv for advice regarding how to support faculty and students post election. I would like to know six months later, how has everyday political grief reshaped your pedagogy/work in composition?" ("Six Months Later").[45]

[45] The subject line "Six Months Later," reflects my time error—I asked my question seven months later.

Three days passed without an answer from over four thousand WPA-L members.[46] Finally, William Thelin replied to my post and asked if anyone responded to my question. He then responded, "While I disagree with President Trump on just about every issue and have tremendous concerns about his leadership and stability, I felt many of us in academia projected our 'grief,' to use your word, onto our students. In other words, students were not as upset about Trump's election as academics were and didn't need as much support [as] we might have thought, based on posts to this listserv and elsewhere […] As a field, we clearly need to rethink how we teach argument and the research that supports it. But that pre-dated Trump as much as we might want to blame him" ("Re: Six Months Later").

Mourning Athena

Thelin's response prompted me to think about the affective dimensions of my experience returning to my ENG 3100J: Writing About Environmental Sustainability classroom the day after the presidential election. Contrary to Thelin's assessment of how students felt, my experience differed—the grief and anger among some of the students in my classroom was palpable. To disguise my political disappointment post-election, I smiled as I entered the classroom and then asked, as I typically do, how the students were doing. One of the students replied, "like shit because we have an asshole for a president." Following his response, an unpredictable drip of other voices underscored his response while many students slumped in their chairs with downcast eyes.

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[46] On November 7, 2017, Barry Maid emailed the WPA-L membership number to me, so this might not be an accurate membership number at the time of my post.

As students who are passionate about environmental sustainability and self-selected to be in an environmental sustainability-themed course, they knew environmental sustainability was at stake; however, could they imagine that Trump would reverse one Obama protection after another? That day, the fragility of the common good was unimaginable for me—I could not imagine, for example, the reduction of the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments. Patagonia maintains the reduction is the "largest elimination of protected land in American history" (Patagonia). It was, however, imaginable that the administration would declare eliminating climate change as a national security threat (Gajanan). Prior to the election, I taught a unit about climate change, and before I even mentioned the president-elect's denial of climate science to open the unit, many students were aware of his stance and anticipated the administration's open hostility.

With sheepdog herding instinct, after several students expressed their political disappointment, I did not let their depression linger because I could not assume collective grief. Instead, I guided the students' disapproving comments to the day's planned workshop. The typical joyful commotion of our collaborative workshops where students discuss their writing over technical issues was conspicuously absent that day. I remember how we sat and wrote together in the shared silence of our trauma. I listened to the silence, lifted my head between sentences and watched the students as they wrote. I felt like I had missed an important pedagogical moment and instead forced the day into my pre-planned lesson despite knowing that the situation called for something far more than I could conceive.

As I watched the students write, I questioned what I should do and I thought about Thoreau's perspective about silence: "I wish to hear the silence of the night for the silence is something positive and to be heard…Sometimes the silence is merely negative, an arid and barren waste in which I shudder, where no ambrosia grows…Silence alone is worthy to be heard…I hear the unspeakable" (*Volume Five* 448). David Orr maintains "teaching about the challenges of sustainability generally can be rather like teaching health care in the emergency room of a big city hospital on a Saturday night in July—one human tragedy followed by yet another, all night long" ("All Hands on Deck" ix). Orr is accurate—that day, the content of the course combined with student disappointment was a tragedy, but it was absent the din of an emergency room. While we sat in silence, I questioned if the revelatory work that critique does even mattered. I wondered if the students had similar feelings. I felt the fragility of critique, the fragility of democracy, and the fragility of the meaning of the identity I forged for myself as a writing instructor.

During the campaign, critique unveiled racism, sexism, anti-environmentalism, and anti-democracy. And yet critique—the cornerstone and protagonist of my class and the subject in which I have dedicated years of study and work failed. The campaign was, in a sense, akin to what Pollan would term a "glass abattoir" ("An Animal's Place). Pollan contends, "Were the walls of our meat industry to become transparent, literally or even figuratively, we would not long continue to do it this way. Tail-docking and sow crates and beak-clipping would disappear overnight, and the days of slaughtering 400 head of cattle an hour would come to an end" ("An Animal's Place"). Extending Pollan's glass abattoir metaphor to the campaign, Americans could clearly see the political

dystopia of American-style fascism at work. America saw who Trump was, and yet critique failed—fascism did not, to extend Pollan's metaphor, disappear overnight. The cornerstone and protagonist of writing failed. I sat in silence as I recalled the times during which I extolled critique's socially transformative power. Critique dropped her aegis and we watched Minerva's owl fly into the distance until she faded.

Dis-Astrum: Secure Connection Failed

Despite my expectations, the WPA-L community did not share any *apocalyptic* stories of reconceptualized curricula, recognitions of counterproductive habits of mind, and revaluation of values.[47] With heart-filled anticipation, I imagined that Nelms pursued his proposal of requiring first year civics and critical thinking courses and anticipated reading a juicy, revolutionary story that would rival Che Guevara's *Motorcycle Diaries*. In response to Duffy's initial question, the collective responses on the listserv had all the required ingredients for inspirational pedagogical stories: solidarity, community, discussion, creativity, and yet the recipe fell flat.

Aside from my disenchantment, I am facing disappointment because I am no longer a member of the WPA-L community.[48] I used to enjoy waking up to reading my WPA-L digest to learn about new ideas, conferences, and opportunities—I was connected; however, just a week ago, I realized that I am no longer receiving my digests. For weeks my email was pinged for listserv maintenance—didn't the test recognize that my email is operational? I exist! But do I?

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[47] I am fetishizing my narrative; the WPA-L listserv members offered important comments; nonetheless, they were not *apocalyptic*—this is actually positive.
[48] Upon revising this section, I am mysteriously subscribed to the listserv.

I am not a Facebook member and never have been. Just to test the level of my disconnection, I attempted to visit my English department's open Facebook page; however, I am prohibited access and my attempts yielded the following message: "Secure Connection Failed." Furthermore, I have unsuccessfully tried joining the Rhetoric Society of America's listserv for nearly a month, which has proven to be a herculean task. My disconnection is ironic considering my dissertation question takes up Miller's question "is it possible to produce writing that generates a greater connection to the world and its inhabitants" (*Writing at the End* 25). I've lost my connection. To reference Caputo, I suffer *dis-astrum*—to be cut from the glowing, guiding screen of my laptop. I am disconnected.

Tables Turned

In July 2017, I attended the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning conference in Estes Park, Colorado. Although I was back home in Colorado, it was my first time at the conference and I was unaware of the creative organization despite being a member of NCTE. My co-presenter and I conducted an interactive session in which we discussed Yagelski's theory of writing as a way of being along with his characterization of Cartesian ontology to several attendees—two of whom were Robert Yagelski and Kurt Spellmeyer. After my belabored reiterations of how Cartesian thinking assumes the writer's sense of self as an autonomous being that exists separately from the world along with asking how to forge a greater connection with the world, Spellmeyer calmly said, "we are already connected." His response reminded me of how Laura Micciche characterizes writing—writing, she explains "is defined, ultimately, by its radical

withness" (502). He furthermore prompted me to remember Yagelski's notion to "write *with*," which is a "way of being together on the earth and a vehicle for imagining and creating a just and sustainable future together" (Yagelski, *Writing as a Way* 8).

Painful Connections

Spellmeyer was accurate when he calmly said, "we are already connected." We are connected—but in the vilest of ways. Similar to Orr's argument that the "challenges posed by nuclear weapons, climate change and ecological deterioration, and artificial intelligence have much in common," the Cartesian ontology of mainstream writing pedagogy is a "manifestation of the logic inherent to the systems in which they are embedded" (*Dangerous Years* 10). In other words, it should not be surprising when Yagelski insightfully argues that mainstream writing pedagogy is implicated in Cartesian logic and the crisis of sustainability. Extending Pollan's insights from the *Ominivore's Dilemma*, in which he explains how food production is implicated in an unsustainable "industrial model," Yagelski argues writing instruction likewise reflects the logic in which it is embedded (*Writing as a Way* 163). No transcendental outside position exists for writing pedagogy—writing, instructors, and students are embedded in complex ecologies. Not unlike farmers who Orr claims, "did not just buy John Deer plows," we likewise "bought into a system, and the reliance of that system had nothing to do with [our] choices" (*Dangerous Years* 23). It should not be surprising when Yageski argues the "industrial model of writing instruction," "will continue to produce students who fit into the consumerist status quo and contribute to the ongoing crisis of sustainability—

students for whom writing is not a vehicle for truth-seeking or a practice of inquiry" (171).

Joyless Connections

Given these ecologies, the joyful connection of the 1000 Gestalten collective and the 2017 Women's March seems naïve. The pink pussyhats of the cheerful 2017 Women's March that were once a symbol of domestic resistance, community, solidarity, and creativity have been co-opted by systematic commodification.[49] Subjectivities become little more than living advertisements. Just consider, for example, how we can purchase pussyhat shirts lined with fleece for thirty percent off, lapel pins, pussyhat-pink merino wool, key chains, headbands, necklaces, mugs, posters, rings—the list goes on and can rival any object-oriented ontology theorist's litany. The pussyhat knock-off products have obscured the joyful, life-affirming social connection that spurred the proliferation of products in the first place. Our sick relationships have devolved into a *pussyhate project* divested of all meaning resulting in alt-right rallies, walmart.com selling "Rope. Tree. Journalist. Some assembly required" t-shirts, a resurgence of neo-Nazi groups, and a forgotten, devastated Puerto Rico (Associated Press). I cringe at the likely backlash of the #MeToo moment.

Such dark relationships are especially visible through social media sites. Responses to the president's tweets, for example, degrade into tabloid-like quarrels. Even

[49] Aside from my commodification critique, the Pussyhat Project faces critiques of essentialism. Feminist media critic Holly L. Derr, for example, argues the Pussyhat project enacts gender essentialism in terms of race and biology ("Pink Flag"). She suggests the color pink is racially narrow and that the concept of woman cannot be reduced to biological sex.

though I am not a Facebook member, I am aware of its divisive algorithms. Once in my Writing about Environmental Sustainability class, for example, a student wanted to share a Facebook post she wrote about the Dakota Access pipeline. Her last project for the class discussed the different perspectives of the Dakota Access pipeline controversy, so her post was well researched. As she read her post to the class, her passion was palpable, but so too was her unshakable despair the next class period. The student announced that her shared writing inadvertently elicited a hateful reply from a stranger. No doubt such sharing and negative responses keep readers logging back in and lining the pockets of platform owners.

Neoliberal capitalism has co-opted Web 2.0—the dense mycelium networks of connection whereby the "subject turns from the agency of exchange into a mechanism of exchange" (Sützl). With regard to online sharing, media theorist and philosopher Wolfgang Sützl argues that Web 2.0 has transformed the everyday into an infinite source of renewed exploitation. Being, Sützl argues, has "transformed into capital" insofar as exchange relationships generate profits for platform owners (Sützl). The labor of sharing "makes the info-liberal pseudo-sharing feel like entertainment, not like labor"—in other words, exploitation becomes pleasurable (Sützl). Neoliberal capitalism has co-opted connection—an uncritical, utopian notion and practice that misguided my dissertation.

To hell with connection. Richard Miller's statement, "why bother with reading and writing when the world is so obviously going to hell" is a better orientation toward the world (*Writing at the End* 16). The field of English studies certainly has espoused such an orientation when considering one of its pervasive narratives. English studies has

a running master narrative of death from Nietzsche's death of God, and Roland Barthes' death of the author to Miller's end of the world (20). Just recently, Scranton has even argued that we must learn to die. Should I too declare the death of writing? Should I declare the death of connection?

Learning to Die: Apocalyptic Narratives

Despite his imperative to learn how to die, Scranton nonetheless argues "to see each day as the death of what came before, freeing ourselves to deal with whatever problems the present offers without attachment or fear" (27). He argues for the death of "acting as if tomorrow will be just like yesterday, growing less and less prepared for each new disaster as it comes, and more and more desperately invested in a life we can't sustain" (27). In other words, Scranton calls for the death of our deep-seated counterproductive habits of mind. Contrary to Scranton, however, I will not declare the death of anything—even ground metaphysics because destruction and creation narratives are still symptomatic of apocalyptic thinking—declaring the end of anything slips into the apocalyptic narrative this dissertation seeks to contest. Furthermore, the apocalyptic worldview of destruction and creation is static, assumes clean breaks, and overlooks complex movements, transformations, and textured temporalities. Even Scranton's playful discursive declarations of death or numerous fashionable turns of post pedagogy x,y, or z become the trappings of apocalyptic narratives because apocalyptic thinking does not differentiate between texts and bodies.

Considering textuality and sense, I find it important to turn to Gilles Deleuze—the philosopher of affirmation, of connection, of the rhizome, which has no stable origin and

hierarchy, but consists of unpredictable "lines of flight" that "establish a logic of the AND" (Deleuze and Guattari 24). Although it might seem predictable, cliché, and obvious to turn to Deleuze, I am not interested in theorizing the rhizome— my interest lies with his interpretation of Baruch Spinoza's thoughts about the body.[50] Deleuze points out Spinoza's assertion "that we do not even know what a body *can do*, we talk about consciousness and spirit and chatter on about it all, but we do not know what a body is capable of, what forces belong to it or what they are preparing for" (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 39).

Extending this same logic to connection, we do not yet know what writing, connections, or *writing-with* can do. Even among the ruins, sensuous, attentive encounters with the world might call attention to previously overlooked ways of being and doing—in other words, overlooked ways of *living*. Giving up on the notion and practice of connection is symptomatic of apocalyptic thinking, which assumes a simplistic worldview. The connections we forge create *numerous* affective stances toward the world. I prefer to not overlook complex interactions among connections—especially when we cultivate detached relationships and communities. In other words, where we might see environmental devastation and simply prepare to die, perhaps we can, in the words of forester and anthropologist Andrew S. Mathews, engage in more attentive encounters among the ruins.

[50] Although academics often reference Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza perhaps as much as his theory of the rhizome, his reference to Spinoza is absent in writing studies.

Speculative Attention

Mathews demonstrates my point in his text "Ghostly Forms and Forest Histories" in which he discusses his fieldwork "practices of walking, looking, and wondering" and attentive speculation to trace the past encounters among politics, "people, plants, and animals" in the abandoned pine and chestnut forests of Mount Pisani, Italy (G145). When he walks through the forest, he not only notes the various species and "textures and forms of walls and ditches, of houses and ruins" but also speculates about what histories shaped the forest floor. Mathews asserts it is difficult work: "it requires constant attention to form, texture, and color, constant speculation as to pattern" (G147). Although he takes photographs, he relies on taking sketches in his notebook to draw attention to key characteristics than can be easily overlooked. He explains, for instance, "a few pencil strokes can summarize the patterns I noticed when I took a picture, whereas photographs are notoriously less helpful for highlighting key features of a complex plant-landscape assemblage. If you know how to see, you can see fascinating stories of human-animal-plant communication embedded in the forms of living and dead trees" (G148). The "ghostly forms" Mathews acknowledges demonstrates how "the layered temporalities of living dying that shape our landscapes" (Tsing et al. M10-M11)

Drawing attention to a photograph he took of a large, ancient stump, he asserts, "if you look closely," "you will see a new round of shoots emerging: this tree is not yet dead" (G149).

Figure 2. Ancient Stool in Capannori, Italy, March 28, 2014. From *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*. Copyright Andrew S. Mathews, used with permission from Andrew S. Mathews and U of Minnesota P.

Similarly, when discussing areas of blackened soil where "chestnut husks have been burned for centuries," Mathews acknowledges initially overlooked collaborations between fungi and trees when he points to "additional actors in this shifting multispecies assemblage are mycorrhizal fungi that allow the tree to absorb mineral nutrients" (G151). Mathews' attentive encounters with the "ghostly forms of past histories in present-day forests" are political because they illustrate numerous human and non-human relationships regarding political and economic life (G154). For Mathews, no singular Anthropocene history exists; instead, he prefers to open his senses and acknowledge the

plurality of "'Anthropocenes'"—doing so allows us to imagine "multiple possible Anthropocene futures" (G154).

Extending this same logic to writing, we do not yet know what writing, connections, or *writing-with* can do because of inattentiveness and the blockages of apocalyptic narratives of beginnings and endings that eclipse alternative futures. As Yagelski explains,

> writing as a practice of being *requires* attention to the writer's inherent connections to those other individuals in a classroom, who are not only members of that temporary community but also members of many larger, overlapping communities that continue to exist and change long after the class itself ends. (*Writing as a Way* 162)

In the same way that Mathews acknowledges overlooked shifting, quiet, micro-collaborations between fungi and trees among the ruins, even when we face writing at the end of the world, the possibilities of connection are not exhausted—Spellmeyer was right, "we have always been connected."

The question remains, how will these connections help us cultivate sustainable and equitable futures among the ruins? As Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt, argue in their *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*—an imaginative text of entangled humanities and scientific writing that combines two books in one—a challenge of our times is how "entanglement with others makes life possible, but when one relationship goes awry, the repercussions ripple" (M5). My only hope is that as I write this sentence and you read it,

this connection might grow from the ruins and ghosts of apocalyptic logic and set in motion co-creative, alternative arts of living in this fragile world.

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