Introduction

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“Soon he is on all fours pushing his pack in front of him. Another hundred yards and he has to crawl on his belly” (Danielewski 447–50). Will Navidson, one of the characters in Mark Danielewski’s novel *House of Leaves* (2000), has discovered a door connecting his house to a series of mysterious underground environments: a staircase, a vast hall, countless corridors. The quoted passage is set deep in the house’s recesses, with Navidson exploring a maze-like environment—a deeply layered space that resonates with the classical myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, the Freudian “unheimlich,” as well as horror film tropes. But despite these familiar cultural coordinates, this space resists the characters’ attempts at representation and appropriation: it is an irreducibly nonhuman environment where human consciousness falters and cognition breaks down. As the disorienting space of the labyrinth becomes foregrounded, Danielewski’s novel translates Navidson’s experience into the visual language of typography: the passage is stretched over four pages, the layout of the text displaying the shifting corridors and Navidson’s bodily contortions as he makes his way through them (see Figure 0.1). Space—meaning both the physical space of the page and the imagined space of the house—destabilizes human understanding and mastery. In this process, spatiality affects the reading experience, confronting readers with how the efficacy of things can spiral out of human control: the titular “house of leaves” takes on an agency of its own, manipulating the characters physically and psychologically, even concretizing typographically into the physical object readers are holding in their hands.

The efficacy of nonhuman spaces, when experienced through narrative form, is at the center of this collection. Recent debates on the Anthropocene have prompted a re-negotiation of the relationship between human subjectivity and nonhuman matter across a wide range of disciplines. “Anthropocene” is a term introduced by chemist Paul Crutzen in the early 2000s to refer to the present geological era and particularly to humanity’s lasting impact on the Earth’s crust: humanity has become a quasi-geological agent through the burning of fossil fuels and the release of large amounts of near-indestructible plastic into the environment. This term has been discussed by numerous commentators in the humanities as well as social

<p>ch. So on he i s on all fours p</p> <p>447</p>	<p>ushing his pac k in fro nt of hi</p> <p>448</p>
<p>m. Another hundred yar ds and he h</p> <p>449</p>	<p>as to crawl on hi s belly. As we c</p> <p>450</p>

Figure 0.1 Typography and nonhuman spaces in Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* (447–50). Pages adapted by the authors for readability.

sciences, sometimes critically (see, e.g., Chakrabarty; Crist; Cohen et al.). In broad strokes, the Anthropocene signals a double disruption: humanity is disrupting the geological record, changing the Earth’s climate and ecosystems in ways that are already having adverse consequences for a vast range of natural environments and life forms. But, at the same time, the Anthropocene exposes the efficacy of nonhuman processes: how biophysical systems may escape human control and have unintended—and devastating—consequences for human societies themselves (and, certainly, for some human societies more than for others).

The entanglement of human activity and nonhuman processes is inscribed in the physical spaces of our planet, from expanding deserts to melting ice caps and coastal areas threatened by the rise of sea levels. This entanglement can become inscribed in humans’ bodily experience of space as well. However, attuning our bodies to the nonhuman is anything but straightforward, because—as many commentators on the ecological crisis point out (Jamieson; Clark)—there is a significant gap between the phenomenology of everyday spaces and wide-ranging changes affecting the planet as a whole. The spatial scale of more-than-human processes, including humanity’s

impact on the planet, eludes everyday experience. Put bluntly: we can experience environmental pollution in our immediate spatial surroundings, but it is easy to ignore an increase of three degrees Celsius in average temperatures around the globe. Human-scale spatiality may be comfortable to inhabit, but it has become (in the West, and increasingly around the globe) bound up with ideologies of human stewardship and mastery over natural resources—precisely the ideology that has led to the current ecological crisis.

This collection proposes that spatial forms, and the spatial forms of narrative more specifically, have a pivotal role to play in expanding our imagination beyond this comfort zone. Various contemporary thinkers—from Bruno Latour to Timothy Morton and Jane Bennett—are contending with notions of nonhuman efficacy and materiality in a theoretical vein. Through the evocation of nonhuman environments, narrative can turn this critique of anthropocentrism into the language of imaginative experience. Narrative can hone our sensitivity to nonhuman spaces: for instance, it can explore counterintuitive locations like Danielewski's labyrinthine house, or it can playfully engage with the "Great Outdoors," as Line Henriksen does in the fictional monologue that closes the collection, an ironic meditation on the forms of narrative, typography, and intersubjectivity. Henriksen imagines a "you" who inhabits the nonhuman space of a "reading cosmos" and is reluctant to send postcards from that "weirdly realistic" place. Our inclusion of Henriksen's text is inspired by a special issue of *Yale French Studies* (1981) devoted to the theory of description, which ends with a piece by French author Georges Perec describing the desk on which he is writing; Henriksen's text offers creative commentary on the ideas outlined in the previous chapters, making sure that the scholarly discussion of nonhuman spaces flows back into imaginative writing. The three parts of this book single out three foci of narrative, and spatial, resistance to anthropocentric assumptions: the first deals with quotidian objects and situations imagined through descriptive strategies that interrupt the human-centered progression of narrative; the second part explores locations affected by disaster and catastrophe, events whose narrativization severely undermines the illusion of human control over space; the third part addresses the epistemological limits of narrative form and how the spatial imagination can attempt to pierce through such limits through various scalar shifts.

The inherently disruptive nature of the Anthropocene has been discussed by many commentators within the field of environmentally conscious literary criticism or "ecocriticism" (e.g., Trexler and Johns-Putra; Rigby). What this collection brings to the table is a sustained engagement with space and form as central sites for confronting the challenges raised by the Anthropocene. Cognitively speaking, the experience of space underlies the modeling of abstract or intangible phenomena such as the "movement" of time or the "overlap" between two concepts (see Rohrer). From a phenomenological perspective, philosopher Peter Woelert writes that "embodied spatial experience ... can ... be broadly regarded as constituting from the very

beginning an essential condition for the possibility of symbolic domestication of the world” (133). But space is more ambivalent than Woelert admits: just as it is grounded in bodily experience and can serve the ends of “symbolic domestication,” it can be used to resist the domestication itself. It can point, allusively but no less powerfully, beyond the conceptual coordinates of everyday reality, as if sending postcards from the “Great Outdoors.”

We see space and form as intrinsically bound up: space always presents itself in a particular form (the grid of a North American city, the meandering shape of a river, the undulations of a hilly landscape); conversely, we cannot think about literary and aesthetic form without bringing in spatial relations. Joseph Frank raised this point in an influential 1945 article, but his interest in modernist experimentations led him to see spatial form as a distinctive trait of modern literature. While modernism is well represented in the corpus interrogated by the authors in this collection (Karlsson Pedersen, Oulanne, Marcussen), the other authors turn to nineteenth-century travel writing (Askin) or contemporary fiction (Ameel, Caracciolo, Gebauer, Kankkunen, Kortekallio, Rodriguez) and poetry (McAllister). Indeed, we do not regard spatial form as an exclusively modernist phenomenon, but we see it as inherent in the physical presentation of a text, in strategies for the evocation of imaginative environments as well as in their experienced shape in readers’ mental imagery. As Frank rightly suggests, however, the spatiality of this encounter between formal strategies and readers’ experience may be foregrounded to different degrees. The narratives we explore employ highly salient spatial forms in ways that resonate, whether presciently or directly, with contemporary debates on the Anthropocene.

An important caveat is that all the literary texts discussed in this collection are by Western writers. We see this focus on Western narrative as a significant constraint on the claims we can make here. Engaging non-Western ways of thinking about space is an important and indeed essential way forward for ecocritically inspired approaches to narrative and a logical next step for our investigation. The work collected in a volume edited by Salma Monani and Joni Adamson, which is positioned at the intersection of ecocriticism and Indigenous studies, is exemplary in this regard. Nevertheless, we believe there is value in examining how Western authors from a variety of geographical contexts (including Scandinavia, Germany, Britain, and the United States) challenge dualistic assumptions about the nonhuman that are at the core of Western modernity. The formalist agenda of this book could also be productively extended to non-Western narrative.

Our approach is inspired by New Formalism, a movement defined by an interest in how form transcends the boundaries of literary or artistic texts and involves the cultural and evaluative formations that shape the life of a given society (see Levinson). Narrative has a central role to play in this project: “The form that best captures the experience of colliding forms is narrative,” writes Caroline Levine in a fundamental contribution to New Formalism (*Forms* 19). This is because narrative, especially

but not exclusively in the genre of the novel, is capable of absorbing and staging, within its folds, a multitude of conceptual forms. Think about how Danielewski builds on the spatial form of the labyrinth and uses it to generate a deeply perplexing space that, in both the characters' and the readers' experience, questions notions of domesticity and rational control. Narrative is also a pervasive form, structuring our understanding of reality in a broader sense: the Anthropocene itself, with its controversial elevation of "the human" to the role of a geological agent (see Crist), is a "metanarrative" (in Jean-François Lyotard's sense) that circulates in contemporary culture. The malleability of narrative form makes it possible for specific cultural texts to destabilize, through spatial experience, broader metanarratives regarding the human and its position vis-à-vis planetary realities.

We frame this inquiry into nonhuman spaces in the terminology of narrative theory—a field that, even in its poststructuralist incarnations, has retained a deep interest in formal patterns. Over the last two decades, space has become a focus of research at the intersection of narrative theory, literary studies, and the social sciences. While extremely valuable, this work has tended to privilege human-scale spaces and is only beginning to engage with the post-anthropocentric philosophies that Richard Grusin brings together under the rubric of the "nonhuman turn." In turn, post-anthropocentric theories have only partially addressed questions of (narrative) form. In the next two sections of this introduction, our goal is—first—to account for the role of literature vis-à-vis discussions on the Anthropocene and the nonhuman and—second—to review narratological work on space and explain how it can benefit our investigation into nonhuman spatiality.

Literature in the Anthropocene: Theoretical Approaches

The Anthropocene as a concept is hard to grasp, as it is "no sort of unitary or easily perceived object" (5), as Timothy Clark puts it, or, as Pieter Vermeulen argues, it only "becomes useful if we accept that [it] is inevitably a misnomer" (8). In coming to terms with this diffuse and problematic concept, foregrounding space may prove helpful. We inhabit two spaces at the same time: an abstract planetary space (the Earth) and a concrete embodied space in which we experience the effects of the Anthropocene. A gap thus opens up between the phenomenology of everyday spaces and the wide-ranging changes affecting the planet as a whole. Both spaces disrupt the longstanding dualism that opposes human societies to nonhuman animals and processes (e.g., geological phenomena or the climate). The natural system of the planet is not a stable and self-contained unity but is influenced and challenged by the equally powerful impacts of human expansionism. Likewise, our everyday relationship to natural environments is one of deep entanglement, effectively casting the nonhuman as an active agent resisting mere exploitation.

Thus, the rise of the Anthropocene has prompted scholars from a wide range of fields to challenge dichotomies between subject and object and to rethink the human-nonhuman binary. Within the nonhuman turn, post-anthropocentric thinkers go against the dominant Western philosophical strand of human exceptionalism and insist on the reciprocal relationship between human societies and nonhuman things and processes. Grusin notes that post-anthropocentric theories are “all engaged in decentering the human in favor of a turn toward and concern for the nonhuman, understood variously in terms of animals, affectivity, bodies, organic and geophysical systems, materiality, or technologies” (vii). The nonhuman turn brings together a wide variety of theoretical approaches such as Actor-Network Theory, Affect Theory, Animal Studies, New Materialism, Speculative Realism, and Object-Oriented-Ontology (OOO). Of particular interest for our volume is the claim, advanced by scholars affiliated with New Materialism and OOO, that literature has a central position in changing our ways of thinking about the nonhuman and challenging preconceived notions about the passivity of spatial environments. These scholars ask us, in Jane Bennett’s words, to give up the “habit of parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings)” (*Vibrant Matter* vii). How to do so can be learned from literature. According to Claire Colebrook, literature and the humanities have a crucial role to play in evoking a post-anthropocentric attitude toward the nonhuman, for, “if reason, calculation, practice and day-to-day thinking have led to a tragic inability to think beyond the expedience of the present, then perhaps it is the task of literature and the humanities to address our sentimental, affective, habitual and non-cognitive comportment toward the world” (115). Literature exposes a vibrantly material background that is normally bracketed in favor of human agency and mastery. As a consequence, the nonhuman turn contests previous linguistic and cultural movements by proposing a very different conception of language: rather than regarding literature as a semiotic system or a tool involved in the construction of cultural identities, the focus is on literature’s ability to present, perform, and create material affects. To some scholars, literature itself even becomes a “biodegradable” materiality, where the very physicality of the page obfuscates processes of meaning-making (Colebrook 118). Matter and meaning coemerge, as posited by—for instance—Karen Barad’s agential realism, where the world is regarded as a constant becoming, consisting of intra-actions of material and discursive agencies: “Mattering is simultaneously a matter of substance and significance” (3).

In the context of New Materialism, Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter* introduces the idea of a vital materiality in order to change “our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption” (*Vibrant Matter* ix) that have led to the Anthropocene and to help us get “a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within our human bodies” (*Vibrant Matter* ix).

Inspired by Bruno Latour's concept of the actant, which is a "source of action that can be either human or nonhuman" (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* viii), Bennett draws attention to the capacity of our nonhuman environments to act upon, and affect, our lives. One example is particularly pertinent to our volume, as it demonstrates the literary inspiration of Bennett's thinking. To explain how things disclose themselves as more than inert matter, she offers the following description of objects she encountered one morning on her way to work:

[One] large men's black plastic work glove
 one dense mat of oak pollen
 one unblemished dead rat
 one white plastic bottle cap
 one smooth stick of wood. (*Vibrant Matter* 4)

As she comes across these items, they exhibit their "thing-power," changing from passive trash to vital things producing effects both among each other and on her. Here space comes to play an important role, because it is within a spatial assemblage with the street and with Bennett's morning walk that each thing exceeds its own singularity and "started to shimmer and spark" (5). In order for her to become aware of this debris, Bennett describes "a certain anticipatory readiness" (5), which she has learned from "Thoreau, Kafka, and Whitman" (xiv). Her most recent book takes this one step further as she follows the continuity of posture in Whitman's writing, supplementing the familiar image of Whitman's "loafing" to the equally prominent postures of nonhuman figures in his writing, such as plants and animals (*Influx and Efflux* 11). Space and literature are thus crucial tools to acknowledge matter as vibrant. This idea is reiterated in Bennett's essay that concludes the seminal volume *The Nonhuman Turn*. Here she ends with a literary description of a character's living space from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and concludes that:

Perhaps the most important stake for me of the nonhuman turn is how it might help us live more sustainably, with less violence towards a variety of bodies. Poetry can help us feel more of the liveliness hidden in such things and reveal more of threads of connection binding our fate to theirs.

(Bennett, "System and Things" 235)

Literature thus becomes a means of making available a more open-minded attitude toward the nonhuman world. This collection picks up on these claims about the importance of literature.

The material ecocritics Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann address the question of literature and nonhuman matter more directly than Bennett, as they lift insights from New Materialism in order to bridge the gap

between text and matter, proposing that “all matter [is] storied matter” (1). Arguing for the implicit textuality of the way matter expresses itself in the world, Iovino and Oppermann substitute a focus “on texts and ... how they ‘reflect’ the world’s phenomena” with a mode of reading “the world and text as an agentic entanglement” (9–10). Here interpretive practices from literary criticism are employed to read matter as an agential narrative operating outside of human practices.

An even more radical interpretation of the relation between text and matter, object and space, is found in Speculative Realism and OOO. Timothy Morton and Graham Harman define an object via its withdrawnness, another thoroughly spatial concept that goes unacknowledged as such. For OOO, every object in the world can never fully appear to us, as objects are always only present at one remove: “no object relates with others without caricature, distortion, or energy loss” (Harman, “The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer” 188). Whenever an object interacts with another object or human in space, they influence each other, and there is always some degree of “loss” in the encounter. Thus, the essence of the object can never be fully realized: “OOO is saying that behind every flow, behind every stasis, there is an object that cannot be reduced to anything whatsoever” (Morton, “An Object-Oriented Defense of Poetry” 208). Also from this perspective literature comes to play a crucial role: both as offering a possible indirect access to the withdrawn object and as itself mirroring the object’s form. First, literature, with its poetic language, can allude to the object that absconds in the encounter with a human mind. In *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy*, Harman shows how Lovecraft’s fiction can allude to a non-human, indescribable world of monsters through gaps and hints in descriptive practices. Second, literature itself mirrors the object’s relationality. In “An Object-Oriented Defense of Poetry,” Morton shows how “the aesthetic dimension is not an optional extra ... To study a poem, rather, is to see how causality itself operates” (206). For Harman and Morton, literature makes a material object appear by translating it into language, a process analogous to the way in which, when objects in the world meet, each of them is morphed into something else.

All in all, in post-anthropocentric theories, space is the place where humans and nonhuman matter interact; it gathers and forms the background upon which we can understand the nonhuman anew. Space in the Anthropocene becomes more than just a passive background upon which humans act, it forms the vital materiality where the objects we once thought were just “dead” matter show themselves recalcitrant and agential. Literature takes a prominent role in witnessing the changed relationship between the human and the nonhuman. In the following section, we turn to narrative theory, a field that offers a number of productive concepts to study the formal strategies through which literature (and literary narrative in particular) can reveal the efficacy of the nonhuman through space.

Space and Narrative (Theory)

A key aspect of our approach is to reorient the readerly attitude toward the nonhuman by foregrounding space and description in narrative texts. Emphasis on the nonhuman has not been a track consistently followed by narrative theory, despite a range of recent suggestions to do so (Askin; Caracciolo; James; James and Morel). Here, we will give a few examples of the discussions of space in narrative theory and point out some untrodden paths for thinking about narrative's engagement with the nonhuman.

As mentioned above, the "Toward a Theory of Description" issue of *Yale French Studies* is a major influence behind the genesis of this collection. In general, the essays in that issue oppose the strict boundary between description and narrative, spatiality and temporality developed by Gérard Genette. Jeffrey Kittay argues that description does not mark the frontier of narrative, as Genette claims, but rather it points out "the frontier or limits of the usefulness of the opposition" (226). The articles in *Yale French Studies* develop a diverse set of approaches that attempt to push the methodology of literary criticism and narrative theory to reconsider the methods that generate oppositions such as description vs. narrative and time vs. space.

But these Genettian dichotomies were generally reinforced in postclassical narratology. Gabriel Zoran isolates spatiality in order to tease out what makes literature a unique spatial object. This is the reverse of most theoretical studies of space and narrative, which reduce it to a container for events and subordinate it to the dynamism of time. Zoran brings space into the vernacular of narratology by abstracting the insights from the classic studies of space in literature—Gotthold Lessing, Mikhail Bakhtin, Joseph Frank, Gaston Bachelard—into a structure that is adaptable to new case studies. Several interesting arguments relevant to post-anthropocentric approaches stick out.

First, Zoran argues that space is tricky to analyze with precision because the critic must recognize that studying space is always a study of its transformation. In a sense, this is studying space from a "spatial point of view." Just as character, plot, and time can be represented spatially or as space is structured in time, "It is impossible to reconstruct the space of the world without structuring the information about it into some kind of a 'spatial pattern'" (312). This strange doubling of spatiality is perhaps clearer if it is pointed out that Zoran's second use of "space" in this definition consists of a silent "human" modifier: some kind of *human* spatial pattern. Second, spatiality in literature can never, of course, be complete. It always balances determinacy and indeterminacy, though most of the time the reader does not notice these gaps. There remains a question if certain objectivities are more difficult to represent in literary narrative. Zoran isolates the difference between humans and nonhumans:

The formation of a character's external appearance constitutes a special problem, different from the formation of an inanimate object—although

every text expresses this difference in a different way. Imagine the grotesque effect that would be created if a character was handled as a physical object. In principle, therefore, one may state that the differentiation between subject and object determines a basic differentiation within space—between the external appearance of the characters and the environmental objects.

(317)

This is Zoran's most overt reference to any kind of ontological difference between types of spaces in the text. Several of the essays in the present collection explore the validity of this distinction (Pedersen, Kankkunen) and point out the ways in which certain texts exploit this anthropocentric bias (Oulanne, Caracciolo).

Ruth Ronen is frequently cited alongside Zoran, though their approaches differ. Ronen foregrounds fictionality in order to define setting alongside other, more dynamic, spatial frames. As such, the topography of fictional entities within a literary text is defined by different modes of access to space; the *setting* is the "actual immediate surrounding" of the entities in a text and a *frame* is an organization of the sub-spaces within this setting (423). The way a text handles framing its entities is thus the origin of different character dynamics and event sequences. She describes several different types of frames, the most interesting of which are "inaccessible frames." These can either be totally "closed" in the storyworld—where "information is inaccessible to characters in another frame"—or "provisionally inaccessible"—a space penetrated later on in the text (426). Most obviously, this has become a useful way of interpreting the relationship between spatial locations, focalization, and the development of the plot. But we can also consider how the nonhuman spaces in literature are another type of these closed, "inaccessible frames," which are primarily valuable because they negate the expectations that narrative should coherently structure and provide access to spatiality.

David Herman's early work on spatiality in narrative (see "Spatial Reference") follows Zoran's and Ronen's schematic designs, but its unique subject matter seems to have inspired his recent turn to the nonhuman. He focuses on ghost stories, and this "supernatural" subject encourages him to foreground nonhuman elements of his participants' storyworlds. Departing from previous structural or phenomenological models of spatiality, Herman's interdisciplinary method combines insights from semiotics with cognitive science and natural language processing. The resulting study of "cognitive mapping" presents one of the first theories for this now ubiquitous concept. He points out that cognitive approaches to narrative are largely about answering important "where" questions that orient the reader: "far from merely providing descriptive background or ornamentation for the primary action, spatial reference in narrative domains helps make storytelling possible" (Herman, "Spatial Reference" 531). In this way, space is not just important structurally, as Zoran and Ronen assert, but it is primary in both the act of storytelling and experiencing a storyworld.

The focus on the “unnatural” dominates another strain of narrative theory that has attempted to account for stories that do not just include supernatural figures but are formed separately from natural language or conventional human storytelling (see, e.g., Alber). In this way, narrative does not just function to represent or even simulate the daily experience of space, but it destabilizes it. Jan Alber points out that this can happen through at least two forms: physically and logically impossible spaces. This is not just a continuum of in/accessibility as Ronen proposed but a categorical separation related to naturalized narrative conventions. In fact, Alber similarly identifies Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* as an example of a narrative that foregrounds defamiliarized space. But, in distinct opposition to the analysis above, he resolves this defamiliarization by interpreting these impossible spaces as allegory, leading back to human meaning-making (189). “Impossible” spaces, as many of the following essays show, are frequently impossible to interpret in these human terms (Marcussen, Rodriguez, McAllister); impossibility, as such, is one of the signals that the text is opening up beyond anthropocentrism.

Another way of applying interdisciplinary insights to narrative space is the recent turn toward geography. This, in a sense, also deals with “impossibility” in narrative form: how do we deal with apparent transgressions between the space of the text and the space of the world? Several tracks have been developed to approach this question, using geography to introduce further tools into narrative theory. Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote, and Maoz Azaryahu’s work has led to a framework for understanding stories that quite literally extend in space. Gerald Prince, on the other hand, sees the potential for a geographical narratology as the need for a paradigm shift: moving from the study of *space in narrative* (the assumption of the studies described above) to *narrative in space* (Prince 1494).

Herman, in *Narratology Beyond the Human*, indeed attempts to extend narrative into space. For him, this takes the form of an “animal geography” that plays out in texts that explore biocentric perspectives (134). While the animal-centered texts that Herman studies are easy to consider as biocentric relative to the modernist texts used as examples in the previous studies of spatiality in literature, it is important to note that this is a byproduct of the increased *affordances* to read a text non-anthropocentrically when confronted with nonhuman figures. As is apparent in the essays included here, when reading from an intentional position “beyond anthropocentrism,” even the smallest introduction of nonhuman space affords an analysis of the formal clash that is staged in literature.

This is where New Formalism, Levine’s work in particular, is useful for generating new narratological models of *narrative in space*. Clearly, the forms that Levine discusses in her work are spatial figures: her central critique includes a deconstruction of narrative “closure.” But her emphasis on form is also spatial in another sense. It seeks to identify persistent spatial figures that stretch *beyond* fiction into the real world as “sustainable models” (Levine, “Three Unresolved Debates” 1243; see also Levine, “Model Thinking”). She points out that certain

aesthetic forms are more sustainable than others: the novel does not afford sustainable representations of monotonous daily labor, or the dynamics of large crowds (Levine, “The Enormity Effect” 59). Other forms are perhaps more sustainable: description, in particular, is a form that affords sustainable models for imagining the environment.

Narrative is sustainable in the context of communicating human realities, but thinking about the ways in which narrative (temporality) is disrupted allows us to think about other forms that open up into nonhuman realities. What would these sustainable narrative forms look like? The dominant strains of anthropocentric narrative theory may not provide adequate tools for identifying sustainable models in the Anthropocene, which is the general theoretical assumption behind the essays collected here. Likewise, privileged narrative forms of spatiality may not be the best at creating a sustainable model for the future—hence the focus on unconventional narratives that are the subject of these essays. By identifying the affordances of narrative that extend beyond the human in previously unrecognized, or misrecognized, ways, the critic can play a role in shaping a more sustainable future.

Overview of the Chapters

The essays are organized into three parts, reflecting complementary modalities of space-based narrative interrogation of the nonhuman. In the first part, “Objects and the Resources of Description,” we start from the question of how objects—even familiar human-made artifacts—can take on quasi-autonomous agency in a story and thus put pressure on anthropocentric assumptions. In the second part, “Catastrophic Narrative Environments,” we move on to the physical and conceptual spaces of catastrophe and their potential for destabilizing human mastery and anthropocentric knowledge practices. Finally, in the third part, “Scales and Limits of Narrative,” we turn to the epistemological dimension of scalar representation in narrative. We show that confronting these spatial concepts discloses possibilities for the narrative exploration of theoretical and philosophical questions.

The first part begins with a chapter by Laura Oulanne, “Containment and Empathy in Katherine Mansfield’s and Virginia Woolf’s Short Stories.” Oulanne investigates the spatial schema of containment and its role in literary modernism, and particularly in the narrative form of the short story. Focusing on the affective and embodied dimension of literary form, Oulanne argues that in Mansfield’s and Woolf’s work, containment has the paradoxical function of opening up new ways of thinking about the human mind in relation to the material world. The result is that empathy, construed in embodied terms, is extended beyond the human domain, embracing the physical objects—boxes, cupboards, and yellow dresses—that populate modernist fiction.

Chapter 2, “Floating Air—Solid Furniture: Vibrant Spaces in Virginia Woolf’s ‘Time Passes,’” by Marlene Karlsson Marcussen, continues the exploration of modernism as a period of intense engagement with spatial

form in narrative (as argued influentially by Frank). Challenging classical narratology's strict distinction between temporal narration and spatial description, Marcussen shows how fiction can yield insight into more-than-human realities via narrativized description. In a close reading of "Time Passes," the middle section of Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*, Marcussen argues that Woolf narrates the nonhuman by evoking the materiality of air through formal strategies—more specifically, through the expressive use of punctuation and anthropomorphic metaphors and similes.

In Chapter 3, "The Descriptive Turn in German Nature-Oriented *Neue Sachlichkeit* (1913–1933)," Michael Karlsson Pedersen stays with modernism but shifts the focus from British to German literature. Developing the concept of "nonhuman literary genre," Pedersen explores the turn to description in the metaphysical naturalism theorized and practiced by Alfred Döblin and Wilhelm Lehmann. Pedersen seeks to bridge the gap between the literary forms of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and the nonhuman ontology of objects articulated, in different ways, by Jane Bennett and Graham Harman. He argues that both Bennett's "horizontal materialism" and Harman's "vertical immaterialism" can be detected in the formal strategies adopted by Döblin and Lehmann. These three chapters also trace an archeology of engagements with the nonhuman in modernist narrative, anticipating and framing the discussion of contemporary fiction in the following part.

In Chapter 4, "Nonhuman Presence and Ontological Instability in Twenty-First-Century New York Fiction," Lieven Ameel analyzes a variety of threatening nonhuman presences in contemporary fiction. This includes catastrophic weather in Teju Cole's *Open City*, massive storms in Ben Lerner's *10:04*, and even a gigantic tiger in Jonathan Lethem's *Chronic City*. Ameel proposes that each of these novels presents distinct imaginative strategies for dealing with problems on vast spatial, temporal, and experiential scales. By disrupting spatial continuity, these nonhuman presences become concretizations of the possible future in the present world. Urban studies, possible worlds theory, and in particular Gilles Deleuze's concept of the fold are invoked to analyze how the palimpsestic layers of meaning in urban space and ambiguous temporal structures are newly represented in fiction that imagines catastrophic events related to climate change.

Kaisa Kortekallio uses a unique phenomenological approach in Chapter 5, "Seasonal Feelings: Reading Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* During Winter Depression." It complements the prior analytical studies to develop an affective account of the reading experience in the face of these catastrophic narratives. Kortekallio outlines her discussion of reading and rereading Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* in the context of the uncanny overlap between imagined ecological disaster and the real discomfort that is felt even in the presumed fantasies of science fiction.

Chapter 6, "Imagining Posthuman Environments in the Anthropocene: The Function of Space in Post-Apocalyptic Climate Change Fiction," also turns to dystopia to address experiments with narrative in space. Carolin

Gebauer adapts Yuri Lotman's spatial model of narrative into a robust tool for analyzing Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. Gebauer's posthuman focus shows how anthropocentric spatiality is disrupted once the notion of "stable" storyworld is put into question.

In Chapter 7, "It Wants to Become Real and Can Only Become Prose": Anthropocenic Focalization in *10:04* and *The World Without Us*," David Rodriguez concludes this part on catastrophe and contemporary fiction by identifying a narrative phenomenon he calls "Anthropocenic focalization." This mode provides a new tool that figures a way of thinking about the Anthropocene not just as a concept or epoch signaling "the human age" but a distinct way of organizing perspective. Its use plays out differently depending on the fictionality of its contexts, so juxtaposing a novel such as Lerner's *10:04* and Alan Weisman's thought experiment *The World Without Us* provides a chance to rethink basic spatial categories in narrative.

The next part opens with "Maarit Verronen's Monomaniacs of the Anthropocene: Scaling the Nonhuman in Contemporary Finnish Fiction." In this chapter, Sarianna Kankkunen analyzes how the contemporary Finnish writer Maarit Verronen's fiction includes scalar descriptions of the nonhuman that challenge the narrative form of the novel through a strategy of enumeration. Kankkunen introduces the idea of the monomaniac as a character who is uniquely attuned to the nonhuman world. Through this figure two different psychological impulses are discussed: the need to confront the nonhuman in embodied terms and the urge to move beyond human-scale description.

In Chapter 9, "Plotting the Nonhuman: The Geometry of Desire in Contemporary 'Lab Lit,'" the relationship between character and space in narrative is further challenged. Marco Caracciolo adapts Alex Woloch's notions of "character-space" and "character-system" to show how desire in two contemporary lab-based novels is plotted through geometrical models that are both abstract and informed by the nonhuman. In reading Jonathan Lethem's *As She Climbed Across the Table* and Jeanette Winterson's *Gut Symmetries*, Caracciolo draws attention to how the plot of desire in the two novels is structured and thematized through two spatial forms: the triangle and the chain, thus defamiliarizing the way we normally perceive human-nonhuman relations in narrative.

With Chapter 10, "Lithic Space Time in Lyric: Narrating the Poetic Anthropocene," we reach the outer limits of narrative and break away from characters and from the novel altogether. With the Anthropocene as vantage point, Brian J. McAllister turns to landscape poetry focused on geological phenomena to search for new scalar models that show aesthetic renderings of a transformed relationship between the human and the nonhuman, figure and ground. Analyzing poems by Hugh MacDiarmid, Robert Smithson, and Brenda Hillman, McAllister argues that each poem renders different aesthetic models of the lithic in ways that challenge the human understanding of space and time.

Continuing in this geological vein, Chapter 11, Ridvan Askin's "Narrating the 'Great Outdoors,'" investigates Margaret Fuller's travel

narrative *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* in order to explore not just the limits of narrative but the limits of human understanding. Evoking Quentin Meillassoux's concept of "the great outdoors," Askin shows that Fuller uses a strategy of "pseudo-paraleptic anamorphosis" (in Askin's terminology) in order to probe a dimension beyond human experience.

Finally, Line Henriksen concludes the volume with a fictional monologue ("Inside the Great Outdoors") in which she revisits, playfully, the ideas and language introduced by the preceding chapters. This piece demonstrates how academic debates can foster the creative imagination of the nonhuman, giving rise to a two-way exchange between literary scholarship and our affective experience as readers, scholars, and writers.

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