

**DIFFRACTING (META)‘FICCTIONS’:
PERFORMATIVITY, NEOCYBERNETICS, DIFFRACTION, AND THE LIVING
PRACTICE/S OF STORY THROUGH SELECT METAFICTIONAL NOVELS**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to re-energize metafiction studies through the frameworks of performativity, neocybernetics, and diffraction. My contention is that the human experience can be viewed as a metafictioning manifold, i.e., an active self-perpetuating entanglement and emergence of narrativizing structures. Metafictions, then, are living artifacts that model the metafictional processes of our constructed realities, while also actively re-organizing our experiences, and acting as heuristics for engaging with the world in metafictional ways. Renewed attention should be given to metafictionality, and in particular to metafictional artifacts, so as to better engage with our material reality as co-participant storytellers alongside the objects and systems around us. The introductory chapter sets the critical and methodological stage. Chapter One uses David Markson's *This is not a Novel* (2001) to demonstrate the performativity of metafictional objects. Chapter Two discusses *The Third Policeman* (1967) by Flann O'Brien and identifies metafictional objects as living systems. Chapter Three looks at Jerzy Kosinski's *Being There* (1970) in order to theorize the agential natures of such object-systems. Finally, Chapter Four investigates the heuristic ethos of a metafictioning manifold through Mark Z. Danielewski's *The Familiar* (2015).

To Riyo, Noah, Jonah, and Elijah.

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I.

INTRODUCTION: DIFFRACTING (META) ‘FICTIONS’

It turns out that the point at which the text closes back on itself is also where it connects with everything that sustains it, a kind of *navel* (which is what makes navel-gazing texts into lenses onto themselves and the world). At the very least, this should remind us that texts (like other living things) can be born and stay alive and continue to produce and reproduce themselves only by remaining *unborn*, that is, by remaining hooked into an ecology, in the womb of a world of other texts and transactions with other things and living things.¹

Introduction

This thesis is about how stories come to matter – their importance, but also how the material world stories our experiences, and conversely, how our storied experiences reconfigure the material world.² This recursive process of emergent and reconfiguring stories and materials – which we live and identify with – implies features about the human experience contrary to linear modes of knowledge production exemplified by Enlightenment thought.³ *Material* is

¹ Ira Livingston, *Between Science and Literature: An Introduction to Autopoetics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), pp. 70-71; italics and parenthetical text in original.

² This paragraph is an edited and revised introductory paragraph to my paper presentation: John Wolfgang Roberts, ‘Metafictionality as Ethic: Affecting Change in Our Narrative Ecologies’, in *Towards Post-Media Theories in Asia* (Tokyo University of the Arts, Senju Campus 2018), held on January 27-28, 2018. The transcript appears in, John Wolfgang Roberts, ‘Metafictionality as Ethic: Affecting Change in Our Narrative Ecologies’, *Philologia* (2018), pp. 41-53.

³ ‘Enlightenment thought’ is broadly employed here and throughout this thesis in different forms in order to represent a broad tradition of the ‘modern’ as conceptualized by Andrew Pickering. Pickering notes that while containing its own subtleties, the word ‘modern’ is generally understood as the Cartesian assumption of a duality between mind and matter; the Newtonian assumptions that matter contains specific properties ‘independent of

understood here as any (non)living, (non)human, (meta)physical, or otherwise manifested/manifesting participant in the human experience.⁴ This is not to say that everything is material, but rather anything intelligible to humans via our sensory capacities (and mediated through objects) are materials participating in our experiences.⁵ Material, in other words, is the stuff of the human story.

Stories are bio(-)logical, that is, they exhibit analogous biological behavior when explored metafictionally, and explained through theories of performativity, neocybernetics, and diffraction.⁶ Stories, I argue, are non-linear, entangled and entangling with other stories and things, and thereby resist fixed labels or meanings. In their many reconfiguring manifestations, stories are living organisms recursively drawing upon the larger ecology of ‘things’, thereby reconfiguring the possibilities of their own storied unfolding. Stories and matter can be regarded as synonymous events embodying an ethos (or habitual dynamic) and ethic (or moral principle) towards engaging with the larger material ecology of people, societies, and technologies, amongst other entities affected and affecting the stories we tell.⁷ As living organisms, stories

any human knower’; and the Enlightenment’s project of reason, being a defining property of modern human subjects. See, for example, Andrew Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 405n2. This is not to disparage linear modes of knowledge production, but instead to suggest that there are alternate modes of engaging with the world, such as through the lens of metafictionality.

⁴ See, for example, Karen Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter’, *Signs*, 28 (2003), 801-31, pp. 822-824, where Barad defines matter as an iterative and intra-active process of congealing agency. Materials – no matter what physical or metaphysical form they take – are phenomena, rather than passive objects in constant (re)engagement with each other that scaffold the world we know. Her understanding of matter as both material and discursive, human and nonhuman, opens the door to investigating metafictional intra-play between words and things, as ‘matter-in-the-process-of-becoming’ (p.823). I adopt this understanding of matter/materiality, along with Katherine Hayles’ analytical approach to materiality, namely that differences do exist within and between material phenomena, in particular, the cognitive dimensions utilized by humans, animals, and technology. The result is an emphasis on the phenomenal aspects of materiality through the lens of a human observer. See, N. Katherine Hayles, *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 82. This is discussed further below.

⁵ Indeed, if there is anything outside the human experience, then it would constitute irrelevant material for our purposes – if it could be considered ‘material’ at all.

⁶ Stories as living organisms are explored in greater depth in Chapters Two and Four and are theoretically outlined further below.

⁷ See, for example, ‘Ethos’, in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, ed. by Douglas Harper (Online: Hangzhou Maoning Tech LTD., 2018); and ‘Ethic’, in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, ed. by Douglas Harper (Online: Hangzhou Maoning Tech LTD., 2018), which are defined as a characteristic spirit of a place and time’s habitual

and matter exhibit a type of moral structure and behavior promoting inclusivity within and between the entities of the narrative ecology, while also subverting the knowledge claims emerging from such reconfigurations.

This ability to perpetuate emerging stories by subverting assumed dogmatism from past narratives, is what I consider the *metafictioning ethic*.⁸ This present-continuous entanglement and emergence of metafictional materials necessitates utilizing performativity theories, neocybernetics, and theories of diffraction in order to understand these storying dynamics as living materials. The metafictioning ethic, in other words, is an ingrained proclivity in what I call the *metafictioning manifold* – the ongoing material metafictionality of the human experience.⁹

My suggestion is that the human experience is a performative and neocybernetic field of material systems and objects. Driving these ongoing narrative entanglements and materializations is a self-reflexive proclivity to reconfigure and perpetuate further material and experiences: what is known as diffraction. Diffraction is a method for challenging classical dualisms and representational approaches by acknowledging, and performing, material differences in the world by bringing disparate materials into play.¹⁰ The ethics described herein

disposition, and the moral principles relating to a group, respectively. Additionally, my understanding of ethics is grounded in the work of Barad and the use of her term, *responsibility* – or response-ability – that is, ethical actions require the ability to respond to differences in the world in order to make a difference in the world. *Responsibility*, in other words, constitutes both an habitual dynamic and a moral principle for maintaining the ongoing materialization of the narrative ecology. See, for example, Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 391-396, especially at p. 396. See also, Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 95, whose work informs Barad's; and Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence*. trans. Alphonso Lingis (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981).

⁸ See, for example, 'Metafictionality as Ethic', pp. 41-53. This is not to claim that past dogmas/stories/conventions are wrong (or right, necessarily), but on the contrary to state that the continued applicability of a story or convention (or any material) to the human experience is by its very act of application a subversion to its otherwise historical applications thus far.

⁹ Indeed, as Chapters Three and Four demonstrate, the manifold's ongoing epistemological and ontological reconfiguration is inseparable from ethics. To be clear, this thesis does not explore ethical implications to various social or philosophical issues, but rather locates an ethical dimension to be explored in future projects.

¹⁰ This is to say that diffraction recognizes a world of material difference and reconfigures those differences by

involve an openness to the material/narrative ecology which generates new materials/narratives and additional contexts for openness. While not making specific ethical claims, this thesis is implicated in the ethics of this openness. In other words, the thesis reveals its ethicality *in the process of describing* the metafictional processes which are encountered in the primary texts discussed.

Metafictions are stories self-consciously communicating the above-mentioned ethos-ethic dynamic, foregrounding ways we can co-participate with the storying materials around us and say meaningful things about them. Metafictions, this thesis argues, model the metafictional processes of our constructed realities, actively contribute to re-organizing our realities, and act heuristically so as to help us engage with the world in metafictional ways. There is much yet to be learned through the study of metafiction as a form not *about* the world, but meaningfully engaging *with* the world, and co-writing our shared experiences *into* the world. This is not to say that metafictions offer a framework for realizing fixed moral structures, but instead to suggest that they impart a conversational approach to negotiating value in the world along with the larger ecology of people and things.¹¹ This thesis builds upon previous metafiction theorists, especially Linda Hutcheon, Patricia Waugh, and Mark Currie. Without necessarily disagreeing with these theorists, this thesis puts their ideas in conversation with performative, neocybernetic, and diffractive frameworks. This approach negotiates certain paradoxes that have been perceived and enlivens the stuff of metafiction, updating it for a twenty-first century, posthuman context.¹² Juha Ridanpaa (2010) writes, ‘metafiction does not try on purpose to launch an

bringing disparate materials together – i.e., the frameworks of performativity, neocybernetics with metafiction, and even diffraction theory itself in this thesis.

¹¹ See, for example, James Burton, ‘Metafiction and General Ecology: Making Worlds with Worlds’, in *General Ecology: The New Ecological Paradigm*, ed. by Erich Hörl and James Burton (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 37; 253-83.

¹² Posthumanism is discussed further below, but generally is understood as a decentering of the human’s centrality in the world along with the problematizations of subject/object relationships with the materials of our experience.

alternative methodology, but rather its alternative methodology emerges as an implicit “offshoot” when it sets out experimentally to parody the conventional methods of reading’.¹³ Comprehensively, this thesis illustrates and implies metafictionality as a methodology for simultaneously engaging, while also describing/understanding, the contexts of our experiences.¹⁴ Select novels, it will be shown, speak to important aspects of the metafictioning processes of the human experience.

This thesis is itself a story, a *storytelling* about story. The term ‘story’ throughout is intended to disrupt distinctions between classical notions of fiction (i.e., constructions) and reality (i.e., history). I intend to privilege the term ‘story’ over ‘narrative’, since ‘story’ more closely embodies a dialogic and non-logocentric approach to the world’s constructions. This thesis demonstrates that story and narrative differentially co-create each other – narrative articulations reconfigure stories, while stories, in turn, reconfigure possibilities of narrative articulation. Therefore, while preferring the term ‘story’ over ‘narrative’, I am not precluding narrative from these storying processes, but including them with the understanding that narratives are meaningful materials that help perpetuate ongoing stories.¹⁵ This thesis tells *a* story about stories as *objects* in the world existing in an ecology of other texts, things, and living things.¹⁶ It tells about transactions within this ecology constituting our stories as *systems* as well. In addition to articulating a story about stories being simultaneous *object-systems* in a *narrative ecology*, it communicates the vivacity of these metafictioning principles in our everyday co-

¹³ Juha Ridanpaa, ‘Metafictive Geograpy’, *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 51 (2010), 47-63, p. 55.

¹⁴ See, for example, Burton, *Metafiction and General Ecology*, pp. 251-83; and Ridanpaa, ‘Metafictive Geograpy’, 47-63, which come to suggest similar methodological claims.

¹⁵ For literary theorists who are critical of the general privileging of ‘narrative’ over ‘story’ in (Western) narrative studies, see, for example, Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 170-172; M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. ed. by Caryl Emmerson (England: Manchester University Press, 1973), pp. 12; 60; and Jacques Derrida, ‘Living on--Border Lines’, in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. by Harold Bloom, et al. (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), pp. 99-100.

¹⁶ Paraphrased portions found in: Livingston, *Science and Literature*, pp. 70-71.

constructed lives which are modeled in metafictional novels.

The argument is that *all* materials *tell* stories and are themselves a part of other stories, and furthermore that their construction in the world *is* a story of other object-systems coming together to participate in *its* emergence. A ‘story’, this thesis ultimately shows is fundamentally any (phenomenal) material in the world that makes itself present to other materials, and in so doing, differentially *co-participates* in *telling* a different materiality into the world.¹⁷ This definition expands theories of metafiction by drawing upon non-anthropocentric constructivist approaches which foreground the roles of non-human materials in co-constructing our realities.

My primary texts: *This is not a Novel (TNN)*, by David Markson (2001); *The Third Policeman (TTP)*, by Flann O’Brien (1967); *Being There*, by Jerzy Kosinski (1970); and *The Familiar: One Rainy Day in May, Volume One (TFv1)*, by Mark Z. Danielewski (2015), are case studies that self-consciously foreground performative, neocybernetic, and diffractive processes and principles to differentially reconfigure the materials of our experience and the stories we tell about them.¹⁸

Metafiction(ality): Problematizing Representations

Metafiction theorist, Robert Alter (1975), attributes metafictionality in stories to works as far back as the *Odyssey*.¹⁹ Currie (1995) similarly writes, ‘Chaucer’s elaborate framings of *The Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare’s plays within plays, the extensive use of epistolary forms in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century poetry and fiction, or the intrusive narrators of Fielding

¹⁷ That is, in telling a different story. Feminist and theoretical physicist, Karen Barad, whom I draw heavily upon in this thesis, does not quite formulate these ideas as ‘story’, but does consider all material to be phenomena – ‘things-in-phenomena’, which ‘[...] are constitutive of reality’. See, Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity’, p. 17.

¹⁸ See, David Markson, *This Is Not a Novel* (London: CB Editions, 2010, 2001); Flann O’Brien, ‘The Third Policeman’, in *The Complete Novels* (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), pp. 219-406; Jerzy Kosinski, *Being There* (1970; London: Black Swan, 1987); and Mark Z. Danielewski, *The Familiar: One Rainy Day in May*. Vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 2015).

¹⁹ Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) p. xi.

and Richardson, are all in a sense precursors of the metafictional paradox'.²⁰ Metafiction has also been considered fundamental to the novel as a genre with early definitive examples being *Don Quixote* (1605) by Miguel de Cervantes, and *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759/1767) by Laurence Sterne.²¹ Modern incarnations of overtly metafictional novels are commonly traced from Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two Birds* (1939), to South American influences like Jorge Luis Borges, and postmodern writers of the 1960's and 70's such as John Barth and Italo Calvino.²² Metafictional stories also manifest outside the 'traditional' literary field and strong examples can be found in the forms of autobiography, comics and graphic novels, film, and e-literature, both in terms of their disruptive storytelling and/or formal techniques.²³

Metafictions are therefore not a form (or genre) firmly situated in postmodern literature, though postmodern forms certainly foreground their metafictionality.²⁴ Instead, *metafictionality*

²⁰ Mark Currie, 'Introduction', in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 1-18, p. 5. The metafictional paradox is addressed further below, but it is essentially the ongoing tension and disruption of reality and our stories (i.e., fictions) through the metafictional practices of undermining the veracity of held conventions about the world and our roles in it.

²¹ See, for example, David Lodge, 'The Novel Now', in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 145-60, p. 156; and Larry McCaffery, 'The Art of Metafiction', in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 181-182. See also, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote De La Mancha*. trans. John Rutherford (London: Penguin Books, 1604-5/1615); and Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (London: Penguin Books, 1759-67).

²² See, for example, Flann O'Brien, 'At Swim-Two-Birds', in *The Complete Novels* (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939); Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998); John Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988 [1963]); and Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. trans. William Weaver (London: Vintage Books, 1979).

²³ These forms are mentioned in Bruce Clarke, and Manuela Rossini, 'Preface: Literature, Posthumanism, and the Posthuman', in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. xi-xxii, pp. xvii-xix, as 'posthuman literary modes'. My argument in this thesis, which is covered in part in Clarke and Rossini, is the inherent metafictionality of literary forms in a posthuman culture, with some forms being more overtly metafictional and posthuman than others, deal in some way with the juxtaposition of frames and the emergence of meaning. Clarke and Rossini note that these forms involve literary and post literary modes that explore elements such as our posthuman natures and utilizing mediums' 're-mediating effect on literary practice'.

²⁴ See, for example, Wenche Ommundsen, *Metafictions?: Reflexivity in Contemporary Texts* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1993), pp. 82-83, where she summarizes the difficult relationship between postmodernism and metafiction, with postmodernism being more of a post-WWII epistemological crisis in the cultural and social domains of contemporary life, and with metafiction extending beyond these spatiotemporal parameters to different periods and texts that self-consciously challenge their own conventions – not necessarily eschewing conventions all together.

occurs in a diverse range of literary styles, genres, time periods, and, as this thesis makes explicit, artifacts and philosophical paradigms. This thesis extends the dynamics of metafictionality from literary texts to all materials in the human experience, arguing towards a paradigmatic shift, from representationalism to a performativity which more meaningfully engages metafictionality.²⁵

Definitions of metafiction are nuanced but share similar themes.²⁶ Included are various understandings such as self-referentiality (Currie), self-awareness of narrative and linguistic identity (Hutcheon), and being analogously exploratory of such structures in ‘reality’ (Waugh).²⁷ Thus, theorists have tended to situate metafiction somewhere on the border between fiction and criticism in its ability to construct fictions while also criticizing the very fictional structures upon which it rests.²⁸ ‘Metafiction’ enters academic parlance with two seminal works: William H. Gass’ essay, ‘Philosophy and the Form of Fiction’ (1970) and Robert Scholes’ ‘Metafiction’ (1970).²⁹ In both cases, Gass and Scholes address a form of writing that incorporates acts of criticism into the fictional process.³⁰ Criticism, as Currie notes, must be taken loosely to grasp metafiction’s ability to reproduce the boundary of art and life, and in so doing, communicate the artificiality of the text by referencing intertextual and extratextual sources.³¹ This seems to be the predominant approach to understanding metafiction, which I do not dispute. Metafictions are critical because their act of inter/extra-textual referencing is a

²⁵ Indeed, this thesis helps illustrate why metafiction(al)ity cannot be pigeonholed into such spatiotemporal parameters such as genre and specific historical periods.

²⁶ For a broad list of definitions, see Ommundsen, *Metafictions?*, p. ix. See also, Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 1-2.

²⁷ See, Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*. 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 59; Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 1; and Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 2.

²⁸ See, for example, Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), p. 114; and Currie, ‘Introduction’, p. 3.

²⁹ William H. Gass, ‘Philosophy and the Form of Fiction’, in *Fiction and the Figures of Life: Essays* (Boston: Nonpariel Books, 1979), pp. 24-25. See also, Robert Scholes, ‘Metafiction’, *The Iowa Review*, 1 (1970), 100-15, and its reprint in, Robert Scholes, ‘Metafiction’, in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 21-38.

³⁰ See, especially, Scholes, ‘Metafiction’, p. 29.

³¹ Currie, ‘Introduction’, p. 4.

subversion (and hence criticism) of their own ‘referential illusion’.³² The criticism of the art-life boundary reproduced in metafiction has the relational effect of criticizing the veracity of its own referent boundary: i.e., that which exists between itself and the reader.

Wenche Ommundsen (1993) notes that ‘[r]eflexivity [...] is best understood as a dimension present in all literary texts and central to all literary analysis: a function which by analyzing literary processes enables us to understand the processes by which we read the world as text.’³³ The idea of reading the world as text resonates across prior and subsequent metafictionists’ works, implying an emphasis on fictional processes, rather than products and thereby fostering an ethos of ‘worlding’.³⁴ Rather than being passive narrative artifacts, then, metafiction is best thought of as a ‘narrative practice’ for reconfiguring (e.g., simultaneously deconstructing and reconstructing) the narrative structures of the human experience from the micro level of the literary text, to the macro level of the world we know.³⁵ Later theoretical works regarding metafiction exist in predominantly postmodern contexts. Throughout the mid-70’s to early 80’s theories of metafiction mature with publications by literary critics such as Alter (1975), Mas’ud Zavarzadeh (1976), Margaret Rose (1979), Robert Scholes (1979), Linda Hutcheon (1980; 1988) Inger Christensen (1982), Larry McCaffery (1982), and culminates in the most popular primer on metafiction, Waugh’s *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984).³⁶ Though the emphases these theorists take differ, they share similar

³² See, Currie, ‘Introduction’, p. 5.

³³ Ommundsen, *Metafiction?*, p. 4.

³⁴ See, for example, Helen Palmer, and Vicky Hunter, ‘Worlding’, COST Action IS1307, (2018) <<http://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/w/worlding>> [Accessed 28 November 2018], who define ‘worlding’ as the expressivity and legibility of a world that emerges through interrelated phenomena.

³⁵ See, Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 2. Waugh contextualizes ‘practice’ as the writerly method for communicating metafictionality in their works and with the reader, but my use of the word is to extend Waugh’s to a self-conscious practice of engaging with novel and world as simultaneous writer/readers of the narrative ecology.

³⁶ See, works by Mas’ud Zavarzadeh, *The Mythopoeic Reality: The Postwar American Nonfiction Novel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976); Margaret Rose, *Parody/Meta-Fiction: An Analysis of Parody as a Critical Mirror to the Writing and Reception of Fiction* (London: Croom Helm, 1979); Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative : The Metafictional Paradox* (New York ; London: Methuen, 1980); Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism : History, Theory, Fiction* (New York ; London: Routledge, 1988); Inger Christensen, *The Meaning of Metafiction: A Critical Study of Selected Novels by Sterne, Nabokov, Barth and Beckett* (Bergen:

overlapping features: the novel as a genre, postmodern culture, the ‘worlding’ potentials of metafiction, the problematization between fact and fiction, and/or the co-participatory dynamics between text, contexts, reader, and author.

This tension between what is supposedly real or not – an artifact’s *reflexive* criticism of its own *referentiality* – lies at the heart of the form’s most cited definitions. Hutcheon (1980), for example, defines metafiction as ‘fiction about fiction – [...] fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity.’³⁷ Waugh adds to this *representationalist* sentiment when writing that metafiction’s objective is to ‘pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality’.³⁸ Metafictions, in these definitions, highlight the difficulty in discerning a clear boundary between what is real and what is constructed in as much as they imply each other’s pre-conditional status as simultaneously constructed and constitutive of a meaningful and identifiable reality.³⁹

Ommundsen dedicates her work to exploring the reflexivity of contemporary metafictions and its implications, writing that ‘stories are not lies but monuments to the search for a specifically human truth.’⁴⁰ She expands the co-participatory narrative act between (con)texts and reader, and explores the political value of postmodern contexts to empower marginalized voices.⁴¹ Despite the critical and cultural bent of Ommundsen’s theory, an ironic tendency can be glimpsed when engaging with metafictions which are seen as disrupting conventions of meaning in the service of a search for a larger truth or commonality. This thesis engages in the same endeavor but from a performative paradigm: I justify this perceived irony

Universitetsforlaget, 1982); and Larry McCaffery, *The Metafictional Muse* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982).

³⁷ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 1.

³⁸ Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 2.

³⁹ One must consider that our fictions and experiential lives are constructed around similar analogous concepts, and metafictions help problematize our experiences as simultaneously fictional *and* real; see, for example, Ommundsen, *Metafictions?*, p. 4.

⁴⁰ Ommundsen, *Metafictions?*, p. 106.

⁴¹ See, for example, Ommundsen, *Metafictions?*, pp. 96-97.

by arguing that metafiction teaches us about the value of maintaining an affectual ethos with the other people and things of the world.

Currie's *Metafiction* (1995) – an edited collection of essays and extracts, contains an introduction by Currie recognizing metafiction theory's cultural placement as a postmodern narrative theory.⁴² Though considering metafiction as a foregrounded dynamic to 'conscious' (i.e., overt) postmodern works, he also acknowledges that postmodernism and metafiction are not the same.⁴³ Currie writes, '[t]he postmodern context is not one divided neatly between fictional texts and their critical readings, but a monistic world of representations in which the boundaries between art and life, language and metalanguage, and fiction and criticism are under philosophical attack'.⁴⁴ This postmodern endeavor to disrupt conventions is prevalent in more overt strands of metafiction studies. Postmodernism adds a language-centered methodology for disrupting any sense of objectivity in the inter/extra-textual reaches of the text.⁴⁵ In Currie, similar to Ommundsen, we find a common postmodern spirit, not of decentered meanings necessarily, but decentering meanings. That is, not to decenter meaning in the search for a larger Truth, but to maintain processes of philosophical attack, and to show that 'Truth' is a performatively processual 'truth' rather than a specific piece of knowledge *about* human experience. Metafictionality as understood through postmodern narrative theory implies truths are dynamic processes rather than verifiable facts.

This thesis builds upon this postmodern processual component. Currie notes three contradictions within postmodern narrative/metafiction that appear to be problems with representation. Of the first two problems, he writes:

⁴² Mark Currie, ed., *Metafiction*, *Longman Critical Readers* (London: Longman, 1995).

⁴³ Currie, 'Introduction', p. 17.

⁴⁴ Currie, 'Introduction', pp. 17-18.

⁴⁵ Currie, 'Introduction', p. 17.

[First] the idea of self-consciousness is strangely inconsistent with most postmodern literary theories which would attribute neither selfhood nor consciousness to an author, let alone a work of fiction. Second there is a vertiginous illogicality about ‘self-consciousness’: that something which is defined by its self-consciousness must surely be conscious of its own definitive characteristic.⁴⁶

If metafiction does not possess clear parameters of ‘selfhood’ (i.e., identity), then what identifiability is it exactly self-conscious of? How can this non-entity possess any self-consciousness in the first place? Currie contends that, if these descriptors are adequate, then metafiction must be conscious of themselves as metafiction as well as ‘fictions’. The difference is important: metafiction self-consciously draw upon their metafictionality rather than merely alluding to their inherently literary conventions. The latter ironically implies a truth-falsity binary, while the former suggests an openness to further entanglements and change with the world’s materials, and an openness to negotiating value and meaning.

This leads to the third problem: metafiction’s performed relationship with past materials that inform its current use. Hutcheon’s postmodern project deals largely with historiographic metafiction – the idea that our understandings of history (and knowledge more generally) are suspect since concepts we use to differentiate fiction and reality are fuzzy at best.⁴⁷ Despite this strand in metafiction studies, Currie’s point illustrates a larger gap in the knowledge of metafiction theories: the differential nature of its ability to re-write the past and the present.

⁴⁶ Currie, ‘Introduction’, p. 1.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Linda Hutcheon, ‘Historiographic Metafiction’, in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 71-91, especially at, pp. 72-73. She notes that there is only contradiction, and therefore the present and past can never be reconciled. See also, Ommundsen, *Metafiction?*, p. 82 who notes that Hutcheon’s term, ‘historiographic metafiction’ is precisely her definition of postmodernism, outlined in her seminal works: Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism : History, Theory, Fiction* (New York ; London: Routledge, 1988); and Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*. 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2002).

Currie, writes:

‘Metafiction’ might have consolidated its place in the critical lexis as a descriptor of postmodern fictional preoccupations, but few commentators have proposed the absolute novelty of literary self-consciousness. The problem here is not merely that metafictional characteristics can be found throughout the prehistory of postmodernism. There is also something about postmodern fiction, the deep involvement with its own past, the constant dialogue with its own conventions, which projects any self-analysis backwards in time.⁴⁸

Again, metafiction, suggest a theoretical problem with the finitude of the past, and imply the past’s continued involvement with the present, since a metafiction, by definition, is consciously activating inter/extra-textual references in a critical process of questioning the integrity of the concepts that bind those texts together. But also, if metafiction is in constant dialogue with the stories and conventions of the past, and metafiction is texts that are inherently critical of the stories and conventions that inform its current figuration, then it follows that metafiction not only undermine their own believability as stories, but also present an epistemological problem about what we know, and can know. If our understanding of the past and its concepts are suspect, then their present uses are doubly so. Metafiction, in other words, re-write the past as they re-write the present precisely through the act of subverting conventions which are iterated and reconfigured, and come to us, from past uses. Currie continues:

Novels which reflect upon themselves in the postmodern age act in a sense as

⁴⁸ Currie, ‘Introduction’, p. 1.

commentaries on their own antecedents. ‘Self-consciousness’ is neither new nor meaningfully ‘self’ consciousness, since the metafiction refers to fictions other than itself, in its own history. The relationship between a critical term and its literary object becomes profoundly confused because the literary object itself performs a critical function.⁴⁹

Metafictions create material crises between the object’s form and what it communicates – between the physical novel and the story told, for instance. The reason material objects and their representational content become problematic in metafictions, is that a metafiction, by way of being self-critical, actively negates, real-time, what it is *saying*, and thereby negates what it *is*. Not only are meanings problematic, and thereby re-written through metafictionality, but the blurring of materiality and meaning suggests a sort of agency within the text to *perform* its ‘critical function’.⁵⁰ Metafictions present inherent issues with reconciling its performed critical function with its conventional contradictions.

This tendency in metafiction to avoid stability and identifiability in meanings has drawn criticism. Hutcheon’s historical emphases on what can be considered factual or fictional, works to contextualize the frustration many feel when engaging with postmodern metafictional texts:

The postmodern novel [of which metafictions form a part] has done the same, and the reverse. It is part of the postmodernist stand to confront paradoxes of fictive/historical representation, the particular/the general, and the present/the past. And this confrontation is itself contradictory, for it refuses to recuperate or dissolve

⁴⁹ Currie, ‘Introduction’, p. 1.

⁵⁰ This idea is suggested in Currie’s later work, Currie, *Postmodern*, pp. 58-76, especially at pp. 66-69.

either side of the dichotomy, yet it is more than willing to exploit both.⁵¹

Elsewhere, I have noted metafiction's resistance to moralizing, and its drawing attention to the constructedness of conventions.⁵² However, whereas critics like Terry Eagleton or Fredric Jameson might relegate this to the postmodern nonsense of moral relativity, or commodity driven art, I intend to show the meaningfulness of this representational exploitation precisely by reorienting metafiction studies away from a language-centric frame and resituating it in a performative paradigm.⁵³

Takayuki Tatsumi, writing in 1997, notes that '[m]etafiction – [was] a device used to challenge the ideology of literature in the 1960's and 1970's – [but] has in the postdeconstructive and postcybernetic culture begun to exert a new sort of totalitarian ideology, with reality itself transformed into metafictionality'.⁵⁴ In the effort to expose the inherent meaninglessness of narrative and linguistic structures, metafictionists have instead imposed strict (non)meanings on said structures. This practice of 'proving' things as inherently meaningless is ironically antithetical to the spirit of metafictionality.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Hutcheon, 'Historiographic Metafiction', p. 73. Hutcheon's point is that postmodernism is a 'contradictory cultural enterprise [...] heavily implicated in that which it seeks to contest', that is, historiographic metafiction, for example, both 'keeps distinct its formal auto-representation and its historical context, and in so doing problematizes the very possibility of historical knowledge' in an ongoing recursive tension. See, Hutcheon, 'Historiographic Metafiction', p. 72.

⁵² See, for example, John Wolfgang Roberts, 'Metafiction: An Introduction on Dramatizing the Boundaries of Social Discourse', *Aichi University: Language and Culture*, 58 (2014), 19-46, p. 22.

⁵³ See, for example, Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp.57-59, who notes the inability of postmodernists to make moral judgments due to their denials of realistic cultural structures; and Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 4-5, where he begins discussing the late-capitalist drive towards art commodification. Again, this is not to say that metafiction is the same as postmodernism, but that metafictionality as it has existed in a postmodern culture, has drawn criticism. This is discussed in more depth below.

⁵⁴ Takayuki Tatsumi, 'Comparative Metafiction: Somewhere between Ideology and Rhetoric', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 39 (1997), 2-17, p. 6.

⁵⁵ I am suggesting that it is ironic that metafictional artifacts resist fixed meanings, while the theories used to arrive at these conclusions are increasingly fixed, and at the same time claims of meaningfulness/meaninglessness are made when the method of metafictionality is necessarily opposed to making such claims.

The problem, perhaps, has been an ongoing contradiction between metafictionality as a *theory* and as a *practice*: in theory it seeks to undermine any definitive qualities about itself, while in practice metafictionists have assumed antithetically anti-illusory characteristics which have become *metafiction's definitive quality*. Again, Hutcheon and Waugh are essential to the development of this thesis, but as Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning suggest, Hutcheon and Waugh tend to reduce metafiction's effects to 'anti-illusionism'.⁵⁶ Neumann and Nünning's line of argumentation lies in the perspective that metafiction perpetuates meaning creation *and* destruction to the point that the process risks becoming a sort of pathological endeavor to replace meanings related to the text – no meaning is ever quite satisfactory, and so the text must be re-engaged with the intention of obtaining an agreeable form of representation.⁵⁷

The paradox of this process is that the metafictional dilemma – the inability of language to analyze its own constructedness in the world – becomes its own convention as a thing-in-itself.⁵⁸ This means that when Waugh writes, '[m]etafiction [...] re-examine[s] the conventions of realism in order to discover – through its own self-reflection – a fictional form that is culturally relevant and comprehensible to contemporary readers'; or Hutcheon states, '[m]etafiction parodies and imitates as a way to a new form which is just as serious and valid, as a synthesis, as the form it dialectically attempts to surpass', they are suggesting a truth-claim about metafiction: namely that metafictionality becomes a (meaningful) convention for 'proving' the meaninglessness of so-called 'meaningful' constructions.⁵⁹ Its anti-illusionism becomes *the* illusion from which escape is impossible, thus leading metafictionists into a

⁵⁶ Brigit Neumann, and Ansgar Nünning, 'Metanarration and Metafiction', in *the Living Handbook of Narratology* (Interdisciplinary Center for Narratology, University of Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2012), paragraph ten.

⁵⁷ That is, as opposed to re-engaging with a text with the intention of proverbially conversing and negotiating meaning with the text.

⁵⁸ See, again, Waugh, *Metafiction*, pp. 3-4, with regards to the metafictional dilemma. See also, Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 88, where she begins to describe the creation/description paradox. This paradox is addressed further below.

⁵⁹ Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 18; Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 25.

narcissistic pathology.⁶⁰ This pathology is, to an extent, reaffirmed by this thesis but only within a context in which the ‘real-world’ significance of metafictional storytelling is the major preoccupation.

The metafictionist is not only locked into the metafictional dilemma, but also, firmly adheres to the practice of debunking meanings, instead of perpetuating dialogue within and between conventions. Another early metafictionist, Mas’ud Zavarzadeh, has proclaimed that the metafictionist can only be certain of the reality of their own discourse.⁶¹ According to this representational approach, the metafictionist dwells in the symbolic systems of their discourse, not only aware of the metafictional dilemma, but also paradoxically believing in the veracity of that dilemma as a conceptual truth.⁶² This thesis similarly posits the idea of a metafictional reality, but one that catalyzes and perpetuates the emergence of patterns of meaning rather than demonstrating conceptual hollowness (and/or conceptual replacement).

Rethinking metafictionality as a theory and practice is becoming increasingly necessary.⁶³ It is overdue because researchers continually apply *established* theories of metafiction to cultural

⁶⁰ Hutcheon makes the distinction between narcissism as a ‘descriptor of engaged self-reflection’ and as pathology; see, Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. xi; 1. Though this thesis will emphasize the former while dismissing the latter, a word about the pathological aspects are worthwhile. Hutcheon notes the Freudian notion of narcissism, as the “universal original condition” of man, making it the basis of more than just pathological behavior’; see, Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 1. See also, Sigmund Freud, ‘On Narcissism, an Introduction’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, ed. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1914), pp. 67-102. Freud’s notion of narcissism, while complex and situated around instincts and sexual libido, produces megalomania and a turning away from the external world; Freud, *On Narcissism*, p. 73. The pathological narcissist replaces reality with (inward) representations and a belief in those representations which dictate behavior. Taking into account the fundamental human capacity for story and the anthropocentrism, it becomes easy to discern a (pathological) condition whereby humans superimpose, and lose ourselves, in megalomaniacal stories about the world and ourselves as protagonists. Perhaps it is our original human condition, but narcissism is also a tool for self-reflection and re-assessment of who we are in the world. This thesis recognizes both definitions of narcissism as our *original storytelling condition* – that is, narcissism as a *self-reflexive practice for navigating our world*.

⁶¹ Zavarzadeh, *Mythopoeic Reality*, p. 7.

⁶² As we will see later, the problematization of concepts as themselves situated material configurations is a major aspect of diffraction theory.

⁶³ As will be discussed further below, much work in metafiction studies serves to re-assert established ideas about metafictionality by locating meta-artifacts that fit into those established parameters.

artifacts rather than help transform the theories in ways that eschew truth-claims. For example, in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature* (2012), R.M. Berry opens his chapter on metafiction: ‘[L]ike other aesthetic concepts, “metafiction” makes unavoidable the problem of all concepts, that they do not precede, either logically or historically, their application’.⁶⁴ Though not disagreeing with Berry, this anti-illusory definition accentuates the interpretation of metafiction as being solely concerned with the debunking of established concepts. Researchers seem engaged in an academic practice of justifying theory through the examination of artifacts instead of generating a new theory of metafictionality *through* practice. In other words, by re-affirming a representational approach through anti-illusory arguments, recent scholarship has neglected the practical task of reconfiguring metafictional approaches. This thesis recognizes the importance of reality as a pre-condition for fictionality, and fictions as a pre-condition for reality: *fiction-reality*, or the differential informing of a reality of the narrative ecology in literature as in the human experience.

Despite the over-emphasis of representation in dominant approaches to metafiction, there have been performative elements in the work of metafiction’s biggest theorists – particularly in Hutcheon, Waugh, and Currie. What Currie calls the *metafictional paradox* is essentially the ongoing recursive tension between fiction and reality/criticism, as discussed above. He writes: ‘the critical text is the literary text and vice versa, and in this tautology we find a succinct expression of the postmodern condition in fiction and criticism’.⁶⁵ Currie, who takes metafictionality as integral to postmodern narrative, considers fiction and criticism to be a *dramatization* of the simultaneity of textual self-consciousness as well as an outward tension with the world as a whole.⁶⁶ Indeed, it’s Currie’s metaphor of *dramatizing*, as opposed to

⁶⁴ R.M. Berry, ‘Metafiction’, in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. by Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons and Brian McHale (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 128-40, p. 128.

⁶⁵ Currie, ‘Introduction’, p. 5. The postmodern is discussed further below.

⁶⁶ Currie, ‘Introduction’, pp. 1-18; pp. 1-5.

blurring the boundaries of fiction and reality which contextualizes my use of metafictionists.⁶⁷

This metaphor recognizes that differences exist – such as between storyworlds and reality – but that they are necessarily entangled and differentially emergent in the ongoing present moment. Currie writes: ‘[n]ot only is this boundary dramatized or signified within fiction as self-commentary, but also problematized by the idea that metafiction is less a property of the primary text than a function of reading’.⁶⁸ In Currie we find the dramatization of metaleptic levels (i.e., fiction and reality), but also a dramatization of the relation between texts. The reality of the reader and the fictionality of the storyworld may be seen as two narrative levels, with the act of reading binding them momentarily into a materially phenomenal event. Though in Currie there remains an anthropocentric notion of the reader, we nonetheless have set the stage for reading – or more generally, *observation* – as an act occurring between texts/levels/materials.

Elsewhere, Currie touches upon this performative dimension. Speaking about the *myth-fact paradox*, Currie notes the way metafictional texts (in this case James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and Jacques Derrida’s ‘Ulysses Gramophone’) can simultaneously disrupt their own referentiality and, in so doing, comment on their inter/extra-textual references by maintaining functionality in its symbolic systems.⁶⁹ The point is that these narrative artifacts are doing something to disrupt and read commentaries into other texts. Currie writes: ‘[t]he trouble with this new, performative mode of criticism and theory is that it leaves the subject-object relation between

⁶⁷ See, for example, Gerasimus Katsan, *History and National Ideology in Greek Postmodernist Fiction* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013), p. 129; and Susana Onega, *Metafiction and Myth in the Novels of Peter Ackroyd* (Columbia: Camden House, 1999), p. 3, as examples that use the metaphor of ‘blurring’ to describe the relationship between fiction and reality in the context of metafiction. As discussed throughout this section, there have been assumptions as to the stability of fiction and reality as realms-in-themselves. The adverb ‘blurring’ implies that inherent separation, but also paradoxically works to negate their separability as distinctive materials in the world by ‘blurring them’. ‘Dramatizing’ on the other hand, maintains their material distinctiveness, while at the same time allowing the necessary agency to reconfigure self and other (e.g., in conversation).

⁶⁸ Currie, ‘Introduction’, p. 5.

⁶⁹ Currie, *Postmodern*, p. 66. See also, James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1932); and Jacques Derrida, ‘Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce’, in *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Andrew J Mitchell and Sam Slote (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013).

the text and its reading mysteriously untheorized'.⁷⁰ Theorizing about performative materials, whether human or artifactual, requires a re-thinking of the subject-object relationship conventionally understood to be between a human reader and the textual object.

Nearly fifteen years prior to Currie, Waugh invoked the performative dimensions of metafiction in what she calls the *creation/description* paradox. She writes: 'the ontological status of fictional objects is determined by the fact that they exist by virtue of, whilst also forming, the fictional context which is finally the words on the page'.⁷¹ According to Waugh, fictional objects 'behave' in a differential fashion: the creation of fiction describes a reality, which draws upon materials in the real world, which in turn imbues those materials with new meanings – in what Waugh sees as metafiction's ability to create 'alternative worlds', or 'different universes of discourses'.⁷² Waugh describes what was later addressed in Currie's myth-fact paradox, but for her the object of concern is not finally *how* literary objects behave, but the descriptive materials that 'demonstrat[e] the existence of multiple realities'.⁷³ For Waugh, this is the 'status of *all* fiction', in that fictions create different worlds – articulating particular narrative configurations with corresponding referents in reality, which are themselves new materials in the world both as literary objects, and as alternative perspectives of the world.⁷⁴

Descriptions rely on the contextual elements of a text, *but* through the act of description, the materiality of that contextual fabric is altered. This not only helps inform Currie's position, but also allows us to reframe metafiction's performativity from language to materiality – language is but one piece of material operating in the larger fabric. Granted Waugh and Currie are theorizing from a language-centric perspective, but in Waugh a material perspective is more

⁷⁰ Currie, *Postmodern*, p. 66.

⁷¹ Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 88.

⁷² Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 90.

⁷³ Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 89.

⁷⁴ Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 89.

strongly suggested. As she notes, ‘[d]escriptions of objects in fiction are simultaneously *creations* of that object’.⁷⁵ The implication is that the act of framing reality – of telling a particular story – is an endless task since every (re)framing *is* a reconfiguration of the material conditions that made it’s telling possible in the first place. Though Waugh does not articulate that second point, she suggests it when writing that:

Metafictional texts show that literary fiction can never imitate or “represent” the world but always imitates or “represents” the discourses which in turn construct the world. However, because the medium of all literary fiction is language, the “alternative worlds” of fiction, as of any other universe of discourse, can never be totally autonomous.⁷⁶

The creation/description paradox asserts that emergent materials cannot be fixed things-in-themselves. Whether speaking of fictions, language, or alternative worlds, the recursively differential nature of the paradox catalyzes ongoing reconfigurations of the world’s materials. ‘Creation’ goes from single action to a processual emergence of materials: ‘description’ changes from a strictly mimetic artifact about the world to an *informed* and *informing* material form. Metafictions are not so much paradoxes, but complex systems.

The above implies that fictional objects resemble living organisms, and that these performatively differential materials are alive in an ecology of similar materials drawing sustenance from them. Part of re-thinking the subject-object relations of performative texts/materials is to confront unavoidable implications that texts are ‘growing’ (and ‘dying’) as per the ever-changing inter/extra-textual materiality of their being, *and* that other systems such

⁷⁵ Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 88.

⁷⁶ Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 100.

as conscious and social systems are inexorably entangled with the textual structures of our fictional objects.⁷⁷ This is because the creation-description paradox necessitates a world in which texts engage observers in describing it – making it intelligible – and thereby rendering it as a newly intelligible text.⁷⁸

In this context, my definition of ‘system’ is not unlike Dirk Baecker’s (2007) ‘the ecological principle’. Originally oriented towards media and digital technology, Erich Hörl (2017) applies Baecker’s principle in a more general sense.⁷⁹ Hörl writes:

This will be, “more radically than we could previously have imagined [...] an ecological order; if ecology means that one makes it have to do with neighboring relations between heterogenous orders, with which it does not have any prestabilized connection, any overarching order, any all-encompassing sense.”⁸⁰

The ecological principle locates a radical relationality between things. Of course, this assumes the ontological existence of things as proverbial building blocks, which I reconcile with my juxtaposition of neocybernetic and new materialist theories, outlined below. Every *thing* exists in an ecology relating to other things, constituting that particular ecology as an impermanent thing-in-itself (for the time being). And since it can be conceived of as a *thing* at all, it must therefore also exist *with* relation to other things in its environment.

⁷⁷ This is to say that humans, and the systems that constitute the human bio-cultural experience, are written in the texts (and materials more generally), which in turn (re)write our experiences. This is outlined in more detail in coming sections.

⁷⁸ This is more fully unpacked in coming sections.

⁷⁹ Dirk Baecker, *Studien Zur Nächsten Scientific* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2007); see also, Erich Hörl, ‘Introduction to General Ecology: The Ecologization of Thinking’, in *General Ecology: The New Ecological Paradigm*, ed. by Erich Hörl and James Burton (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 6, in which Baecker’s ideas are quoted and translated into English.

⁸⁰ Hörl, ‘Introduction’, p. 50n30. See also, Baecker, *Studien Zur Nächsten Scientific*, p. 9.

The terms *system*, *environment*, and *ecology* are meant to foreground different aspects of the same fiction-reality fabric. ‘System’ is used to refer to a thing’s constitutive makeup as a network of entities, or as a part of a larger network of entities – in this second case, synonymous with ‘environment’. Examples of this would be a metafiction comprised of different narrators, fonts, time periods, etc.; and a metafiction that draws from different aspects of the culture and past culture in order to weave some story. Indeed, the difference here is largely a matter of perspective. However, ‘system’ and ‘environment’ imply a fabric of objects affecting each other, while the word ‘ecology’ suggests an additional quality to these system-environments as living organisms.⁸¹ Though ‘system’ and ‘environment’ are used in neocybernetics to argue for life in system-environments, the use of ‘ecology’ is a more recent development suggesting the ontological nature of system-environments as alive.⁸²

Further to the paragraphs above, a thematic contradiction must be addressed: namely, the simultaneous decentering *and* re-affirmation of the *human*. Humans are integral to the world as we know it – since we cannot experience the world any way other than ‘human’ – *but* we also cannot be its egotistical center.⁸³ This is to say, the world is made from various object-systems, *including* the material phenomena of a human experiencer experiencing it. To state this more idiomatically, we ‘create’ the storied world, but could not do it without the symbiotic

⁸¹ See, for example, basic dictionary definitions: ‘Ecology’, in *Dictionary*, ed. by Apple Inc. (Online: Apple, 2019).; and ‘Environment’, in *Dictionary*, ed. by Apple Inc. (Online: Apple, 2019), which define these words in these terms. Additionally, the ontological assumptions associated with ‘environment’, exist as well with regards to ‘system’. See, for example, ‘System’, in *Dictionary*, ed. by Apple Inc. (Online: Apple, 2019).

⁸² With regards to the epistemological and ontological tensions suggested by these two groups of terms (system-environment and ecology), coming sections will address the importance of this perceived disparity as a necessary oscillating dynamic of our fiction-realities.

⁸³ These ideas are prevalent in Speculative Realism, and other theories of objects, assemblages, and materiality, that seek to understand the non-anthropocentric relationships between people and things. See, for example, Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 20-38; Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology: Or What It’s Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), at pg. 74; Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Malden: Polity, 2002), pp. 136-139; and Levi Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (Ann Arbor Michigan: Open Humanities, 2011), at pg. 44.

relationships with other material companions.⁸⁴ This simultaneity suggests that our entanglement with the world's emergent materiality is only 'storying' because we have projected our own storying pathology upon the object-systems of our experience.⁸⁵ For this reason, I propose to use a fourth term of my own devising: the *metafictioning manifold*. My coining of this term is intended to incorporate system, environment and ecology but also to include the human observer who sets the frame for how we are to approach the overall ecology as a storying narrative articulation. That is, the human observer participates in the present-continuous framing of an ongoing larger story of shared experiences with other people and things [the metafictioning manifold], while also self-aware of our co-operative roles in it.⁸⁶

This *metafictioning manifold* – the differential co-creative and co-participatory act of entangling and emergent materials – exhibits its own 'bio-logic' through its self-referential recursivity. This is akin to stating that a text remains 'alive' to a culture for as long as it maintains relevance, or as Livingston noted, hooked and unborn in an ecology of other things.⁸⁷ But the deeper nuance this thesis explores is that we contribute to the life of that text, as much

⁸⁴ See, for example, Donna Haraway, 'Talk Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti', *YouTube*, (2017) [Accessed January 8 2018]. Haraway makes the point that we, as well as other things co-habit each other 'in order to be at all'. Her argument deals specifically with organisms, but the point is made that the human is symbiotic with the things of the environment.

⁸⁵ See, for example, H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 1-12, regarding the centrality of story and narrative structures to the human experience. This in no way serves to negate an external reality, since as we will see in the neocybernetics section that an external reality can be understood, but instead that our navigation of that reality takes the form of storying relationships between the object-systems of the material world. This thesis does not venture into the fields of evolutionary literary theory, but there are studies focused on the 'storied human experience' from cognitive, biological, and anthropological perspectives. See, for example, Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass. ; London: Belknap, 2009); Brian Boyd, Joseph Carroll, and Jonathan Gottschall, *Evolution, Literature, and Film : A Reader* (New York ; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2010); Jonathan Gottschall, and David Sloan Wilson, *The Literary Animal : Evolution and the Nature of Narrative* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press ; [London : Eurospan, distributor], 2005); Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal : How Stories Make Us Human* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012); Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982).

⁸⁶ See, for example, Burton, 'Metafiction and General Ecology', p. 267, who describes Nelson Goodman's ideas of worldmaking, which include the human's perception as well as a poietic engagement with the other things of the world. See also, Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), p. 6.

⁸⁷ Livingston, *Between Science and Literature*, p. 70-71.

as it contributes to ours. That is, texts and things in turn create us, and in this ecological relationship, the metafictioning manifold takes on a life of its own. The metafictioning manifold's ethos can be seen as an inherent drive to maintain life – to draw from *and* to contribute to a larger material ecosystem.

Current State of Metafiction Studies

This thesis is situated within metafiction studies while also drawing from the field of science and literature. To date, no significant book-length publication dedicated to metafiction and metafictionality in the context of literature and science exists and this thesis strives to bridge this gap. The following article-length publications do inform this thesis, especially in their non-representational approach to metafiction, resonating with theories of performativity, neocybernetics, and diffraction.

Contributing a chapter to *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science* (edited by Katherine Hayles), Peter Stoicheff (1991) explores the commonalities between metafiction and chaotic systems.⁸⁸ Stoicheff's work maintains a language-centric approach, but also recognizes metafiction as inherently chaotic: that is, exhibiting 'nonlinearity, self-reflexivity, irreversibility, and self-regulation'.⁸⁹ These dynamics are characteristic of complex systems, and in fact, Bruce Clarke, whose work is particularly important to this thesis, mentions metafiction in brief sections of *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Signs* (2008) where he interprets them as analogue representations of neocybernetic systems.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Peter Stoicheff, 'The Chaos of Metafiction', in *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science*, ed. by N. Katherine Hayles (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 85-99. See also, Katherine Hayles, *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990).

⁸⁹ Stoicheff, 'Chaos of Metafiction', p. 85.

⁹⁰ See, for example, Bruce Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Signs* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 84-85; 96; 114; 119; and especially at 94-94.

Clarke's subsequent work further explores the connections between literature and other forms of media as exhibiting neocybernetic and posthuman dynamics.⁹¹ Clarke's co-edited book with Mark B. N. Hansen (2009) brings together researchers across media studies and the sciences to explore the interstices of the humanities and sciences in neocybernetics, though metafiction is not explicitly discussed.⁹²

Norman N. Holland (2013), in '*Don Quixote and the Neuroscience of Metafiction*' discusses the bio-cognitive processes which he argues produce a sense of vertigo in the reader when reading metafiction.⁹³ Also focused on systems of representation, Holland contends that metafiction short-circuit our suspension of disbelief, and therefore trigger bio-cognitive responses such as anxiety when fiction and reality cannot be adequately differentiated.

Regarding postmodernism, Stefan Herbrechter (2017) contends that metafiction exhibits a pedagogical purpose in understanding human experience.⁹⁴ The collection, *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, in which Herbrechter's essay appears, contextualizes the posthuman cultural project by tracing its lineage from the medieval to postmodern periods. It identifies posthuman literary modes such as science fiction, autobiography, comics and graphic narratives, film, and e-literature (all of which are metafictional in their engagement with 'frames', in the broadest sense of the word), and explores themes that are central to this thesis' metafictional focus: the nonhuman, bodies, objects, technologies, and futures. This thesis differs by locating the inherent metafictionality in these themes, which helps expand upon those literary approaches, and enriches the study of

⁹¹ See, for example, Bruce Clarke, and Manuela Rossini, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁹² See, Bruce Clarke, and Mark B.N. Hansen, eds., *Emergence and Embodiment: New Essays on Second-Order Systems Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

⁹³ Norman N. Holland, 'Don Quixote and the Neuroscience of Metafiction', in *Cognitive Literary Studies: Current Themes and New Directions*, ed. by Isabel Jaen and Julien Jacques Simon (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2012), pp. 73-88.

⁹⁴ Stefan Herbrechter, 'Postmodern', in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (2017), pp. 54-68.

metafictions and metafictionality.

The above-mentioned themes and literary modes pinpoint a literary culture in which there exist scientific questions and responses to metafiction. But, in their emphases on non-modern engagements between people, things, technology, and narrative, they also suggest an ecological perspective on the entanglement and emergence of entities involving groups distinctly identified as humans and nonhumans, the living and nonliving, the physical and metaphysical. In *General Ecology: The New Ecological Paradigm*, James Burton (2017), claims that ‘metafictionalizing’ (to think metafictionally about metafiction/ality) can be regarded as ‘a general mode of contemporary cultural thought, expression, practice, and [is] in some sense integral to (the thinking of) general ecology’.⁹⁵ His point, here, is that a self-referential approach to self-referential texts is a potentially fruitful method for exploring the nature of objects and their relations within the system of an ecology.

My own recent work has attempted to pick up the mantle of these latest trends in metafiction studies in order to further legitimize the ‘real-world’ significance of metafictional approaches.⁹⁶ The following sections unpack the three theoretical strands of the thesis – performativity, neocybernetics, and diffraction. First, I will outline the history, theory, and the

⁹⁵ Burton, ‘Metafiction and General Ecology’, at p. 256. Also see, Burton, ‘Metafiction and General Ecology’, pp. 253-256 for a general understanding of ‘metafictionalizing’. See also, Erich Hörl, and James Burton, eds., *General Ecology: The New Ecological Paradigm* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

⁹⁶ See, for example, John Wolfgang Roberts, ‘Metafiction: Stories About Stories’, in *Japan Writer’s Conference* (Okinawa: 2013); John Wolfgang Roberts, ‘Metafiction: An Introduction on Dramatizing the Boundaries of Social Discourse’, *Aichi University: Language and Culture*, 58 (2014), 19-46; John Wolfgang Roberts, ‘Ecologies of the Posthuman’, in *The Central Japan Literature Society* (Shimizu: 2015); John Wolfgang Roberts, ‘Entanglement and Emergence in the Neocybernetic Posthuman’, in *Culture Typhoon* (Tokyo, Tokyo University of the Arts: 2016); John Wolfgang Roberts, ‘Entanglement and Emergence in the Neocybernetic Posthuman (Presented at Culture Typhoon 2016, Tokyo University of the Arts)’, *Philologia* (2017), 77-85; John Wolfgang Roberts, ‘Metafictionality as Ethic: Affecting Change in Our Narrative Ecologies’, in *Towards Post-Media Theories in Asia* (Tokyo University of the Arts, Senju Campus 2018); John Wolfgang Roberts, ‘Metafictionality as Ethic: Affecting Change in Our Narrative Ecologies (Presented at the Post-Media Research Network Conference 2018, Tokyo University of the Arts)’, *Philologia*, 49 (2018); and John Wolfgang Roberts, ‘The Nonmodern Ontological Theatre’, *Constructivist Foundations*, 13 (2018), 398-401. Indeed, the evolution of my thought across these published and presented works are a record of my own growth, maturity, and confidence in situating metafiction as analogue representations of a larger metafictioning reality.

implications of performativity theory applicable to metafiction. Then I will do the same for neocybernetics and diffraction, before concluding this introduction with an overview of the chapters.

Performativity

Performativity theory begins with J. L. Austin's 1955 Harvard lectures, posthumously published as *How to Do Things with Words*, (1975), wherein he distinguishes between performative and constative utterances.⁹⁷ His work centers on verbal speech – that which does things in the world (performative utterances), and that which describes things as they are (constative utterances). The utterance: 'I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*' (together with breaking a bottle across a ship's hull), is an act of speech, but also, performs the christening of a ship.⁹⁸ Performatives are utterances which simultaneously state and perform *the* actions which they refer to. From Austin, performativity theory evolves and is developed in a range of contexts including post-structuralist thought (Jacques Derrida, and Paul de Man), gender studies (Judith Butler), performance studies (Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick), and scientific disciplines, particularly Science and Technology Studies (STS) (Karen Barad, and Andrew Pickering).⁹⁹

⁹⁷ See, J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); J.L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*. 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

⁹⁸ See, for example, Austin, *Do Things with Words*, pp. 5-6; and James Loxley, *Performativity* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 8.

⁹⁹ See, for example, Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Signs*, 28 (2003), 801-31; Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Karen Barad, 'Interview with Karen Barad', in *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies*, ed. by Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012), pp. 48-70; Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 1999); Judith Butler, 'Performative Agency', *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 3 (2010), 147-61; Judith Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', in *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Chicago University Press, 1988), pp. 1-23; Andrew Parker, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, eds., *Performativity and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1995); Andrew Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency and Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Andrew Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010); John Searle, *Speech Acts*:

But the first development of Austin's work comes from John Searle's speech act theory.¹⁰⁰ Speech acts contextualize performatives as rule-governed performances or behavior.¹⁰¹ Searle writes: '[a] theory of language is part of a theory of action', meaning that representational systems and their employment are intertwined.¹⁰² This differs from Austin's distinction in that constatives can be seen as performative since they too are performances *and* representations of symbolic systems of speech.

Austin and Searle's work, while aware of the importance of context, did not accord it enough prominence within their speech-act theories.¹⁰³ The christening of a ship still requires a bottle, a ship and the precise situation of ceremonial naming in addition to the utterance; likewise, a marriage in a play, while performing the rules of a marriage ceremony, does not constitute a real marriage. This led to more narrative-oriented formulations of performativity, by theorists such as Derrida and de Man, who considered conventions as iterable through different contexts.¹⁰⁴ Since utterances can be spoken in different situations, as in an actual

An Essay in the Philosophy of Language (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); and John Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

¹⁰⁰ See, Searle references above.

¹⁰¹ See, Searle, *Speech Acts*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁰² Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, p. 17.

¹⁰³ Searle champions an approach to performativity as systems that include utterances as words and sentences; words and sentences that refer to other things, events, or which predict; and words and sentences that 'state, question, command, promise,' etc., as opposed to Austin who emphasized the formal structure of the performative utterance. See, Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 124-126. Similarly, Derrida's contribution was to re-introduce the proverbial 'poet' and argue that all utterances were infelicitous, whereas for Austin, only fictional utterances in theatre, for example, were. That is, all utterances, real or fictional, require a degree of iterability inherent to language manifesting a 'personal-cultural construction of reality.' See, Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p. 125. Indeed, this was the cause of a public feud between Searle and Derrida. See, for example, Raoul Maoati, *Derrida/Searle: Deconstruction and Ordinary Language* trans. Timothy Atanucci and Maureen Chun (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). Essentially, Searle's position was centered on pragmatic applications of conventions, whereas Derrida's was more phenomenological and focused on the iterability of conventions in various contexts – characteristic of Analytical and Continental clashes in methodological approaches. See also, John R. Searle, 'Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida', *Glyph*, 1 (1977), 198-208; Jacques Derrida, 'Limited Inc Abc...', in *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 29-110; and John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), p. 169, which trace the trajectory of their debate.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', pp. 1-23; Jacques Derrida, *Memories: For Paul De Man*. trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava and Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Jacques Derrida, *Without Alibi*. trans. P. Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations*. trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); and Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New

christening of a ship, as well as within a stage play, performative utterances must be recognizable and iterable in different contexts. Utterances are therefore capable of reconfiguring and subverting the contextual boundaries and possibilities of a ‘valid’ utterance. James Loxley (2007) summarizes: ‘iterability, by a strange and difficult logic, is both the condition of the possibility of performative felicity *and* the condition of its strict impossibility’.¹⁰⁵ Utterances can never fully iterate themselves since the act of iteration is always performed under different material conditions. Contexts are impossible to fully replicate, and because of this, each uttering *is* an act of reconfiguring the possibilities that make it felicitous (valid). My use of the word ‘subversive’ in Chapter Two and throughout lies in this implication: an utterance’s felicity under new material conditions *is* a subversion of an utterance’s assumed felicitous parameters.¹⁰⁶ Performative utterances simultaneously iterate and subvert, and in this paradox are the conditions for reconfiguring the material landscape.

This formulation allows for viewing intelligible materials as real, constructed, and malleable. Constatives (that is, representational and factual language), are also dependent upon constructed conventions and therefore offer paradoxical understandings of facts/reality as similarly constructed.¹⁰⁷ All utterances therefore have performative iterative and subversive qualities suggesting that our experiences and understandings of the world are simultaneously real and constructed via the differential processes of iteration and subversion. Our objective is not to disregard representations, but to recast representationalism as contingent upon performative acts, not fixed monuments of/to knowledge.

These narrative-centered approaches to performativity are gateways to material

Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

¹⁰⁵ Loxley, *Performativity*, p. 84.

¹⁰⁶ My intention is not to suggest a radical component to the performativity of materials, but to state plainly that iteration and negation of conventions occur simultaneously in the moment of utterance/phenomena and is a necessary feature of the continued evolution and change of the world’s intelligible structures.

¹⁰⁷ This is a notion that resonates with Hutcheon’s work in ‘historiographic metafiction’.

approaches, allowing further exploration about identities of being, the production of art, and our everyday experiences. The notion of iterative and subversive narratives illustrates that our ongoing interaction with the world is based on conventional expressions, *and*, with our *being* in the world, which is organized by cultural conventions. Butler (1997, 1999) takes this approach to gender and queer studies, Parker and Sedgwick (1995) explore the world of performance studies, Victor Turner (1969, 1974, 1982, 1987) develops this approach into more anthropological studies, and theorists like Michael Kirby (1965) and Jerzy Kutnik (1986) theorize on the performativity of avant-garde theatre and fiction, respectively.¹⁰⁸ Uniting these various strands is the notion that everyday conventions imply we are living out fictions, and that who we are is also a (very real) fictive expression of similarly constructed conventions. Turner notes: '[w]hen we enter whatever theatre our lives allow us, we have already learned how strange and many-layered everyday life is, how extraordinary the ordinary.'¹⁰⁹ Performativity theory comes to question the notion of fixed identities, and suggests that who we are in the world is a result of the conventions we embody and the way we mold those conventions *while* enacting those narratives.

More recently, performativity has thrived in the general field of Science and Technology Studies (STS). STS is an academic field studying the recursive processes of interaction between

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, the above references to Butler, and Parker and Sedgwick. Regarding the work of Parker and Sedgwick, their definition of performativity is different than the one outlined here and its philosophical tradition. Despite Parker and Sedgwick viewing this difference as the extremes of the same scale – with performance studies exploring the extroversion of the actor/introversion of the signified, and the philosophical variant addressing the 'dislinkage [...] of cause and effect between the signifier and the world' – they nonetheless contend a common ethos, if you will, by the 'torsion, the mutual perversion [...] of reference and performativity. See, Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Introduction', in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. by Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-18, pp. 2-3. See also, Michael Kirby, *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1965); Jerzy Kutnik, *The Novel as Performance: The Fiction of Ronald Sukenick and Raymond Federman* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969); Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974); Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982); and Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987).

¹⁰⁹ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 122.

culture, science, and technological innovation.¹¹⁰ A major aim of STS is to question the assumed objectivity of scientific facts, seeing them as entities constructed within a wider environment of culturally-determined meaning. Pickering (1995) writes:

Until the late 1950's, it seemed enough to think of science as a body of knowledge, a collection of empirical and theoretical propositions about the world. [...] [S]ince the 1970's, work on the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK) [falling under the umbrella term of STS] has increasingly documented the importance of the human and the social in the production and use of scientific knowledge.¹¹¹

Pickering, with his sociological background, is concerned with the role of human agency in science.¹¹² The *practice* of human culture co-creates empirical knowledge about the world, and knowledge therefore cannot be separated from our influence. Understanding this requires a paradigmatic shift from representationalism to performativity. He writes: 'the world is filled not, in the first instance, with facts and observations, but with agency. The world, I want to say, is continually *doing things*, things that bear upon us not as observation statements upon disembodied intellects but as forces upon material beings.'¹¹³ This approach, otherwise known as the performative idiom, or *performative paradigm*, re-evaluates knowledge-centric

¹¹⁰ See, for example, the works of Karen Barad, 'Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/Continuities, Spacetime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come', *Derrida Today*, 3 (2010), 240-68; Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Malden: Polity, 2002); Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013); Andy Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Donna Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004); Katherine N. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Don Ihde, and Evan Selinger, eds., *Chasing Technoscience: Matrix for Materiality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); and Andrew Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency and Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹¹¹ Pickering, *Mangle*, pp. 1-2.

¹¹² Pickering, *Mangle*, p. 9.

¹¹³ Pickering, *Mangle*, p. 6. Pickering's understanding of observation as something distinct from agency will be problematized throughout this thesis as inseparable from the phenomenality of material emergence.

Enlightenment approaches. All aspects of the biological-cognitive-cultural human experience are agential materials performatively engaged with knowledge production.

Drawing upon Bruno Latour, Pickering makes the case for *nonmodernism*, where ‘people and things are not so different’.¹¹⁴ He contends, nonmodern approaches reveal a particular ontology about the world, namely, a general ‘refusal of a dualist split between people and things’ and that temporal processes are better understood in evolutionary terms rather than ‘causal and calculable’ approaches.¹¹⁵ For Pickering, scientific practice, and by extension the human experience, is a ‘reciprocal coupling of people and things happen[ing] in time, in a process [...] [called] mangling.’¹¹⁶ The performativity of nonmodernism is fundamental to sub-disciplines within STS, namely cybernetics and new materialism, as well as posthuman approaches to understanding the world.¹¹⁷ In fact, the neocybernetic and new materialist emphases on the performativity of metafiction necessitates a nonmodern approach to the assumed rigidity of people and things.¹¹⁸

This mangling, which I discuss as the *metafictioning manifold/ethic* is an entangling and emergent process raising three issues. First, I am interested in the metafictioning process itself since it is no longer ‘causal and calculable’. Second, curiosity arises regarding the practicality of these processes: that is, the question is raised as to what is the relationship between ‘people

¹¹⁴ Pickering, *Cybernetic Brain*, p. 18. See also, Bruno Latour, ‘On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications Plus More Than a Few Complications’, *Philosophia*, 25 (1990), 47-64; Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Bruno Latour, ‘On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications’, *Soziale Welt*, 47 (1996), 369-81; Bruno Latour, ‘Keynote Speech: On Recalling Ant’, (Lancaster: Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, 1998); Bruno Latour, ‘On Recalling Ant’, in *Actor-Network Theory and After*, ed. by John Law and John Hassard (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), pp. 15-25; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Bruno Latour, Graham Harman, and Peter Erdelyi, *The Prince and the Wolf: Latour and Harman at the LSE* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2011). Additionally, see, Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (Melbourne: re.press, 2009), which is a criticism of Latour’s project, but which lays out the principles of his project objectively.

¹¹⁵ Pickering, *Cybernetic*, p. 19.

¹¹⁶ Pickering, *Cybernetic*, p. 19.

¹¹⁷ These sub-disciplines are discussed further below.

¹¹⁸ This is illustrated via the coming sections, and developed throughout the chapters.

and things,' exactly? Finally, the word 'reciprocal' eludes clear definition since it suggests recursivity within and between materials, agency even for nonhuman objects, and an ethicality of giving and receiving between these agential materials. The second and third curiosities are approachable through theories of neocybernetics and diffraction. The first point, however, signals one of the latest developments in performativity theory, a new materialist understanding of performativity in the work of Karen Barad.

Barad's (2007) formulation of performativity is called *agential realism*, defined as a phenomenal approach to epistemology, ontology and ethics.¹¹⁹ Though she does not engage with metafiction, her theoretical departure from theories of reflexivity (which dominate much of metafiction criticism) to theories of diffraction, helps re-energize metafiction studies through the notion that the phenomenal performativity of language and materials (the *material-discursive*) is simultaneously an act of constructivism (i.e., fictionalizing) and realism. Barad offers the groundwork for performatively exploring metafiction and reality as fully disruptive *and* realist. Her theory is informed by her background in quantum mechanics – particularly in the philosophy of Niels Bohr – and feminist contexts in the vein of Donna Haraway.¹²⁰

According to Barad, all materials are intra-active (as opposed to interactive), and emerge as objects in the act of indeterminate phenomena coming together to create intelligible things.¹²¹ Materials can be understood in two exclusive ways: as apparatuses for generating material into

¹¹⁹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, pp. 32-33.

¹²⁰ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, pp. 25-38, especially at pp. 25-26 regarding Bohr and his theoretical influence on her project, and pp. 29-30 regarding Haraway's influence. With regards to Haraway, much of Barad's theories are indebted to Haraway's development of diffraction (a concept in physics but appropriated for culture theories). This is outlined in sections below. As for Bohr, he was a Nobel Prize winning quantum physicist, famous for his role (along with Werner Heisenberg) in the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum physics. The Copenhagen interpretation is a formal set of mathematical principles of understanding quantum mechanics. The prevailing interpretation, attributed to Heisenberg, however, is the uncertainty principle, which suggests the unknowability of things – a representational perspective. Bohr on the other hand championed an 'indeterminacy principle', which countered Heisenberg's approach and much of Western metaphysics, by suggesting that things do not have simultaneously determinate boundaries, but that they are in fact indeterminate and become determined with the use of an apparatus (i.e., observer). In other words, it is not a question of what can be known, but what can be said to exist, to paraphrase Barad. See, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, pp. 19; 115-119

¹²¹ See, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 33. These things sometimes appear 'fixed' at the human scale.

the world, and as patterns themselves mediated through other apparatuses.¹²² The performative-metaphysical novel can be investigated as an emerging pattern of material, as well as a tool for generating additional patterns in the narrative ecology.¹²³ Barad's agential realism is more fully explored in coming sections, and in Chapter Four's investigation of the above-mentioned nonmodern performative causal structures, as well as in more praxis-oriented examples in Chapter Five. Here, however, performativity's nonmodern constructivism of the material and discursive elements of reality and culture, and the differential self-referentiality (iteration-subversions) from which this performative fabric emerges, implies a living-ness best addressed by theories of neocybernetics.

Neocybernetics

Neocybernetics develops from cybernetic theory which, like its nineteenth-century precursor, thermodynamic systems theory, is a theoretical approach to systems.¹²⁴ Whereas thermodynamics emphasized energy's entropic processes – 'all worldly processes tend toward *equilibrium*', or heat-death – cybernetics is a discourse of control.¹²⁵ '*Cybernetics*' is Greek for 'governor', implying a regulatory agency functioning to manipulate a system's entropic processes.¹²⁶ For example, a coal-burning engine will produce heat and energy until the coal runs out. However, with a *steersman* coupled to that thermodynamic system, through the

¹²² See, for example, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 73.

¹²³ These dynamics are further explored in coming sections.

¹²⁴ For introductory material on the similarities and differences of first- and second- order cybernetics, see, for example, Bruce Clarke, and Mark B.N. Hansen, 'Introduction: Neocybernetic Emergence', in *Emergence and Embodiment: New Essays on Second-Order Systems Theory*, ed. by Bruce; Mark B.N. Hansen Clarke (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 1-25; Bruce Clarke, 'Systems Theory', in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Science*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 214-25; Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, pp. 131-159; and Francis Heylighen, and Cliff Joslyn, 'Cybernetics and Second-Order Cybernetics', in *Encyclopedia of Physical Science and Technology*, ed. by R.A. Meyers (New York: Academic Press, 2001), pp. 1-24.

¹²⁵ Clarke, 'Systems Theory', pp. 215-218.

¹²⁶ Clarke, 'Systems Theory', p. 216.

process of *negative feedback*, the harnessed energy allows for a functioning locomotive. Negative feedback is the process of measuring the amount of energy being produced and feeding that measurement back into the system so as to steer the processes towards a desired rate.¹²⁷ Such a system requires entropic processes, apparatuses, and steersmen to ‘drive’ the system forward.¹²⁸

In mid-twentieth century cybernetics, information systems replace energy. Despite the hobbyist characteristics amongst early theorists – since evolved into applications in STS, AI, and the posthumanities – cybernetics had darker beginnings in experimental psychiatric practices in Britain, and command-and-control military weapons systems in the United States.¹²⁹ Cybernetics emerges in the 1940’s through the Macy Conferences (1946-1953), convened by cyberneticians Warren McCullough and Frank Fremont-Smith.¹³⁰ These conferences were attended ‘by major luminaries in fields ranging from mathematics and information theory to anthropology, psychology, and sociology, including Norbert Weiner, John von Neumann, Claude Shannon, Heinz von Foerster, W. Ross Ashby, Gregory Bateson, and Margaret Mead’.¹³¹ Cybernetic theories continue evolving through theorists such as Clarke

¹²⁷ Clarke, ‘Systems Theory’, pp. 216-217.

¹²⁸ As will be shown, ‘entropic processes’ are to be taken more analogously as a ‘living thing’. ‘Heat death’ should be taken as analogous to a biological death. The coming discussion elaborates on these ‘living’ dimensions to things.

¹²⁹ See, for example, Pickering, *Cybernetic Brain*, pp. 4-7. See, for example the works of Claude E. Shannon, and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Illinois: Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, 1949); John von Neumann, *Mathematical Foundations of Quantum Mechanics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955); and Norbert Weiner, *Cybernetics; or, Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1948), as examples of early American cybernetics, and William Ross Ashby, *Design for a Brain* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1952); Alan Turing, ‘The Turing Digital Archive’, King’s College, Cambridge, National Cataloguing Unit for the Archives of Contemporary Scientists, <<http://www.turingarchive.org>> [Accessed December 30 2018]; and William Grey Walter, *The Living Brain* (London: Duckworth, 1953), as examples of early British cybernetics.

¹³⁰ Clarke, ‘Systems Theory’, p. 218. See, for example the work of Warren S. McCulloch, *Embodiments of Mind*. 2nd edn (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988). Frank Fremont-Smith was an early organizer of the Macy conferences, and a necessary element in bringing the cybernetic context to the Macy Conferences which were largely medical in nature. See, for example, American Society for Cybernetics, ‘Foundations; the Subject of Cybernetics; History of Cybernetics; Chapter 2: The Coalescence of Cybernetics’, American Society for Cybernetics, <<http://www.asc-cybernetics.org/foundations/history2.htm>> [Accessed December 30 2018].

¹³¹ Clarke, ‘Systems Theory’, p. 218. Additionally, there was a later series of British meetings beginning in July of 1949, called the Ratio Club, founded by neurologist John Bates, and attended by Ashby, Alan Turing, Walter,

and Pickering, amongst others in fields such as the humanities and social sciences, and enjoys presence in academic groups such as the International Society for the Systems Sciences (ISSS), American Society for Cybernetics (ASC; the current incarnation of the original Macy Conferences), and the Society for Literature, Sciences, and the Arts (SLSA).¹³²

The shift from (first-order) cybernetics to (second-order) neocybernetics is a focal shift from self-regulation to self-reference. Clarke writes:

Second-order systems theory marks the point at which cybernetic discourse grasps the constitutive nature of operational recursion across natural systems – bodies, minds, and societies – and applies its principles to itself. By acknowledging that the cognitive system of the observer is necessarily bound up in the phenomena to be understood, it takes upon itself the burden of self-reference.¹³³

and others. See, for example, Phil Husbands, and Owen Holland, ‘The Ratio Club: A Hub of British Cybernetics’, in *The Mechanical Mind in History*, ed. by Phil; Owen Holland; Michael Wheeler Husbands (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), pp. 91-148. See also, the works of Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972); Margaret Mead, *Male and Female* (New York: Perennial, 1949); and Heinz von Foerster, *Understanding Understanding: Essays on Cybernetics and Cognition* (New York: Springer Verlag, 2002).

¹³² The ISSS is the current incarnation of another early cybernetic group, the Society for General Systems Research (SGSR), founded in 1954. See also, ‘International Society for the Systems Sciences (ISSS)’, International Society for the Systems Sciences (ISSS), <<http://issss.org/world/index.php>> [Accessed December 30, 2018]. Major journals include SLSA’s *Configurations*. See, for example, ‘Configurations’, Johns Hopkins University Press, (2018) <<https://www.press.jhu.edu/journals/configurations>> [Accessed December 30 2018]. Journals affiliated with ASC, are *Cybernetics and Human Knowing: A Journal of Second-order Cybernetics, Autopoiesis, and Cybersemiotics*, and the *Journal of Science and Literature; Kybernetes: The International Journal of Systems and Cybernetics*; and *Constructivist Foundations*. See, for example, ‘Applying the Science of Context’, American Society for Cybernetics, <<http://asc-cybernetics.org>> [Accessed December 30 2018]; ‘Cybernetics and Human Knowing: A Journal of Second Order Cybernetics, Autopoiesis & Cybersemiotics’, Cybernetics and Human Knowing, (2018) <<http://chkjournal.com>> [Accessed December 30 2018]; ‘Journal of Science and Literature’, Journal of Science and Literature, <<http://www.literatureandscience.org>> [Accessed December 30 2018]; ‘Kybernetes: The International Journal of Systems and Cybernetics’, Emerald Insight, <<https://www.emeraldinsight.com/loi/k#>> [Accessed December 30 2018]; and Alexander Riegler, ‘Constructivist Foundations: An Interdisciplinary Journal’, Constructivist Foundations, <<http://constructivist.info>> [Accessed December 30 2018]. Regarding Clarke and Pickering, it would be fair, in my opinion, to regard them as cyberneticians. Their fields of study, particularly literature and sociology, respectfully, draw from, and inform, the ongoing field of cybernetics. Additionally, they are regular contributors and readers for various cybernetic publications.

¹³³ Clarke, ‘Systems Theory’ p. 221.

In cybernetics, the regulating governor is part of the system's circuitry. But in neocybernetics, the governor must also take into account that they too are being *governed* through similarly cybernetic processes. This is the 'operational recursion' of components differentially informing the system which in turn reforms the entities. Systems, Clarke reminds us, are 'any complex totality composed of interdependent elements [...] in such a way that a *process* emerges from [...] the interdependent interaction of those elements'.¹³⁴ Neocybernetics is the study of exploring relationships between these entities, while self-consciously aware that we are bound in those processes.

Niklas Luhmann (1995) – an intellectual grandfather to neocybernetics – argues that a system is necessarily self-referential.¹³⁵ Self-referentiality is inherent for two reasons. First, distinguishing the properties and processes of a system (i.e., for a collection of entities to be considered, functionally and identifiably, as a system), is by definition, a self-referential act of a system distinguishing itself as something other than, but part of, the larger environment.¹³⁶ Secondly, to make a more metafictional point from the perspective of the human observer, the study of systems compels us to inquire into our own situatedness in the many systems that constitute our experiences and the materialization of the environment which we are part of.

Hans-Georg Moeller (2006) reminds us that every system is situated in an environment (with what constitutes an 'environment' varying depending on the system being considered and the particular ecology of systems unique to that given environment).¹³⁷ A system always acts in a way that differentiates it from the totality of the environment (i.e., its *umwelt*), and in so doing,

¹³⁴ Clarke, 'System's Theory', p. 214. Italicized text in original.

¹³⁵ Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*. trans. John Bednarz jr. and Dirk Baecker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 13.

¹³⁶ See, for example, Hans-Georg Moeller, *Luhmann Explained: From Souls to Systems, Ideas Explained* (Chicago: Open Court, 2006), pp. 219-220.

¹³⁷ Moeller, *Luhmann Explained*, pp. 219-220. See also, John Smith, and Chris Jenks, *Qualitative Complexity: Ecology, Cognitive Processes and the Re-Emergence of Structures in Post-Humanist Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 6.

communicates its identity as a system (some *thing*) in the world.¹³⁸ This is because the act of making a thing, such as a system, intelligible, is the same act that excludes the rest of the environment from that distinction and its immediate processes.

This is not to imply that natural, social, or cultural environments of humans are entirely dictated by everyday contexts. Rather, it is to support the larger neocybernetic claim that while the systems which make up human experience need not be limited to our *roles* in life, nor the intertextuality of texts, material objects do necessarily maintain our bio-cultural selves in the world. Neocybernetics dramatizes the frames of modern intelligibility and communicates the entanglement between our bio-social identities, our ability to cognize our environments, and the objects and materials that populate our spatio-temporal experiences. As neocyberneticians have argued, neocybernetic systems consist of differentially co-creating and co-participatory social, psychic, and technological systems.¹³⁹ The human, in other words, ‘can only exist in its relations to the nonhuman’.¹⁴⁰ Who, or what we are depends on our relationships with the other systems of an environment. Two things are being said: first, that the act of observation is a simultaneous inclusive-exclusive act, and second, that acts of observation may re-draw what that system-environment can look like since the parameters are not fixed. Understanding this is to self-referentially position oneself in such a way as to disrupt the modern sense of a self with authority over our various system-environments.

My contention is that reading metafiction through theories of neocybernetics recasts metafictional self-referentiality as self-conscious of these neocybernetic processes. The circuitry of a reader, the material physicality of the book, and the social and technological contexts in which it was written and read, constitutes a neocybernetic system. It spreads across

¹³⁸ See, for example, Moeller, *Luhmann Explained*, pp. 219; 223; 224-226.

¹³⁹ See, for example, Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, pp. 16-19.

¹⁴⁰ Bruce Clarke, ‘The Nonhuman’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 141-52, at pp. 150-151.

various spatio-temporal parameters, the entities of which actively participate in the book's *reading*. Neocybernetics begs us to consider the moment of engagement between entities – for example, the way in which a critic creates meaningfulness surrounding the text, contexts, media, etc., just as these materials inform the meaningfulness of the critic. Observers self-conscious of their meaningful participation, come to ask how much of their reality is constructed in the way that they construct the intelligibility of that moment.

As metafiction is defined as story about story, so too neocybernetic systems are 'cybernetics about cybernetics'.¹⁴¹ Clarke writes, '[t]he foregrounding of paradox by narrative embedding, metalepsis, and *mise-en-abyme* are to postmodern narrative aesthetics [...] what self-referential recursion and system differentiation – the emergence of systems within systems – are to second-order systems theory'.¹⁴² Taking the metaphorical synonymy of narratives and systems, as Clarke drawing from Roland Barthes does – both are a 'complex totality composed of interdependent elements' from which a process of systemic emergence continues – then the similarities between metafiction and neocybernetics become evident.¹⁴³ Both deal with self-referential paradox, which disrupts the perceived veracity/integrity of the system/narrative. Both reveal embedded intertextuality, and an embedding in a larger system/narrative ecology. Furthermore, both remind us of the disruptions wrought by seemingly disparate systems or

¹⁴¹ See, Clarke, 'Systems Theories', p. 221, where he notes the concurrent emergence of neocybernetic theories with the 'metafictional and "cognitive" turns in narrative literature'; see also, Joseph Tabbi, *Cognitive Fictions* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 4. Additionally, see, Heinz von Foerster, 'Cybernetics of Cybernetics', in *Understanding Understanding: Essays on Cybernetics and Cognition* (New York: Springer, 2003), pp. 283-86, a foundational essay coining the phrase 'cybernetics of cybernetics' with regards to second-order cybernetics, laying the philosophical groundwork for the role of the observer, and which ends with an ethical call – that is, for human observers to exercise their autonomy from the system by declaring their purpose for exploring second order systems, lest the purpose be decided for us on a totalitarian trajectory. My own 'purpose' here is to suggest metafiction helps foreground the entangled, yet autonomous, human observer in ethical acts with the materials around them.

¹⁴² Clarke, 'System's Theory', p.221; see also Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, pp. 95-97.

¹⁴³ Clarke, 'System's Theory', p. 214.

narratives to break perceived boundaries and couple to, co-participate in, and co-create new articulations of system-narratives.

Despite its perceived synonymy with metafiction, neocybernetics offers opportunities to expand metafiction theories in two particular ways: as living materials, and as a narratological lens for engaging with the world as living metafictions.¹⁴⁴ My contention is that metafictions are self-conscious of their living processes, and of the living processes of the material reality from which they emerge and re-engage with. Foundational to neocybernetics is the idea of autopoiesis, which describes second-order systems as *living* processes – a dynamic implied in theories of metafiction as I will show in this thesis. Autopoiesis was developed by Chilean scientists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, to answer two fundamental questions: ‘[w]hat is the organization of the living?’ and, ‘[w]hat takes place in the phenomenon of perception?’¹⁴⁵ Their conclusion, summarized by Pier Luigi Luisi (2003), was that autopoiesis is the:

organiz[ation of] the production of its own components, so that these components are continuously re-generated, and the system can therefore maintain the very network processes that produces them. The organization of the living, basically, appears then as the constitutive mechanism of the constitution of the identity as a material entity.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ That is, both the world and we are living metafictions.

¹⁴⁵ Humberto R. Maturana, ‘Introduction’, in *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*, by Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980), pp. xi-xxx, pp. xii/xiv. See also, Humberto Maturana, and Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980).

¹⁴⁶ Pier Luigi Luisi, ‘Autopoiesis: A Review and a Reappraisal’, *Naturwissenschaften*, 90 (2003), 49-55, p. 51.

Autopoietic systems are the simultaneously self-determining product and process of their own materiality.¹⁴⁷ Though developed from a biological discipline, autopoiesis continues evolving in social and cultural studies.¹⁴⁸ This self-producing capability implies, at a cultural level, that the relationships between people and things are more holistically recognizable as a living organism.¹⁴⁹

The second question regarding the phenomenon of perception originally led to the conclusion that ‘cognition and the operation of the living [...] were the same thing.’¹⁵⁰ That is, the phenomena of cognizing the world is a function of a living thing’s material processes: cognizing the environment *is* necessary to maintain autopoiesis.¹⁵¹ Perception, in other words, should not be understood as a ‘grasping of an external reality’, but a manifesting dynamic triggered by the environment.¹⁵² From a socio-cultural perspective, concerns with the phenomena of perception and the intelligibility of the environment lead to issues with the reader/critic *and* with the nonhuman elements of living systems, all of which participate in the lively act of perception and system materialization.

Clarke’s neocybernetics is especially literary for the reason that it constitutes a narratology: a way for perceiving texts (and ourselves) as second-order systems, suggesting that (from a human perspective) the organization of the living and the phenomenon of perception *are* metafictional acts. This *posthuman narratology*, offers a way of reading metafictional acts that

¹⁴⁷ See, Clarke, ‘Systems Theory’, p. 222. Originally intended to explain living biological processes, autopoiesis has been used to comment on social, cultural, and technological processes as well.

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, Smith and Jenks, *Qualitative Complexity*, p. 6. Smith and Jenks also note Maturana and Varela’s subsequent disagreement with autopoiesis’ appropriation in ‘cognitive theory, epistemology, and cybernetics’.

¹⁴⁹ This is to say that the neocybernetic intra-play of our biotic and metabiotic systems frames our experiential and material realities as a living ecology. See, for example, Donna Haraway, ‘Cyborgs, Coyotes, and Dogs: A Kinship of Feminist Figurations and There Are Always More Things Going on Than You Thought! Methodologies as Thinking Technologies’, in *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 321-42, p. 322, who discusses the ‘cyborg’ (cybernetic-organism) in similar terms.

¹⁵⁰ Maturana, ‘Introduction’, pp. xvi-xvii.

¹⁵¹ See, for example, Maturana, ‘Introduction’, p. xv.

¹⁵² Maturana, ‘Introduction’, p. xv.

more holistically acknowledges the autopoietic processes at work in both storyworld and real world.¹⁵³

Drawing upon Luhmann, Clarke differentiates between *biotic* and *metabiotic* autopoietic systems.¹⁵⁴ The biotic constitutes biological systems such as the body and the brain, as well as other biological systems.¹⁵⁵ Metabiotic systems, on the other hand, concern the autopoietic processes of meaning systems, particularly as they deal with mind (i.e., *psychic*) and society (i.e., *social*).¹⁵⁶ Psychic systems emerge through consciousness, while social ones are through communicative practices.¹⁵⁷ The biotic and metabiotic are autopoietic, though differentiated by their biological and discursive/symbolic natures, respectively.

In addition to these autopoietic systems, Clarke differentiates non-autopoietic systems such as abiotic matter/energy and machines.¹⁵⁸ Machines particularly, receive special attention from Clarke, as he considers them crucial to the constitution of the neocybernetic (metabiotic) human.¹⁵⁹ Machines are an umbrella term for human-made artifacts or objects, but, as I make clear throughout the thesis, all matter as well. According to Clarke, machines constitute a *technological system* operating in a medium of *media*.¹⁶⁰ Technologies materialize through the mediation of technological artifacts, which also mediate psychic and social systems to further generate additional technologies. Clarke symbolically places machines between mind and

¹⁵³ Again, my contention is that both world and human are living metafictional systems that engage with each other as such. Clarke's posthuman narratology is a step towards fully exploring this dynamic in my metafictioning methodology.

¹⁵⁴ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁵⁵ See, Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 17; and Luhmann, *Social Systems*, p. 2. Due to the literary frames set by this thesis, these biotic systems are not addressed.

¹⁵⁶ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 19; Bruce Clarke, *Neocybernetics and Narrative* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 13.

¹⁵⁷ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 19; Clarke, *Neocybernetics and Narrative*, p. 13.

¹⁵⁸ Granted, my use of performativity theories re-situates abiotic matter/energy as autopoietic systems in the context of a neocybernetic/metafictioning human observer, Clarke, however, considers them 'non-living non-autopoietic systems' and further refrains from including these abiotic elements in the neocybernetic discussion. See, Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 17.

¹⁵⁹ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁰ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 19. This is in contrast to the medium of consciousness for psychic systems, and communication for social systems.

society to make the point that though technologies are abiotic, they are necessarily entangled with the human experience and, being coupled to psychic and social systems, become autopoietic by forming part of our metabiotic selves while informing changes to psychic and social systems.¹⁶¹ These metabiotic systems, then, are autopoietic while also forming a larger autopoietic experience: the neocybernetic human.

The psychic system (mediated through consciousness), the technological system (mediated through media), and the social system (mediated through communication) offer a tripartite framework for reading texts.¹⁶² Clarke's posthumanist narratology formulates the intra-systemic framework:

Neocybernetics makes an important intrasystemic distinction between functions of *operation* and *observation*: systems must operate to function at all, but those operations are steered to a greater or lesser extent by the particular operation of observation. Focalization complexifies the category of narration by distinguishing a separate, embedded layer of narrative function. The production of the text through its narrating instance corresponds to the self-productive operation of autopoietic systems generally (social systems in particular), as focalization corresponds to the specific operation of perception (in psychic systems in particular).¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, pp. 17-19; Clarke, *Neocybernetics and Narrative*, pp. 12-16.

¹⁶² This model is reminiscent of earlier narratologists like Gerard Genette and Mieke Bal, who both include a focalizing element to the traditional *sujet-fabula* narrative model. See, for example, Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 3rd edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); and Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Cornell University Press, 1983). *Sujet* and *Fabula* are the two-part components of narrative as developed by the Russian Formalists, and which have come to be called, *narrative discourse* and *story*, respectively. While story is the chronological order of events, narrative discourse is the way that story is articulated. In the case of Genette, he is interested in the 'narrating instance', or the event of narrative production which mediates the *sujet* and the *fabula*. Similarly, Bal splits the conventional *sujet* – or discourse – into text and story: the textual use of a narrative medium, and the ordering event that mediates the text with the *fabula* being created in the imagination of the reader. See, Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, pp. 21-22. See also, Abbott, *Introduction to Narrative*, p. 241, regarding story and narrative discourse. This is to show that there is narratological precedence in theorizing upon the role of the reader,

¹⁶³ See, for example, Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 31.

Both acts of operation and observation are discursive functions.¹⁶⁴ Whereas the narrative operation of the text corresponds to Luhmann's social system and to the concept of the narrator contained within a text, narrative observation corresponds to the psychic system and the particular linguistics, perception, affect, or thought that the narrator exercises in their narrating instance.¹⁶⁵ Clarke writes, '[a]lthough focalizations must be narrated (rendered at the layer of the story by the signifiers of the narrator's text) what *is* narrated is a result of what is or is not focalized. Observations must be produced by operations that are guided by those same delimited observations.'¹⁶⁶ Each narrating instance reconfigures the text's possibilities, which in turn reconfigure what is possible to be focalized on, and in this way the narrator and the act of focalization (the text's social and psychic systems, respectively) are bound by different parameters, yet are recursively coupled together in a 'double feedback loop'.¹⁶⁷ Because of this differential feature of posthuman narratology, the textual intra-play of neocybernetic systems within neocybernetic systems is always metafictional. Clarke writes, 'focalizations tell a story *about* the text, running alongside the story told *by* the text'.¹⁶⁸ That is, with a psychic system coupled to a larger environment, of say communicative society and mediating technology, there emerges the symbolic actions necessary for telling stories about the larger autopoietically neocybernetic reality.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 30.

¹⁶⁵ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁶⁶ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 31.

¹⁶⁷ See, for example, Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 32.

¹⁶⁸ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 32.

¹⁶⁹ See, for example, Clarke, *Neocybernetics and Narrative*, p. 15, where he writes that the metabiotic aspects of the technological system, though non-autopoietic, use media to couple meaning systems such as 'language, writing, printing, phonography, and/or cinematography' and to mediate the self-production of our other meaning systems – the psychic and social. The point here being that the neocybernetic stuff of consciousness, communication and media must be in play in order to tell a story, and if all stories tell stories alongside the ones being told, then all neocybernetic systems, like all stories, are metafictional. See, for example, Andrew Bennett, and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. 4th edn (Harlow: Longman, 2009), p. 54, regarding the self-reflexive and metafictional dimensions of stories.

If the traditional ‘discourse’ aspect of the narrative binary is divided into operation (social system/text/narration), and observation (psychic system/story/focalization) then Clarke’s formulation of the technological system corresponds to the environment at large, and the text’s fabula: the storyworld.¹⁷⁰ The emphases here are the emergence of events, objects, actors, locations, and things to color the world being shown to us by the narrator.¹⁷¹ Since the role of a system is to reduce the complexity of its environment and make a part of the environment intelligible, then the technological system most fully corresponds to the materialization of fiction and reality as narrative articulations.¹⁷² Clarke writes:

[I]n contrast, a fabula emerges only through indirect mediations. To construct a fabula, the discourse mutually constituted by text and story – narration and focalization – must then be submitted to the selective cognitive operations of analytical interpretation [...] and any given discourse can yield any number of plausible fabulae.¹⁷³

Textually, this ‘selective cognitive operation’ exists in the narrator, who must feed narrated information back into their narrating instance so as to propel the story forward. But the reader must not be overlooked. Speaking about the roles of *technoscience*, and drawing upon the work of Latour and Michel Serres, Clarke notes: ‘[j]ust as informatic feedback complicates the input-output and signal-noise distinctions, the hybrid couplings of technoscience in action complicate distinctions between cultural subjects and natural objects.’¹⁷⁴ That is, as systems such as the

¹⁷⁰ See, for example, Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁷¹ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 31.

¹⁷² Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 34; see also, Luhmann, *Social Systems*, p. 26.

¹⁷³ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 30.

¹⁷⁴ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 8. See also, Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Michel Serres, *The Parasite*. trans. Lawrence R. Schehr (Minneapolis:

social and the psychic are distinct, yet inform each other to a certain degree, so does the role of technology and its mediating nature problematize the systemic boundary between an artifact in the world, and a reader. The point is that fabulae can be seen as emergent technology (material) analogous to the human material experience. Further to this modeling metaphor, a text (as matter) is part of this technological reality as much as it contains its own operational and observational capabilities (as text), *and*, delving deeper, readers themselves – often, through rereadings and misinterpretations – assume a mediating role in figuratively rewriting the text.

This tripartite system exists in texts, but also in our realities, and there are proverbial ‘gates’ where the social, psychic, and technological of the storyworld and the real-world overlap, feeding into and reconfiguring one another, and serving different roles depending on the narrative plane they are operating in. In this thesis, this tripartite system – when following its own ‘narrating instance’ logic, is applied to metafiction and corresponding ‘reality’ – becomes a *metafictioning methodology*, the description of which, is inseparable from the understanding of a *metafictioning manifold*.¹⁷⁵

While the work of Clarke is narrative-based, Heikki Hyotyniemi (2006) takes a mathematical and engineering approach to neocybernetics and is concerned with modeling biological systems.¹⁷⁶ Yet, Hyotyniemi’s modeling approach also lends itself to a metafictional context as I am arguing for metafiction as models of our neocybernetic realities.¹⁷⁷ Hyotyniemi uses

University of Minnesota Press, 2007); and Michel Serres, *Statues: The Second Book of Foundations*. trans. Randolph Burks (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

¹⁷⁵ Chapter Five more fully expresses this, with the epilogue commenting on the methodological inseparability.

¹⁷⁶ See, for example, the works of Bruce Clarke already discussed, and Heikki Hyotyniemi, *Neocybernetics in Biological Systems* (Helsinki: Helsinki University of Technology, 2006).

¹⁷⁷ That is, metafiction models our neocybernetic realities and are themselves neocybernetic in their performativity with the reader and (con)texts. In other words, metafiction models what they are performing, and these two aspects of product and process differentially inform each other into continued autopoietic emergence of a neocybernetic ecology.

neocybernetic principles for ‘reaching a holistic view of complex processes in general’.¹⁷⁸ In the preface to *Neocybernetics in Biological Systems* (2006), Hyotyniemi notes that the ‘biological’ in his title should be taken as ‘bio-logical’: that is, there is a certain logic in the way living systems carry on – regardless of their ‘phenosphere’.¹⁷⁹ A phenosphere is a medium.¹⁸⁰ A medium is that element that binds co-participatory constituents into an ecology. Luhmann (2000), understands ‘medium’ as a ‘“horizon” of changing constructions which, as medium, outlives these constructions’.¹⁸¹ Something like *communication* is a medium, as it is the communicative act that keeps society (e.g., the economy, law, etc.) structured in some way.¹⁸² Likewise, the medium of *consciousness* keeps minds tethered together and *media* maintain the usefulness of artifacts.

As a living thing ‘constructions’ eventually die, but mediums are self-perpetuating.¹⁸³ This is to say, bio-logical systems are mediums from which constructions emerge and are themselves an environment that supports those constructions. Likewise, bio-logical systems are themselves mediums situated in larger environments. The nesting of system-environments can be magnified internally or externally, bracketing materials of its particular environment across various times, places, and dimensions (e.g., metaleptic levels between the storyworld and the

¹⁷⁸ Hyotyniemi, *Neocybernetics*, n.p.; abstract.

¹⁷⁹ Hyotyniemi, *Neocybernetics*, n.p. This information can be found in the preface.

¹⁸⁰ Heikki Hyotyniemi, ‘Lecture 12: Philosophical Consequences’, Helsinki University of Technology, Department of Automation and Systems Technology Cybernetics Group, ([Accessed 11 June 2017], slide 46.

¹⁸¹ Niklas Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p.11.

¹⁸² See, for example, Hyotyniemi, ‘Philosophical Consequences’, slide 46, where he mentions the ‘socio-economic’ as a phenosphere.

¹⁸³ There is some disagreement between neocyberneticians and new materialists (discussed more below) as to the necessity of the medium. While necessary in neocybernetics, since both system and environment automatically confirm a medium without which they could not emerge, in new materialism – particularly in the work of Barad – a medium is not necessary for the emergence of material, but like any other material, emerges with the rest of reality. This is discussed further below, but my own position is more in line with neocybernetic thought. See, for example, Moeller, *Luhmann Explained*, p. 225: ‘Sense’, is the Luhmannian ‘universal medium’. Metafictions, which operate largely on a principle of paradox, are always told in the spirit of making sense, and to this extent, require a (neocybernetic) human to make sense of the text/reality. See also, Hayles, *Unthought*, p. 66, who notes this cognitive shortcoming in new materialist thought, stating that if the new materialists are right, there would be no way of knowing since new materialists do not account for mediums and cognitive acts as essential to the materialization of things.

reader; present and past, natural and supernatural, etc.). The medium is the *being-ness* that supports the emergence of materials, of which those materials would cease to exist if the medium itself were removed from the system.¹⁸⁴ I argue that metafictionality is the medium of human experience, out of which intelligible materials model its bio-logic in their very emergence. Metafictions in particular have much to say about the material processes of the manifold (including its own medium: metafictionality itself) – metafictions, that is, tell stories about the stories they are telling.

Neocybernetics is concerned with differential processes, except that in neocybernetics it is not between substance (context) and form (text), but between medium and form.¹⁸⁵ An example offered by Luhmann and Moeller is footprints on a sandy beach.¹⁸⁶ The sand is the medium and when it is disturbed, such as by a walker, the beach is reconfigured with footprints (from a ‘loose coupling’ of the medium of sand, to a ‘strict coupling’).¹⁸⁷ Constructions come into strict form, but eventually return to the loosely structured medium. Taking the metaphor a step further, footprints re-affirm the sandy beach and reconfigure it simultaneously. It re-affirms the sand because the footprints could not exist without that sandy medium. If we imagine the footprints have disappeared, the sand remains in the picture. If we imagine that the sand has disappeared, the footprints cease to have existed. The *form* of footprints are a self-referential testament to the *medium*. I contend that from a neocybernetic perspective, a proverbial ‘life-force’ is made possible and sustained by the relationship between medium and forms – differentially sustaining and constituting the system as ‘living’.¹⁸⁸ A living system,

¹⁸⁴ Moeller, *Luhmann Explained*, pp. 221-222

¹⁸⁵ See, for example, Clarke and Hansen, ‘Introduction’, p. 4.

¹⁸⁶ Moeller, *Luhmann Explained*, pp. 221-222.

¹⁸⁷ Moeller, *Luhmann Explained*, p. 221.

¹⁸⁸ Conversely, performative differential processes are more situational and seek to reposition a network of material into its present materializations (i.e., context and text). This is not to say, however that one is more useful than the other, but that in the context of metafiction(ality) performativity and neocybernetics, though different, complement each other. In many ways, the differences are justified in that both are possible depending on the view one takes. If we take metafictions as object-events, then they differentially reconfigure their context-

performatively re-iterates itself by self-referentially re-affirming itself through its forms, and creating a renewed sense of interactive possibilities, behaving to foster openness and maintain its autopoietic processes.

Neocybernetics extends performativity theory into the realm of the living by contextualizing elements that are inherently metafictional such as self-referentiality, recursivity, non-linearity, and material emergence. It therefore allows us to address some fundamental gaps in metafiction studies that do not fully address the ongoing differential emergence of things and story – materials and discourse. Not only can we view metafictions as events, performatively speaking (which is consistent with neocybernetics), but we can view them as alive in their autopoietic emergence as systems tethered to a similarly neocybernetic human experience. As mediums making possible novel forms of expression through their performative materiality, metafictions are animated by a neocybernetic framework into affectual relations with the reader, and thereby collapses strict modern concepts of time, matter and space within the metafictioning manifold.

Diffraction

Diffraction theory serves three purposes in this thesis: it offers a method for putting performativity and neocybernetics in ‘conversation’ with each other (as well as all object-systems); it establishes this proverbial conversation as inherently ethical; and it identifies these processes as entirely metafictional – thus allowing us to understand metafictions as fundamentally ethical engagements with people and things. Diffraction theory, as a critical framework, comes from Haraway (1997). It is developed through feminist science studies, STS,

text relationship. If on the other hand, we approach metafictions as systems, then texts emerge from a field of possibilities, not necessarily from specific contexts. My stance, as evident in Part Two, is to amalgamate these into object-systems – context and medium, are from this metafictional perspective, different ways of framing the narrative ecology which exhibits an ongoing process of life.

and technoscience and constitutes an integral part of material approaches to performativity through Barad's work in new materialism.¹⁸⁹ Generated largely through academic activity at the University of California at Santa Cruz, diffraction theory helps rethink modern Enlightenment forms of knowledge production by embracing ethically informed performative approaches in posthuman contexts.¹⁹⁰

Performativity (in the vein of Haraway and Barad), neocybernetics, and diffraction fit within the broad framework of posthumanism.¹⁹¹ Defining posthumanism is helpful in outlining key generalities, and Neil Badmington (2011) summarizes its general philosophical project:

¹⁸⁹ See, for example, Donna J. Haraway,

Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.Femaleman(C)_Meets_Oncomouse(Tm): Feminism and Technoscience (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 16, where she describes diffraction theory as her 'invented category of semantics. As we will see, diffraction has its roots in physics with the study of light and its wave/particle duality. In addition to works by Haraway and Barad already mentioned, other important works on diffraction are, Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Signs*, 28 (2003), 801-31; Karen Barad, 'Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/Continuities, Spacetime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come', *Derrida Today*, 3 (2010), 240-68; Karen Barad, 'Interview with Karen Barad', in *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies*, ed. by Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012), pp. 48-70; Karen Barad, 'Intra-Actions', in *Mousse*, ed. by Adam Kleinman (2012), pp. 76-81; Karen Barad, 'Diffracting Diffraction', *Parallax*, 20 (2014), 168-87; Vivienne Bozalek, and Michalinos Zembylas, 'Diffraction or Reflection? Sketching the Contours of Two Methodologies in Educational Research', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* (2016), 1-17; Jacob Edmond, 'Diffracted Waves and World Literature', *Parallax*, 20 (2014), 245-57; Brigit Mara Kaiser, Kathrin Thiele, 'Diffraction: Onto-Epistemology, Quantum Physics and the Critical Humanities', *Parallax*, 20 (2014), 165-67; Melanie Sehgal, 'Diffractive Propositions: Reading Alfred North Whitehead with Donna Haraway and Karen Barad', *Parallax*, 20 (2014), 188-201; Kathrin Thiele, 'Ethos of Diffraction: New Paradigms for a (Post)Humanist Ethics', *Parallax*, 20 (2014), 202-16; and Iris van der Tuin, 'Diffraction as a Methodology for Feminist onto-Epistemology: On Encountering Chantal Chawaf and Posthuman Interpellation', *Parallax*, 20 (2014), 231-44.

¹⁹⁰ See, for example, Barad, 'Diffracting Diffraction', pp. 169-172. See also, Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987). Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'She, the Inappropriated Other', *Discourse*, 8 (1986/7); Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Question of Identity and Difference', in *Inscriptions* (University of Santa Cruz: Center for Cultural Studies, 1988); and Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Post-Coloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), as key works used by Barad to demonstrate the rich activity occurring towards diffraction theory in Santa Cruz.

¹⁹¹ For key works on posthumanism and the posthuman that speak to the processual metamorphosing non-human nature(s) of the human and our experiences, see, Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Malden: Polity, 2002); Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013); Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Signs*, 28 (2003), 801-31; Bruce Clarke, and Manuela Rossini, *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*. ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Richard Grusin, *The Nonhuman Turn* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Donna Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004); Pramrod K. Nayer, *Posthumanism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014); and Carry Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

According to humanism [...] the human being occupies a natural and eternal place at the very center of things, where it is distinguished absolutely from machines, animals, and other inhuman entities; where it shares with all other human beings a unique essence; where it is the origin of meaning and the sovereign subject of history; and where it behaves and believes according to something called “human nature”. [...] Posthumanism, by way of contrast, emerges from a recognition that “Man” is not the privileged and protected center, because humans are no longer – and perhaps never were – utterly distinct from animals, machines, and other forms of the “inhuman”; are the products of historical and cultural differences that invalidate any appeal to a universal, transhistorical human essence; are constituted as subjects by a linguistic system that pre-exists and transcends them; and are unable to direct the course of world history towards a uniquely human goal.¹⁹²

Though there is much to agree with, here, Badmington mistakenly assumes humanism is misguided in light of the posthuman project that seeks to negate our assumptions about who we are. Quoting from Clarke, he writes, ‘posthumanism arises from the theoretical and practical inadequacy – or even impossibility – of humanism, from the relativization of the human that follows from its “coupling...to some other order of being” (Clarke 2008: 3)’.¹⁹³ But it is precisely this either/or binary opposition between posthumanism and humanism, which

¹⁹² Neil Badmington, ‘Posthumanism’, in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Science*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 374-84, p. 374. See also, Badmington’s edited collection on posthumanism, Neil Badmington, *Readers in Cultural Criticism: Posthumanism*. ed. by Neil Badmington (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000). and his introduction therein, Neil Badmington, ‘Introduction: Approaching Posthumanism’, in *Readers in Cultural Criticism: Posthumanism*, ed. by Neil Badmington (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 1-10.

¹⁹³ Badmington, ‘Posthumanism’, p. 374. See also, Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 3.

diffraction theory helps move beyond.

Speaking of the proto-posthumanism evident in medieval literature, Karl Steel (2017) writes of being ‘suspicious about the very temporal boundaries of “proto” and “post,” [...] arguing [instead] that any systematized humanism will always fissure under the pressure of its own efforts at coherence. Posthumanism does not follow humanism; rather, it is inherent in its own claims’.¹⁹⁴ That is, these two projects are always pregnant with each other – by exploring one, we discover aspects of the other. Clarke, in the same edited collection, writes that much of the posthuman project has been a discursive preoccupation with ‘disrupting the scripts of humanism’, but with the ‘nonhuman turn’ (e.g., understanding the world in terms of ‘animals, affectivity, bodies, organic and geophysical systems, materiality, or technologies’) in posthuman discourses, ‘[t]he category of the nonhuman is necessarily as incoherent as the category of the human itself.’¹⁹⁵ Things are not categorizable with fixed identifiable markers, but their identifiability is performed by subverting assumptions – ‘not by pos(i)ting, but by negating’.¹⁹⁶ That is, the identifiability of the human experience emerges through the subversion of conventional assumptions – a sort of disruptive ethos to the human story foregrounding our nonhuman dimensions as *space[s] whereupon discussion[s] can occur*.¹⁹⁷ Disruptions, in other words, enrich the world with the potentiality for conversation to emerge from those gaps torn into our assumptions about ourselves.

Diffraction theory helps explore the heuristic and ethical properties of metafiction as it relates to the nonhuman dynamics of texts and our experiences. Diffraction – and my storying

¹⁹⁴ Karl Steel, ‘Medieval’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 3-15, p. 3.

¹⁹⁵ Clarke, ‘The Nonhuman’, pp. 141-142. See also, Richard Grusin, ‘Introduction’, in *The Nonhuman Turn*, ed. by Richard Grusin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), pp. vii-xxix, p. vii.

¹⁹⁶ Clarke, ‘The Nonhuman’, p. 142.

¹⁹⁷ Clarke, ‘The Nonhuman’, p. 142. Clarke writes that this is a space where an image may occur, meaning, something identifiable. I alter this sentiment in conversational terms to suggest that there is not only an image, but additional negotiations with the narrative ecology regarding any intelligible material.

variant, the metafictioning methodology (which seeks to recapture the humanist element of the observer) – are methodologies for exploring the de/reconnective events and processes with the world’s materials, as spaces whereupon the vignettes of our real and analogous experiences can be told and transformed.¹⁹⁸

N. Katherine Hayles (2017), notes a shortcoming to new materialist theories: namely that they separate the cognitive act from materiality.¹⁹⁹ Hayles writes, ‘[s]eparating materiality from cognition does not [...] strengthen the case for materiality. On the contrary, it weakens it, for it erases the critical role played by materiality in creating the structures and organizations from which consciousness and cognition emerge’.²⁰⁰ Cognition, this thesis finds, *is* the instance that materials make themselves present to each other and thereby co-construct each other (and therefore any related causal structures) as object-systems. It is here that my project departs from theories of new materialism and puts them in conversation with neocybernetics. Things are not definitively things-in-themselves, so much as open-ended relational phenomena, which includes human cognition. Metafictions illumine Hayles’ point, that the cognitive/readerly act *is* the ethical persistence of materials to (re)create the structures and organizations from which things like cognition emerge and feed back into the becoming of the world we inhabit. Coming chapters will demonstrate this interplay between new materialist and neocybernetic theories in a metafictional context.

In 1992, Haraway described diffraction as ‘a feminist tool to rethink difference/s beyond binary opposition/s’.²⁰¹ Kaiser and Thiele (2014) note Haraway’s conception of diffraction as a

¹⁹⁸ This lack of a ‘humanist element’ is mentioned further below. Basically, Hayles critiques new materialism for its inability to acknowledge the human cognitive role. See, Hayles, *Unthought*, p. 65-66.

¹⁹⁹ Hayles, *Unthought*, p. 66.

²⁰⁰ Hayles, *Unthought*, p. 66.

²⁰¹ Kaiser and Thiele, ‘Diffraction’, p. 165. See also, Donna Haraway, ‘The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriated Others’, in *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 63-

departure from regarding objects as pre-existing things-in-themselves, to – using Barad’s terminology – things-in-phenomena.²⁰² Kaiser and Thiele write: ‘Haraway adopted diffraction to move our images of difference/s from oppositional to differential, from static to productive, and our ideas of scientific knowledge from reflective, disinterested judgment to mattering embedded involvement’.²⁰³ Through the optic metaphor of diffraction (as opposed to the geometric metaphor of reflection), Haraway seeks to express difference/s as always changing and inseparable from ourselves, since taking note of differences is *also* partaking in those differences. Haraway’s diffraction is semantic-oriented ‘[...] to make differences in the world’, by ‘contest[ing] metaphors we habitually use to describe practices of knowing and living’.²⁰⁴ Diffraction, from its inception as methodology is inherently ethical, inclusive, and conceptually subversive.

Haraway, Barad, and other theorists sharing similar performative approaches, constitute a minor group bridging the humanities and sciences.²⁰⁵ Barad contends that feminist science studies scholars have offered criticisms of reflexivity in favor of a ‘science-in-the-making’ approach, but that ‘mainstream science studies scholars seem to be unaware of the fact that the nature-culture dichotomy has been challenged vigorously on multiple grounds by feminist, poststructuralist, postcolonialist, queer, and other critical social theorists, and that attending to the issues they raise is an integral part of questioning the constitution of the nature-culture dichotomy’.²⁰⁶ Ironically then, much mainstream ‘science-in-the-making’ scholars undermine their own projects when ‘underestim[ing] the mutual constitution of the “social” and the

124.

²⁰² See, for example, Kaiser and Thiele, ‘Diffraction’, p. 165; and Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity’, p. 817.

²⁰³ Kaiser and Thiele, ‘Diffraction’, p. 165.

²⁰⁴ Haraway, *Modest Witness*, p. 16. Also, see, Kaiser and Thiele, ‘Diffraction’, p. 165.

²⁰⁵ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 87.

²⁰⁶ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 87.

“scientific” [:] not only *that* it matters, but *how* it matters and *for whom*.²⁰⁷ Despite growing trans-disciplinary reaches across the ‘two cultures’ to recognize shared contributions and insights, much within these fields still adhere to the institutional boundaries and paradigms that keep them separated – a dynamic this thesis works against.²⁰⁸

Along with Werner Heisenberg, Niels Bohr was a chief architect of the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum physics stipulating the complementarity and uncertainty of quantum mechanics.²⁰⁹ These principles are regarded as ‘cornerstones’ to the Copenhagen interpretation, but are paradigmatically different.²¹⁰ Heisenberg’s ‘uncertainty principle’ is representational: ‘we remain *uncertain about [an electron’s determinate momentum] value*, which is “assumed to exist independently of itself”, *owing to the unavoidable disturbance caused by the measurement interaction*’ [e.g., the observer]. For Heisenberg, true values can never be known because the act of observation influences the measurement of those values.

Bohr’s complementarity framework on the other hand finds fault with the uncertainty principle and is phenomenal rather than representational.²¹¹ Bohr suggests it is impossible to separate the individual behavior of ‘atomic objects and their interaction with the measuring instruments, which serve to define the conditions under which the phenomena occur’.²¹² The intelligibility of (atomic) things are not inherent properties, but are determined through the phenomenal interaction of the thing with the measuring apparatus.²¹³ This complementarity led Bohr to formulate a lesser-known alternative to the uncertainty principle: the ‘indeterminacy

²⁰⁷ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 87. Italics in original.

²⁰⁸ See, for example, C.P. Snow, ‘The Two Cultures’, in *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1961, who first outlines the disparity between the sciences and the humanities.

²⁰⁹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 3.

²¹⁰ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 115.

²¹¹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, pp. 115-116. Italics in original.

²¹² Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 308.

²¹³ For example, the material conditions, measuring instruments, and the observer.

principle'.²¹⁴ The indeterminacy principle adds a new dimension to the measurements of phenomena. Measurements, and the concepts that inform their application, are phenomenally co-participatory in the determination of a thing's intelligibility. Picking up where Heisenberg leaves off, Bohr addresses a more fundamental issue: '[f]or Bohr, the analysis of these conditions rests on the crucial insight that the concepts are meaningful, that is, semantically determinate, not in the abstract but by virtue of their embodiment in the physical arrangement of the apparatus'.²¹⁵ Our concepts, in other words, constitute determinate things contributing to the overall indeterminate material condition.²¹⁶ As Barad notes, the object and its measuring agencies are inseparable.²¹⁷ A thing, therefore, as a thing-in-itself, can never be objectively known.

Unpacking this via a quantum discourse, Barad does not suggest an analogous applicability from the quantum to the social world.²¹⁸ She does, however, contend that diffraction – as conceptualized in the two-slit diffraction *gedanken*-experiment to determine if 'light was a particle (classically held by Newton) or a wave (as experimentally shown by [Thomas] Young in 1803)' – is an 'apt metaphor [...] of reading insights through one another in attending to and responding to the details and specificities of relations of difference and how they matter'.²¹⁹ Diffraction is a methodology for reading the complimentary indeterminacy of the world around us in a way that challenges classical dualisms and representational approaches.

Diffraction, Barad writes, 'is a physical phenomenon that lies at the center of some key discussions in physics and the philosophy of physics' involving 'patterns of difference'.²²⁰

²¹⁴ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 116.

²¹⁵ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 117.

²¹⁶ See, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 139.

²¹⁷ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 139.

²¹⁸ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 70.

²¹⁹ Kaiser and Thiele, 'Diffraction', p. 165; and Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 71.

²²⁰ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 71.

When stones are dropped into a pond, or when water passes through a barrier changing the dynamics of its flow, these disturbances perpetuate diffractive patterns of difference. Keeping this metaphor in mind, Haraway suggests that diffraction patterns, ‘can make a difference in how meanings are made and lived’.²²¹ Acting in, and reading the world diffractively, she suggests, contributes to more informed and ‘promising interference patterns’.²²² These patterns make use of differences in unconventional ways. Trinh T. Minh-ha (1988) argues that, ‘[d]ifference as understood in many feminist and non-Western contexts [...] is not opposed to sameness, nor synonymous with separateness. [...] There are differences as well as similarities *within* the concept of difference’.²²³ For example, if a second stone is dropped into the pond, those diffraction patterns will interfere with the first stone’s patterns resulting in two outcomes. First, where the crest of one wave meets with the crest of another, the amplitude intensifies in what is known as ‘constructive interference’.²²⁴ Second where the crest of one wave meets with another’s trough, they cancel each other out in what is known as ‘destructive interference’.²²⁵ Whatever manifests is due to the interference of differences and the ‘superposition of waves’, whether they be in phase (constructive) or out of phase (destructive).²²⁶ As suggested by Haraway and Minh-ha, differences exist *within* the same entity, and these differences do not have clear boundaries, but shift and reconfigure depending on the many metaphorical stones dropped in the pond of one’s experience.²²⁷

²²¹ Haraway, *Modest_Witness*, p. 14.

²²² Haraway, *Modest_Witness*, p. 16.

²²³ Quoted in Barad, ‘Diffracting Diffraction’, p. 169. See also, Trinh T. Minh-ha, ‘Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Question of Identity and Difference’, in *Inscriptions* (University of Santa Cruz: Center for Cultural Studies, 1988).

²²⁴ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 78.

²²⁵ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 78.

²²⁶ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 80.

²²⁷ That is, things are not inherently constructive or destructive, but contingent upon a particular confluence of things in phenomena.

The idea that such reverberations exist across the nature-culture fabric and are recorded and written into each other, is what Barad calls *superpositions*. Barad writes:

Each bit of matter, each moment of time, each position in space [i.e., *spacetime-matterings*] is a multiplicity, a superposition/entanglement of (seemingly) disparate parts. Not a blending of separate parts or a blurring of boundaries, but in the thick web of specificities, what is at issue is its unique material historicities and how they come to matter [...] Superpositions – here and there, now and then – are not a simple multiplicity, not a simple overlaying or a mere contradiction. Superpositions aren't inherent; they are the effects of agential cuts, material enactments of differentiating/entangling.²²⁸

Every situation and object is a phenomena of differences – intra-actions co-creating each other. *Intra-action*, Barad writes, is '*the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*'.²²⁹ As opposed to *interactions*, which assumes that agencies (i.e., the meaningful interaction of materials) are pre-existent features of that material, intra-actions signify the emergent proclivity of matter and agency through their very intra-activity. Their distinctiveness exists only in a 'relational, not an absolute, sense.'²³⁰ Every *thing* is a superposition – a manifestation composed of specificities that extend across space, time, and matter. Objects across geographies and histories feed and 'write' into being a particular superposition, distinguished as a particular object or thing. The significance of diffraction theory in this thesis is that it provides a vocabulary for thinking about

²²⁸ Barad, 'Diffracting Diffraction', p. 176.

²²⁹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 33; italics in original. See also, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 197.

²³⁰ See, Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity', p. 818; and Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 33,

how the stones of performative and neocybernetic objects-systems interfere with each other through the medium of metafiction.

Barad's specificities are complicated as they challenge the concepts of causality, agency, and reality and help establish an intra-active ethos, or practice. Barad's umbrella term for this diffractive reality is *agential realism*, which is the understanding that phenomena are the primary ontological unit of entanglements (intra-acting agencies) from which epistemological properties materialize.²³¹

Diffraction as a methodology is the practice of engaging with the world of sedimentizing (iterating) and reconfiguring (subverting) materializations, with the awareness that the observer is one such sedimentizing/reconfiguring phenomenon. This awareness and practice is the ethical component to the agential realist ethos. Ethics is shown to be an inseparable part of the entire ongoing phenomena since observing systems (the observer and observed) are entangled (affecting each other) by the very act of making themselves present to each other. "Observer" and "observed" are nothing more than two physical systems intra-acting in the marking of the "effect" by the "cause"; no human observers are required (though "humans" may emerge as being part of practices)', writes Barad.²³² Accountability, that is, the marking of the *effect* by the *cause*, is what gives agential realism not only its ethical component, but also its ability to comprehend objectivity.²³³ That is, reality *is* the response-*ability* of materials to respond to each other and to do so in a way that fosters future intra-actions: it is, therefore, not a matter of the 'right response, but rather a matter of inviting, welcoming, and enabling the response of the

²³¹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 333.

²³² Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 340. Again, here is an example of what Hayles notes is a shortcoming to new materialist philosophies – a negation of the importance of a human observer.

²³³ See, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 340.

Other’.²³⁴ The embracing of differences requires an ethos of openness to the particular frames contextualizing and challenging our realities.

Since intra-active phenomena *are* response-able observing systems, it follows that any object is capable of observing as much as being observed. This does not mean that all objects are intelligent (implying inherent qualities), but that they are performatively capable of making parts of the environment intelligible (relational) to themselves. All objects are *apparatuses* – observable components within larger phenomena, and catalyst for distinguishing other objects.²³⁵

Cause and effect do not exist linearly, but, through apparatuses, emerge differentially. Barad discusses this in the context of producing and reproducing verifiable scientific data but the idea is relevant here. She writes that ‘[a]ccountability to marks on bodies [intelligibility] requires an accounting of the apparatuses that enact determinate causal structures, boundaries, properties, and meanings’.²³⁶ Essentially, textual disruptions with/in metafiction are the differential emergence of causal structures activating a particular spacetime-mattering. Every reading, in other words has a metafictioning story behind its reading, and this ethical practice informs and enriches our experiences and reconfigures its intelligibility.

Regarding agential realism, Barad writes:

Believing something is true doesn’t make it true. But phenomena – whether lizards, electrons, or humans – exist only as a result of, and as part of, the world’s ongoing intra-activity, its dynamic and contingent differentiation into specific relationalities.

“We humans” don’t make it so, not by dint of our own will, and not on our own. But

²³⁴ Barad, ‘Intra-Actions’, p. 81.

²³⁵ See, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 340; pp. 175-176.

²³⁶ See, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 340.

through our advances, we participate in bringing forth the world in its specificity, including ourselves. We have to meet the universe halfway, to move forward what may come to be in ways that are accountable for our part in the world's differential becoming. All real living is meeting. And each meeting matters.²³⁷

By being accountable – able to respond to the world around us – we become proactive, co-participatory, and congruent with the world's differential becomings. We are, in effect, matter mattering matter, or stories storying story. Metafictional encapsulate both articulations.

Diffraction amalgamates the various frameworks of this thesis into a metafictioning methodology, and as such performs the methodology that it outlines throughout the chapters. Barad reminds us that diffractions can be explored as apparatuses that generate effects, *and* as the effects themselves – they are mutually exclusive.²³⁸ Barad writes: '[d]iffraction queers binaries and calls out for a rethinking of the notions of identity and difference.'²³⁹ Diffraction questions the boundaries with which we categorize and engage the world, and asks us to reconsider the differences *with* and *in* things.²⁴⁰ Although this can be said of performative and neocybernetic theories as well, diffraction differs in that it offers a phenomenal perspective that reformulates the nature of causality into a nonmodern perspective. This provides a bridge between the ontological approach of performativity theory and the epistemological one of

²³⁷ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 353.

²³⁸ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 73.

²³⁹ Barad, 'Diffracting Diffraction', p. 171.

²⁴⁰ See, for example, Haraway, 'The Promises of Monsters', pp. 69-70, where Haraway discusses the work of Minh-ha to locate "difference" as a "critical difference within" and describes diffraction as a mapping of the effects of difference. See also, Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity' p. 803, n. 3; Barad, 'Diffracting Diffraction', pp. 169-170; Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'She, the Inappropriated Other', *Discourse*, 8 (1986/7); Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Question of Identity and Difference', in *Inscriptions* (University of Santa Cruz: Center for Cultural Studies, 1988), which is drawn upon by Barad to illuminate Minh-ha's early work on rethinking difference; and Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Post-Coloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), which Haraway draws upon to help formulate her own ideas of difference.

neocybernetics by foregrounding the eventfulness of things to differentially materialize as they come in contact with other things. Furthermore, it adds an ethical approach in our understanding of how differences affect/effect more differences and highlights the idea that affecting/effecting change into the world is a *practice*.

This is not to claim that performativity theory and neocybernetics are devoid of an ethical component. But in diffraction we find the ethics necessary to transverse *and* traverse disparate systems of thought in a way that encourages meaningful acts of engagement whilst also resisting being pigeonholed with and in symbolic systems of language (i.e., representationalism): an ethos consistent with metafiction.²⁴¹ The ethical implications of these frameworks are certainly included in a diffractive methodology. For instance, the emphasis on the present moment, the distrust of objectivity, and the warning against using means to justify the ends.²⁴² Diffraction, while perhaps agreeing with those ethical approaches, seeks instead to perform – practice – its ethicality in a way that does not subscribe to controlling, silencing, or otherwise manipulating the other in a power struggle. Diffraction does not make specific ethical claims, but the spirit of its ethics emerges in its very performative second-order processes – again, a key feature of metafiction. Ethics and practice are synonymous as teleological elements for bettering our practices of engaging with the world. In this thesis, the theory and

²⁴¹ This is to say, diffraction allows us to explore the many things intra-acting to formulate the apparatus (e.g., transverse), and to also traverse the patterns it creates in the metafictioning manifold.

²⁴² See, for example, Heinz von Foerster, 'Ethics and Second-Order Cybernetics', in *Understanding Understanding: Essays on Cybernetics and Cognition* (New York: Springer, 2003), pp. 287-304, at p. 302 where he warns of the danger of using the means to justify the ends, implicitly warning against non-individualistic approaches that minimize the freedom of choice in the individual, which come, paradoxically, when subjectivity is accepted as dogma (pp. 293-295). This is despite claiming that ethics are not a matter of reward or punishment, and 'reside in the action itself' (p. 290). See also, Kirk S. Kidwell, 'Politics, Performativity, Autopoiesis: Toward a Discourse Systems Theory of Political Culture', *Cultural Studies <-->Critical Methodologies*, 9 (2009), 533-58, where he 'argues that political culture is an autopoietic, performative discourse system that regulates the production of political knowledge and the performance of political action' (533). That is, Foucauldian power relations between the state, society, and individual are autopoietically performed and regulated (536). In addition to illustrating the compatibility of performativity and second-order systems theory, Kidwell's emphasis on the political culture is, by its nature, a politicization of the ethicality found in, and demonstrated by bridging these frameworks together.

practice of metafiction is more fully explored as diffractive phenomena (i.e., a diffractive genre). Diffraction theory helps ensure that descriptions of metafictionality do not succumb to the presumptions of representational knowledge claims, leaving the genre itself room to grow into new frameworks.

Herein lies the methodology of this thesis and as I ultimately argue, the methodology of metafiction(ality). Whereas performativity theory allows us to view metafictions as simultaneous objects and events, and neocybernetics recasts metafictions as living systems, we run the risk of presenting metafictions as dichotomous objects or systems, fictions or realities, without an open-ended theory for navigating those particular views. For example, how can metafictions be both living and inanimate, systems and objects, physical and metaphysical, epistemological operations and ontological beings? It is not merely about the contexts in which things are read, but that as material phenomena various dimensions are activated in their material emergence. Barad notes: ‘diffraction is not only a lively affair, but one that troubles dichotomies, including some of the most sedimented and stabilized/stabilizing binaries, such as organic/inorganic and animate/inanimate.’²⁴³ My contention is that metafictions are all these things, and my ‘metafictionizing’ of these theories all work to illuminate this open-ended proclivity to maintain open-endedness *in the service of* generating new materials in the world and new knowledge about those materials.²⁴⁴ Metafiction *can* be all these things precisely because it is *not* in the interest of metafiction(ality) to be any *one* thing. In fact, if there is one thing that metafictions *are*, it’s that they are not what people *thought* they were.²⁴⁵ And this is exactly the point of this thesis: metafictions force us to reconsider the nature of knowledge

²⁴³ Barad, ‘Diffracting Diffraction’, p. 168.

²⁴⁴ Barad calls this, with the addition of the ethical dimension, ‘ethico-onto-epistem-ology’. See, for example, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, pp. 90; 185, and 381.

²⁴⁵ von Foerster describes this best in, von Foerster, ‘Ethics’, p. 304, when quoting the fifty-eighth symbol of the *I Ching*, writes that ‘[t]he ultimate frame for change is unchanging.’

production by being predictable in their unpredictability.

Chapter Structure

Moeller writes that a frustrating aspect to reading Niklas Luhmann's books is that they are emblematic of the recursive systems they describe.²⁴⁶ To gain a fuller understanding of a concept, one must trace its uses across a variety of chapters and contexts – implying that meanings must be re-introduced time and again to tease out their complexities. This thesis faces a similar problem, though every attempt has been made to avoid a disruptive Luhmannian 'meta-thesis'. The structure employed is based upon the diffraction of four general terms and their associated variants: metafiction, performativity, neocybernetics, and diffraction.

It is useful to think of the following chapters as a fabric consisting of certain shapes and patterns. The four chapters can be divided into blocks – as Part One and Part Two. Part One consists of two foundational chapters which introduce theories of performativity and neocybernetics. These chapters focus primarily on what the text is doing and relate to the reader allegorically. The second chapter on *This is Not a Novel* introduces performativity theory à la Austin and Derrida, arguing that the novel, and metafiction more generally, is an inherently performative object, while the next chapter on *The Third Policeman* introduces Clarke's neocybernetics, contending that it, and metafictions generally, are in fact living systems.

Part Two, on the other hand, utilizes the logic of performativity and neocybernetics now introduced in order to move beyond the text and into their reconfiguring ecologies. The fourth chapter on *Being There* argues that the novel is self-consciously aware of the reader's (mis)readings – as a natural condition of *being with* the text and, as such, identifies principles

²⁴⁶ Hans-Georg Moeller, *The Radical Luhmann* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp. 11-12. To clarify, Luhmann's methods for writing books are nonlinear, and as a consequence, his books reflect that nonlinearity.

that help explain differential causal structures. The fifth chapter on *The Familiar: One Rainy Day in May, Volume One* locates a new diffractive reading practice in living metafiction and materials exploring the principles gained in the previous chapters.

These chapters also match as uneven pairs. Chapters Two and Four are predominately performative in nature, while Three and Five are neocybernetic.²⁴⁷ Chapter Two introduces performative theories in more familiar ways, before advancing radical insights in Chapter Four via Barad's new materialism. Conversely, Chapter Three draws upon the theories of Clarke, and earlier cyberneticians such as Varela and Maturana, and Luhmann, and concludes with Chapter Five's analysis of neocybernetic entanglement and emergence *in practice*. Indeed, the neocybernetic chapters are more *praxis* oriented – as opposed to the performative *theories* in Chapters Two and Four – and the thesis can therefore be considered as both a performative and constative utterance of this oscillating tension between theory and praxis, culminating with Chapter Five's implementation of both dimensions in conversation with each other, exemplifying the metafictioning manifold.

I also attempt to say specific things about metafictionality more generally. Throughout, terms like metafiction, story, and material are interchangeable, suggesting nuanced meanings depending on the context of the discussion. Upon first glance, my primary texts may seem to have little in common. They span nearly eighty years from the mid-twentieth to the early-twenty-first centuries; they come from different cultural paradigms – from modernism to postmodernism – and, arguably, from humanism to posthumanism. The authors, though mostly American, also consist of an Irishman and a Polish immigrant to the United States, both of whom did not initially speak English growing up, and, their respective novels are presented out of chronological order. Though, some novels appear more conventionally metafictional than

²⁴⁷ This is to further suggest that neocybernetics and performativity are of equal importance.

others, this thesis demonstrates that they all self-consciously address aspects of the metafictioning manifold. Together, these novels plot this thesis' telling in a controlled manner. A more in-depth look at the chapters reveals the richness of these inconsistencies.

TNN shows that metafictionality is a performative event that, even while it attempts to subvert the form, cannot help but tell a story and re-affirm its core elements. Metafictions, then, not unlike this thesis, must reflect identifiable aspects of our stories/experiences while also problematizing their identifiability, thereby establishing the reader as a convention to metafictions. *TNN*, was written in a postmodern cultural context, though Markson himself has been described as one of the 'last of the modernist[s]'.²⁴⁸ Recalling the modernist mantra of 'make it new', I argue that despite Markson's/the narrator's highly disruptive narrative style, they cannot help but tell a very *real* story.²⁴⁹ In other words, there is something fundamentally familiar about the novel and metafictions more generally, which is re-presented in new ways. Story or materials are always in a process of making itself new, and (re)writing the world.

Secondly, metafictions exhibit a 'bio-logic' as analogous living organisms feeding off the narrative ecology. Chapter Three's discussion of *TTP* builds upon Chapter Two, investigating the neocybernetic relations that invariably reach from the levels of the storyworld, to the realities of readers, to the societies and technologies respectively contextualizing and mediating the materiality of our fiction-realities across various spatio-temporalities. *TTP*, penned in 1940, but published in 1967, was written at the tail-end of the modernist era. But, its

²⁴⁸ Joseph Tabbi, 'Solitary Inventions: David Markson at the End of the Line', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 43 (1997), 745-72, p. 749. See also, Tabbi, *Cognitive Fictions*, at pp. 108-109, regarding Markson's *Wittgenstein's Mistress* that follows modernist principles, except for the fact that Kate – the protagonist – accomplishes systematic re-entry into her own novel. That is, in her mental degeneration, becomes the reader of the narrative (her journal) which she has already written.

²⁴⁹ See, for example, Ezra Pound, *Make It New: Essays by Ezra Pound* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), from where the modernist 'mantra' appears. See also, Michael North, 'The Making of "Make It New"', in *Guernica* (Online: Guernica, 2013), which traces the genealogy of the phrase to the neo-Confucian scholar Chu His (1130-1200 AD), who anecdotally locates the phrase as an inscription on a washbasin of the first king, Ch'eng T'ang, of the Shang dynasty (1766-1753 BC).

ability to ‘make it(self) new’ problematizes modernist verisimilitude, since we are not quite sure what *it* is that is to be remade anew. While many modernist scholars would argue that modernism is already subverting verisimilitude, my contention is that modernist writing sought, as did literary realism, to accurately represent reality – the difference being that it attends to the very disjointed nature of reality.²⁵⁰ *TTP* could be regarded as a proto-postmodern novel, and its publication date hints at this idea, as this manuscript was continually rejected and eventually abandoned before being posthumously published in 1967 at the height of an overtly postmodern literary culture.²⁵¹ *TTP* does not seek to represent a disjointed reality, but rather to expose Enlightenment (realist) thought as a fiction, taken to its logical extremes *ad absurdum* and therefore eschewing the modernist project which despite its many disruptions maintains a faith in the representational logic of knowledge production.²⁵² *TTP*’s principle is that story iteration-subversions are *never* static, and the proclivity of story/material to continually iterate-subvert in an environment makes it a living system since iterations and subversions are preconditions for their differential emergence and continued entanglements.

TTP’s writing date of 1940 was a time of great scientific challenges to modern thinking, with developments in fields such as quantum mechanics and cybernetics gaining momentum.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ As outlined in Chapter Two, the modernist project is in many ways an extension of the realist project – its disruptions being attempts to capture a new de-centered reality that emerges after the First World War. See, for example, Paul Cobley, *Narrative* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 152. See also, Marina MacKay, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 48, where she discusses the formal style of James Joyce’s *kunsterroman*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* whose disruptive narration is representative of the age and development of the narrator himself. See also, James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin Books, 2000 (1916)). See also, Keith Hopper, *Flann O’Brien : A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-Modernist*. 2nd edn (Cork: Cork University Press, 2009), p. 15, and Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 9.

²⁵¹ Regarding the roughly agreed upon historical range of postmodernism, see, Bran Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1-2. Regarding reasons for posthumously publishing *TTP*, see, Hopper, *Flann O’Brien*, pp. 41-42, who note the publishers thought it too fantastic.

²⁵² See, for example Pickering, *Cybernetic Brain*, p. 405n2, and McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, p. 9, who locate an epistemological essence at the core of modernist thought.

²⁵³ See, ‘neocybernetics’ section for general information. Though major cybernetic milestones occur after the war toward the latter half of the decade, daily life would have been busy with new technologies and ‘telepathic’ machines such as the telephone and television which would have helped reshape the spatio-temporal scale of the

TTP is therefore notable for being both proto-postmodern and, to an extent, proto-posthuman. The novel plays with the illogicality of modern logic, the splicing of human and technology, and the quantum-like spookiness in challenging a linear modern existence. *TTP* makes apparent the notion that metafictional objects are not bound by temporal or spatial parameters, and these metaleptic reaches continue to sustain the metafictional object-system with ‘life’.

Part Two argues, firstly, that metafiction is not an anti-mimetic form as much as they exhibit what I am calling a ‘*mimesis*’ of phenomena, and secondly, that metafiction can be seen as a *diffractive* genre, rather than a reflexive one, and that this can be read into everyday life. *Being There* addresses the performative causal structure of such bio-logical object-systems, and by subverting classical Enlightenment ways of seeing and interacting with the world, suggests new ways in which our metafictioning realities are entangling with the other materials of the world. This chapter resolves the question as to what will replace the linear logics that *TNN* and *TTP* have problematized. *Being There*’s plot illustrates quantum theories of causality, and the causal relationships between protagonist and cast of characters mirror the problems of (mis)reading and (mis)interpretation between readers and texts. This mirroring of the act of (mis)reading in the storyworld as in reality, is understood as a ‘*mimesis*’ of phenomena. Indeed, *Being There* is steeped in recursive relationships between fiction and reality differentially creating each other: it was most likely plagiarized from an earlier Polish novel, *Kariera Nikodema Dyzmy* (1932), doubles as a guide to an analogous representation of Kosinski’s own life after escaping Stalinist Poland, and hails the reader more explicitly than the works discussed in the previous two chapters.²⁵⁴

times. See, Samuel Whybrow, ‘Flann O’Brien’s Science Fiction: An “Illusion of Progression” in *the Third Policeman*’, in *Is It About a Bicycle*, ed. by Jennika Baines (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), p. 129, who notes *TTP* as a critique of the Enlightenment project.

²⁵⁴ Tadeusz Dolega-Mostowicz, *Kariera Nikodema Dyzmy* (the Career of Nikodem Dyzma) (New York: Roy, 1950 [1932]).

The final chapter proper on *TFvI* utilizes diffraction to suggest and explore the heuristic ethos of metafiction to perpetuate ongoing stories through a ‘conversational’ ethic with other materials. The final chapter is an example of how metafiction catalyzes meaningful relationships with other materials of the metafictioning manifold and elicits in the reader a practice of openness to influence and be influenced by those other materials. Metafiction is never beholden to any one system of thought, and therein teaches the reader to navigate between these systems and to act in ways that promote and perpetuate further openness and ‘dialogue’ between materials. While in the first two chapters we establish metafiction as object-systems in a metafictioning manifold, and in Chapter Four we locate a paradigmatic shift for understanding the manifold, in this chapter we uncover the ethos for such a manifold to continue perpetuating itself with our co-participation.

TF is a novel, consisting of a proposed total of 27 volumes of which, at the time of writing, only five volumes (season 1) have been released.²⁵⁵ This thesis focuses on the first volume, since it sets the tone for the entire project and teaches the reader how to engage with the series.²⁵⁶ What is especially unique about this novel is that it takes as its model, serial

²⁵⁵ See, for example, Mark Z. Danielewski, *The Familiar: Into the Forest*. Vol. 2 (New York: Pantheon Books, 2015); Mark Z. Danielewski, *The Familiar: Honeysuckle & Pain*. Vol. 3 (New York: Pantheon Books, 2016); Mark Z. Danielewski, *The Familiar: Hades*. Vol. 4 (New York: Pantheon Books, 2017); and Mark Z. Danielewski, *The Familiar: Redwood*. Vol. 5 (New York: Pantheon Books, 2017). Regarding the project’s hiatus, Danielewski announced on his Facebook page that due to a lack of sales (possibly from its overly ambitious style) volume six, which would have begun season two of his project, would be on pause. See, Mark Z. Danielewski, ‘Mark Z. Danielewski (February 3, 2018)’, Facebook, (2018) <<https://www.facebook.com/MarkZDanielewski/photos/it-is-with-a-heavy-heart-that-i-must-report-the-familiar-has-been-pausedtheres-n/1788256297885651/>> [Accessed February 6 2019]. See also, Various, ‘R/Thefamiliar’, reddit, (2018) <https://www.reddit.com/r/TheFamiliar/comments/7x3lly/is_the_hiatuscancellation_that_surprising_to/> [Accessed February 6 2019], for a short conversation between fans regarding the hiatus. It outlines many of the challenges facing the ambitious project, which I discuss in Chapter Five, regarding the project’s necessary entanglement with the narrative ecology in order to stay alive. This development does not change my research, but reinforces it, as an example of a bio-logical performative system facing an entropic reality. Comments in Danielewski’s original post reveal fan’s willingness to help fund the coming volume, and are encouraging Danielewski to set up a GoFundMe account to illicit funding from the general public so Danielewski can self-publish for his loyal fans. This further development begs the question if *The Familiar*’s success – livelihood – is perhaps dependent on freeing itself from the publishing industry into a freer democratic space. It is therefore worth pondering whether the pause might be a calculated move on Danielewski’s part.

²⁵⁶ Arguably, this makes volume one slightly more metafictional than the others, as this didactic element is a little

television shows of the 21st century, to inform the development and release of future volumes. They are contingent upon continued interest, public conversation, and input from the readership. The *TF* series is postmodern *and* posthuman, entirely performative, neocybernetic and metafictional, dependent upon systems of societies, technologies, and readers, and exhibiting a living-ness and self-consciousness about its own novelistic emergence. In fact, any conversation about the novel *is* an overt act of *(re)writing* the novel into the world and contributing to its future shape.²⁵⁷ Whereas the other chapters of the thesis utilized texts that modeled aspects of a metafictioning manifold, *TF* serves to model the manifold itself while simultaneously participating in it. We learn here that it is this communicative ethos within and between object-systems that gives metafiction their ongoing relevance in the world, and that in turn continue to perpetuate the world with new materials and meanings.

Chapter Five, as a concluding chapter, demonstrates how the metafictioning manifold's object-systems work together to co-tell and co-materialize the world's storied reality, revealing metafiction as 'technologies of the nonmodern self' – that is, things overtly making apparent our situatedness and co-participation in the ecological materialization of our storying experience.²⁵⁸ I ultimately argue here that the metafictional novel is one such apparatus that draws our attention to our entanglements and becomings, and encourages us to be at our metafictional best so as to co-participate in a thriving material experience.

more overt.

²⁵⁷ This would be true of all materials, but *TF* seems to be designed to thrive on exploiting such relationships with the narrative ecology.

²⁵⁸ Pickering, *Cybernetic Brain*, p. 176 . 'Technologies of the nonmodern self' is taken from Pickering to describe certain artifacts that draw our attention to the entanglement and becomings between people and things. Examples he gives are Musicolour, EEG music, LSD, yoga and meditation, and performance art, among others. My emphasis on the 'nonmodern' aspects, which Pickering does employ, is an articulation of the Foucauldian idea, 'technologies of the self', which addresses the schizophrenic self, and which Pickering utilizes more especially psychiatric contexts. See also, L.H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton, eds., *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

The purpose of this thesis is to re-energize metafiction studies through the frameworks of performativity, neocybernetics, and diffraction, and thus bridge a gap between now-conventional theories of metafiction and constructivist strands of literature and science studies. By doing so, I argue that metafiction disrupts the modern Enlightenment sense of self and world; are performatively living objects *and* systems in, of, and with the world of the human experience; exhibit a ‘mimesis’ of phenomena instead of a mimesis of process; are a diffractive genre as opposed to a reflective one; and locate the reader, technologies, and social contexts as necessary literary conventions to its, and our, ongoing development. The metafictional novel self-referentially foregrounds these elements, and by analogy illustrates these processes to all object-systems of the human experience, therefore suggesting an inherent metafictional quality to the human story, which is itself a metafictioning within the larger manifold.

I engage with past theories of metafiction to expand them in ways that see metafiction – and in particular the metafictional novel – as events rather than fixed artifacts; alive in a (narrative) ecology as opposed to being inanimate objects; and differential acts of ethically informed and heuristic performances with the reader who also is performatively and neocybernetically co-operating with (metafictional) objects-systems. Furthermore, this thesis shows that the metafictional novel in particular is self-conscious of these entangling and emergent performative dynamics rather than merely ludic reflections of linguistic and narrative systems.

Metafiction self-consciously continues to write into the world via the same processes that have been written into its own formal and historical development as a genre of literature. Metafiction does not merely mirror and criticize the narrativity of human experience, they reconfigure it in their small way by engaging the materials of the human experience in cooperative and co-creative processes of materializing meaningful materials in the world. In

simultaneously modeling and engaging in this present-continuous emergence of meaning, metafiction has much to teach the reader about the ethical and agential potential involved with interacting with the (non-)human, (non-)living, and (meta)physical things of the human experience, not the least of which, is to locate the reader themselves and the object-systems of our experiences as necessary literary conventions in our storied artifacts *and* lives. In this way, the human experience can be viewed as an active self-perpetuating entanglement and emergence of narrativizing structures – a *metafictioning manifold*. I argue throughout that renewed attention should be given to metafictionality, and in particular to metafictional artifacts, which act as apparatuses that reflect current material conditions *and* simultaneously diffract those aspects of the human experience so as to offer insights as to how we might better engage with our material reality as co-participant storytellers alongside the objects and systems around us.

PART ONE

II.

**METAFICTION AND PERFORMATIVITY: ITERABILITY AND SUBVERSION OF
STORYING CONVENTIONS IN DAVID MARKSON'S *THIS IS NOT A NOVEL*¹**

[T]heoretical fiction [i.e., metafiction] is a performative rather than a constative narratology, meaning that it does not try to state the truth about an object-narrative but rather enacts or performs what it wishes to say about narrative while itself being a narrative.²

Introduction

This chapter aims to set the groundwork for utilizing metafictional novels as models of the inherent metafictionality of the human experience. The objective here is to introduce concepts that will be used throughout, but also to meet the reader on more familiar textual terms. This chapter focuses on what the text is doing and how it relates to the reader allegorically by introducing performativity theory *à la* Austin and Derrida, and arguing that the novel, and metafiction more generally, is an inherently performative object. Not only is this chapter fundamental to the thesis, but it is also conceptually at the core of later discussions in Chapter Four regarding new materialism.³

David Markson's This is Not a Novel (TNN) (2001) demonstrates how metafictionality

¹ This chapter was originally submitted in a different form for the degree of MA at National University; see, John Wolfgang Roberts, 'Metafiction and Performativity: Iterability and Subversion of Storytelling Conventions in David Markson's "This Is Not a Novel"' (National University, 2015), pp. 1-57.

² Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*. 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 59. 'Theoretical fiction' is Currie's term for metafictional literary works that question the veracity of their own conventions, and thus making them 'theoretical' since they problematize the assumptions of held conventions.

³ This is because Barad's new materialism emerges from theories of performativity.

is a performative event that cannot help but tell a story precisely because of its ability to subvert itself while also re-affirming core identifiable elements. Metafictions, then, not unlike this thesis, reflect identifiable aspects of our stories/experiences while also problematizing their identifiability.

TNN gets its name from a review criticizing Markson's previous book, *Reader's Block*, as 'not a novel'.⁴ *TNN* questions the conventions of the novel, and employs a metafictional writing style, yet creates a sense of verisimilitude in the reader.⁵ *TNN* draws attention to the simultaneity of maintaining realist conventions *about* the world while also re-defining the ways they are utilized *in* the world. It is written as a series of terse, unrelated sentences dealing with matters of death, art, and the writing of the book the reader holds in their hand – disruptive sentences with which the protagonist, Writer, wishes to achieve the same catharsis as conventional novels while also seeking to subvert those conventions. We come to find through all this that Writer is terminally ill and seeking to reinvent the novel form before dying.

According to Davin Heckman (1995), 'Markson's work *is* a novel in more ways than one. Not only is its novelty interesting and refreshing, but it manages to satisfy many of the processes that readers associate with novel reading.'⁶ Implicit in these processes is an

⁴ Quoted in Laura Sims, 'David Markson and the Problem of the Novel', *New England Review*, 29 (2008), 58-70, p. 59.

⁵ David Markson, *This Is Not a Novel* (London: CB Editions, 2010, 2001). Regarding verisimilitude, see, for example Paul Copley, *Narrative* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 255-256. In this glossary he defines realism as a mode of depiction that seeks to express the 'common-sense realities of life'. One result of these depictions is the 'reality effect', or verisimilitude, which is fostered through such common-sense descriptions. This is not to suggest that verisimilitude does not exist in other forms of writing, but that in realism it is achieved through consonant descriptions of the everyday. As discussed in the introductory chapter, despite modernist writers' attempts to subvert verisimilitude, my position is reflective of Copley's, who notes that modernism actually sought to 'expand the reality effect' through a 'new faith in the ability to explore human identity'. In this light, modernism can be seen as an extension to realist conventions reflective of the advancements in science, technology, and self-knowledge, and the disruptive natures of these modern approaches to knowledge. See, Copley, *Narrative*, pp. 135; 250-251. See also, Malcolm Bradbury, and James McFarlane, 'The Name and Nature of Modernism', in *Modernism 1890-1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 19-56, p. 27.

⁶ Davin Heckman, 'This Is Not a Novel by David Markson', in *PopMatters* (Online: 1995), n.p.. This review is no longer available online.

inescapability from convention, which is both the reason for its status as a convention *and* a precondition for its own malleability. Its metafictionality manifests an artifactual novel unconventionally adhering to traditional realist conventions and working to materialize a relatable story therein.⁷ In these ways, *TNN* self-consciously expresses an understanding of traditional storytelling conventions, particularly in the novel form, as necessarily iterable *and* subversive in both the novel and the human experience.⁸ *TNN* thus overtly questions what constitutes a story or novel, and, by implication, the intelligibility of human/individual experiences of the world (which must someday end).⁹ As such this chapter foreshadows later discussions on the temporal impermanence of living materials and the co-participatory dynamics of materializing stories (in novels *and* reality). A reason for selecting this novel is to propose that the title *This is Not a Novel* not only references the literary category this artifact attempts to elude, but can also be taken as a rhetorical acknowledgement that *TNN* is not merely a *novel*, but as will be seen, a *life* – the protagonist’s and by analogy, our own, as well as the living experience of reading and finishing the book which can be expressed and manifested in the world in various forms. The mutual imbrication of fiction and life recurs throughout this thesis, initiated here by *TNN* through its metafictional content, as well as in the way the reader must be co-present in constructing such a dying protagonist, which in turn self-consciously co-constructs the reader’s own impermanent experience of the novel.

⁷ My objective, however, is not to determine what constitutes literary realism or the parameters of the novel, so much as to explore a larger expressive quality – metafictional disruptions seem to be a necessary component in the real-time intelligibility of artifacts and our experiences of them.

⁸ The link between the novel genre and the human, as well as the type of conventions challenged by Markson are addressed in subsequent sections.

⁹ The parenthetical is a reference to Lindsay Thomas, ‘Why We Read Novels’, *Contemporary Literature*, 56 (2015), 386-93, at pp. 392-393, who notes the act of reading novels as having something to do with our own knowledge of our own impermanence. This is discussed in more depth in Chapters Three and Five, but the suggestion I want to make here, is that the novel as a form, and our experiences of consuming these novels, are bound by a sense of life and inevitable death, and like the protagonist of *TNN*, who faces an impending death, a desire to enrich our lived/ing experiences.

As covered in the introductory chapter, the metafictional novel is best suited for drawing this connection between novel and human experience because of the varied situations and contexts in which it reiterates the shared conventions of the novel form. In investigating this iterative and subversive nature of storytelling conventions, this chapter locates a processual and differential dynamic, both in the way that every iteration is necessarily a subversive expression of that convention (and vice versa), and also in the way the stories of our lives, and the materials that comprise them, similarly co-constitute each other.¹⁰ In other words, this chapter establishes the reasoning behind understanding storytelling conventions in the present-continuous form, as *storying* conventions – their differential dynamics are included in the understanding of the framing capabilities of both story and world. The emergence of story is inseparable from the entangling of stories, and this simultaneous disruption of old forms and the perpetuation of new forms makes all story inherently metafictional *and* performative.

Performativity theory enjoys a varied history and has steadily moved into the realms of narrative, ontology, materiality and posthuman theory, all of which appear to varying degrees throughout this thesis.¹¹ Despite variations, these strands share an understanding of things as

¹⁰ This is to say, all conventions are inherently subversive. An over-used convention, such as a cliché, proves the point. The fact that it is so iterable ensures its ongoing use in new situations. Cliché does not imply that a convention ceases to change, but that it continues to be applicable regardless of its positive or negative reception. In locating the reader as a necessary convention to the novel, and to the metafictioning manifold in all coming chapters, it suffices to say that in one's own experiences of the world, they – the person – is the biggest cliché as a constantly iterable element to all they have ever seen or known within the manifold. This dynamic – not necessarily in the context of clichés – is explored in greater detail in Part Two.

¹¹ For a selection from the evolution of performativity theory, see: J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); J.L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*. 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); John Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', in *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Chicago University Press, 1988), pp. 1-23; Jacques Derrida, *Without Alibi*. trans. P. Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 1999); Judith Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969); Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974); Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982); Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987); Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002);

differentially performing and representing their meaningfulness in the world. ‘Performativity,’ as defined by J. L. Austin, is a type of utterance that ‘indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing action’.¹² Performatives, then, are statements that constitute the action they describe: for example: ‘thank you’ *is* the act of giving thanks.¹³ ‘Thank you’ is an utterance that simultaneously represents the idea of ‘thanks’, performs that idea, and thereby materializes thankfulness in reality. Metafictions, likewise, are self-conscious narratives that represent a narrative structure, perform that structure, and leave traces in the world regarding the capacities of our conventions and storytelling abilities, as Currie above reminds us when he writes that metafiction enacts or performs what it wishes to say about narrative while also being a narrative.¹⁴

TNN communicates to the reader that they, not unlike the novel genre, are organized and made meaningful in iterative and subversive acts of *re-writing* the basic conventions that make story and human life intelligible.¹⁵ *Re-writing* is not about the act of writing, so much as the co-participatory performance of people and things enacting meaning. As communicative performances, whatever is written is not proverbially written in stone, and so *TNN* ‘says something about narrative’, to quote Currie, in so far as conventions and readers, are necessarily malleable.¹⁶ We will return to performativity after outlining necessary ideas about metafiction’s

Andrew Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency and Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Andrew Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010); Karen Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter’, *Signs*, 28 (2003), 801-31; Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); and Ira Livingston, *Between Science and Literature: An Introduction to Autopoetics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

¹² Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 6.

¹³ Livingston, *Between Science and Literature*, p. 64.

¹⁴ See, Currie, *Postmodern*, p. 59.

¹⁵ My use of ‘re-writing’ is intended to convey the sense that conventions are already written in the world and so every subversion is a re-writing of that convention – reconfiguring its expressive potential.

¹⁶ Currie, *Postmodern*, p. 59.

tension with realism and its entanglement with the novel as a genre. After this, performativity can be used to analyze *TNN*'s metafictionality and its processes with the reader.

We must break away from Currie in that a specific truth is indeed revealed by *TNN*, albeit via its performance: while conventions must shape-shift, the co-participatory spirit of communication and performing new meanings *into* the world amongst things and humans must be essentially present.¹⁷ *TNN*, like all novels and things, is an event rather than a fixed artifact, and as a metafiction, is self-conscious of this aspect and formally exploits it. This dynamic will be essentially present in coming chapters as well.

This chapter serves as the only academic work, to my knowledge, taking *TNN* as the object of investigation. *TNN* is not often mentioned in articles dealing with Markson's works.¹⁸ However, since it is considered part of a tetralogy, consisting of Markson's last four novels, including *Reader's Block* (1996), *Vanishing Point* (2004), and *The Last Novel* (2007) (published before his death in 2010), similarities can be shown.¹⁹ Peter Dempsey notes: 'Markson's last four novels, [...], all walk a literary tightrope, without the usual safety nets of plot and character development, yet through some form of alchemy are compelling and oddly

¹⁷ This is with reference to the epigraph in this chapter, in which Currie contends that metafictional narratives say something about narratives while themselves being a narrative, rather than offering 'truths' about narratives. My point is that metafictional narratives do not reveal a representational truth about narrative, as Currie tells us, but rather make apparent a performative truth that meaning comes together through the phenomenal event of materials coming together, rather than there being inherent meanings to things. See, Currie, *Postmodern*, p. 59.

¹⁸ In fact, when it is mentioned in academic sources, it is often connected with the other novels of Markson's tetralogy. See, for example, Laura Sims, 'David Markson and the Problem of the Novel', *New England Review*, 29 (2008), 58-70; and Laura Sims, *Fare Forward: Letters from David Markson* (New York: powerHouse Books, 2014), which make use of *TNN*. For the only complete study on Markson's body of work, see, Francoise Palleau-Papin, *This Is Not a Tragedy: The Works of David Markson*. 1st edn (Champaign, Ill.: Dalkey Archive Press, 2010), which also investigates *TNN* in connection with the other novels of the tetralogy. Markson receives the most academic attention with regards to *Wittgenstein's Mistress*, which is considered a precursor to the stylistic form of the tetralogy. The highest rate of academic research on Markson appears to be around 1990, which would have been after the publication of *Wittgenstein's Mistress*. See also, David Markson, *Wittgenstein's Mistress* (Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1988).

¹⁹ See, Sims, 'Problem of the Novel', p. 58, where Sims categorizes the last four novels as a loosely-defined tetralogy. See also, David Markson, *Reader's Block* (Normal, Ill.: Dalkey Archives, 1996); David Markson, *Vanishing Point* (Washington D.C.: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2004); and David Markson, *The Last Novel* (Washington D.C.: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2007).

haunting'.²⁰ Contrary to Dempsey, I argue that conventions are present at all times in *TNN*. Drawing upon reviews and scholarship on books of the tetralogy to supplement my argument, I analyze *TNN*'s performative ability to affect a compelling story despite metafictional attempts to forego commonplace conventions. This is not to say that the other books of the tetralogy do not embody similar dynamics, but rather that, through *TNN*, which specifically addresses the novel form and implies its necessary entangling and emergent proximity to human life and experiences, we are better equipped to explore these performative and material dimensions as they relate to story, in both the novel and reality.²¹ The other novels of the tetralogy fulfill a literary objective, while *TNN* continuously undermines itself in a truly metafictional and performative fashion while at the same time re-affirming the very conventions it apparently undermines. There is, in other words, something more paradoxical about *TNN* than the other novels of the tetralogy.

Markson's Metafictional Telling

Monika Fludernik (2009) distinguishes between metafiction and metanarrative.²² Metafiction, Fludernik writes, is a 'narrative strategy or a comment on the part of the narrator [...] explicitly or implicitly draw[ing] attention to the fictionality of the story and the narrative discourse.'²³

²⁰ Peter Dempsey, 'David Markson Obituary', in *The Guardian* (Online: 2010).

²¹ For example, *Wittgenstein's Mistress* is about a protagonist, Kate, who believes she is the last person on earth. Stylistically and philosophically informed by Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, it deals with the inability of language to fully express what we feel, remember, and want to say in order to meaningfully communicate with others. See, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Sweden: Chiron Academic Press, 1922 [2016]). *Reader's Block*, is about a character named Reader, who is unable to construct and articulate a clear understanding of the protagonist; implying perhaps that much of our understanding of others comes from our own readerly constructions and interpretations rather than factual attributes. *Vanishing Point*, similarly, is about a protagonist, named Author, who is unable to maintain any plot sequences, but nonetheless draws attention to the composite nature of himself who is 'fleshed out' by the many references of the novel. *The Last Novel*, which centers on the protagonist, Novelist, is not unlike the protagonist of *Readers Block*, *Vanishing Point*, or *TNN*, but with the impetus to create his own genre. While *TNN* does attempt to create a new kind of novel, any attempts are immediately subverted.

²² Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 156; 61-63.

²³ Fludernik, *Narratology*, p. 156. Metafictionality is also generated outside the narrational level, by a narrative's presentation: i.e., through *mise-en-abyme*, endless recursivity, metalepsis (jumping across narrative levels), and

For this reason, metafiction is often described in disruptive terms as it self-referentially infringes upon the fictional illusion.²⁴ While metafiction foregrounds a story's artifactual constructedness, metanarrative refers to the narrator's self-conscious *telling* of the story. Though not always serving to break the mimetic illusion of the fiction, metanarration is concerned with the narrational *act* more so than a text's formal conventions; metanarrational focus is on the performance of the story rather than methods of story representation.²⁵ Metanarration, however, still falls under the umbrella term *metafiction*, and therefore the latter term is used here.²⁶ From a performative approach, however, the nuances of these two terms are intended in the use of 'metafiction' since performativity theory allows for the understanding of metafiction in both its iterative self-conscious *telling* and its subversively expressive re-writing of story conventions as a differential event – a (performative) metafictioning.²⁷

Considering these terms as a unified whole, metafiction acts by performing or enacting what they want to *say* about narratives while also *being* a narrative, thus performing their narrativity as fictional illusion *and* as self-conscious commentary about that illusion.²⁸ For example, *TNN*'s protagonist, Writer, opens with: 'Writer is pretty much tempted to quit writing' (1).²⁹ Writer thus self-referentially foregrounds a reluctance to tell his story, forsaking the method (e.g., writing and the use of conventions) through which he would otherwise tell it. In effect, Writer disrupts his own telling by self-referentially acknowledging himself and his

an overemphasis on plot to disrupt the text's congruence. See also, Fludernik, *Narratology*, p. 63.

²⁴ See, for example, Wenche Ommundsen, *Metafiction?: Reflexivity in Contemporary Texts* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1993), pp. 8-9.

²⁵ See, Fludernik, *Narratology*, pp. 61 and 156.

²⁶ See, Fludernik, *Narratology*, pp. 61-63; 156. Fludernik states that this commonality is less notable in German literature than in English. However, it can be summarized that metanarration is an act of disruption upon the storyworld, which can either serve to build believability and trust in the narrator, or else, undermine that trust and believability in the story.

²⁷ This was addressed in the introductory chapter, and the thesis as a whole serves to elaborate on the present-continuous formation of *metafiction*.

²⁸ See, Currie, *Postmodern*, p. 59. See also, Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 88.

²⁹ Future references to page numbers will be made in-text.

disposition against telling his story. But by the fact that the words exist on the page, and the proceeding text fleshes out the novel, we see that he has in fact *told* his story in some form or another. This paradox begs us to consider what exactly Writer is trying to tell us about conventions and novels. We are made aware from the outset of the novel that its telling *and* its conventions are to be challenged – its *performance* and *representation*, respectively.

Patricia Waugh (1984) defines metafiction as:

[A] term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text.³⁰

Waugh suggests both fictions and realities are made intelligible by similar conventions and metafiction works to challenge the veracity of those conventions as well as the inter-play between fiction and reality.³¹ Metafictionists generally agree that metafiction complicates the nature of fiction and reality by ‘dramatizing’ those boundaries.³² These boundaries are ‘dramatized’ because any challenge to convention in a work of fiction is a challenge to its use in reality as well, and this tension actively informs and reforms the other.³³

³⁰ Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 2.

³¹ Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 2.

³² See, Mark Currie, ‘Introduction’, in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 1-18, pp. 2-5.

³³ Robert Scholes, ‘Metafiction’, in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London Longman, 1995), pp. 21-38, p. 29; Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 29; Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative : The Metafictional Paradox* (New York ; London: Methuen, 1980), p. 5; Currie, ‘Introduction’, pp. 2-5.

Paul Cobley (2001) writes: '[metafictions] indicate the *re*-representative nature of narrative'.³⁴ Not only do they maintain a self-conscious formality, but they also negate their own formalism. More to the point, as Waugh notes, '[m]etafiction explicitly lays bare the conventions of realism; it does not ignore or abandon them [...]. [M]etafiction helps us to understand how the reality we live day by day is similarly constructed, similarly "written"'.³⁵ Waugh's sentiments seem to contradict Cobley's in that Waugh emphasizes distinctive ontological similarities between fictions and reality as represented through metafiction, while Cobley emphasizes the ontological re-organization of realist structures. However, both recognize a fundamental nature to metafiction, and it is the marriage of these two emphases which unlocks the performative interpretation of metafiction. Taken together, Waugh and Cobley present a literary form which reflects realist structures, while also reconfiguring those structures, thereby re-presenting them in ongoing recursive processes. *TNN* perpetuates and re-imagines the identity of the novel, confirming metafiction(ality) as an inescapable dimension of the novel as a genre, generally, and more specifically suggesting that so-called realist novelistic conventions have always been in a process of becoming something else, while maintaining particular features.³⁶

Realism is broadly understood as writing which attempts 'to represent "the world" "as it really is"'.³⁷ However, the world (as it 'really is') can never fully be represented since conventions always fall short.³⁸ The reason conventions insufficiently frame the world is because their utilization in the world is a restructuring of those conventions in new spatio-

³⁴ Cobley, *Narrative*, p. 158.

³⁵ Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 18.

³⁶ See, Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 14; and Mario Ortiz Robles, *The Novel as Event* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2010), p. 21, regarding irony as an inherent element of the novel as a genre which constantly re-subverts its own conventions creating an 'ironic dissonance' in the 'discursive status of the novel.'

³⁷ Andrew Bennett, and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. 4th ed. edn (Harlow: Longman, 2009), p. 326.

³⁸ See, for example, Stefan Herbrechter, 'Postmodern', in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (2017), pp. 54-68, p. 60.

temporal contexts. This is to say that all readings of a text reconfigure the nature of the conventions themselves therein and their possibilities for communicating new meanings. Therefore, each conventional iteration is its own slight subversion as well. Convention and new meaning must consistently, and differentially, re-inform each other so as to cohere an ever-evolving understanding of ‘reality’.

‘Reality’ is always embedded within conventional frames with which we make the world intelligible. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle (2009) write: “[...]text and world” names a false opposition. Texts cannot but be part of the world. To talk about texts as “representing” reality simply overlooks the ways in which texts are already part of that reality, and ways in which literary texts *produce* our reality, make our worlds’.³⁹ Conventions do not frame the world, but *make* it – realities *are* constructions, and vice versa, informing each other. Metafiction is self-conscious of this differential dynamic between conventions and reality, and performative approaches are thereby warranted since they account for the ongoing performance of this *fiction-reality* (e.g., reality constructed and made intelligible through storytelling conventions).⁴⁰

Joseph Tabbi (1997) describes Markson as one of the last of the modernists.⁴¹ Tabbi is correct in calling Markson a modernist as he seeks to make the novel new by getting closer than ever to his story without the formal constraints of the conventional realist novel.⁴² According to

³⁹ Bennett and Royle, *Introduction to Literature*, p. 33, italics in original.

⁴⁰ ‘Performativity’ is discussed further below.

⁴¹ Joseph Tabbi, ‘Solitary Inventions: David Markson at the End of the Line’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 43 (1997), 745-72, p. 749.

⁴² See also, Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 38, where she considers conventional literary realism to be an eighteenth-century convention that still lingers in the novel genre. See also, Kristin Thompson, ‘Realism in the Cinema: ‘Bicycle Thieves’’, in *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 197-217, pp.197-198 for a film perspective on realism in art not being imitations of reality according to set conventions, but formal uses of a genre’s – or medium’s – possibilities to approximate a sense of reality which changes over time, and therefore, the conventions used must also change over time to maintain realistic representations.

Marina MacKay (2011), literary modernism was a utilization of the ‘revolutionary sensibilities of the early twentieth century, intent on liberating fiction [...] from realist conventions of representation’.⁴³ Realist conventions, however, are ‘the lowest common denominator of the novel genre’, as Cobley notes; and they are not necessarily liberated by the militaristic ethos of the avant-garde.⁴⁴ Shifting away from the everyday *umwelt* of the human experience resulted in a new emphasis on the ‘formal execution’ of the novel, rather than its subject matter.⁴⁵ This has been idiomatically popularized through the catch phrase popularized in the 20th century by Ezra Pound: ‘*make it new*’.⁴⁶ As one press release for a modernist exhibition at the Harry Ransom Center at The University of Texas at Austin (2003), notes: ‘In this revolution, words were set free from syntax, notes from traditional harmonies and color and line from perspective.’⁴⁷ But as Cobley points out, in the spirit of ‘making things new’, ‘modernist representation seeks to be more “accurate”, getting closer than ever before to what it chooses to render’.⁴⁸ Markson gets ‘closer to reality’ not by ‘militaristically’ attacking established

⁴³ Marina MacKay, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 201.

⁴⁴ See, Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 32. See also, MacKay, *Novel*, p. 23. Regarding the avant-garde, see, Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, and Brian McHale, ‘Introduction’, in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. by Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons and Brian McHale (London ; New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 1-18, p. 1: the term *avant-garde* is contextualized in its militaristic origins and evolution into more political uses. Also, modernism is situated as an early historical period of the avant-garde in this book; see especially Bray et al, ‘Introduction’, pp. 6-8, and associated chapters that address modernist-era experimental approaches: Joanna Gavins, ‘The Literary Absurd’, in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. by Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons and Brian McHale (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 62-74; Richard Murphy, ‘The Poetics of Animism’, in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. by Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons and Brian McHale (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 36-47; Peter Stockwell, ‘The Surrealist Experiments with Language’, in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. by Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons and Brian McHale (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 48-61; and John White, ‘Italian Futurism and Russian Cubo-Futurism’, in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. by Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons and Brian McHale (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 21-35.

⁴⁵ Mackay, *Novel*, p. 10.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Ezra Pound, *Make It New: Essays by Ezra Pound* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), a retrospective collection of Pound’s work bearing his popular catch phrase as its title. See also, Michael North, ‘The Making of “Make It New”’, in *Guernica* (Online: Guernica, 2013), which traces the geneology of the phrase to the neo-Confucian scholar Chu His (1130-1200 AD), who anecdotally locates the phrase as an inscription on a washbasin of the first king, Ch’eng T’ang, of the Shang dynasty (1766-1753 BC).

⁴⁷ ‘Make It New: The Rise of Modernism’, ed. by Harry Ransom Center (Online: The University of Texas at Austin, 2003).

⁴⁸ Cobley, *Narrative*, p. 152. See also, Mackay, *Novel*, p. 48 where she discusses the formal style of James

convention, but in light of his inability to succeed at its destruction, reaffirming a disruptive quality – as convention – to both the novel form and human experience. This convention underpins the rest of this thesis.

At issue then is not realism *per se*, but the realist genre which seeks to suppress or appropriate metafictionality so as to maintain a simplistic sense of verisimilitude.⁴⁹ That is, to expand the notion put forth by Hutcheon, that literary (English) realism is not so much the ‘epitome of the novelistic mode’, but ‘a stage in the genre’s development [...] containing within itself the contesting seeds of its own transcendence’.⁵⁰ Novelistic realism, in other words, is always pregnant with metafictionality, but unfortunately, the realist method of speaking about novels remains ‘froze[n] in time’ while the genre itself continues to subvert its own conventions.⁵¹ Markson strives to arrive at a realist and relatable truth about the *re-presentative* nature of novel and life, without paradoxically forcing these conventions into fixed frames towards a more readily digestible novel.⁵² That is, *TNN* can be read as extending Hutcheon’s analysis to encourage a new way of talking about the novel, which paradoxically does not – cannot – ever part with the realist mode it is embedded within, but also cannot be bound by truly realist structures. The realist genre assumes a reality of fixed meanings and representational truths about the world, but *realism* more broadly is something that is always

Joyce’s *kunsterroman*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* whose disruptive narration is representative of the age and development of the narrator himself. See also, James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin Books, 2000 (1916)).

⁴⁹ See, for example, Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, pp. 38 and 47; Robles, *The Novel as Event*, p. 24; Fludernik, *Narratology*, p. 61.

⁵⁰ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 38.

⁵¹ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 38.

⁵² As Hutcheon notes, realist novel conventions are conventions that have gotten stuck. The implication is that these basic conventions were not strictly defined (as evident through earlier novels such as *Don Quixote* and *Tristram Shandy*), and there is no reason why novels must continue to be defined in eighteenth and nineteenth century realist terms. See also, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote De La Mancha*. trans. John Rutherford (London: Penguin Books, 1604-5/1615); and Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (London: Penguin Books, 1759-67).

here, being made new again; not a story told (or produced), but a storytelling (or ongoing process) of an ever-shifting reality.⁵³

Written before the publication of *TNN*, Tabbi's description of Markson's artistry in *Reader's Block* and *Wittgenstein's Mistress* (1988) remains valid.⁵⁴ He writes:

Markson evolved a nonsequential method for composition that breaks the work into distinct lexical units of at most a paragraph or two; and Markson, [...] makes jumps from one topic to another and has his protagonists continually return to a single idea from a number of different perspectives.⁵⁵

Markson's lexical units appear randomized, yet as the reader proceeds, certain ideas or themes emerge. Each page of *TNN* testifies to the variety of material cultures woven throughout the protagonist's life, and to a large part Western civilization.⁵⁶ Each note, separated by whitespace, and scarcely more than three or four lines long, speaks of the tribulations, 'the obsessions and afflictions' of various 'writers, artists and composers through the centuries' (Back Cover). The back cover further states that these 'lexical units' are 'quotations of heart-stopping beauty – and Writer, mak[es] of these an echo chamber of the creative life' (Back Cover).⁵⁷ Writer describes the novel he is trying to pen with the mantra that re-surfaces in each of the novels of the

⁵³ The difference between literature as a 'product' corresponding to the realist genre, and the more 'processual' approach of metafiction, is a distinction offered by Hutcheon to illustrate their inherently different dynamics. See for example, Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, pp. 36-47. See also, Chapter Four, this thesis, where Hutcheon's framework is explored in greater depth.

⁵⁴ See, David Markson, *Wittgenstein's Mistress* (Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1988).

⁵⁵ Tabbi, 'Solitary Inventions', p. 749.

⁵⁶ It should be noted that the majority of Markson's references are drawn from the pantheon of Western cultures across various spatio-temporal contexts. This does not suggest that the East necessarily experiences life differently with regards to story. I maintain, that these fundamental *storying* processes are present throughout the human experience.

⁵⁷ This fugue is discussed later in the chapter.

tetralogy: ‘Nonlinear, Discontinuous. Collage-like. An Assemblage.’ (112). An excerpt from the first page reads:

Writer is pretty much tempted to quit writing.

Writer is weary unto death of making up stories.

Lord Byron died of either rheumatic fever, or typhus, or uremia, or malaria.

Or was inadvertently murdered by his doctors, who had bled him incessantly.

Stephen Crane died of tuberculosis in 1900. Granted an ordinary modern life span, he would have lived well into World War II. [...]

Writer is equally tired of inventing characters. (1)

Each statement is a proverbial frame juxtaposed with its neighboring sentences, and in play with the rest of the novel’s assembled utterances. Writer comments on his writerly inclinations and emotions, and speculates about other writers. Indeed, Writer’s speculations about Lord Byron and Stephen Crane betray his weariness at making up stories and preoccupation with writers’ deaths. Likewise, the glimpse into some of the world’s common maladies informs other sentences forcing us to acknowledge an underpinning tension to Writer’s own proclaimed weariness and temptation to quit writing.⁵⁸ Markson allows the reader to piece the story together by putting frame in play with frame so the reader may also speculate about Writer.⁵⁹ *TNN* is representative of the novel genre in the way it *re-presents* realist conventions, *re-presents* random utterances and facts to the reader (by way of presenting utterances that change in their meaningful nuances with relation to other utterances the reader comes across), and thereby *re-*

⁵⁸ These implications are addressed in sections below.

⁵⁹ Subsequent sections address the role of the reader, and inter-play between utterances which reveal Writer’s own obsessions and afflictions.

presents the novel to the reader as an artifact requiring their ongoing participation in its construction. The following sections explore three variations of utterance working together to create the above discussed dynamics. In the first utterance, Writer expresses disdain for traditional novel conventions; in the second variant, Writer attempts to re-classify his novel; and in the third, Writer comments upon his own health condition.

Performativity, Conventions, and the First Utterance

Austin differentiates between two types of utterance: the *constative* and *performative*. Constative utterances, as Jonathan Culler (1997) summarizes, are verifiably true or false, and ‘make a statement which describe a state of affairs’.⁶⁰ For example, ‘this is a table’ would be a constative. There is, however, recursivity to the constative/performative distinction. David Gorman (1999) notes that Austin himself ‘refutes’ the distinction between the performative and the constative.⁶¹ Austin, announces: ‘[i]t is time to make a fresh start on the problem. We want to consider more generally the senses in which to say something may be to do something, or in saying something we do something (and also perhaps to consider the different case in which *by* saying something we do something).’⁶² That is, it is not just the case that performatives do things in the world – even as they describe, all utterances have these effects as well.

Culler notes that a statement such as, ‘The cat is on the mat’, which is a constative statement of fact, could be uttered in a more elliptical way, as ‘I hereby affirm that the cat is on the mat’.⁶³ This is not to suggest that such an utterance produces a cat on a mat, *per se*. However, the linguistic and experiential conventions that make possible the intelligibility of a cat on a

⁶⁰ Jonathan Culler, ‘Philosophy and Literature: The Fortunes of the Performative’, *Poetics Today*, 21 (1997), 503-19, p. 504.

⁶¹ David Gorman, ‘The Use and Abuse of Speech-Act Theory in Criticism’, *Poetics Today*, 20 (1999), 93-119, p. 97.

⁶² Austin, *How to Do Things*, p. 91. Also, quoted in Gorman, ‘The Use and Abuse’, p. 97.

⁶³ Culler, ‘Philosophy and Literature’, p. 505.

mat *are* re-created performatively and in this way the cat and the mat are indeed manifested as conventional re-affirmations at the moment of utterance. In other words, such an utterance is not the sole reason for a manifesting reality, but an element – a piece of material in a larger network of materials – that makes possible in the performative instance, something wholly like a cat that is sitting on a mat. Culler goes on: ‘constative utterances also perform actions of stating, affirming, describing, and so on. They are a kind of performative’.⁶⁴ Constatives are deceptively covert performatives possessing and performing self-referential understandings of their linguistic meta-data (e.g., affirming, describing, etc.). Constatives alert us to underlying conventions of systems of representation – language – which must exist in order for there to be meaningful utterances at all.⁶⁵ But also, performatively speaking, every utterance is a materialization of change in the world – both in terms of communication and its related effects, and its conventional iteration and recontextualization. This is not to say that one prefigures the other, but that the event of uttering is a simultaneous expression of both. Together, constatives and performatives (which embody each other) characterize a differential dynamic, formally self-referential (internally oriented) and materializing in the world (externally oriented).

With regards to metafiction, the performative/constative distinction resonates in that metafictions call attention to their formal aspects of construction, while also constituting a story(telling), thus illustrating in action what it describes in words. *TNN* as the title suggests, performs such metafictional performances by self-consciously calling attention to itself as a novel, and proclaiming that it is not representative of the novel form while giving every indication that that is precisely what it is.⁶⁶ From a constative perspective, it is a declarative,

⁶⁴ Culler, ‘Philosophy and Literature’, p. 505.

⁶⁵ That is, constatives alert us to the material reality conventionally scaffolding our experiences.

⁶⁶ But in so doing, *TNN* reaffirms novelistic structures through its performativity/constativity. From here, the use of performativity is meant to carry this differentially performative and constative distinction, unless particular points are being made about constatives.

self-referential, title alluding to novelistic conventions generally associated with novels.⁶⁷ Performatively speaking, the title suggests the materialization of a non-novel in the world while describing itself as such. Indeed, the title teaches the reader how to anticipate the work: as a *novel* novel.

Metafictionally speaking, *TNN* is not so much a cultural artifact than a present-continuous mediating object, dramatizing people and things from the past and present with the storyworld, and thereby fostering continued relations with these people and things towards the future.⁶⁸ For *TNN* to be a novel, it must have an implied/real reader(ship) and a writer – a figure who is conflated with the protagonist, Writer.⁶⁹ As will be discussed further below, the psychological makeup of the protagonist is of prime importance if he is to be the leading character, and there must be others to relate to and with, and a place for these relations to exist, if the novel's social aspects are to be communicated. These fundamental aspects to the novel must necessarily be present even if this novel is to actively subvert those conventions. That is, in order to subvert things like time sequence, plot, character, setting, etc., they have to be present in the first place.

Markson declares the type of conventions he seeks to omit from *TNN*. The following is compiled from sections throughout the novel:

- A novel with no intimation of story whatsoever, Writer would like to contrive.

[...]

⁶⁷ Furthermore, from a constative perspective we are reminded of the conventions beyond the novel, as relating to literary genres, culture and technology (which play into the development of the novel, and the linguistic system).

⁶⁸ This fugue of references are explored in coming sections.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Copley, *Narrative*, p. 250; 253; 261, where Copley summarizes novel conventions as exhibiting a conflated voice between narrator and author, contain mimicked or imitative behavior, are written in prose, and are concerned with individual psychology and implied social relations. The weight of these conventions are unpacked in the final section of this chapter.

Plotless. Characterless.

Yet seducing the reader into turning pages nonetheless. (2)

- Actionless, Writer wants it.

Which is to say, with no *sequence of events*.

Which is to say, with no indicated *passage of time*.

Then again, getting somewhere in spite of this. (3)

- Indeed with a beginning, middle and an end. (4)

- A novel with no *setting*. [...]

Ergo meaning finally without *descriptions*. (5)

- A novel with no overriding central *motivations*, Writer wants.

Hence with no conflicts and/or confrontations, similarly. [...]

With no social themes, i.e., no picture of society.

No depiction of contemporary manners and/or morals. (6)

- A novel entirely without symbols. (7)

- Ultimately, a work of art without even a subject, Writer wants. (8)

- Does Writer even exist? (11)

- Obviously Writer exists.

Not being a character, but the author, here.

Writer is *writing* for heaven's sake. (12)

- In a book without characters. (71)

- Nonlinear. Discontinuous. Collage-like. An Assemblage. Self-evident enough to scarcely need Writer's say-so. (112)

- Words, Words, Words. (145)

- Nothing more or less than a *read*.

- Simply an unconventional, generally melancholy though sometimes even playful now-ending read. (167)

Markson mentions character, setting, plot, action, conflict (internal/external), symbols and descriptions. This list is not exhaustive, but implies that these are the elements expected of most novels. Despite shunning those conventions, Markson paradoxically embraces such conventions as: beginnings, middles, ends, maintaining the book form, and utilizing words to performatively emphasize the act of reading. The list above serves as a general summary of the novel – that is, *TNN* is a novel about writing a novel without many novelistic conventions, but by the very act of mentioning them, manifests those conventions on the page, and performatively, in the emerging story.

In writing, ‘[a] novel with no intimation of story whatsoever, Writer would like to contrive’ (2), Markson sets out to negate storytelling conventions in *TNN*. However, the impossibility of this task is exemplified, for example, in the convention of character. Despite writing, ‘[i]n a book without characters (71), the protagonist, Writer, constitutes at least one character. Additionally, other historical writers, artists, and composers, also serve as a cast of characters. In fact, Writer becomes a character, to such an extent that Markson feels the need to re-subvert his protagonist. He writes:

Obviously Writer exists.

Not being a character, but the author, here.

Writer is *writing* for heaven’s sake. (12)

Pondering whether he exists, Writer concludes that he does, but as an author rather than a character (12). Later, he states that *TNN* can be regarded as an autobiography (47), showing he can exist as a character *as well as* the author.⁷⁰ He exists as a character in his own autobiographical telling, *and* is the author who has lived the experience he is now penning. Autobiography, as Kari Weil (2017) notes, challenges the duality of living persons and characters.⁷¹ Weil contends that because of ‘hetero-affection’: ‘the fact that I am moved to write by another within me, an other whom I cannot fully know, and only with whose help I can remember or forget’, we are forced (from a posthumanist context) to acknowledge the contradiction of the ‘auto’ prefix and thereby open ourselves up to the other materials – the interstices between ‘machine and animal, human and nonhuman’ – and take account of our affective relationships that collectively communicate some sort of constructed identity.⁷² Indeed, this thesis contextualizes this metafictionality: characters live in their storyworld, just as we live in our realities as constructions, whereby metafiction, as models that foreground the necessity of the reader, manifest an autobiographical dimension between the text and the reader. We learn, therefore, that by wrongly assuming his non-existence as a character, Writer also wrongly assumes his reality as separate from the autobiographical story. His status as character and author (fiction and reality) are inseparable and differentially contingent as they reaffirm each other. His autobiography while ironically denying a fixed identity, substantiates a particular intelligibility to his reality, and vice versa.⁷³

⁷⁰ This is the second style of utterance explored further below.

⁷¹ Kari Weil, ‘Autobiography’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 84-95, p. 93.

⁷² Weil, ‘Autobiography’, pp. 85-86; 93.

⁷³ Regarding autobiography in a posthumanist context as a denial of a fixed sense of self, and a continuous exploration of the myriad things and referents which we are affecting and affected by, see, Weil, ‘Autobiography’, pp. 88 and 93. This should be taken analogously as our relationship with reality. Part Two explore this differential co-informing dynamic between constructions and reality.

Writer claims *TNN* to be many things in addition to an autobiography, thereby instantiating the text as a collection of differentially phenomenal fiction-realities. As autobiography, Writer utilizes the storytelling conventions of his form in order to render his reality but what become equally clear is that his reality is fundamentally shaped by those self-same conventions.⁷⁴ Indeed, as long as there are things to be made sense of by humans, storytelling conventions will exist.⁷⁵ Reality, however, cannot exist as a thing-in-itself, but only comes into being as a thing-in-phenomena with other things.⁷⁶ The issue regarding what is real or not is, ultimately, not the point. Rather, it is that fiction and reality share a common humanizing language, constantly re-informing and reconfiguring each other along storytelling parameters.

Markson's re-subversions of character, reveals a deeper performative quality to the text than merely an analogous relationship to the protagonist. The re-subversion produces a story in the process of its telling, and conversely, a reader in the process of their experiencing the story unfold. Reader, protagonist, and implied author, are synchronized expressions *doing* a novel in the world. What this performative activity does, is not only reassert new subverted conventions, but resituates the novel as a whole, as an event in the process of being created. The fact that 'Writer is *writing*' not only re-subverts the characterless novel by implying that he is not *in* the novel, but *outside* it (producing it), but also re-situates Writer into an implied setting (12).

By conflating Writer with the author, Markson accomplishes a defining characteristic of the novel genre despite his desire for the contrary.⁷⁷ According to Cobley, the novel is an

⁷⁴ Markson, *This is Not a Novel*, p. 47, regarding Writer's claim that *TNN* is an autobiography.

⁷⁵ See, H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 3; Cobley, *Narrative*, pp. 19-27; Fludernik, *Narratology*, p. 1; and Kay Young, and Jeffrey L. Saver, 'The Neurology of Narrative', *SubStance (Special Issue: On the Origin of Fictions: Interdisciplinary Perspectives)*, 30 No. 1/2 (2001), 72-84, which understands neurological disorders as degraded abilities to narrate our place in the world.

⁷⁶ *Things-in-phenomena*, rather than things-in-themselves are from Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity', p. 817. This is explored in greater depth in Part Two.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Cobley, *Narrative*, p. 253, who defines the novel in such terms.

extended narrative form consisting of a mixed mode of mimesis and the narrator's/poet's voice.⁷⁸ It utilizes a mixture of imitative descriptions, *conflating voices belonging to the narrator and/or author*.⁷⁹ Furthermore, the novel is largely written in prose, and is concerned with individual's psychology and their implied social relations.⁸⁰ The novel is not concerned with upholding strict conventions like plot, character, setting, and point of view, but rather presenting in relative ambiguity the voice of the narrator who exists on a fictional narrative plane with the voice of the author living on the plane of reality; utilizing representations with referents in real life so as to scaffold a believability to the story (whether they be fantastical or not); and valuing the process by which human dispositions and intentions are reconciled with, in, and between others in a society with which we must communicate and co-participate in order to both resolve (or otherwise fail to resolve) these dispositions, and maintain (or otherwise fail to maintain) a social structure that allows valuable acts of co-participation to thrive. Strict conventions like plot, character, setting, and point of view, in fact, emerge out of these more fundamental novelistic storytelling dynamics. Paradoxically, while conventional subversions strengthen novel conventions (apparently *iterative* rather than *subversive*), they are nonetheless performatively subversive since they re-configure the expressive potential of the conventions themselves.⁸¹ For example, *TNN*'s ability to communicate a realistic novel despite the disjointed assembling of utterances, illustrates the realism present in such assemblages.

Before Writer's re-subversion, he ponders the different ways he can create the novel, while not relying on specific convention. This seems to be the plot until the above re-subversion, retroactively re-defines the plot as Writer not pondering, but actually in the process of writing.⁸²

⁷⁸ Cobley, *Narrative*, p. 253.

⁷⁹ See, Cobley, *Narrative*, p. 250; 253; 261. Italics used to emphasize the conflation of voices between narrators and authors.

⁸⁰ Cobley, *Narrative*, p. 253.

⁸¹ The expressiveness of conventions are discussed in more depth further below.

⁸² This differential dynamic is discussed more with regards to the second style of utterance.

Writer is now performing the artifact – the novel-writing event – and is thereby both the character and performer of *TNN*. Despite claiming, or rather, by claiming that the novel is ‘[a]ctionless, [...] Which is to say, with no *sequence of events*. Which is to say, with no indicated *passage of time*’ (3), Writer is both situated, through the ongoing act of writing, in a ‘sequence of events’ and in the ‘passage of time’. Each utterance thereafter in the progression of the novel implies, through this new processual situation, an event in time and, collectively then, a sequence of events. Therefore, in its totality, this is a novel which does indeed depict the passage of time.

The conflation of author and writer produces a blurring of time sequences in storyworld and reality – two dramatized metaleptic levels in co-operation with each other. The proverbial writing of the novel, the unfolding of the storyworld, and the reception of the novel by a reader are the same entangling and emergent phenomena. The co-creative and co-participatory emergence of story through people and things are an inherent dynamic of metafiction and novels, but *TNN* makes this the definitive aspect of its plot – both reader and Writer co-author and co-produce *TNN* in real-time.⁸³ As the story of a dying writer progresses while the reader spends time with the novel, it is also the case that Writer is dying, real-time, as the reader engages the novel. There is a synchronized simultaneity of time passing at the narrative *and* discourse levels.⁸⁴ This is to say that the story-time (the duration of a story) and the discourse-time (the time taken to articulate a story’s events) appear to be synchronized, and since the discourse-time involves the reader – not unlike the metafiction explored in coming chapters – who is located extradiegetically as a meaningful participant in *TNN*’s telling, there is a strong

⁸³ This is explored in greater depth below.

⁸⁴ My use of ‘narrative’ and ‘discourse’ are meant to call attention to the storyworld and the reader’s reality as a unified manifold. Consistent with the conventional formulation of the Russian Formalist’s conception of *sujet* (the narrative articulations of a story’s raw materials) and *fabula* (the raw materials of a story before being narrated).

sense that *TNN* is a present-continuous *storytelling* across metaleptic frames. There is no scene or summary *per se* in *TNN*, but they emerge real-time in the act of reading. Importantly then, *TNN*'s metafictionality establishes the reader as a necessary convention to the novel, and to the metafictioning manifold more generally throughout this thesis, through this synchronization of time(s) and the differential manifestation of story.

Differential Ruptures and the Second Utterance

The second style of utterance declares what this novel is or is not. For example, Writer states, '[t]his is also a kind of verbal fugue, if Writer says so.' (149). These utterances do not always end with, 'if writer says so', but we are nonetheless reminded of the conflated nature between author and protagonist.⁸⁵ Whereas the first utterance addressed Writer's creative intentions, the second type offers authoritative, and sometimes speculative, re-classifications.

The history of the novel is difficult to define clearly.⁸⁶ 'Depending on how you define the novel', writes Mackay,

[Y]ou could attribute its emergence to the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern empire of the ancient Greeks or to England over a millennium and a half later. [...] [O]n the one hand, the novel is the product of a culturally hybrid classical antiquity, and, on the other hand, the outcome of Britain's transition into capitalist modernity.⁸⁷

TNN reminds us why these ambiguous origins are consistent with the novel's ongoing evolution. There is something inherent to the novel genre that resists fixed parameters of categorization.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Copley, *Narrative*, p. 253, where he notes the novelistic tendency for novels to conflate the author and narrator.

⁸⁶ MacKay, *Novel*, p. 21.

⁸⁷ MacKay, *Novel*, p. 21.

The genre's own 'origin story' hints toward the constant shapeshifting of the genre and helps contextualize *TNN*'s own novelistic strategies and re-classifications. The novel genre appears to be a metafictional performance across centuries in constant iteration and subversion of its own novelty.

Through centuries of historical figures, interactions, and artistic works, Markson declares *TNN* to be, a novel, mural, autobiography, opera, and many more (16; 32; 47; 64). This again, merely foregrounds and self-consciously addresses what many novels do. In fact, all novels are 'non-novels' from one perspective or another, yet fully novelistic in their affirmation of the complexities and ambiguities of the human experience in content and form. That is, novels mold the complexity of the human experience in all its 'genred' possibilities, whether traditionally novelistic or not. Indeed, one premise throughout this thesis is that the novel as a genre is a meta-commentary upon the liveliness of the false dichotomy between novels and so-called 'non-novels' as diverse expressions of the human experience. The novel is a genre whose conventions have always been entangled with its surrounding ecologies (i.e., cultures, technologies, and readers), and *TNN* demonstrates how novels become metafictional practices in perpetuating the evolution of the novel and its expressive qualities at any given place and time.⁸⁸

Performativity, from a Derridian approach, is the phenomenon in which the iteration of a held convention is never a complete repetition and, as such, language continually subverts the conventions of signification. As such, those conventions become metafictional, performatively expressing those conventions into the world. This self-referential dynamic is an inherently metafictional process of criticism.⁸⁹ The phenomenal moment – the rupture – is a moment when

⁸⁸ See, Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp.2-3; and MacKay, *Novel*, p.21, with regards to the novel being an entangled/ing form.

⁸⁹ This was covered in depth in the introductory chapter.

a convention presents itself with its own alterity thereby performing itself differently into the world. For readers this means informed acts of reconciliation or justification to conventional challenges being enacted. The performative, in the language of metafiction theories, is an uttered moment revealing the convention as construct, and therefore questioning the validity and or value of that convention.

Parody is often used for comic ends, mimicking the conventional wisdom of a genre or narrative articulation and subverting those assumptions through humor.⁹⁰ Parody helps unpack the performative moment of rupture in cultural and literary terms. Fredric Jameson (1991) notes that in the cultural logic of a postmodern culture, *pastiche*, rather than parody, is primarily at play.⁹¹ Whereas parody maintains an ‘ulterior motive’, pastiche is a ‘blank parody’ – engaging in the same parodic processes minus the critical impulse to subvert: a sort of parody for parody’s sake.⁹² The result is an historical displacement, locked in a superficially ‘perpetual present’ with uncertain and incomplete grasps of past and future.⁹³ This forms a large part of Hutcheon’s (1995) project on historiographical metafiction – that past (conventions) can never be definitively known, thereby calling into question the very nature and practices of knowledge production.⁹⁴ The reader is thereby catalyzed into employing their own methods of historically situating their knowledge. Their understandings, however, are varied and incomplete, due in part to postmodernism’s rejection of grand historical narratives.⁹⁵ Umberto Eco notes in *Reflections on the Name of the Rose* (1985):

⁹⁰ See, for example, Mackay, *Novel*, p. 202.

⁹¹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 18.

⁹² Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 18.

⁹³ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, pp. 19-20; 23.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Linda Hutcheon, ‘Historiographic Metafiction’, in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 71-91, pp. 72-73.

⁹⁵ Bran Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 10.

I think the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her, “I love you madly,” because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still, there is a solution. He can say, “As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly.” At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly that it is no longer possible to speak innocently, he will nevertheless have said what he wanted to say to the woman: that he loves her, but he loves her in an age of lost innocence.⁹⁶

As the innocence of love is ruptured into a self-conscious (re-)presentation, it constitutes a parody of love’s innocent capacities so as to criticize its assumed convention of innocence. The awareness of Barbara Cartland’s contribution to a current understanding of love – or any other referent associated with love – illustrates the cooperative dynamics of ‘blank parody’ with the reader. Barbara Cartland, Lord Byron, Stephen Crane, Bertolt Brecht, or any other writer with an idiosyncratic style, are not finally the focus of *TNN*. Pastiche performs for the reader, those references, and their contexts, echoing into the re-presentation of the convention. Jameson’s criticism fails to note that while parody has the ‘ulterior motive’ to criticize and change a conventional assumption, pastiche colors the expressive scope of the convention and allows for a conversational negotiation of meaning between the writer, the reader, and the text.

Niall Lucy (2000) writes: ‘postmodern literature “knows” *nothing*, or it knows that there is no representational form of characterization that could hope to account for or capture a character’s identity, whose essence remain unrepresentable’.⁹⁷ *TNN* foregrounds a fractured

⁹⁶ Umberto Eco, ‘From: Reflections on the Name of the Rose’, in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 172-78. See also, Umberto Eco, *Reflections on the Name of the Rose*. trans. William Weaver (London: Secker and Warburg, 1985), pp. 65-81.

⁹⁷ Niall Lucy, ‘Introduction (on the Way to Genre)’, in *Postmodern Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. by Niall

writing style and temporal shifts between the moment of narration and the historical contexts of its many referents.⁹⁸ Ruptures occur at the intersection of two planes: the historical lineage of representable knowledge about the world, and the so-called ‘perpetual present’ of lived experience. The effect is the phenomenal conjoining of representable knowledge, the human experiencer, and the media form (i.e., the novel). Lucy continues with reference to Thomas Docherty’s (2000) work:

Such knowledge is an ethics [...] because it substitutes a search (on the reader’s part) for the ontology of character (identity) with the need to respond pragmatically to the non-totalizing particularities of the alterity of character (difference). This is an ethical substitution because it locates the reader, like a character, as a marginalized subject-in-process within textuality, such that through his or her decentered subjectivity a reader might begin to understand some of the difficulties of being “other”.⁹⁹

The so-called difficulties of being ‘other’ signifies a rupture in the fabric of ontological distinctions, both in the characters of novels, for instance, and in the empathetic reader responding to the work’s presentation of ontological difference. Ruptures present a convention or ontological articulation with its own alterity, and this presentation reverberates to other things connected to that disrupted convention, spurring a need to reconcile meaning.

Waugh makes the metafictional case:

Lucy (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 17.

⁹⁸ This has been introduced above and is elaborated upon below.

⁹⁹ Lucy, ‘Introduction’, p. 17. See also, Thomas Docherty, ‘The Ethics of Alterity’, in *Postmodern Literary Theory: An Introduction*, ed. by Niall Lucy (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), pp. 140-48.

In fact, parody [or pastiche, or rupture, in the most general sense as conventions simultaneously presented with their alterity] in metafiction can equally be regarded as another level of positive literary change, for by undermining an earlier set of fictional conventions which have become automatized, the parodist clears a path for a new, more perceptible set. The problem arises because parody is double-edged. A novel that uses parody can be seen either as destructive or as critically evaluative and breaking out into new creative possibilities.¹⁰⁰

There is dialectical change in the parodic, or metafictional work, not only in the self-consciousness of the artifact, but also in the real-life re-negotiations of the convention. The ‘double-edged’ nature of parody/metafiction *is* the performative nature of iterability and subversion in performativity theory. ‘New creative possibilities’ implies an act of observation underway in metafiction, the objective of which is to impose value judgments upon the convention in question, and also the alternative(s) proposed.

This is not to say all parody is synonymous with self-reference or with all metafiction(ality), but that, as Hutcheon (1985) writes: ‘[parody is] a method of inscribing continuity while permitting critical distance. It can indeed, function as a conservative force in both retaining and mocking other aesthetic forms; but it is also capable of transformative power in creating new syntheses.’¹⁰¹ At the moment of rupture, the convention in question is presented to the reader in two forms, similar, yet different. These two forms constitute a parody of the convention as theretofore held, and a self-consciousness of the artifact which is exposing its

¹⁰⁰ Waugh, *Metafiction*, pp. 64-65.

¹⁰¹ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 20.

own conventional narratology through self-reference. The artifact questions its artifactual validity, and the reader, upon interpretive acts, thereby co-creates meaning with the text.¹⁰²

Currie writes that ‘metafictions dramatise the boundary between fiction and criticism, either as illusion-breaking authorial intervention or as integrated dramatization of the external communication between author and reader’.¹⁰³ Again, there is a distinction between the ‘utterance’, and the soundness of a convention’s intelligibility upon readerly reception. The inherent critical question from rupturing the convention and the retroactive validation of new conventional dynamics, stem from the artifact performing itself in a way that iterates its ‘genre’ all the while drawing the reader’s attention to challenges and variations to that convention.

¹⁰² This potentiality in the reader to manifest the text resonates with the work of Roland Barthes’s ‘The Death of the Author’ (1977), and (predominately phenomenological approaches to) reader-response theories, which see the reader’s role as vital to the literary experience; see, for example, David H. Richter, ‘Reader-Response Theory’, in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. by David H. Richter (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007), pp. 962-80, p. 962, regarding the reader’s role in reader-response theories; and Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, in *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana, 1977). Barthes, implies the reader’s prominence by decentering the primacy of the author and their authority in the performative creation of a text’s meaning; which is an ‘anti-theological’ activity to refuse fixed meaning; Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. by David H. Richter (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007), pp. 874-77, pp. 876-877. Barthes, however, has merely replaced one mediating object – the author – with another authoritarian object – the reader – to establish from the fabric of texts, references, codes, etc., the incomplete meaningfulness of the text. Similarly, phenomenological variants of reader-response theory find a middle-ground between formalist/structuralist and psychological/sociological variants; see, Richter, *The Critical Tradition*, p. 972. According to Richter, there are two phenomenological schools of reader-response theory, the French school represented by theorists such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Georges Poulet, emphasizes, as Richter notes, ‘the way reading transforms the book-as-object – the heavy, dead, material thing – into a subject, and intelligence, a mind to which we subordinate our own’; and the German one represented by Wolfgang Iser and Robert Jauss, who ‘perceive in the text the mutual dependence – the creative collaboration – of composer and performer’; Richter, *The Critical Tradition*, pp. 972-973; see also, Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982); Georges Poulet, ‘Criticism and the Experience of Interiority’, in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, ed. by Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1972), pp. 56-72; and Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘Why Write?’, in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. by David H. Richter (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007), pp. 662-72. Though there is much that resonates with my thesis, these approaches differ from my project in that they maintain a fixed subject-object boundary, despite arguing for their blurring in the creation of meaning between reader and text. The French school still subordinates the reader to the text, and the German school, though placing text and reader in collaboration, contends that it is the reader who *concretizes* the text; thus maintaining a modern sense of causality and the rigidity of the ontological distinctions between text and reader. ‘Concretize’ refers to the work of Roman Ingarden; see, Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), who Hutcheon draws from in *Narcissistic Narrative*. My overarching argument is that the intra-activity of the metafictioning manifold performatively creates the material and meaning, and thereby the text/reader distinction in the intra-active moment. This is covered in Part Two.

¹⁰³ Curry, ‘Introduction’, p. 4.

That conventions can be changed implies that they too are cultural artifacts – constructed and made malleable through reader entanglement. Metafiction and performativity put an onus on the reader, to understand ways in which particular conventions might be re-imagined and materialized. John Barth (1963) writes in ‘Life-Story’, that ‘(1) fiction must acknowledge its fictitiousness and metaphoric invalidity or (2) choose to ignore the question or deny its relevance or (3) establish some other acceptable relation between itself, its author, its reader’.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, *TNN* accomplishes all three by embracing its metafictionality, denying its conventionality, and establishing a co-operative relationship with the reader to negotiate meaning. Rupture materializes a continuous story, analogous to the way conventions themselves operate in the everyday emergence of the human experience, by fostering engagement across metaleptic planes.

Every utterance is a rupture to the convention(s) informing it. James Loxley (2007) adds that ruptures occur in the convention, *and* in the event of uttering.¹⁰⁵ Linguistically speaking, conventions are ruptured in the form of re-signification. From a performative perspective, the utterance – a citational use of previous conventions – ruptures the spatio-temporal context that made its utterance possible, thereby re-configuring the related fabric of fiction-reality. On the rupturing event, Derrida (1989) writes: ‘[t]his moment calls for new conventions which itself proposes or promises, but which, for that reason, it cannot without artifice take advantage of or found its authority on at the very moment that it calls for new laws’.¹⁰⁶ While conventional performances reconfigure the nature of that convention and its possibilities for further reconfiguration, conventions can never be a constative representation-in-itself. Any authority

¹⁰⁴ John Barth, ‘Life-Story’, in *Lost in the Funhouse* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988 [1963]), pp. 116-129, at p. 128. See also, Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁵ James Loxley, *Performativity* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 105.

¹⁰⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Memories: For Paul De Man*. trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava and Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 119. See also, Loxley, *Performativity*, p. 104.

given to, or built upon, the convention is itself an emergent effect of the conventional performance in the world.¹⁰⁷ Derrida suggests that by the very ethos of performance (which *is* a reconfiguration of convention in new contexts), every performance must beget further performances. A fixed consensus on convention, strictly speaking, negates the principle of performance (though it ironically arises out of performance in the first place).

When pressed, this ‘performative principle’ suggests a paradox: conventions move along ongoing evolutionary trajectories in which their application changes (etymologies, for example), but these trajectories also cannot take place without a ‘birth’ of sorts. It’s worth considering the moment of a convention’s iterative and subversive materialization.

Derrida implies an observers’ role in these performances. Not only are observers informed by, and informing, these conventional reconfigurations, but they are also constructing the artifice in which to scaffold a reality around those conventions. It follows, that the moment of rupture phenomenally includes conventions, observers, and artifacts which contextualize a rupture and, in turn, are reconfigured by rupturing events.

Every moment is an original utterance birthing a new convention *and* reconfiguring an old one in a differential event. In *Negotiations* (2002), Derrida addresses the American Declaration of Independence, which carries relevance.¹⁰⁸ It seems that the Representatives who issue the Declaration, in declaring these ‘Colonies’ ‘Free And Independent States’, are presupposing their status as such.¹⁰⁹ At the moment before declaring, there are no Representatives of Free And Independent States, who carry with them the ‘authority of the good People of these Colonies’.¹¹⁰ Their status materializes via the signature upon the declaration.

¹⁰⁷ This is to say, that abstract concepts such as ‘authority’ are themselves materials in the world that emerge and materialize like all other materials.

¹⁰⁸ See, Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations*. trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

¹⁰⁹ Loxley, *Performativity*, pp. 101-105. See also, Derrida, *Negotiations*, p. 49.

¹¹⁰ Thomas Jefferson, *The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States of America* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), p. 10.

The Colonies did not morph into Independent States, but as Derrida suggests, were a performative and self-referential creation of their conventional status as States – a disruptive rupture.

This shows how the differential nature of the performative retroactively validates itself.

Derrida writes:

They do *not* exist as an entity, the entity does *not* exist *before* this declaration, not as such. If it [i.e. the “people”] gives birth to itself, as free and independent subject, as possible signer, this can hold only in the act of signature. The signature invents the signer'.¹¹¹

The performative event is an instance of a convention (re)inventing itself through disruption. The act of subversion not only invents a new form, but retroactively re-invents the old form, from Colonies to Independent States (or, to use terms more applicable to this thesis, from conventional novel to a ‘mural of sorts’ (32)).

Markson also plays with this differential element of re-invention.¹¹² Upon setting out to write a character-less novel, and realizing that he, the protagonist, is indeed a character, he must ponder his ontological nature and clarify for the reader that he is not a character *per se*, but the author (112). Likewise, his second style of utterance – declarations of what the novel is – are all similar attempts to rupture the idea of the novel as a genre, and mark its ontological nature as similar in form to artifacts as varied as a heap of riddles, the Egyptian Book of the Dead, and/or a comedy (61; 128; 162). Markson sees that novel conventions are inescapable, but also,

¹¹¹ Derrida, *Negotiations*, p. 49. See also, Loxley, *Performativity*, p. 102.

¹¹² With regard to the novel as a genre, this means that, past novels can be read as say murals or operas (as suggested by Markson about his own novel), since the novel as a differentially manifesting entity has always contained within it the possibilities of other ‘genres’.

that they are incomplete in their expressive scope.¹¹³ These utterances, by the fact that he must continue to re-subvert them and thereby re-invent them, shows the inescapability of convention in non-novelistic and human experiences. That they must be re-subverted is a testament to the fact that conventions must maintain their iterability, while opening themselves up for re-definition.

Markson's novel – like Derrida's free and independent States – suggest an obvious paradox: their evolution can be traced *ad infinitum*, but like the signing of the Declaration of Independence and Writer's declaration that *TNN* is an opera (64), there is an originary moment that retroactively leaves its mark upon the object. Loxley writes: '[a]ll institutions must ultimately be traceable to an original moment, the moment of their invention, yet the beginning must have this differential nature, this original split in its taking place that opens it at the outset to what is other than the purely conventional'.¹¹⁴ There is an original moment to all conventions, and these moments share the same differential dynamic, which ruptures from the old convention and invents a new one. Derrida (1994) writes that this moment:

[D]oes not conform to preexisting conventions [...] but whose force of *rupture* produces the institution or the constitution, the law itself, which is to say also the meaning that appears to, that ought to, or that appears to have to guarantee it in return.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Though it appears he is trying to justify his title as not a novel, and therefore argue for some other artistic form, the opposite is true.

¹¹⁴ Loxley, *Performativity*, p. 104.

¹¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*. trans. P. Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 30-31. See also, Loxley, *Performativity*, p. 104.

The suggestion here is that every (present) moment is an original moment of rupturing and reconfiguring convention. However, this rupture is made possible by the convention itself, that is, the fact that a convention is held, presupposes its own subversion and a new unforeseen form. As Loxley writes: ‘it is the openness to inventiveness, to that which is yet to come, which is always at work in any conventional structure’¹¹⁶ In metafictional terms, this means that each frame presupposes its re-negotiation of parameters in order to form a new distinction. *TNN* is not only performative in the way it reasserts novelistic conventions through performative utterances and the explicit denial of those conventions, but also, makes explicit use of this differential dynamic by declaring not only that ‘this is not a novel’ but by also declaring all the things that it, in fact, is as well.

This is to say, all metafictional acts are performatives. Metafictional acts are imbued with performative processes and their literary nature frame these performatives as analogue representations of human experiences (i.e., stories) which exist in that very experience (i.e., reality). The opposite is also true: performatives are metafictional acts. The use of conventions in framing our stories and experiences are the implementation of narrative constructs which in turn help materialize our experiences of reality. Performativity theory, however, helps us move beyond the mere contribution of the reader to the storyworld, and instead helps locate an understanding of a reciprocal co-creative dimension between artifact and reader to in-form and reconfigure each other’s so-called story worlds.

In Derrida’s formulation of performativity, the idea of the fictional utterance, the importance of convention, and the performative event are intertwined. Derrida’s performativity begins from this dualism in Austin’s theory: ‘between original, substantial, normal or valid performatives and secondary, hollow, abnormal ones’.¹¹⁷ But seeing as such *etiologies* are

¹¹⁶ Loxley, *Performativity*, p. 105.

¹¹⁷ Loxley, *Performativity*, p. 74.

dependent upon specific real-world conventions, Derrida makes the point that ‘iterability’ is a fundamental feature of performatives, when posing the rhetorical question, ‘[c]ould a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a “coded” or iterable utterance?’¹¹⁸ Loxley summarizes:

Derrida argues that all marks or signifying elements – characters, words, sentences, pictures, hieroglyphs, gestures, uniforms and so on – must be repeatable or iterable; they must be able to function beyond a particular context or situation if they are to count as marks at all. A non-iterable mark just would not be able to signify or stand for something since it would not be recognizable as an element in a language, a code or a system of signs. But the iterable mark therefore combines sameness and difference in a combination that is not necessarily stable: without being iterable, no mark could ever mean the same thing in different contexts; yet because it is iterable, a mark can never be constrained to signify a single meaning.¹¹⁹

All utterances, then, are dependent on specific conventions giving the utterance meaning, and also, the fact that utterances harken back to those specifics in new situations means that performative utterances simultaneously express an inherent sameness (convention) and newness (context). As Miller writes (2007): ‘the possibility of the abnormal [etiolations/newness] is an intrinsic part of the normal [conventions/sameness]’.¹²⁰ Derrida’s formulation seeks, then, to uncover different iterable conventions present in an utterance. Culler writes:

¹¹⁸ J. Hillis Miller, ‘Performativity as Performance/Performativity as Speech Act: Derrida’s Special Theory of Performativity’, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 106 (2007), 219-35, p. 229; Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’, p.18.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in, Loxley, *Performativity*, p. 168.

¹²⁰ Miller, ‘Performativity’, p. 230.

Derrida's analysis suggests that rather than opposing serious to nonserious or citational utterances...one should work to identify different sorts of iteration or citation within a framework of a general iterability. One would end up with 'different types of marks or chains of iterable marks and not an opposition between citational utterances on the one hand and singular and original utterance events on the other.'¹²¹

TNN suggests the novel genre offers the so-called framework of general iterability.¹²² Within this framework, rather than analyzing proper or improper uses of storytelling conventions, or concerning our reading with issues of originality or lack thereof, we instead identify different types, or chains, of iterable utterances.¹²³ As mentioned, *TNN* offers three types of utterance, which are self-reflexively metafictional: declarations of conventions Writer rejects, aesthetic statements on what the novel 'is', and utterances addressing Writer's own health condition.¹²⁴ These utterances work to craft particular 'chains' in the sense that they build upon and inform each other, revealing the inescapability of realist conventions, and a sense of their continuous iterability and subversion. *TNN*'s utterances do not literally confirm the necessity of convention as it existed at any point in time, but through constant negation, avoidance, and re-classification, the text reveals the necessity of those conventions in manifesting the novel and story.

Metafictional/performative utterances have simultaneous processes of subversion and iterability. The first is concerned with new meanings and re-configuring conventional parameters; the latter re-establishes a fundamental value for newly articulated conventions.

¹²¹ Culler, 'Philosophy and Literature', p. 509. See also, Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', p. 18.

¹²² Culler, 'Philosophy and Literature', p. 509. See also, Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', p. 18.

¹²³ Culler, 'Philosophy and Literature', p. 509. See also, Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', p. 18.

¹²⁴ There are also the random facts and musings of cultural figures, but as we will see, those operate at the service of the other three basic utterances.

Rupture is the method by which the metafictional/performative operates since it self-consciously foregrounds the fictionality of the convention, and therefore catalyzes transformations.¹²⁵ Markson challenges the formalism of the novel, not just by rupturing the conventions of its content, but also the conventions of its more traditional form. For example, the text refuses to use complete paragraphs or proper grammatical prose style and often employs language more reminiscent of poetry than prose. The paradox is that Markson's subversions *are* the iterations of the novel's most traditional convention: the perpetuation of narrative *through* disruptions.

Formally speaking, *TNN*'s metafictional performance asks the reader to consider not what this might be called *instead* of 'novel', but the labels that apply *in addition to* 'novel'. The implication is not that the label 'novel' is wrong, but that it is right, and right amongst others. *TNN* is not tearing down conventions in search of another, but arguing for a plurality of identities by offering a 'conventional novel' while subverting those very conventions, and thereby being an 'unconventional' one *as well*.

Markson offers his own answers to what this novel might be, if not traditionally speaking, a novel. Thus, according to Writer,

- This is a novel [...]. (16)
- This is even an epic poem [...]. (18)
- Also even a sequence of cantos awaiting numbering [...]. (20)
- This is even a mural of sorts [...]. (32)
- This is also an autobiography [...]. (47)

¹²⁵ Furthermore, this disruptive process of conventional self-perpetuation implies that they are living (as individual conventions, as novel, and as readers living with/in their particular conventions) in that as long as a convention (in whatever incarnation it is taking) can remain connected to its ecology of conventions, it will continue to exist as long as it can disrupt and re-define itself. This idea of self-referential conventions constituting living systems is the subject of the next chapter.

- This is also a continued heap of riddles [...]. (61)
- Or even a polyphonic opera of a kind [...]. (64)
- This is even a disquisition on the maladies of the life of art [...]. (75)
- Or an ersatz prose alternative to *The Waste Land* [...]. (88)
- Or a treatise on the nature of man [...]. (98)
- Nonlinear. Discontinuous. Collage-like. An Assemblage. (112)
- A contemporary variant on “The Egyptian Book of the Dead”. (128)
- This is also a kind of verbal fugue [...]. (149)
- Nonetheless this is also in many ways even a classic tragedy [...]. (150)
- Or on the other end of the scale even a volume entitled *Writer’s Block* [...]. (152)
- Or sometimes of course even a comedy of a sort [...]. (162)
- Or even his synthetic personal *Finnegans Wake* [...]. (163)
- Or was it possibly nothing more than a fundamentally recognizable genre all the while, no matter what Writer averred? [...]
- Nothing more or less than a *read*. [...]
- Simply an unconventional, generally melancholy though sometimes even playful now-ending read? (167)

Prosaic novel conventions take on new life in these self-referential utterances. In addition to traditional character, setting, plot, and time, *TNN* utilizes many other attributes thought to be distinctly separate from the novel genre. Dissimilar novelistic elements include poetry,

autobiography, music, painting, essay, and elements of play and playfulness.¹²⁶ Many of these are (inter/intra)connected, but what defines the novel most accurately, and which also takes into account all of these nuances, is perhaps, '[n]onlinear. Discontinuous. Collage-like. An Assemblage', since this novel is indeed all of these things, depending on contingent differences from person to person (112).¹²⁷ Again, this quote is found in all four novels of the tetralogy that thematically address aspects of literary production and reception; here we are reminded that the nature of *TNN* (and the novels of the tetralogy), the novel as a genre, and the experiences of life are assemblages of material (con)texts and disruptions, from which emerges various meaningful expressions of that reality.

This novel is an assemblage of shifting elements regarding the perspective of the observer. For example, if the reader locates the novel's poetic aspects, they might explore its canto-like structure, and comparability to T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922); or the epic qualities of the work drawing upon the cornerstones of Western art.¹²⁸ A focus on poetry might lead a researcher to look at the polyphonic and musical qualities of the language used, formally from line to line, or contextually, from subject to subject. This sort of research might foreground its mural-like structure, as the entirety of the work spans across genres, arts, and time-periods.

Likewise, realist aspects of the novel could touch upon Markson's biography; his likeness to the narrator, and the resemblances to canonical works like *Finnegans Wake* (1939) or dramatic genres.¹²⁹ One could read the novel in anthropological, psychological, sociological, or biological terms, as a commentary on the nature of humans in the face of death, or the necessary relationships between humans and the aesthetical realms of experience. This novel can even be

¹²⁶ See, for example, Markson, *This is Not a Novel*, pp. 18, 20, 88 (Poetry); 47, 75, 128, 150, 152, 162, 163 (autobiography); 64, 149 (music); 32, 112 (painting); 75, 98, 128, 152, 163 (essay); 16, 150, 162, 167 (conventional novel/genre); 61, 64, 112, 149, 167 (play and playfulness).

¹²⁷ That is, contingent upon a variety of social, cultural, and even biological factors unique to each individual.

¹²⁸ T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc, 1998 [1922]).

¹²⁹ James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2012 [1939]).

an extended commentary on writer's block, which the narrator suggests is an adequate alternative title, or about re-thinking our anthropocentrism and becoming literate with the ecologies of our world that help 'give us the impression we ["exist"]' (See, 152; 160) – the latter being the objective of this thesis.¹³⁰ Again, the fact that this could apply to all novels is, in fact, the point that *TNN* is making.

This novel disrupts any concept of the traditional mimetic novel, into a poetic, musical, autobiographical assemblage, both meant to comment upon its form, and to also forsake such commentary in favor of a fulfilling read. As Maria Russo (2001) writes: '[a]s you turn the pages, you realize that there is a story being told, the story of a character you come to care deeply about. When Writer reveals a devastating truth on the book's very last page, one that puts in context all the preceding preoccupations, your heart wrenches'.¹³¹ This truth is that he is dying, and deferring completion of the novel is in some way a deferral of his own impending death, and the negation of convention perhaps a deep inability to accept his reality.¹³² But in finding these conventions necessarily inescapable, he comes to terms with his end. *TNN* being:

About an old man's preoccupations. [...]

Writer's cancer. [...]

Farewell and be kind. (167)

¹³⁰ Beckett, Samuel. 1954. *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (Grove Press: New York), p. 77. This final point regarding *TNN* and Beckett is expanded further below.

¹³¹ Maria Russo, "'This Is Not a Novel" by David Markson', in *Salon* (Online: 2001).

¹³² This dynamic is more fully explored in coming chapters. However, it is worth clarifying here that it seems that Writer and the narrator – who are conflated – are kept alive by the prolonging of story. A metaphorical death occurs when the novel ends, and therefore, endless disruptions ensure a continuation and plurality of story for the sake of staying alive.

These preoccupations are with the finality of life – the reality that conventions give us a place in the world, and that placement offers various expressions of experience, but that fictions and realities cannot last forever – a sentiment underpinning coming chapters.

This is not ‘not’ a novel: Towards a Differential Readerly Event

This section explores the false dichotomy between novel and human. *TNN* maintains its fundamental novelistic conventions by conflating the narrator’s and author’s voice and thereby metaleptically engaging the reader, from its fictional plane into ours. The novel puts its form, conventions, and people in play as co-participants, and *TNN* makes these dimensions the means by which the story is told. This is to say, there is something in the novel form representative of the human proclivity for story, to experience life as the authors and narrators of our own story, and to navigate our social relations as best we can, and *TNN* succeeds by being self-aware of this. Therefore, there is something more immediate, realistic, and worthy of compassion in *Writer*, who ironically continues to suspend the reader’s disbelief *through* metafictional disruptions. In the same gesture of maintaining a social relationship with the reader, *TNN* maintains a lively society of referents from the world’s many spatio-temporal contexts, as well as the pantheon of history’s characters.

Conventions arise from our relationship with time; as Paul Ricoeur (1984) writes, story is: ‘the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes a refigured time through the mediation of a configured time’.¹³³ Distinguishing three forms of mimesis from a textual perspective, Ricoeur uses variant one (prefigured time) as the time prior to our narrative understanding; variant three (refigured time) is our subsequent understanding of the real world after engaging a narrative

¹³³ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*. trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. 3 vols. Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 54.

(which includes the narrative within the new understanding); and variant two (configured time) mediating between mimesis one and mimesis three in the form of emplotment.¹³⁴

Emplotment, Ricoeur notes, ‘opens the space for fiction [and] produces the “literariness” of the work of literature’.¹³⁵ These three recursive variants produce through the convention of plot, as Karl Simms (2003) summarizes, an ‘understand[ing] of narrative as narrative, and as mimetic of the real world; it enables us to see the actions depicted in narrative as *human* actions.’¹³⁶ That is, as Simms notes elsewhere, ‘it is not nature that is [mimetically] represented, but human life. If narrative did not have this *referential* function, its purpose would be lost, and we would not “understand” it in any deep sense’.¹³⁷ Ricoeur considers narrative to *be* the human relation to time.¹³⁸ The intelligibility of narrative, as fiction or human experience, is possible only because we are human and understand time via constructions of space – i.e., settings, characters, points of view, plots, etc. Our observations (e.g., readings) are integral to the materializations of narrative.

Wenche Ommundsen (1993) notes the difficulty in defining metafiction since its status as a genre, dynamic, or even as a fiction, is arguable.¹³⁹ On the ‘genre’ of metafiction, Waugh writes: metafiction ‘cannot unite to form a literary “movement” because they exist only at the moment of reading.’¹⁴⁰ This curiously reaffirms the phenomenal aspect of metafiction: that they are, finally, defined by their dynamism. That is, despite metafictionality being fundamental to a postmodern culture (e.g., a ‘movement’), and literary novels being quintessential examples of this genre, they only exist at the moment of reading because our relationship with time

¹³⁴ Karl Simms, *Paul Ricoeur* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 86

¹³⁵ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, p. 45.

¹³⁶ Simms, *Paul Ricoeur*, p. 86.

¹³⁷ Simms, *Paul Ricoeur*, pp. 85-86.

¹³⁸ Cobley, *Narrative*, p. 17. See also, Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, p. 3.

¹³⁹ See, Ommundsen, *Metafictions*, pp. 14-17.

¹⁴⁰ Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 12.

produces the conventions with which metafictional moments (in novel and life) become intelligible.¹⁴¹

Currie writes: ‘[t]he trouble with this new, performative mode for criticism and theory [i.e., metafiction] is that it leaves the subject-object relation between a text and its reading mysteriously untheorized.’¹⁴² Essentially, metafiction complicates the agential nature of readerly materials. Does the reader read the text? Or does the text read into the reader? Or does the act of reading exist between two textual materials embodying different human and nonhuman ontologies? This chapter sets up this thesis more broadly to investigate this third position more robustly in coming chapters.

Currie’s point speaks to the notion that every text is framed by a set of conventions which predisposes it towards a particular materialization, but also, a particular open-ended nature ensuring the emergence of something new. These two dimensions *collude* to reaffirm a text’s ‘metaphysics of reference’ *and* the deconstruction of that referential fabric: its iteration and subversion, respectively.¹⁴³ What results is the performance of a so-called *both/and* manifestation materializing at the moment of reading. Though Currie seems to focus primarily on the postmodern reluctance (in criticism and fiction) to establish an objective reference to theoretical fictions (i.e., metafiction) – as do I throughout this thesis – he stops short of elaborating upon the role of the reader in this performative equation.¹⁴⁴

Hutcheon, by contrast, foregrounds the reader in her interpretation of metafiction: ‘I would say that this “vital” link is re-forged, on a new level – on that of the imaginative process

¹⁴¹ This is not to say our relationship with time pre-exists the metafictional moment, but as we will see in coming chapters, this relationship is iterated and subverted at the moment of encounter with other materials of the human experience.

¹⁴² Currie, *Postmodern*, p. 66. Currie is speaking about inherently metafictional postmodern texts.

¹⁴³ Currie, *Postmodern*, p. 67.

¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, Currie notes that the same could not be said for realist works of fiction since they serve to reaffirm a particular notion about the world rather than challenge it. See, Currie, *Postmodern*, p. 67. This is to say, Currie maintains classical distinctions between reader and text, and realist and metafictional literature.

(of storytelling), instead of on that of the product (the story told). And it is this new role of the reader that is the vehicle of this change.’¹⁴⁵ In a more processual view of metafiction, emphasis is therefore given to a functioning relationship between reader and text, in which the imaginative processes of the reader work to help tell the story. It is no longer a matter of being told a story – a dynamic which traditional realism seeks to approximate – but of being in conversation with the text engaging the processes of reality and fiction.

Though touching on rhetorical aspects of metafiction, Hutcheon maintains a human-centricity to readerly acts.¹⁴⁶ Hutcheon does not fully account for subject-object relations between reader and text.¹⁴⁷ Instead of ascribing meaning production solely to the reader’s imaginative processes – as if imagination were a fixed ability in the reader – we can rather intuit a co-development of meaning by, and with, the text. Re-casting Hutcheon’s work on subject-object processes of reading, we can extend the complexity of the readerly event to include the inanimate object.

James A. Herrick (2013) defines *rhetoric* as ‘goal-oriented speaking or writing that seeks, by means of resources or symbols, to adapt ideas to an audience’.¹⁴⁸ Artifacts (e.g., speaking or writing), while created with intent, also mold and persuade audiences of particular ideas.¹⁴⁹ Echoing Waugh’s sentiment to metafiction’s heuristic capacity, Beth Ann Boehm (1987) writes:

¹⁴⁵ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 152. Hutcheon notes the incompleteness of the rhetorical tradition to account for the processes of metafiction, as do I, but also contends that the simultaneity of agential roles occurs at the levels of writer, reader, and critic. The literary object, in other words is still subservient to the will and intention of the writer, reader, and critic.

¹⁴⁷ That is, subject-object relations in the readerly act are better understood through a rhetorical perspective rather than a classically literary interpretive ones, though they incompletely explore those relations.

¹⁴⁸ James A. Herrick, *The History and Theory of Rhetoric: An Introduction*. 5th edn (Boston: Pearson Education Inc., 2013), p. 257; This definition stands in contrast to rhetoric as an art, which seeks to understand the effective use of symbolic expressions, see, Herrick, *History and Theory of Rhetoric*, p. 257.

¹⁴⁹ This is not to negate the human component, but only to illuminate that while acts of interpretation seek to discover meaning in a particular artifact, rhetorical acts on the other hand influence the reception of meaning through its mediation *through* artifacts – the object is a necessary component to the circuitry of meaning creation, and integral to *how* that meaning materializes.

[W]riters of contemporary metafiction make us conscious of our activity as readers. What they have to teach us about how we read applies not only to metafiction but to mimetic fiction as well, and though we may not be able to come away from a radically metafictional text with a summary truth about the truth outside the fiction, we may come away as better readers – of both texts and world.¹⁵⁰

Metafictional works are a sort of training ground for new ways of reading in that they address underlying assumptions about text and world (as stated by Waugh). But they also act as heuristics for engaging the world by foregrounding our roles as readers and movers of the world we know, as mentioned by Hutcheon and Boehm. Indeed, one new way of reading suggested by metafiction – and *TNN* and the other novels in this thesis – are that subject-object relations to reading can be seen as co-productive meaningful events of reader and text.

But Boehm's mention of a summary truth must be unpacked. Metafiction ventures into different narrative planes (i.e., storyworld and the reader's reality), by questioning preconceived boundaries between fiction and reality, and persuading the reader of their paradoxical simultaneity. This suasion constitutes metafiction's rhetorical dimensions, which include the reader in the emergence of meaning and meaningful engagements.¹⁵¹ This however, challenges Boehm in the sense that there is not a 'summary truth about the truth outside the fiction'.¹⁵² Metafiction illustrates that there are in fact summary truths – realist conventions – re-affirmed precisely through metafiction's disruptive nature *and* through the reader's role in cohering

¹⁵⁰ Beth Ann Boehm, 'A Rhetoric of Metafiction' (Dissertation, Ohio State University, 1987), p. 20.

¹⁵¹ That is, meaning is not inherent to the text.

¹⁵² Boehm, 'A Rhetoric of Metafiction', p. 20.

meaning into basic storytelling templates. Realist conventions are constructed entities while also being the building blocks of new human experience.

However, Boehm is also correct – metafictional texts do not (either explicitly or implicitly) proclaim truths about the world as knowable things-in-themselves but, rather, persuade and enlighten the reader as to the relevance of performativity. Hutcheon's readerly formulation must be further expanded to allow an agential potential to the text. *TNN* does not espouse knowledge about reality, but often questions it by embodying a more relational truth – the 'truth' that the fictions of our open-ended realities are prone to disruptions, self-perpetuation, and re-signification.

TNN's title itself, for example, makes a truth claim, but stands paradoxically juxtaposed with the published materiality of the book. On one hand, it must utilize novelistic conventions to be considered a novel, and on the other hand, it must re-define those conventions if it is to justify its own title (in the context of its materiality). Through the 'rupturing' of conventions, the text performs with the reader in such a way that the subject-object relations of its reading are problematized. This is largely the topic of Chapter Four, but in *TNN* its metafictional disruptions hail the reader into co-creating the novel as the reader themselves hail the text as a tool for co-creating the conventions of their reality; a differential moment of hailing.

Metafictional ruptures persuade the reader into a dialogue that questions challenged conventions.¹⁵³ *TNN* does not challenge the conventions constituting fictions and realities, but takes as its subject the organization of fiction and reality. As Daniel Green (2003) writes on postmodern fiction (which is distinct from metafiction, but foregrounds narrativity through

¹⁵³ John Wolfgang Roberts, 'Metafiction: An Introduction on Dramatizing the Boundaries of Social Discourse', *Aichi University: Language and Culture*, 58 (2014), 19-46, p. 21, 24. This is also to say that metafictional texts do not persuade the reader into making a different knowledge claim than what is assumed to be the conventional case, but instead, persuades into dialogue, which eventually leads into different knowledge claims depending on the material conditions informing the reading between the reader and text.

metafictional devices), ‘[t]he accomplishments [...] have been not in the various dismantlings of convention – the denial of plot or character – but instead in inventing new ways of “getting somewhere in spite” of the refusal to take the established path.’¹⁵⁴ Herein lies the heuristic potential to engage the reader in meaningful co-participation with text and world.

The Third Utterance: A Fugue of Emerging Story

The first utterance demonstrated the inescapability of convention by maintaining conventional semblance despite attempts to disrupt and reclassify. The second style investigated such attempts to reclassify the novel, and, the novel genre (which is not unlike the dynamics of the human experience) in order to maintain expressive diversity. The third utterance serves two purposes: to illustrate the emergence of a story (despite Writer’s attempts to disrupt it) around his relation to time; and to consider as supplementary utterances, the many references drawn from different times and contexts as a nebulous assemblage resonating together to inform the story.

The third utterance comments on Writer’s own health condition. This utterance is supplemented by the proverbial echo chamber of random notes throughout focusing on death, and generates the story behind Writer’s desire to create a final ‘new’ work of art before dying. The first example of this occurs on pages thirteen and fourteen when after listing countless ailments, deaths, and related speculations about famous people in history, Markson/Writer questions himself about whether he too can have headaches. He writes, ‘Which is to say that Writer can even have headaches, then? Writer can have headaches’ (13). ‘Writer does have headaches (14)’. Whereas the first two utterances focus on the artifice of the artwork, this third

¹⁵⁴ Daniel Green, ‘Postmodern American Fiction’, *The Antioch Review*, 61 (2003), 729-41, pp. 732-733.

address focuses on backstory, which develops and grows increasingly nuanced over the course of five hundred or more notes on death (Back Cover).

Cobley boils narrative down to: ‘a sequence that is narrated’.¹⁵⁵ Narrative, is the way a story is articulated.¹⁵⁶ What becomes obvious is that Writer’s story is articulated from the perspective of a dying man. From Cobley’s definition we get the ‘perspective’ of an observer making distinctions, and the experience being represented by that narrator’s ‘voice’.¹⁵⁷ Narrative emerges from the relational coupling of these bits of information relayed by the narrator weaving together a storyworld through the co-creative agencies of narrator and reader.¹⁵⁸

Writer expresses a desire to communicate a sense of place without setting, temporal sequence without indications of time, and a classical three-part structure (beginning, middle, and end) despite its collage-like presentation (1-4). Any sense of verisimilitude in *TNN* is not a function of inherent meaning, but of the reader’s willingness to be co-present and open with these non-sequiturs and co-construct a meaningful story about Writer – a dying man – between the lines. The story is not revealed to the reader *through* reading, but actually emerges with the reader in the phenomenal event *of* reading and making the chaotic jumble of non-sequiturs intelligible. It is the human dimensions of our sequential scenery – our characters, settings, causal structures, points of view, and approaching ends – that Markson tries to subvert. But these conventions are ultimately inescapable.¹⁵⁹ Subverted conventions in Markson’s novel

¹⁵⁵ Cobley, *Narrative*, p. 6. Rather than present a perceived tautology, this is to say that sequences require human input in order to be considered a narrative in principle. See also, Cobley, *Narrative*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁶ See, for example, Abbott, *Narrative*, p. 237. According to Abbott, there is some disagreement between narratologists as to whether a narrative must be narrated, as this would exclude much of drama and film. This thesis does not aim to solve that question, but my contention in the context of this thesis is that narratives are always *told*, albeit in as much as their intelligibility as narratives require conventional framing which make such sequences intelligible as narratives. See, Cobley, *Narrative*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁵⁷ Cobley, *Narrative*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁸ Cobley, *Narrative*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁹ See, Gabriel Josipovici, *The Lessons of Modernism* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987). p. 100.

must eventually be re-subverted because realist conventions cannot be erased from our narratives.

When Writer writes, ‘[a] novel with no overriding central *motivations*...[h]ence with no conflicts and/or confrontations, similarly’, he ironically expresses a motivation to create a motivation-less story (6). Consequently, through the paradoxical denial (and re-affirmation) of this convention, Writer sets up the reader to expect certain conflicts (which must arise out of character motivations), and thereby offers a rather mimetic story despite ongoing metafictional subversions. It becomes clear that Writer is dying. Writer makes several performative declarations regarding his health, which worsen as the novel progresses:

- Writer can have headaches. (13)
- Writer does have headaches. (14)
- Writer’s arse. (107; 114)
- All of this preoccupation implying little more, presumably, than that Writer is turning older. [...]

Though with Writer also now recalling the refrain from Dunbar’s Lament for the Makers, about the deaths of such as Chaucer and Lydgate and Henryson and Gower:

Timor mortis conturbat me.

The fear of death distresses me. (129)

- And so to bed. (148)
- Does Writer still have headaches? And/or backaches? [...]

Turning older or no. (156)

- Also there is Writer’s tendonitis. (158)

- Likewise Writer's pinched nerve. (160)
- Or yet again, Writer's sciatica. (162)
- Nobody comes. Nobody calls. (163)
- Writer's silent heart attack. (164)
- Writer's right-lung lobectomy and resected ribs. (165)
- About an old man's preoccupations. [...]
 Writer's cancer. [...]
 Farewell and be kind. (167)

These declarations work to further re-subvert the original subversion of the convention of conflict. What becomes evident however, is the way in which the convention of conflict is more strongly *re-asserted* than subverted. This element of the dying protagonist retroactively re-invents the novel as a work in the act of being written – to be not only a novel about re-imagining the genre of the novel, but also to be the validation of a dying man – a conventional story *about* the human relation to time.

Writer acknowledges the re-subversion of the subversion (thereby iterating the convention), when he writes: '[a]s from the start, affording no more than renewed verification that he exists' (156). Writer is referring to his declining health as verification that he exists, whether we are speaking of Writer as the performer of the novel, or the subject of its storyworld. But in a roundabout way this verification of existence also serves to re-affirm the idea that Writer *is* real, thereby adding another metaleptic level to the novel as Writer and David Markson become blurred entities.¹⁶⁰ This additional metaleptic level has implications for the reader, since

¹⁶⁰ Indeed, there is some fiction mirroring reality and vice versa, as this was Markson's third to last novel, with the next one being *Vanishing Point*, and the last one being *The Last Novel*, which, shortly after being published, he died.

the reader occupies the same narrative plane as Markson (albeit in the present rather than the past).

After re-affirming this motivation with, '[l]ikewise again merely serving to ratify his existence,' Markson writes a more ambiguous, but equally uncanny utterance: '[w]e always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist' (158; 160). This is a reference to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1954), to which Vladimir responds to Estragon: '[y]es, yes, we're magicians. But let us persevere in what we have resolved, before we forget. [...]'.¹⁶¹ In the play, while waiting for Godot, Vladimir helps put a pair of boots on Estragon since it will help pass the time.¹⁶² Importantly, however, there is no real significance to the boots, except to fill a void. Both characters occupy a space in which there is no movement, besides themselves. These characters exhibit a sort of uneasiness with the way they seem to merge with their environment. They run the risk of losing their individual distinctiveness to the environment, and so to preserve themselves, they must resort to meaningless actions for the sake of grasping for a sense of self in danger of disappearing.

As Writer puts it, it is a novel '[a]bout an old man's preoccupations' (167). The story that emerges creates an ephemeral quality to the book that spans across the metaleptic levels. Within this short novel of impermanence, is a subtlety that connects the sentiments into a reverberating fugue of an 'old man's preoccupations'(167). Writer is dying, and seems to occupy a space in this 'echo-chamber', where he craves some sort of 'movement', not unlike Vladimir and Estragon, as death encroaches.

At the material level of the book, the novel comments upon its own possible status as a mere preoccupation to pass the time. As Writer tells us, just 'Words, words, words' (145). Towards the end of the novel, Writer recognizes the dual purpose of this work, as not only

¹⁶¹ Beckett, *Godot*, p. 77.

¹⁶² Beckett, *Godot*, pp. 76-78.

something to give him ‘the impression he exists’, but also as something engaged for the sake of doing something, if only to re-confirm his own sense of self (160). Conventionally speaking, these novelistic parameters perpetuate themselves, but in the end they are still constructions – figments of minds narrativizing themselves through inescapable processes of narrative. Writer asks:

Nothing more or less than a *read*?

Simply an unconventional, generally melancholy though sometimes even playful now-ending read? (167)

Through the metafictional commentary upon the novel, the five-hundred or so deaths are re-signified. That is, they gain additional meaning, not as random notes about famous people who have died, but representations of the fears Writer has about dying.

Perhaps the many disruptions of the novel have been desperate attempts to put off the inevitable. Performatively speaking, novelistic conventions are reasserted in the way this non-novel actually does contain a character and a plot. Not only are there five-hundred or more historical figures, but also, Writer and the reader – who Writer acknowledges upon reaching the end of the book and finally coming to terms with the inevitable finality of his narrative reality. It contains a sequence of events, both randomly speaking with each note, and with regards to Writer’s progressively worsening health. Time indeed passes, both in Writer’s approaching death, and in the finality of the book as the reader reaches the final page. There is the action of declining health, and the action of turning pages. This is all to say that despite the overt claim that ‘this is not a novel’, this book is very much a novel with traditional novelistic conventions; self-consciously aware of its ability to offer new ways of looking at the novel as a genre, as well

as the realities of the reader. It re-defines the shapes and parameters of those literary conventions and situates them, not as merely novelistic, but as very real conditions of our experiences with the world.

Conclusion

Markson's *TNN* is a conventional novel without being a traditional one. While it does not follow the preconceived notions of what a novel is, it nonetheless satisfies those novelistic conventions while also reconfiguring them. Performativity theory, as formulated by Derrida, helps to understand the ways in which this metafiction ruptures novelistic conventions and re-imagines their new dimensions. This chapter argues that the novel is an assemblage, whose boundaries depend upon the reader or critic's perspective of the novel to co-create meaning – as well as other elements of the narrative ecology informing and reforming the expressive quality and potential of the novel.

In this way, *TNN* avoids settling into set parameters or contexts that run the risk of becoming obsolete in the face of a changing reality. It constitutes a sort of living organism that feeds off its narrative ecology in order to stay relevant and active in the reality of the human experience. This chapter contributes toward the deeper understanding and complexity of not only the relationship between performativity and metafiction, but also the re-classification of the novel as a live performance of assemblage re-configurations rather than as passive inanimate objects.

This chapter establishes the performative foundation necessary to continue exploring select metafictional novels that exhibit self-referential awareness's of their own performativity and therefore suggests different ways (from more traditionally conventional understandings) of living in the world. Though this thesis does not deal explicitly with the novel as a genre, *per se*,

the suggestion has been that the novel as a genre appears to be an (inherently metafictional) analogue technology, best attuned to our entangled/ing realities.

The next chapter focuses on this reality – a neocybernetic system between society, technology, and psyches – and suggests a new narratology for engaging with the world as performatively metafictional systems. The focus shifts to problematizing the Cartesian, Newtonian, and Enlightenment ideals of modern thought, and to prepare for the necessary paradigm shift explored in Part Two by addressing the implications of Chapter One: that performatively metafictional objects (such as people and novels) are also systems in an environment of other iteration-subversive systems, and as such constitute a *living* narrative ecology – a *metafictioning manifold*.

III.

**METAFICTION AND NEOCYBERNETICS: FLANN O'BRIEN'S *THE THIRD
POLICEMAN* AS ANALOGUE NEOCYBERNETIC MODEL**

Writing to his publisher, Timothy O'Keeffe, [...] O'Brien discussed a 'horrible fear that some stupid critic (and which of them is not) will praise me as a master of science fiction'.¹

Introduction

This chapter builds upon Chapter Two's argument that novels and objects are performative *iteration-subversions*, arguing that things are living systems as well. Things are alive by their abilities to actively entangle with other things in the narrative ecology, emerge, and continue as meaningful objects. By contending that objects are living *object-systems*, I show that metafiction self-consciously exemplify these dynamics in the generation of their storyworlds, and in their participation in the real world as objects. Metafiction, in other words exemplify what appears true of all object-systems, and neocybernetics gives us a framework to view metafiction in this more accurate way: as simultaneous models of and participants in an entangling and emergent narrative ecology – processes foregrounded by Flann O'Brien. Understanding metafiction, and metafictionality more generally, as alive, is necessary because it continues to expand previous theories on metafiction in this performative vein by necessarily

¹ Samuel Whybrow, 'Flann O'Brien's science fiction: an "illusion of progression" in *The Third Policeman*' in *Is it about a Bicycle?': Flann O'Brien in the Twenty-first Century*, ed. By Jennika Baines (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), p. 129; parentheses in original.

coupling objects, societies, and readerly acts as differential events in the continued emergence of materials and meaningfulness within the metafictioning manifold – itself a living system.

Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* (*TTP*; 1967; penned in 1940) metafictionally flaunts its non-linearity and resistance to logical coherence by highlighting what I will go on to show are Cartesian, Newtonian, and Enlightenment absurdities, problematizing classical relationships between subjects and objects.² This chapter does not solely pinpoint the absurdities of modern thought when taken to their logical extremes, though it certainly highlights this aspect. Rather, extending the notion of object-events as object-systems, *TTP* allows us to say something about these object-systems as inherently metafictional, performative, *and* living processes emerging from and thriving upon our material environment.³ These dimensions are contrary to the above strands of modern thought precisely in the way they challenge ontological distinctions between things, problematize the assumption that things contain inherent properties and causal structures independent of an observer, and counter the over-emphasis of the centrality of human reason to human experience.⁴

TTP could be regarded as a proto-postmodern novel, and its publication date hints at this idea, as the manuscript was continually rejected and eventually abandoned before being posthumously published in 1967 at the height of an overtly metafictional and postmodern literary culture.⁵ *TTP* does not seek to represent a disjointed reality, but rather to expose

² Flann O'Brien, 'The Third Policeman' in *Flann O'Brien: The Complete Novels* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2007), pp. 219-406.

³ Again, the 'material environment' is to be understood as (non)living, (non)human, and (meta)physical material-discursive reality of the human experience.

⁴ See, Andrew Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 405, n. 2, who sets out these key features of the 'modern', while also acknowledging that they are not necessarily definitive. Still, these are the features I am challenging throughout this thesis, and they are the features that critics of *TTP* have grappled with as well.

⁵ Regarding the roughly agreed upon historical range of postmodernism, see, Bran Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1-2. Regarding reasons for posthumously publishing *TTP*, see, Keith Hopper, *Flann O'Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-*

Enlightenment (realist) thought as a fiction, by taking it to logical extremes *ad absurdum*, and thereby eschewing the modernist project which maintains a faith in the representational disjointed logic of knowledge production.⁶

TTP's principle is that story iteration-subversions are *never* static, and the proclivity of story/material to continually iterate-subvert in an environment makes it a living system since iterations and subversions are preconditions for their differential emergence and continued entanglements. While literary scholars might argue that modernist works such as *TTP* (which was penned in the modernist literary era) already subvert verisimilitude, my contention is that modernist writing seeks, as did literary realism, to accurately represent reality, albeit in the specificity of its disjointed nature.⁷ *TTP*, somehow resists this 'modern realism'. Its ability to 'make it(self) new' problematizes modernist verisimilitude since we are never sure what *it* is that is to be remade – *TTP* enigmatically avoids coherence, and not for the sake of establishing a new objective(ly disjointed) realism.⁸ By avoiding the establishment of realistic parameters in a representational modern paradigm, *TTP*'s ability to perpetuate itself as a story with regards to the narrator, and to its meaningfulness to the reader, implies a different teleology. A teleology oriented towards remaining alive and evolving in its narrative ecology *with* the reader, rather than merely commenting on the reader's reality. Ironically, this 'mirroring' of the reader's reality still occurs, but, as we will see, not in representational terms, but through performative

Modernist. 2nd edn (Cork: Cork University Press, 2009), pp. 41-42, who notes the publishers thought it too fantastic.

⁶See, for example Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain*, p. 405n2, and Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 9, who locates an epistemological essence at the core of modernist thought.

⁷As outlined in Chapter One and Two, the modernist project is in many ways an extension of the realist project – its disruptions being attempts to capture a new de-centered reality that emerges after the First World War. See, for example, Paul Cobley, *Narrative* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 152. See also, Marina MacKay, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 48, where she discusses the formal style of James Joyce's *kunstlerroman*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* whose disruptive narration is representative of the age and development of the narrator himself. See also, James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin Books, 2000 (1916)). See also, Hopper, *Flann O'Brien*, p. 15, and McHale, *Postmodernist*, p. 9.

⁸See, Chapters One and Two regarding the sources of the phrase, 'make it new', which is popularly attributed to Ezra Pound.

and neocybernetic life processes.

It is in these ways that *TTP* communicates a new realism, but one that is phenomenal, systemic, and alive, rather than adhering to fixed representational parameters. It is worth noting that the time of *TTP*'s writing was also a time of great scientific challenges to modern thinking; *TTP* is therefore notable, in my opinion, for being a proto-posthumanist novel as well.⁹ O'Brien's general knowledge of what can be called the 'New Physics' (quantum physics, and by extension cybernetics at the macro level) is well documented.¹⁰ O'Brien writes,

This, em, pulse known as time – ‘the experience of duration’ – is still very baffling, notwithstanding the expositions and expostulations of men such as Minkowski, Einstein, Eddington. A horse has one-third the life expectation of a man. If a man is riding a horse, what sort of time informs this association? One reads that Newton distinguished two kinds of interval distinguishing events – distance in space and lapse in time. But what is it that lapses? The space-time men confute Newton and say there is in fact one interval. Do you know it would put years on a man.¹¹

In O'Brien's engagement with the 'new physics', we locate the playful spirit that informs the

⁹ Though major cybernetic milestones occur after the war toward the latter half of the decade, daily life would have been busy with new technologies and 'telepathic' machines such as the telephone and television which would have helped reshape the spatio-temporal scale of the times. See, Whybrow, 'Flann O'Brien's Science Fiction', p. 129, who notes *TTP* as a critique of the Enlightenment project. Regarding the novel as proto-posthumanist, this claim is made in light of coming discussions which utilize the neocybernetic theories of Bruce Clarke and his narratological framework: a *posthumanist narratology*. See, for example, Bruce Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Signs* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 20-35. This framework, while decentering the centrality of the human cultural agent, stipulates a necessary human coupling to minds and objects in our social lives.

¹⁰ See, for example, Andrew Spencer, 'Many Worlds: The New Physics in Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*', *Éire-Ireland*, 30 (1995), 145-58, p. 145; see also, Flann O'Brien, *Hair of the Dogma* (London: Paladin Books, 1986), p. 65.

¹¹ O'Brien, *Hair of the Dogma*, p. 65; quoted in Spencer, 'Many Worlds', p. 145.

ludic natural law of the storyworld – informed by the fictional philosopher de Selby. *TTP* plays with the illogicality of modern logic, the splicing of human and technology, and the quantum-like spookiness inherent in challenging a linear modern existence, making apparent the notion that metafictional objects are not bound by temporal or spatial parameters, and that these metaleptic reaches sustain metafictional object-systems with ‘life’.

This chapter suggests that *things* are alive in the way they help perpetuate our realities, as our realities help perpetuate things. This takes into account the affectual necessity between all materials in an environment. This larger environment, as well as the individual systems of people and things, constitute a definition of autopoiesis in that a living thing is simultaneously the product and process of its own emergence.¹² In other words, *things* are elemental to our ongoing emergence, and this emergence ensures the ongoing production of additional things, and vice versa. I argue here that *TTP* analogizes these processes in its storyworld and that it is therefore through this frame that a reader can productively approach the novel.

In a neocybernetic context, the word for these things is *technology*, though, as will become clear, I privilege the word *material* for its larger scope of objects.¹³ Still, *technology* is

¹² See, for example, Humberto Maturana, ‘Introduction’, in *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980), pp. xii-xxx, p. xiv. *Autopoiesis* means ‘self-producing’ in Greek; coined by Chilean scientists, Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, in 1971 to describe the self-organization of living systems; see, Pier Luigi Luisi, ‘Autopoiesis: A Review and a Reappraisal’, *Naturwissenschaften*, 90 (2003), 49-55 (p. 50). Such a system maintains its identity by the way it continues to produce the elements which in turn perpetuate its ongoing processes; see Soren Brier, ‘Cybernetics’, in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Science*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 89-99, p. 89; and Bruce Clarke, ‘Systems Theory’, in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Science*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 214-25, pp. 222-223. This term will be unpacked in greater detail in coming sections with regards to metafiction and *TTP* in particular.

¹³ This is to say that neocybernetics views technology from the perspective of media which helps mediate our narratives in the world. My contention is that all matter – living and nonliving, human and nonhuman, physical and metaphysical – performs a mediating function, a perspective more congruent with new materialist conceptions of a material-discursive manifold (the language and things of the human experience). See, for example, Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, pp. 18-19, regarding technological systems as machines (or things) coupled to our social and psychic (metabioc) systems. This is discussed throughout the chapter, and elaborated upon in coming chapters. See also, Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), for a new materialist perspective on all matter, which I synthesize in coming chapters with neocybernetic approaches.

taken to signify the environment of human-made (or otherwise appropriated) artifacts – as object, *and* system-environments.¹⁴ As a living object-system, *TTP* draws from us – its readers – necessary elements to maintain its existence as a narrative, as we draw meaningfulness from it. This is not to say that the reader’s response to the text creates its meanings and therefore differentially (re)creates the text, though this is part of it.¹⁵ More to the point is that both text and reader are object-systems, living in a narrative environment satiating aspects of their systemic emergence by drawing sustenance when encountering each other.¹⁶ *TTP* demonstrates how object-systems, whether as texts or readers, or anything else, are living self-referential systems inexorably ‘[...] hooked into an ecology [...]’ of living object-systems.¹⁷

A *system* as a ‘complex totality composed of interdependent elements’, could equally define *narrative*.¹⁸ The premise from which this chapter investigates metafiction as neocybernetic processes rests in this conflation of terms. From a literary posthuman perspective, the constant emerging and splicing of systems in our bio-cultural selves can only be seen as a *storytelling*.¹⁹ Bruce Clarke (2008) writes:

Neocybernetic system’s theory resonates with narrative forms, valorizing narrativity as a significant allegory of systemic operations. [...] Systems have tales to tell

¹⁴ See, for example, Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, pp. 18-19, where he labels the objects that emerge from non-autopoietic systems (such as abiotic matter or energy), but which ‘compounded’ with metabiotic systems (such as human social and psychic systems), become their own ‘technological species’ of metabiotic system. Again, I am claiming that metafiction is neocybernetic models of a larger neocybernetic and metafictional reality. As such, metafiction is technologies which illuminate the nonmodern aspects of our lives – what Andrew Pickering calls: ‘technologies of the nonmodern self’. See, Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain*, p. 176.

¹⁵ See, Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), pp. 140-141.

¹⁶ See, for example, Ira Livingston, *Between Science and Literature : An Introduction to Autopoetics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), pp. 70-71, where he writes that the self-referential aspect of a text is where texts open themselves up to the ecology that sustains it as a text, and therefore remains ‘alive’.

¹⁷ Livingston, *Science and Literature*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁸ Clarke, ‘Systems Theory’, p. 214.

¹⁹ See, for example, Stefan Herbrechter, ‘Postmodern’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (2017), pp. 54-68, p. 60.

because they have to tell tales – literally, they must sequentially select and connect the elements of a medium in a continuously viable way – to keep going.²⁰

System-narratives, in other words, which are autopoietic, exhibit this *storytelling* capability via a medium that ensures their continued relationality.

Not only are systems autopoietic in the process and production of its constituent elements, but as we will see, systems themselves are elements in an autopoietic environment – their difference is a matter of scale. In either case, the act of recursively reconfiguring itself in response to its environment *is* the telling of its story – an emergent narrative is an emergent system and their communicated meaningfulness in the world brings with it the (story) conventions which contextualize their meaningfulness to the environment.²¹

Neocybernetic systems theory adds to metafiction studies a living component both in terms of its textually performative dimensions *and* its operations with readers, society, and our experiences. With autopoiesis at its core, neocybernetics challenges preconceived notions of what is artificial and natural.²² As I will show, *TTP* can be read as representing a neocybernetic system – a self-aware living system in constant entanglement and emergence with, and in, its environment. It demonstrates a metaleptic system (e.g., a network of narrative levels) and an environment of metaleptic systems (i.e., an ecology of networks), *and* shows neocybernetics as important to understanding metafictional processes since they more holistically engage narrative levels across the spectrum from storyworld to the reader's reality. It is in these ways

²⁰ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 7.

²¹ See, Chapter Two for an in-depth discussion about basic conventions which offer diverse expressive capabilities.

²² See, Sarah Dillon, 'Chaotic Narrative: Complexity, Causality, Time, and Autopoiesis in David Mitchell's *Ghostwritten*', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 52 (2011), 135-62, p. 154, where she notes the problematization of artificial and natural things through autopoiesis. Additionally, see the introductory chapter for a general overview of the field of neocybernetics.

that *TTP* can be understood as characteristic of various narrative planes embedding in, and drawing from, each other across different spaces, times, and fiction-realities.²³

Plot and Logical Tensions

TTP is a novel about an unnamed narrator who, after killing the old Phillip Mathers for his money, supposedly spends eternity reliving the same absurd three days of afterlife. The first chapter outlines how the narrator comes to know the works of the philosopher de Selby in school, and how he comes to live with the dishonest John Divney, who talks the narrator into giving Mathers a fatal blow with a spade, thereby robbing the narrator of Mathers' money (231).²⁴ Divney, a farm-hand who, after the death of the narrator's parents, takes charge of the narrator's estate (which includes the house, a farm, and a bar) convinces the narrator to go along with the murder so that he can afford to self-publish his 'definitive "De Selby Index" wherein the views of all known commentators on every aspect of the savant and his work had been collated' (229). However, after the murder, Divney takes the old man's money and hides it from the narrator for a period of three years. The narrator explains, '[i]n the weeks which followed I asked him where the box was a hundred times in a thousand different ways. He never answered in the same way, but the answer was always the same. It was in a very safe place' (233). Over the following three years the narrator and Divney become inseparable, the narrator claiming that '[i]n later months I had hoped to force him to capitulate by making my company unbearably close and unrelenting but at the same time I took to carrying a small pistol in case of accidents' (234).

²³ As discussed in Chapter Two, fiction-realities is coined to suggest that reality is constructed out of conventions, which in turn further re-constructs conventions. Fictions and realities in-form each other. This dynamic comes to its fullest fruition in this thesis in Chapter Five, which locates an additional ethical dimension to these affective processes across various narrative planes.

²⁴ Future references to page numbers will be made in-text.

Divney in effect cheats the narrator out of his house, farm, and bar. The narrator expands upon his suspicions regarding Divney's moral character: 'I knew that he was sufficiently dishonest to steal my share of Mather's money and make off with the box if given the opportunity' (234). Once Divney feels things have quieted down, he informs the narrator that it's time to retrieve the box and he allows the narrator to get the box from under the floorboards at Mather's house (234-235). The reader learns, however, that this was all a pretense leading towards his own murder. When the narrator uncovers the box, he reaches 'bodily into the opening and just when it should be closing about the box something happen[s]' (238). It is from this point in the second chapter the illogicalities of the novel manifest.

Absurdities materialize in the house after that 'something happens' when the narrator begins matter-of-factly conversing with Mathers' ghost. Despite their nonchalant behavior, their conversation helps set the tone for the novel's absurdities, with Mathers answering the narrator's questions solely in the negative form (241-250). This exemplifies the subversive nature of the novel to undermine logical principles utilizing the same logicity. Joe, the narrator's soul, who acts as an unseen and interjecting companion, first alerts the narrator to Mathers' unusual responses (242). Upon considering the observation that Mathers is only answering questions in the negative, the narrator asks, '[w]ill you answer a straight question' (242). The scene proceeds as follows:

'I will not,' he replied.

[...] I sat thinking for a moment until I thought the same thing inside out.

'Will you refuse to answer a straight question?' I asked.

'I will not,' he replied.

[...]

‘Very well,’ I said quietly. ‘Why do you always answer No?’

[...]

“No” is, generally speaking, a better answer than “Yes”,’ he said at last. (242-243)

Mathers goes on to explain that upon much reflection, after rectifying his sinful ways, he came to understand that refusing requests was the only sure way to avoid committing more sins (243-244). Mathers further contends that bad requests outnumber good ones by three to one (244). The suggestion is that any endeavor to make sense of the world and our role in it cannot be logically maintained, since the representational system used to make that sense is self-defeating.²⁵ While Mathers upholds his vow to respond in the negative, it does not mean all negated responses are negative. The narrator’s grammatical inversion, along with Mathers’ persistent negation has the following effect:

He seemed to speak eagerly, his words coming out as if they had been imprisoned in his mouth for a thousand years. He seemed relieved that I had found a way to make him speak. [...] [His eyes] were now bright and active and moved about restlessly in their yellow wrinkled sockets. (243)

The narrator’s grammatical twist not only shows such reasoning taken to absurd extremes, but also that it is both stifling *and* liberating. In other words, the narrator locates a paradoxical feature of modern thinking, that while such reasoning is intended to contain our knowledge and

²⁵ See, for example, Donna Haraway, ‘The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriated Others’, in *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 63-124, p. 89, where she notes the ‘negativity’ inherent in all representations. Haraway is claiming that representations require a ‘silent object’, but since actors and actants – the human and unhuman – are indeed active, a social relationship is necessary, rather than ‘doctrines of representation and objectivity’.

experience of the world, the same reasoning can subvert those understandings. It's not that the narrator is out-witting Mathers, but that modern logic is itself a proverbial house of cards and such linguistic play can go on *ad infinitum*.²⁶ As Martin McQuillian (2001) writes, discussing Jacques Derrida via the works of Paul de Man (2001), '[...] any critical insight cannot be validated outside the terms of the text it reads and any attempt to claim it as prescribable fact of reading is a blindness to reading's own inexhaustible openness'.²⁷ Taking the act of reading as allegorical to one's understanding of their place in the world, Mathers is no doubt blind to his continued openness to the world. The narrator approaches Mathers from outside his linguistic 'parameters', with a reformulated grammatical structure, and this allows for inexhaustible openness even within 'set' structures.²⁸

Leaving Mather's house, the narrator walks to the police station where we first encounter the famous line by Sergeant Pluck: '[i]s it about a bicycle?' (267). After three days of senseless talk of bicycles with the policemen, conversations with the narrator's soul, and various creations defying science and reasoning, the narrator comes upon his own house. Divney now lives there with his wife, Peggy Meers, and son, Tommy, and we learn that sixteen years have passed; the narrator states that '[h]e told me to keep away. He said I was not there. He said I was dead. He said that what he had put under the boards in the big house was not the black box but a mine, a bomb. It had gone up when I touched it. [...] The house was blown to bits, I was dead' (401).

²⁶ Here in this paradox lies the double-bind of posthuman theories, which this thesis addresses, especially in Part Two. On the one hand, representations are constructed and do not hold for long. On the other hand, they are inescapable. Indeed, to deconstruct them is to perpetuate further constructions (i.e., iteration-subversions), and to reconstruct them is to anticipate further re-constructions.

²⁷ Martin McQuillian, *Paul De Man* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 23.

²⁸ This is to say, as argued in Chapter Two, that even with set structures, expressive variety and openness do not cease. The narrator, in other words disrupts Mather's paradigm, yet allows him to iterate that very paradigm while allowing different forms of communication.

The plot itself is an illustration of modern reasoning run amok, as Hugh Kenner (1997) reminds us, '[t]he logic commences, of course, with de Selby, and most readers have found themselves feeling, now and again, that de Selby nearly makes sense.'²⁹ Extended to the eccentricity of the storyworld's events, the logic of which permeates the entire novel, we finally come to the conclusion that, as David Cohen (1997) explains, '[t]he book [...] has been written by a corpse, [and we know one thing for certain:] that he lives. Finally [however], the circular nature of the ending takes away all possibility of the text having been written by the narrator.'³⁰ Implicitly, we are destined to continue on a circular self-defeating trajectory of nonsense, or of existential nothingness.³¹ However, through a neocybernetic framework, the narrator indeed communicates the story of *TTP* precisely because he *lives* in a bio-logical sense (though he is biologically dead).

Upon the revelation that the narrator has been dead for sixteen years, in what he thought was three days away from home, the narrator begins to lose his memory (again). At first, he is uncertain if Divney is telling the truth, stating that 'I do not know whether I was surprised at what he said, or even whether I believed him' (402). Looking around, he notices things are different around the house, and does not recognize the two people crying and wailing on the floor. He leaves, and walks down the road where, '[t]he night had passed away and the dawn had come with a bitter searing wind. The sky was livid and burdened with ill omen' (402). During this walk he notices his own existence and comes upon a strange structure that looks 'as

²⁹ Hugh Kenner, 'The Fourth Policeman', in *Conjuring Complexities: Essays on Flann O'Brien*, ed. by Anne Clune and Tess Hurson (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies; The Queen's University of Belfast, 1997), pp. 61-71, p. 67.

³⁰ David Cohen, 'Arranged by Wise Hands: Flann O'Brien's Metafiction', in *Conjuring Complexities: Essays on Flann O'Brien*, ed. by Anne Clune and Tess Hurson (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies; The Queen's University of Belfast, 1997), pp. 57-60, p. 60.

³¹ Kenner speculates that O'Brien's conscience was the 'fourth policeman' of the novel, and the one who purposely suppressed the manuscript because the pagan Irish overtones of the novel contradicted his 'explicitly formed and highly orthodox' Catholic conscience, and presented a 'subversive' view of eternity as devoid of hope (Kenner, 'The Fourth Policeman', p. 71).

if it were painted like an advertisement on a board on the roadside (402). This can be seen as symbolic of the constructed nature of the reality he self-consciously finds himself in.³² This structure is the police station, which he now has no previous recollection of. Upon hearing approaching footsteps, the narrator stops walking as Divney catches up. They do not say a word, and enter the police station where the fat Sergeant Pluck is inside and addresses the *two men* (as opposed to just the narrator): ‘[i]s it about a bicycle?’ (403-404). The uncanny feeling of this final exchange rests in the paradox that the narrator’s afterlife is not so much a ‘hell’ which he has been condemned to experience repeatedly, but that the nature of the ‘hell’ is continually changing despite the resemblance to past experiences, suggesting perhaps he is not necessarily ‘repeating’ his experiences.³³ This is to say that the recursive dynamic of the novel, along with the appearance of Divney, communicate opposing understandings of the novel.

In this metafictional moment, however, there is a glimpse of hope from the existential degeneration of the novel.³⁴ This novel appears to fold back on itself but remains along time’s

³² This is not to say his afterlife is constructed, per se, but that the framework informing his world (which the reader understands as his afterlife) is a modernist construction. Indeed, O’Brien was conflicted with *TTP* because it negatively challenged his own Catholicism – painting a Godless afterlife forged by modern Enlightenment logic and reasoning – a hellish realm. Further below, I challenge this dichotomy through a neocybernetic framework – itself a reformulation of modern reasoning that re-captures pre-modern non-linear approaches to the world. Regarding O’Brien’s conflicted interest with *TTP*, see, Kenner, ‘The Fourth Policeman’, pp. 61-71; at 71, Kenner explains O’Brien’s view that *TTP*’s vision of the afterlife was devoid of hope. Regarding O’Brien as a Thomist, see, Carlos Villar Flor, ‘Flann O’Brien a Postmodernist Who Happens to Be a Thomist’, *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* (2011), N.P. See also, Jennika Baines, “‘Un-Understandable Mystery’ Catholic Faith and Revelation in the Third Policeman’, *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* (2011), N.P; and Lanta Davis, ‘Calmly making Ribbons of Eternity: The Futility of the Modern Project in Flann O’Brien’s *The Third Policeman*’ *Renaissance*, 4, 64, (2012), 341-352, p. 342. Regarding the tendency of neocybernetics to recapture religious patterns of thought, see, Heikki Hyotyniemi, ‘Lecture 12: Philosophical Consequences’, Helsinki University of Technology, Department of Automation and Systems Technology Cybernetics Group, ([Accessed 11 June 2017], slide 50.

³³ Therefore, this might not be a ‘hell’ in a strictly theological sense, since hell requires, from a Catholic point of view, to die purposely outside of God’s fellowship; see, *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II*. ed. by The Catholic Church (New York: Doubleday, 1995), p. 292. Considering O’Brien’s own Catholicism, *TTP* presents an afterlife where both the murderer and the murdered exist together without hope for redemption. This is problematic from a salvific point of view, which neocybernetics helps rectify by giving meaning – and life – to its perceived meaninglessness. This afterlife appears analogous to an earthly reality framed with ‘hellish’ modern paradigms filled with existential absurdities that extend beyond earthly existence as the natural (absurd) law of the universe – which is what O’Brien seems to be challenging in the first place.

³⁴ This modern recursivity is characterized by the metaphor of two mirrors reflecting each other in infinite regress, as opposed to the diffractive metaphor I use and explore in greater depth in Chapters Four and Five, of

arrow. Performatively speaking, this illustrates an ongoing iteration-subversion of itself – a continuous performance replaying its structural conventions in new contexts. The novel is on a constant trajectory of story unraveling, and in this way, we can assume that what the novel presents is merely three days of an extremely long journey. This is not a novel about a hellish experience, but a story that boldly pushes itself beyond the physical covers of the book.

Making the case for the narrator's 'life' performatively beyond the covers of the physical book rests in the illogical implications of the story's recursion from chapter twelve to chapter four. Indeed, these illogicalities help unpack the relationship between text and reader – fiction and reality – more fully, by collapsing the ontological distinctions between storyworld and reality (i.e., text and reader) and arguing that relationships constitute a living environment of living things – discussed in the sections below.³⁵

The narrator, it transpires, cannot remember anything before the scene he is in at any given time, so when he enters the police station with Divney in the novel's closing line (404), it is as if he has entered for the first time, and we as readers realize there is no way this past-tense narrator, then, could have narrated the story, which by the laws of the storyworld, should be three days (of sixteen years) of blank memory.

Identifying the problems more concretely, the first problem is that the novel seemingly recurses back to the fourth chapter to be re-narrated, but with Divney in the picture. With the narrator unaware of the adventures that came before this event, not only should these 're-lived' chapters not exist, but the paradox suggests that the first three chapters (and part of chapter four) somehow simultaneously exist outside and within the narrator's death. He has been dead all along, yet the recursion excludes the earlier sections which recount the events leading up to

ripples reconfiguring the field of a pond.

³⁵ Furthermore, the causal implications between these distinctions and their manifestation as an actual practice in the world are explored in Part Two.

his entering the police station and meeting Sergeant Pluck. The story in other words seems to discriminate between these two analogue narrative planes – the narrator’s life and afterlife – yet there should not be any story at all to discriminate upon in the first place.

The second problem homes in on the spatio-temporal locality of the narrator and his narration. If the narrator can narrate this novel in the first-person, past tense, but cannot remember anything outside of his current scene, then from where is he narrating? According to the logic of the novel’s structure, there should be no novel to narrate at all – bringing into question the narrator’s ontological and metaleptic situatedness. *What* is this narrator and *where* is he? Since the novel seems to be a commentary upon the absurdities of linear scientific reasoning, suggesting there is much about the story that cannot be explained by modern logic, and which is absent to the reader via those lenses.³⁶ *TTP* begs for a different framework of analysis in order to reconcile these inconsistencies.

The third problem regards the embedded and entangled narrative planes themselves. The narrator appears to be narrating from within, as the protagonist, and outside the text as omniscient storyteller. A first person, past tense narrator cannot tell a story that has been forgotten, and therefore his great knowledge must be reconciled with his great forgetfulness. In problem three, we see how the co-evolution of systems (i.e., the narrator as protagonist, and as omniscient storyteller) across metaleptic levels means the actual written story is not entirely self-contained within the covers of the book, nor of the parameters contextualizing the novel. The nature of *TTP*’s ontological boundaries within the story and regarding its relationship with

³⁶ See, for example, Bruce Clarke, and Manuela Rossini, ‘Preface: Literature, Posthumanism, and the Posthuman’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. xi-xxii, p. xv-xvi. They summarize Karl Steel, who writes a chapter in the same collection regarding posthuman critiques of medieval pre-modern literature. In this period Steel sees the beginnings of humanist assumptions that remain to the present day. See also, Karl Steel, ‘Medieval’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 3-15.

the real world must be re-thought in a way that maintains its identity as a story while at the same time opening it up to the greater environment.

TTP's Dramatization of Fiction and Reality

The absurdities of the novel can be seen as attempts to short-circuit modernity's mechanistic approaches.³⁷ The narrator unknowingly inhabits an afterlife whose natural laws are dominated by the theories of the philosopher de Selby who believes, amongst other things, for example, that a man's reflection in the mirror is that of a younger man due to the amount of time it takes light to travel from the mirror to the observer's eye (276).³⁸ Cohen writes that "[t]he method of de Selby is to start with undeniable fact and twist it into fantasy [...]. The problem is with conclusions'.³⁹ But, Kenner writes, "[a]s the narrator notes, "it is difficult to get to grips with his process of reasoning or to refute his curious conclusions [...]"'.⁴⁰ A certain sympathy is therefore afforded to the narrator in his endeavor to produce a definitive *De Selby Index* intended to prove that much of the critical literature are "[...] misconceptions based on mis-readings of his works' (229).⁴¹

The policemen, themselves keepers of the laws of the narrator's 'hellish' afterlife, are exemplars of the novel's strangeness. One policeman, Sergeant Pluck, expounds 'The Atomic

³⁷ See, Flore Coulouma, 'Transgressive and Subversive: Flann O'Brien's Tales of the in-Between', *Sub-Versions: Trans-National Readings of Modern Irish Literature*, 44 (2010), 65-85, p. 82.

³⁸ Other theories are that a journey is an hallucination (263); the earth is sausage shaped due to the fact that humans can only move in one direction despite believing the contrary (303); houses have caused the degeneration of the human race, causing a "[...] progressive predilection for interiors and a waning interest in the art of going out and staying there' (236); and human existence is a "succession of static experiences each infinitely brief" which de Selby came to understand from examining old movie film (263).

³⁹ Cohen, 'Arranged by Wise Hands', p. 60.

⁴⁰ Kenner, 'The Fourth Policeman', p. 67.

⁴¹ Ironically, the narrator's discovery of de Selby occurs at the age of 16 when encountering his *Golden Hours*, which happens to have the final two pages missing (225). Perhaps the key to understanding de Selby is written in those final pages. Furthermore, we learn throughout the novel that many of these critics were frauds or pseudonyms (326/374); and referenced manuscripts are missing or illegible (276/352) adding to the inability to speak authoritatively on de Selby and the world through his lens. The fact that many critics used pseudonyms does not necessarily make their critiques invalid. It does, however, raise concerns about their unreliability, especially in the context of de Selby's unreliability and the moral character of the other critics.

Theory' which explains the metamorphic reasons there are some who are part bicycle when their atoms get swapped from too much riding (293). Then there is policeman MacCruiskeen who pricks the narrator with a spear so sharp that an inch from the tip it is invisible to the eye, and who makes chests of drawers that fit inside one another, until invisible to the narrator. Finally, there is Policeman Fox, who has the face of Mathers, occupies his own personal police station in the walls of Mathers' house, explains to the protagonist how everything was done (i.e., how he got there), and that he (Fox) and the box of ominum are the reason for everything (393-394). As Mathers explains to the narrator towards the end of their conversation in chapter two, '[t]hey all have the gift of seeing the winds' (249). The policemen are attuned to the illogical laws and processes of their environment. This environment includes machines such as a lift that one can reach eternity by, as well as things like a new color that turns people insane.⁴² *TTP* presents a world in which, as Anne Clissmann (1975), an early critic of Flann O'Brien's work, states, '[t]he comic *reductio* tends to lead to the world of the absurd'.⁴³

Critics have suggested various 'meanings' for *TTP* in order to make sense of this *reductio ad absurdum*. Despite various conclusions, there is consensus regarding the cause of such absurdities, namely the scientific expansion of Western rationalism. M. Keith Booker (1991) writes that '[t]he book is largely about the confident pretensions of Cartesian epistemology to be able to reach (and recognize) Truth. [...] There are a number of parodies of the Western drive for knowledge'.⁴⁴ Lanta Davis, in a more religious reading, writes that 'O'Brien critiques modernity's substitution of religion with scientific empiricism and Enlightenment rationalism, arguing that if these distinctly modern values continue unchecked,

⁴² See, Joseph Brooker, *Flann O'Brien* (Horndone: Northcote House Publishers, 2005), pp. 52-53 for a list of fantastical elements in *The Third Policeman*.

⁴³ Anne Clissmann, *Flann O'Brien: A Critical Introduction to His Writings: The Story-Teller's Book-Web* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1975), p. 181.

⁴⁴ M. Keith Booker, 'Science, Philosophy, and "*The Third Policeman*": Flann O'Brien and the Epistemology of Futility', *South Atlantic Review*, 4, 56, (1991), 37-56 (p. 38).

the result will not be an idealized heaven on earth, but rather a hell of endless futility'.⁴⁵ Joseph Brooker (1991) contends that '*The Third Policeman* regularly asks us to think the unthinkable – an idea which is itself, in fact, not easy to think. The book operates at the edges of possibility, and tampers with them to disconcerting effect'.⁴⁶ Samuel Whybrow summarizes, '[i]n *The third policeman*, darkness descends in the wake of scientific progress, too brilliant to be fully understood'.⁴⁷ Common to these critics' claims is that the modern project ultimately leads towards displacement as they inevitably problematize one's sense of knowledge of the world. *TTP* seems to insult the drive for a fixed Truth, caution a Hell of endless futility, ponder unsettling alternatives to our conventional human narratives, and 'digress' from supposed enlightenment into a new 'dark age'. In short, the novel appears to be a sense-less romp into a chaotic narrative without purpose or goals, but thereby actively parodying modern methods of sense-making. *TTP* criticizes linear thinking through extremes, but, paradoxically, makes linear sense.

This chapter differs from the above critiques of *TTP* by not lamenting the absurdities of 'unchecked' Western reasoning. As opposed to these reductionist readings of *TTP*, an *expansionist* reading instead integrates its absurdities into its own logic and opens the path towards a nonmodern understanding. This is to say, *TTP*'s absurdities appear as such when framed in strictly modern parameters (despite being logically derived *ad absurdum*) in order to critique those same parameters. Conversely, however, these absurdities find a nonmodern, yet linear, reconciliation and analogous applicability through non-linear frameworks. Michael Patrick Gillespie (2003) writes:

⁴⁵ Davis, 'Calmly making Ribbons', p.341.

⁴⁶ Brooker, *O'Brien*, pp. 59-60.

⁴⁷ Whybrow, 'Illusion of Progression', p. 128. Italics and lower-case spelling of the title in original.

A commitment to complexity regulates readings not according to immutable concepts of historicity but rather according to a sense of its antimonies. We perceive in a nonlinear rather than linear fashion. Therefore, forcing allusions imbedded within the discourse into a symmetrical pattern moves me no closer to a coherent articulation of an aesthetic response to the passage.⁴⁸

Gillespie argues for readings not limited to particular periods or methods, but which take into account various aesthetic experiences. In this way, there is no true meaning for a text since even a re-reading ‘will never lead to the same aesthetic experience’.⁴⁹ In terms of *TTP*’s narrative progression: we can never return to the same starting state, as is the case with *TTP*’s iteration of chapter four.

Gillespie writes, ‘[...] experience, imaginative disposition, emotional connotation and other elements [...] change the response radically’.⁵⁰ A nonlinear reading of the novel will not explain existent objective ‘symmetries’, but rather, subjective tapestries that can be ‘radically’ engaged. For this reason, non-linear readerly acts *are* self-conscious and performative engagements with the text and reading experience, which do not regard story as a ‘museum’ of story elements, but as a performance reflecting the nature of the reader’s subjective experiences and contexts while reading. In other words, the text’s antimonies *and* the reader’s involvement co-operate to both perform and reconfigure the dimensions of the story.

TTP contains various metafictional elements such as an unreliable narrator, ambiguous language, footnotes, and mise-en-abyme – especially regarding de Selby’s biography and outlandish theories. *TTP*’s metafictionality exploits the ambiguity of borders along fixed story

⁴⁸ Michael Patrick Gillespie, *The Aesthetics of Chaos: Nonlinear Thinking and Contemporary Literary Criticism* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), p. 39.

⁴⁹ Gillespie, *Aesthetics of Chaos*, p. 39.

⁵⁰ Gillespie, *Aesthetics of Chaos*, p. 39.

frames, for example, by blurring the ficto-realistic boundaries through obviously fictionalized footnotes; telling a story, though by the narrator's own suggestion, he has no memory to tell a story; and the catalyzing of the reader to speculate – e.g., story-tell – in order to reconcile the novel's incoherent absurdities. The subversion of fixed frames *is* its self-criticism, which, as we learned in Chapter Two, ensures its iteration under new expressive parameters. This is because the criticism of a convention or frame is an inherent challenge to its use in the world, of which, the text itself is part. Consequently, fiction and reality demonstrate self-conscious glimpses into each other's own constructedness. The very dynamic of a processual problematization of a fiction-reality suggests a necessary inter-activity between things such as story, novel, and reader, to name a few. The coming sections of this chapter therefore establish the necessity of this environment surrounding the storyworld of the text via its metafictional paradoxes while unpacking the logical problems identified in this section. These environments, I will show, justify these 'illogicalities' as logical manifestations of a living metafiction, situated in a living metafictioning manifold.

Mark Currie (1995), describes metafiction as a 'borderline discourse', meaning it problematizes preconceived assumptions such as artificial and natural, or fictions and realities.⁵¹ Currie writes:

[Metafiction is] a kind of writing which places itself on the border between fiction and criticism, and which takes that border as its subject. [...] The borderline between

⁵¹ Mark Currie, 'Introduction', in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (Harlow: Longman Group Limited, 1995), pp. 1-18 (p. 2).

fiction and criticism has been a point of convergence where fiction and criticism have assimilated each other's insights, producing a self-conscious energy on both sides.⁵²

Metafiction implies a metafictionality of reality, and also suggests, in turn, a reality to fictions. Currie notes that not only are metafictional situations situated on the borders of various narrative planes – i.e., fiction and reality – but also, they locate the problematic elements that have gone into establishing those narrative planes as fixed things in themselves.⁵³ It is not that metafictional situations affirm or negate the veracity of any particular narrative, but that they make those planes self-conscious about their own identities – allowing them to assimilate elements from each other by disrupting their integrity as 'self-enclosed' things-in-themselves.

Metafiction straddles the point where object-events – conventions – are constructed (fictions) but are also things in the world that can be explored (criticism). However, being a performative text, metafictional situations transform the fiction-criticism (material-event) boundary from a text commenting on its own constructedness, to a text that *also* re-defines the environment in which it is situated and being read. Its self-referentiality ripples into the readers' reality – thus resituating itself.⁵⁴

The use of 'criticism' (reality) must be taken loosely. Currie writes:

[t]his difference [between these two types of criticism] illustrates an important preliminary distinction in the way that metafictional situations dramatise the boundary between

⁵² Currie, 'Introduction', p. 2.

⁵³ As we will see, Currie's use of the word criticism carries with it different meanings.

⁵⁴ In this way, we can imagine a pond of ripples interacting with other objects that in turn produce their own ripples, and so on – this metaphor will be revisited in Chapter Five as an alternative to the more conventional metafictional 'mirror' which is understood to reflect reality, rather than *diffract* it.

fiction and criticism, either as illusion-breaking authorial intervention or as integrated dramatization of the external communication between author and reader.⁵⁵

Metafiction dramatizes the boundary between fiction and reality by calling into question the reality of the fiction and the fictionality of the reader's reality. If we take 'author', as one of many mediating elements incorporating a plurality of factors feeding into a text's manifestation, we begin to see the paradoxical feedback loops between fiction and criticism (linguistically speaking) and fictions and reality (materially speaking). Therefore, metafiction and neocybernetics are not opposed to each other. In the same way that the reader cannot transform into the physical novel, and vice versa, and must maintain material identities, we are nonetheless coupled to each other and influence the material and meaningful emergence and expressiveness of one another.⁵⁶ In other words, we preserve a (neocybernetic) relationship with the novel while maintaining our performative metafictional capacities *both* in the expression of our identities, *and* in our decentered subject-object relationships with the world's things. Neocybernetics allows us to speak about this simultaneity – metafictionality being a condition of a living material-discursive identity *and* the ethos and practice informing engagements with other things (explored in Part Two). The contexts of creation and of reading play into *authoring*

⁵⁵ Currie, 'Introduction', p. 4.

⁵⁶ This idea is more fully explored in Chapter Five. However, this may first appear to be at odds with the neocybernetic theories used, since neocybernetic systems are understood to be 'operationally closed' – that is, self-enclosed as systems, but open to the environment which allows the 'closed' system to thrive as a living 'organism'. It seems paradoxical that neocybernetics compliments the study of metafiction when metafiction inherently disrupt the assumed boundaries of things such as fiction and reality, while neocybernetics maintains stricter identities as operationally closed systems such as, for example, the technological (artifact) and psychic systems (reader). But this is not a problem with the theories, but rather with the modern representational paradigms. Indeed, from a performative approach, conventions must be 'iterative' and 'subversive', and from a neocybernetic approach, they must be 'closed' to a fundamental identity, while also being 'open' to changes in response to the environment thus ensuring a system's – or story's – resilience.

a certain meaningful text in the world, just as texts help author different meaningful expressions – they are ‘mutually entangled’.⁵⁷

TTP as Living Neocybernetic Circuit

Neocybernetics is useful for understanding metafiction (and technology/artifacts more generally) as living systems.⁵⁸ In this section, I explore a certain logic in the illogicality of *TTP*, and, paradoxically, by problematizing modern ways of thought, neocybernetics helps make sense of the incoherent ‘noise’ that is *TTP*’s storyworld. The randomness and absurdities of the novel may be just that, as far as the storyworld goes as a thing-in-itself. But one of the key contentions of this thesis is that objects are never merely things-in-themselves. Instead, objects are living events, of which any distinction as objectified thing-in-itself is merely a temporary and pragmatic distinction for the sake of making sense of what can otherwise be considered a nonsensical environment. What is perceivable to us, are constructions, or in the terms of this thesis, fiction-realities.⁵⁹ This section more fully outlines a neocybernetic framework before applying its methodology to *TTP* more robustly in coming sections.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, pp. 151-152, where she describes the material and the discursive as ‘[...] *mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity*’ [Italics in original]. Intra-activity, or ‘[...] *mutual constitution of entangled agencies* [which are] *only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement*’ (33; Italics in original), can be regarded here as the performative operations of system-environments, or text-contexts, which do not signify a sole independent author, but a multiplicity of object-events that only appear as object-events at the moment they make themselves present to each other. This is explored in greater depth in Part Two of this thesis. Here it serves to complicate the anthropocentric notion of the author, and the classical distinctions between our linguistic and material selves.

⁵⁸ ‘Technology’ is often used interchangeably in this thesis to mean ‘artifact’ or ‘object’ more generally, as things that are necessarily coupled to and embedded in the human experience, and which mediate extended abilities in our experiences. Clarke uses ‘technology’ in the sense of technological advancements (especially in transformative genres like science fiction), but also in the sense of writing and narrative being types of technologies that create meaning in the world of the human experience, along with our societies and psyches. See, Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, pp. 18-19. See also, Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. viii, who defines her use of the term ‘vitality’ to describe the capacity of all objects and things to have ‘trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own’.

⁵⁹ That is, our realities consist of myriad fictions in constant iteration-subversion with, and in, each other.

A neocybernetic system is a co-emerging system incorporating the biotic, meta-biotic, and technological systems into continuously evolving system-environments.⁶⁰ As Hans-Georg Moeller (2006) clarifies, the environment is everything outside a system that helps distinguish a system as such.⁶¹ That which is outside a system helps define the boundaries of a system. For this reason, object-systems must retain iterative semblance while also metamorphosing within its environment. Herbrechter notes that, '[o]nly by affirming the process of repetition does one gain access to what is different'.⁶² In this way, environments only change in the sense that inter/intra-dependent systems constituting something thought of as an environment are in constant flux while iteratively recognizable. Neocybernetic systems in other words, maintain an emerging and entangling identity, not as a system-in-itself, but by its ability to maintain such an evolving identity by remaining entangled with its larger environment. Neocybernetic systems, then, appear to be material processes of iteration and subversion with and between the world's people, cultures, and things.

The neocybernetic human can be seen in autopoietic and non-autopoietic ways according to Clarke. It is worth making two preliminary points: first, I wish to foreground Clarke's work, which takes on increased prominence in this chapter, and informs the methodological approach of this thesis.⁶³ Secondly, my approach differs from Clarke's neocybernetic theories in that he does not consider the technological system to be autopoietic, i.e., living. I will show however, that *TTP* allows for a view of a living technological system,

⁶⁰ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, pp. 16-19, discusses how the biotic (biological) and metabiotic (social and psychic) systems are autopoietic.

⁶¹ Hans-Georg Moeller, *Luhmann Explained : From Souls to Systems, Ideas Explained* (Chicago: Open Court, 2006), p. 219.

⁶² Herbrechter, 'Postmodern', p. 62.

⁶³ See, for example Bruce Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Signs* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); Bruce Clarke, *Neocybernetics and Narrative* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Bruce Clarke and Mark B.N. Hansen, eds., *Emergence and Embodiment: New Essays on Second-Order Systems Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); and Bruce Clarke, and Mark B.N. Hansen, 'Introduction: Neocybernetic Emergence', in *Emergence and Embodiment: New Essays on Second-Order Systems Theory*, ed. by Bruce; Mark B.N. Hansen Clarke (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 1-25.

which in turn informs this thesis' argument that object-systems no matter their ontological formulation, share an entangling and emergent trajectory with and in the other object-systems of the environment. Importantly, this allows for a more agential and affective view of objects as co-participants in the metafictioning manifold.

Indeed, the difference between living and non-living systems already gets blurred. Sarah Dillon (2011) writes '[...] synthetic autopoietic systems ought necessarily to be considered living; Maturana and Varela's theory thus challenges our received opinions about the division between what is artificial and what is natural.'⁶⁴ The artificial influences the 'realities' of that which is natural, which in turn influences the artificialities that are produced in our particular 'reality.' Similarly, Waugh claims that metafiction disrupts the received boundary of what is real and what is fiction, '[i]n showing us how literary fiction creates its imaginary worlds, metafiction helps us understand how the reality we live day by day is similarly constructed, similarly "written"'.⁶⁵ Re-contextualized autopoietically, Waugh shows that metafiction, when observed, influence (e.g., mediate) the way the social system is observed by the psychic system. Echoing cybernetician Stafford Beer, non-living machines, such as '[...] firms and industries, clinics and hospitals, professional bodies, departments of state, and whole countries' can be autopoietic.⁶⁶ Dillon contends literature too, can be added to that list.⁶⁷

Maturana comes to see an epistemological and linguistic problem to how this 'living' is organized, as he could not explain what constituted an autonomous living system in a vocabulary that maintained autonomy. He writes:

⁶⁴ Dillon, 'Chaotic Narrative', p. 154. See also, Humberto Maturana, and Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980), p. 82.

⁶⁵ Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 18.

⁶⁶ Stafford Beer, 'Preface', in *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*, ed. by Robert S. Cohen and Marx W. Wartofsky (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980), pp. 63-72 at p. 70; quoted in Dillon, 'Chaotic Narrative', p. 154.

⁶⁷ Dillon, 'Chaotic Narrative', p. 154.

[...] any attempt to characterize living systems with notions of purpose or function was doomed to fail because these notions are intrinsically referential and cannot be operationally used to characterize any system as an autonomous entity. [...] eventually, I made a distinction between what I called self-referred and allo-referred systems.⁶⁸

The self-referred eventually became autopoiesis, the nature of living systems defined ‘as unities through the basic circularity of their production of their components.’⁶⁹ In terms of the storyworld of *TTP*, it can be viewed as an autopoietic system since it perpetuates itself, beyond the ending of the physical novel through its self-referential, metafictional form; the narrator’s seemingly eternal journey *must* extend beyond the timeframe set by the covers of the novel. This means that the novel’s self-reference is necessary for its continued emergence as a living entity (necessarily coupled to societies and readers).

The allo-referred became allopoietic, which can only ‘be characterized with reference to a context.’⁷⁰ The allopoietic is that which emerges out of the environment of autopoietic systems. The physicality of the book, for instance, is allopoietic since it emerged from the environments of ‘compounded [...] autopoietic systems.’⁷¹ The novel is a ‘machine’ – an artifact – emerged from the environment of human psychic and social systems.⁷² Maturana and Varela characterize a ‘machine’ as, ‘[...] defined by the nature of their components and by the purpose that they fulfill in their operations as man-made artifacts.’⁷³ Similarly, graphic novel

⁶⁸ Maturana, ‘Introduction’, p. xiii.

⁶⁹ Maturana, ‘Introduction’, p. xiv.

⁷⁰ Maturana, ‘Introduction’, p. xiii.

⁷¹ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 18.

⁷² Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 18.

⁷³ Humberto R. Maturana, and Francisco J. Varela, ‘Autopoiesis: The Organization of the Living’, in

theorist, Scott McCloud identifies any human activity not associated with our two basic instincts for survival and reproduction, as ‘art’.⁷⁴ The point is all man-made objects serve as ‘technological machines’, and though they might not have immediate relevance to our survival, they are maintained through our very survival, which in turn sustains the technological system of machines.⁷⁵

In neocybernetics, the biotic is the biological autopoietic system, characterized by organic systems, including cells, bodies (including the brain), and organisms.⁷⁶ The biotic is included with the metabiotic, as self-referential autopoietic systems.⁷⁷ Metabiotic systems are not perpetuating life in an organic sense, as much as they make life meaningful.⁷⁸ Metabiotic systems thus include the psychic system, which operates in the medium of consciousness, and the social system operating through the medium of communication.⁷⁹ What makes this biotic and metabiotic environment *neocybernetic*, however, is the integration of the non-autopoietic – that is, technology – which is integral to our metabiotic evolution.⁸⁰

Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living, ed. by Robert S. Cohen and Marx W. Wartofsky (London: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980), pp. 63-134, p. 77. Clarke characterizes these machines as ‘technological systems’; see, Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 19.

⁷⁴ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: William Morrow, 1993). p. 164. McCloud’s theories, and graphic representations, have much to contribute towards the often abstract ideas of metafiction, in particular regarding frames, and how their juxtapositions contribute to time and movement in narratives.

⁷⁵ This concept of ‘technological machines’ resonates with Michel Foucault’s (1988) notion of ‘technologies of the self’, in which he argues that in order to be free and happy, humans must first reflect critically and morally on themselves via certain technologies, or things, as technologies of production; technologies of signs; technologies of power; and technologies of self; and thereby challenge dogmas of scientific discourses relating to the production of things; the use of signs, meanings, and symbols; the conduct of individuals towards certain ends or domination; and individual pursuits of ‘happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.’ See, Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. ed. by Luther Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H Hutton (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), p. 18. See also, Herman Nilson, ‘Michel Foucault and the Games of Truth’, in *Michel Foucault and the Games of Truth*, ed. by Herman Nilson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), pp. 97-102, pp. 97-98. Indeed, coming chapters elaborate upon these technological machines, from a neocybernetic perspective, which include within it, the specifics of Foucault’s framework, and which more fully embody Andrew Pickering’s ‘technologies of the nonmodern self’ which challenge Cartesian, Newtonian, and Enlightenment discourses in the modern world. See, Andrew Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 176.

⁷⁶ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, pp. 16-19.

⁷⁷ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p.18

⁷⁸ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p.18

⁷⁹ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 19.

⁸⁰ Technology, broadly speaking, is inseparable from our bio-cultural experiences of the world.

Non-autopoietic systems are abiotic, consisting of matter-energy (the dynamical and thermodynamic mediums), and machines, or technological systems mediated through the medium of media.⁸¹ This is not to present a tautology, but to suggest that there exists a material reality serving as a medium from which media (new materials) emerge. ‘Media’ is the formal manifestation to the more metaphysically conceived ‘medium’. Despite being non-living, machines are perpetuated by the ecology of metabiotic systems. While Clarke sees technology’s necessary entanglement *to* the human in order to continue emerging non-autopoietically, this chapter and thesis subverts Clarke’s human/technology dichotomy by arguing that this very dynamic implies technology’s autopoietic, and our non-autopoietic, dimensions. Metafictionally, we become objects contributing to an autopoietically emergent *TTP*, for instance, just as it contributes to our own metabiotic dimensions.⁸² That is, in problematizing subject-object distinctions, human and artifact autopoietically ensure each other’s autopoietic emergence by virtue of being inexorably entangled. Minds, technologies, and societies are different systems operating in different mediums, but as I more fully articulate in Part Two of this thesis, these system’s coupling ensure the differential materialization of human *and* environment.

The role of the observer is fundamental to distinguishing (first-order) cybernetics from (second-order) neocybernetics. While the field of cybernetics attempts to make sense of the hybrid processes between human and machine (e.g., technology as extension to human ability), neocybernetics goes one step further by acknowledging that we are not separate from these

⁸¹ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 19. Regarding the abiotic, Clarke does not go into any great depth in this area. My own research, however, by integrating theories of performativity situates these abiotic elements as part of the overall performatively neocybernetic ‘metafictioning manifold’. See, especially, Part Two of this thesis.

⁸² This is covered in greater depth in coming sections, both in the plot of the novel, and with regards to the relationship between it and the reader.

artifacts, but situated in a co-participatory relationship with them.⁸³ In other words, there is an affective bidirectional link with things. Theorist Soren Brier (2011) writes, ‘[t]hus the construction recurs on the constructor itself’.⁸⁴ If observation is key to making the world intelligible, then those intelligible things too, in a neocybernetic framework, affect the human observer. It is not just that our minds observe other systems in the environment, but that those other systems observe us. This claim is further supported by new materialist theories in Chapters Four and Five, but they are inherent in neocybernetics which allows us to establish its living dynamism (somewhat absent in new materialist theories but necessary to the arguments of coming chapters).

The placement of the observer, inside or outside a system makes a difference as to whether the system is considered cybernetic or neocybernetic. In cybernetics, the observer engages the machine from the ‘outside’. The observer sees the system as something to be controlled so as to regulate its trajectory. Clarke writes,

The Governor controls the system it governs through *negative feedback*: it measures a process (extracts information about energy) and feeds that measure back into the process so as to damp its amplifications past a set-point with a reduction that steers it back to its desired rate.⁸⁵

Neocybernetically speaking, we are not concerned with a human governor – though as we will see in future chapters, the paradoxical necessity of a human observer, though decentered, is

⁸³ The distinction here serves to show that there is a field of research concerned with the systemic interplay of humans and nonhumans, and within that field, a subfield that stresses systemic self-referentiality, which lends itself especially well to the study of metafiction.

⁸⁴ Brier, ‘Cybernetics’, p. 91.

⁸⁵ Clarke, *Systems Theory*, p. 216.

necessary and echoes these first-order sentiments. Neocybernetics does not necessarily discount a governor either, but explores the way they too are being governed in systemic ways. Whereas the governor regulates the system in accordance with environmental contexts, neocybernetics, conversely, 'seeks' a new idea of 'normalcy' based on integrating systemic deviations – because to be alive is to 'seek' evolutionary changes. Simultaneous self-referential observations between observer and environment requires the system emerge with the integrated knowledge of its observations.

Regarding the logicity of neocybernetic systems, Clarke writes:

Second-order systems theory has pursued that wholesale reconstruction of operational logic. These neocybernetic developments have pressed the analysis of recursive processes beyond organic, mechanical, and computational control processes toward the formal autonomy that endows natural systems with their cognitive capacities.⁸⁶

Neocybernetic systems, as (meta)biotic circuitry, in other words, whether completely biological or not, resembles living organisms endowed with cognitive ability. As mentioned earlier, Clarke does not regard the technological system to be autopoietic in any way, but here we see a path toward those ends if such second-order human-nonhuman hybrids exhibit their own bio-logic.⁸⁷

Clarke writes,

⁸⁶ Clarke, *Systems Theory*, p. 220.

⁸⁷ Indeed, the argument can be made that the technological system is natural as it occurs naturally in the world wherever there is a confluence of activity between humans and environmental factors.

[T]hey [machines/technology] emerge only out of environments compounded with the metabiotic autopoietic systems [i.e., social and psychic] of (not necessarily human) minds and societies. That is, technics is constitutionally paradoxical: it partakes of autopoiesis while not producing it.⁸⁸

Again, while taking a different view of technology's paradoxical nature, it is nonetheless worth acknowledging technology's necessary coupling to human's social and psychic systems which are in constant states of interconnectedness and metamorphosis. Clarke writes:

[T]echnological systems, while nonautopoietic, are nonetheless as emergently metabiotic as psyches and societies, and therefore are a species of meaning systems in their own right. [...] [T]he posthuman is something more precise than a mash-up of the human and the mechanical. It is bound up with the further unfolding of a metabiotic emergence of nonautopoietic systems and structures, distinct from, yet coeval with, the coevolution of autopoietic meaning systems.⁸⁹

Clarke acknowledges technology's emergent inter-relational dynamics. This is what *TTP* demonstrates to the reader, both in its metafictional representations and in its neocybernetic processes. On the one hand, the entanglements of people and technologies grow in the storyworld, for example, with the centaur-like hybrids of man and bicycle (293), mentioned earlier; and on the other hand, the physical novel maintains life by entangling meaningfully with the reader and their social contexts.

⁸⁸ Clarke, *Neocybernetics and Narrative*, p. 14.

⁸⁹ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 19.

R.L. Rutsky (2017) explores this shift in understanding technology as autopoietic and complimentary to the human through the work of Octavia Butler. Rutsky writes,

[T]echnology is no longer seen as part of a dialectic that figures it either as *instrumentum*, a means to human ends, or as out-of-control and dangerous [i.e., the fear of machines taking over humanity]. It is instead presented as part of what Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela have called an autopoietic system, capable of reproducing and maintaining itself.⁹⁰

What is unique about *TTP*, is that it is aware of itself as an element in a larger autopoietic environment: a neocybernetic system as well as a model of that system – the sections below demonstrate this. Its status as technology – cultural artifact – must be reconciled with its storyworld if it is to be a (meta)narrative at all, and be self-aware of its living bio-logical entanglements and emergence with people, things, and societies.

Clarke writes:

Chronologically as well as conceptually, the unfolding of the theory of self-referential systems runs parallel with the metafictional and “cognitive” turns in narrative literature [...] [t]he foregrounding of paradox by narrative embedding, metalepsis, and *mise-en-abyme* are to postmodern narrative aesthetics [...] what self-

⁹⁰ R.L. Rutsky, *Technologies*. ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini, *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 182-95, p. 95. See also, Octavia Butler’s *The Xenogenesis Trilogy*, consisting of: Octavia Butler, *Dawn* (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1987); Octavia Butler, *Adulthood Rites* (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1988); and Octavia Butler, *Imago* (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1989), which are explored by Clarke, and Haraway, precisely for these technological implications: Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, pp.167-192; and Donna Haraway, ‘The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse’, in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 228.

referential recursion and systems differentiation – the emergence of systems within systems – are to second-order systems theory.⁹¹

Metafictions and neocybernetic systems are synonymous: the narrative self-perpetuates through the subjective focalization of the observer on the paradoxes of the elements within the text. Through this continuous process, texts become narratives of meaning and (mis)understanding – since a misunderstanding *is* an understanding of some sort.⁹² Furthermore, since observers vary, as do multiple readings by the same observers, systems always yield new information and meaning. Metafictions and neocybernetic systems are emergent and never static. The existence of paradox within texts, guarantees an endless array of (non)sense-making – new materials. Thus, this thesis cannot talk about systems and fictions as metafictions without also speaking about technology, or things that emerge from disparate systems observing each other.

Technological systems are one such *storytelling* embedded with our metabiotic social and psychic systems.⁹³ Tzvetan Todorov (1977) writes,

The embedded narrative is the image of that great abstract narrative of which all the others are merely infinitesimal parts as well as the image of the embedding narrative which directly precedes it. To be the narrative of a narrative is the fate of all narrative which realizes itself through embedding.⁹⁴

⁹¹ See, Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, pp. 95-97; quoted in Clarke, *Systems Theory*, p. 221. See also, Joseph, Tabbi, *Cognitive Fictions* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Tom LeClair, *In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

⁹² See, Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*. trans. John Bednarz jr. and Dirk Baecker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 158, regarding (mis)understanding.

⁹³ That is, despite Clarke's stance on technology not being autopoietic, my claim is that they are autopoietic, though not in a biological sense.

⁹⁴ Tzvetan Todorov, 'Narrative Men', in *The Poetics of Prose* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 72-73. See also, Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 97, who draws upon Todorov to support his argument that metalepsis (the compromising of narrative levels) follows from metadiegesis (narrative embedding), suggesting what has defined in this thesis as fiction-realities.

Neocybernetic systems are conglomerates of object-systems embedded with/in one another, making themselves relevant stories, precisely by their ability to continue iterating and subverting their own boundaries. System-narratives are simultaneously self-contained *and* unbounded – their boundaries and inter/intra-textual reaches are a matter of perspective; defined by their particular relations to other object-systems in the environment (i.e., with the reader), they are performatively articulated. Clarke writes,

In autopoietic systems theory the system-environment distinction exhibits a double positivity. There is no shearing off into exclusivities of subject over object, system idealism or environmental materialism. Environments secure the being of systems, that secure the knowing of environments in an indivisible loop'.⁹⁵

System and environment differentially co-create each other through self-referential processes of embedding and coupling with/in other system-narratives. Understanding object-systems as storytelling events prompts a questioning of the substance of its self-referentiality. Cognition perpetuates the systemic and environmental processes of inter/intra-textual storytelling. This ‘cognition,’ is not only of the observing mind, but also of the manifold of coeval system-narratives that determine an environment of systemic co-evolution – its ongoing autopoietic storytelling. Metabiotically speaking, Clarke contends that our psychic, social, and technological systems ‘are now the cultural contexts through which stories of metamorphosis weave their uncanny interconnections.’⁹⁶ In other words Clarke is suggesting that the act of

⁹⁵ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 61.

⁹⁶ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 4. Clarke, in this work, is speaking specifically about narratives of metamorphosis – depictions of changes in the human who is situated in particular environments. However, as I am arguing generally, metafiction is a neocybernetic model of a neocybernetic human reality of storytellings, and

observation is crucial in the realization of a narrative.⁹⁷ The act of observing and being observed, and scaffolding of an experiential and material world constitutes *the* cognitive act.⁹⁸

With the understanding of an affectual simultaneity between objects cognizing emergent material into being, we can now turn to *TTP*. The narrator illustrates the metafictional/neocybernetic process when his exchange with Joe, the narrator's soul, turns paradoxical, begging an observational investigation for meaning. Here, the narrator is led to a bed by Policeman MacCruiskeen to spend the night. As the narrator gets comfortable on the bed, he feels his body unwind, reflecting out the window at the stars in the night sky (325). The narrator hears his soul murmur something, but it does not sound as if it came from within him, but outside himself. He narrates that he imagines his soul is lying beside him, and so he tries to keep his hands neatly at his side so as not to touch his soul's body, which is probably '[...] scaly or slimy like an eel or with a repelling roughness like a cat's tongue' (327). Joe disrupts the narrator, upon hearing him and is insulted at the narrator for suggesting his body might be scaly. The comic exchange ends with:

Why was Joe so disturbed at the suggestion that he had a body? What if he *had* a body? A body with another body inside it in turn, thousands of such bodies within each other like the skins of an onion, receding to some imaginable ultimum? Was I in turn merely a link in a vast sequence of imponderable beings, the world I knew merely the interior of the being whose inner voice myself was? (327)

as such it is not that readers observe their realities into existence, but that all autopoietic systems are engaging the same observational behavior.

⁹⁷ This sentence seems obvious. However, it is meant in a non-anthropocentric way. As will be discussed in depth in Chapter Four, observation manifests as objects make themselves present to each other. It is not an inherent trait or capability that objects possess.

⁹⁸ This is elaborated upon further below.

When the narrator begins pondering the metadiegetic possibilities of his existence, he exemplifies the dynamics of a neocybernetic system. The metafiction/neocybernetic process involves imagining Joe as possessing different ontologies. At the same time, the act of observing Joe causes the narrator to look at himself as ‘text’, and as part of the ongoing *mise-en-abyme*, that he himself might be part of. The observer is integrated into the textual system, observing its operations from the ‘outside’, as well as being an elemental component of its processes from the ‘inside’. There is no clear distinction between outside and inside, just recursive observation from with/in the system-environment of, in this case, bodies and souls.

Neocybernetically, a systems’ understanding takes a metafictional turn by ‘putting the paradox to work’.⁹⁹ The narrator, in observing the paradox, begins a systemic process of constructing a network of metaleptic planes of bodies housed within each other like nested boxes. This infinite metaleptic digression causes him to question his own place in the ‘world.’ He begins to see himself not as separate from Joe, but perhaps in a network of bodies and souls in which it is possible he is himself a soul for some other body.

Their general exchange helps identify the way metafictionality animates observers into contemplation, leading not only to a realization of the elusiveness of trying to contain the boundaries of the system-environment, but also understanding that observers themselves are indistinct from the manifold.¹⁰⁰ First, there is the paradoxical idea of Joe, the soul, having a body. This paradox is ‘activated’ by the comment that the body is scaly. The narrator confronts the illogicality of a body-less soul taking offense to such a comment. The narrator must seek to understand the reason for such an illogicality. What is striking about this exchange is that the

⁹⁹ Clarke, *Systems Theory*, p. 221.

¹⁰⁰ See, Chapter Two of this thesis for the rhetorical nature of metafiction, which does not persuade the reader of any representational understanding of the world (i.e., facts, realism, etc.), but performatively spurs the reader into contemplating (assuming the reader’s willingness) the constructed nature of our conventions.

unnamed narrator is supposed to be the body of the soul; instead an absurd dualism is created. Yet they interact and regard each other as different entities. For the narrator to suggest that Joe's body is most likely scaly, slimy, or rough like a cat's tongue, is an insult against himself (327).

However, the exchange between the narrator and Joe presents interesting interpretations. In a modern approach, this illogicality would have been dismissed through careful syllogistic reasoning. Furthermore, a sound conclusion, such as: 'If Joe is a soul, then he must have had a body at some time since all human bodies have souls' would be entirely possible. Therefore, the narrator makes Joe think of the body he once had and is upset to think of his human vessel as anything less than human. Or, one could reason that Joe has never had a body, but being familiar with earthly aesthetic tastes, particularly of his 'separate body,' the narrator, is perhaps reacting compulsively and forgetting that his body has died.¹⁰¹

Despite linear attempts to draw sound conclusions, it still ends in speculation. What appears as a linear explanatory narrative to understand Joe's anger with the narrator, is in fact nonlinear speculative narrativization – a differential systemic reconfiguration across metadiegetic levels.¹⁰² This carries with it pansychic and hylozoist implications. Indeed, the distinction between matter and mind is blurred when speculation is the act of simultaneously observing and materializing new matter. The narrator's speculation on Joe's bodies transforms Joe from a soul to a complex inter/intra-textual system-narrative. The larger paradox here is

¹⁰¹ At this stage of the novel the reader is not necessarily aware that the narrator is dead. However, the fabulatory nature of the plot after the narrator reaches for the box at Mather's house, and the fact that he hears Joe as not coming from within but outside, are perhaps the biggest clues to the reader.

¹⁰² Though outside the scope of this thesis, there is connection to pansychic philosophies, including the more recent nonhuman manifestation as *speculative realism*. See, for example, Steven Shaviro, 'Consequences of Pansychism', in *The Nonhuman Turn*, ed. by Richard Grusin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), pp. 19-44. Shaviro notes that the commonality of all things is that matter has mind, or sentience (19-20). This is complimentary to the hylozoist features – that all matter has life – of neocybernetics mentioned earlier in the chapter. If the narrator and Joe are both embedded system-narratives reacting and speculating to/about each other, then it follows that the act of speculation is the act of *realization* in as much as these two entities continue to differentiate themselves from each other in some way and thereby continue co-perpetuating the other's materialization.

that by complicating the entity through speculation, new (temporary) consensus is reached.¹⁰³ This speculative narrativization is exactly what the reader is catalyzed into doing with *TTP*; but the novel continuously disrupts consensus, thus avoiding any fixed representation. The act of making something intelligible *is* the act of problematizing it because it is always situated in a nonlinear environment which we seek to reconcile in linear terms. There is, however, a complex paradox to nonlinearity: linear conclusions are possible in nonlinear systems. All that is required are proverbial ‘snapshots’ which trace particular trajectories, evolutions or histories towards specific conclusions.

As with the narrator and Joe, the reader observes a paradox with specific information and an illogical conclusion about the novel. This represents *TTP* as a whole. A linear reading may be inductively true according to principles used to investigate it, but ultimately it is still *speculation* – the act of materializing *a* reasonable conclusion. Past critics have only offered speculative interpretations despite the disguise of proven argumentation.¹⁰⁴ The novel is so complex, that explanations of scientific criticism, Catholic faith, and complex rhetorical shifts, are equally plausible and intertwined representations in this novelistic system. *TTP* however offers an explanation to its complexity without minimizing its complexity through linear explanation. In the passage with Joe and the narrator is the paradox’s heuristic capacity to teach the reader how to read the text by engaging the plurality of speculation through performative and systemic approaches by analogizing a neocybernetic framework – or narratology – from which to read the novel.

¹⁰³ When speculative acts have ceased and new judgments have been reached, it is only then that the new consensus’ complexity is minimized into linear parameters. That is, it only appears linear when regarding each premise as fixed representations in which new speculative endings take on a point by point trajectory from beginning to end.

¹⁰⁴ As do I, self-referentially so, and therefore arguing congruently with the performative frameworks employed throughout. My conclusions embody an operationally closed spirit of constant reconfiguration, rather than making fixed claims about *TTP* and metafiction generally.

First Problem (The Third Policeman as Neocybernetic Model)

In a Cartesian reading there are strong metafictional effects, but in an autopoietic reading there are non-linear metafictional processes at work resulting in logical understandings of the story as a nonhuman ecology of elements across metaleptic levels *in* play. The first problem, of chapter twelve recouring to chapter four, can be understood as not actually recouring back onto itself, but instead proceeding along time's arrow as a continuous narrative, self-organizing as elements (such as Divney) enter the system, thereby changing the narrative relationships between those things. In this way, the general structure of the plot is a linear self-organizing system in that new elements perpetuate narrative changes. There is no way of knowing what past 'recursions' were like. Likewise, there is no way of knowing if the narrator and Divney will actually relive everything experienced in the narrated parts between the fourth and final chapters.

In entering the police station with Divney, the very idea of a 'starting point' is negated, as they experience the same scene differently. In neocybernetic systems, starting points and narrative emergence are irreversible and material conditions can never be replicated. The form and content are dependent upon each other. The plot then is non-linear, irreversible, self-reflexive and self-organizing in this way.¹⁰⁵ To clarify a point regarding (non)linearity, my suggestion is (throughout the thesis) that systems *are* linear in their progressions but are non-linear in the way they draw value or sustenance from their environment, other systems, and/or metaleptic levels.¹⁰⁶ That is, linear systems appear non-linear, and vice versa, when their

¹⁰⁵ See, Peter Stoicheff, 'The Chaos of Metafiction', in *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science*, ed. by N. Katherine Hayles (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 85-99, p.85 who lists the very features as shared by chaotic (e.g., complex) systems and metafictional texts in 'the phenomenal world'.

¹⁰⁶ This is especially evident in Chapters Three and Five.

neocybernetic/metafictional processes are observed. Linearity and non-linearity are differentially co-creative components of the same phenomenal processes.

TTP's first problem of recursion is addressed as cyclic (i.e., a revisiting) in the critical literature. Brooker describes this dynamic as characteristic of the novel's narrative running along "time's cycle" rather than "time's arrow".¹⁰⁷ Brooker contends:

Divney's arrival suggests that if hell does go round and round, it regularly picks up new passengers. In a continuing *Third Policeman*, we might reasonably expect any number of newly dead characters to show up, doing unwitting atonement...it would not be wholly repetitive.¹⁰⁸

Keith Hopper (2009), echoes this:

At the end of the novel both Noman [the unnamed narrator] and the reader understand that he must endure this torment for eternity, repeating his macabre odyssey *ad infinitum*: "Hell goes round and round. In shape it is circular and by nature it is interminable, repetitive and very nearly unbearable."¹⁰⁹

Brooker and Hopper's explanations reflect the irreconcilability of modern reasoning: it is at once repetitive, yet not repetitive. That is, this hellish experience repeats infinitely, yet

¹⁰⁷ Brooker, *O'Brien*, p. 51.

¹⁰⁸ Brooker, *O'Brien*, p. 51.

¹⁰⁹ Hopper, *Flann O'Brien*, p. 41; The portion in quotes comes from the final page of *The Third Policeman* after the 'Publisher's Note'. Keith Hopper's footnote, p. 234, footnote 73, notes that the 'Publisher's Note' and excerpt were taken from the initial draft of the manuscript. See, Flann O'Brien, 'Publisher's Note', in *The Complete Novels*, ed. by Everyman's Library (New York: Everyman's Library, 1967), pp. 405-06, p. 406.

implicitly, cannot be fully repetitive if it ‘picks up new passengers’.¹¹⁰ Neocybernetics helps elucidate how hell, in *TTP*, is not repetitive. Modern reasoning, that is, cannot account for the iterative-subversive aspects of the novel, and the hell depicted therein. It therefore begs the question: if the novel is indeed temporally repetitive, how can each ‘re-enactment’ be constitutive of different elements? By its own logic, the novel is not repetitive. Saying that the paradox is true, constitutes it as absurd according to a modern rationale. Ironically, through autopoiesis, the paradox makes more ‘linear’ sense, as the plot reflects a continuous emergence of narrative rather than infinite circular regression.¹¹¹

There is good reason for the paradox of, and emphasis on, repetition and recursion. Niklas Luhmann (2000) borrows the term *re-entry* from mathematician George Spencer Brown, to explain the use of paradox and recursion in autopoietic systems. ‘Reentry is always a tautological and ultimately paradoxical operation, which presupposes an imaginary space.’¹¹² It is the paradox of saying the same thing in two different ways that gives rise to new possibilities.

When something is said a first time, it is observed as something distinct. Thereafter, if observed again, with previous understandings, there is re-entry. Moeller writes,

A system distinguishes itself from its environment and thereby constitutes itself as a system. [...] Once a system has established itself by distinguishing itself from the environment, it can reintroduce this distinction within itself. It can, so to speak, become aware of this distinction.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Brooker, *O’Brien*, p. 51.

¹¹¹ The following explores this dynamic.

¹¹² Niklas Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 277.

¹¹³ Moeller, *Luhmann Explained*, pp. 223-224.

Self-reference is the system's self-awareness of distinctiveness from the environment, by way of the process of re-entry.¹¹⁴ In other words, re-entry describes the causal chains of iterations-subversions. That is, a system's self-awareness of distinctiveness from the environment plays into its ongoing emergence as a thing that is also in flux as its relationship with the environment changes. In *TTP*, the distinction of the plot's re-entry, as distinguished from the system of the story's linear narrative creates an overt representation of the process of re-entry.

Re-entry does not actually 're-enter' the system because those elements never left the system. In this context, it is helpful to touch upon Derrida's (1994) concept of hauntology.¹¹⁵ Derrida notes that, 'the singularity of any *first time* makes of it also a *last time*. [...] [T]he spirit comes by *coming back*, it figures *both* a dead man who comes back and a ghost whose expected return repeats itself, again and again'.¹¹⁶ Ghosts, plot trajectories, and the physicality of the novel, are events of new narrativizations. That is, they are *first-last times* whose presence is a 'return' of ongoing iterations of a past convention and new expressions. Paraphrasing Karen Barad (2012), to remember is to *re-member*, that is, to make present again that which has always been part of us in some way.¹¹⁷ *TTP* shows us that it is not only the ghosts that haunt us, but all matter which is continuously re-membered in our ongoing experiences. Divney is not destined to spend eternity sharing the narrator's hell, nor does this hell repeat itself in any classical sense. These materializations – proverbial ghostly manifestations – find some classical link to a given realm (or system-narrative), but like a ghost, inhabit others as well. Neocybernetically speaking,

¹¹⁴ Moeller, *Luhmann Explained*, p. 224. This is to say its systemic ontology becomes something – an element – in its continued emergence. It has knowledge of itself as a system.

¹¹⁵ See, for example, Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*. trans. P. Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994). See also, Herbrechter, 'Postmodern', pp. 60-63.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Herbrechter, 'Postmodern', p. 61. See also, Derrida, *Specters*, p. 10.

¹¹⁷ See, Karen Barad, 'Intra-Active Entanglements: An Interview with Karen Barad', ed. by Malou Jeuelskjaer and Nete Schwennesen (Kvinder, Kon & Forskning NR, 2012), pp. 10-24, p. 21. See also, Karen Barad, 'Diffracting Diffraction', *Parallax*, 20 (2014), 168-87, pp. 168-167 where Barad uses the metaphor of earthworms in the soil 're-turning' the soil, as in reconfiguring elements in a present-continuous re-membering of elements.

the storyworld is one system-narrative incorporating Divney and the narrator; a murder and a cashbox; a bicycle pump and a philosopher. Indeed, *TTP* is a story foregrounding the emplotment of these things. Conversely, there is no guarantee that Divney's wife, Peggy, for instance will end up in the narrator's hell (system-narrative) as she has little to no relation with the narrator. Instead, considering the nature of object-system-narratives to couple together as an ecology, in a so-called alternative universe/afterlife, there may be another system-narrative with an alternative plot trajectory populated by say, Divney, Peggy, and the 'ghosts' of their experiences together which may inform a different afterlife with Divney and Peggy, but not the narrator, for example. As readers, we must therefore think of these embedded system-narratives as reaching from other systems to constitute themselves as systems in the first place, *and* to recognize that any entity distinguished as an object-system is simultaneously haunting myriad system-narratives.

Re-entry is the moment when the system distinguishes itself from its environment, thereby proceeding in its self-organizational plot trajectory. A system's autopoietic progression is more fluid along time's arrow, with rupturing moments of self-awareness (re-entry) propelling the system in certain directions. It is useful to imagine re-entry as bifurcation points in the system. A bifurcation point is a term used in chaos theory to signify the moment when systems must 'make a decision' upon some 'element' influencing it. Observing these new elements, systems continue emerging by incorporating that 'data' into itself; the result is a different system than what existed before. The recursion from chapter twelve to chapter four, for example, constitutes the novel's self-referential re-entry – incorporating the story back into itself, into an emerging 'hell'.

At the moment of re-entry, when the narrator and Divney enter the police station, the system of the story reaches its bifurcation point. It shifts from a linear to a non-linear text, from

a simple system to a complex system in the reader's eyes. The narrator and Divney entering the police station again is the moment of re-entry which metafictionally transcends the physical covers of the book. We become aware of sixteen years of story that occurred before the front cover, and the possibility of an infinite progression of story occurring after the back cover. It seems then that the bifurcation point upon re-entering the police station with John Divney presents two 'decisions' to the story (as artifact and system) and the reader (as newly aware of always being part of that particular system). One is the linear route, which recourses along time's cycle (paradoxically non-linear), or the non-linear route, which proceeds in a linear fashion according to autopoietic principles. *TTP*, then, is an analogue neocybernetic model whose paradoxes are justified in a real-time autopoietic telling, yet in this real-time telling of the story, the narrator and his telling appear to be irreconcilable.

The Second Problem: Psychic (Mis)Information

TTP, then, maintains linear coherence despite its inherent paradoxes. The second problem is that the narrator and the act of narration do not cohere, contradictorily existing in separate frames, though only a few instances reveal this narratological incoherence. In the first chapter, the narrator says, 'I soon got to know it was a good school and a very expensive one but I did not pay over any money to the people who were in charge of it because I had not any. All this and a lot more I understood clearly later' (224). It is unclear how the narrator would come to know something more clearly in the future, if the reference points in the past are constantly erased from memory.

Earlier in the chapter, the narrator appears to know his name, yet later goes on to be unaware of his name, which is problematic for a first-person, past-tense narrator. When the narrator goes to retrieve the box of cash, Divney tells him that should he encounter anyone, to

reply that he knows nothing of the house he is in, nor what he is looking for. The scene and chapter conclude:

‘I don’t even know my own name,’ I answered.

This was a remarkable thing for me to say because the next time I was asked my name I could not answer. I did not know. (235)

The narrator remains nameless throughout the novel. When he meets Mathers, there is the following exchange:

‘What is your name?’ he asked sharply.

I was surprised at this question. It had no bearing on my own conversation but I did not notice its irrelevance because I was shocked to realize that, simple as it was, I could not answer it. I did not know my name, did not remember who I was. [...] I found I was sure of nothing save my search for the black box. But I knew that the other man’s name was Mathers, and that he had been killed with a [bicycle] pump and spade. I had no name. (245)

One can assume from his language that he regains his identity and capability to narrate this novel at some future time. As the first problem suggests, he should not be able to recover what has been lost in such a recursive afterlife – the recursive nature of the plot should further degenerate into incoherent noise.

TTP’s narrator cannot remember anything of the past, narrating the novel as if he were experiencing everything for the first time. When Divney dies, and joins the narrator in the

afterlife, the narrator proceeds without recollection of what he has done over the past three days (400-404). However, despite the narrator's faulty memory, he still narrates in the past tense, creating a metafictional effect regarding the novel's linguistic coherence. Would he not have forgotten the contents of the novel by the time he has reached the point in the future from which he is narrating? The fact that the narrator is able to coherently narrate his story negates the idea that the plot trajectory must, of necessity, degenerate into further nonsense.

The paradox also begs the question: why not just write the novel in the present tense? In linear terms, this would make more sense. *TTP* would maintain its metafictional nature through the plot's autopoeitic trajectory. However, a past tense narration presents a deeper and stronger metafictional position by separating the narrator from his narration. The narrator of *TTP*, as observing system, occupies two narrative frames.¹¹⁸ Much has been discussed above about observation as an act between entities, but drawing our attention to a readerly act upon a text helps address the second problem more efficiently.

Moeller, summarizes Luhmann's concept of social systems as, 'consist[ing] of communication, not of people'; in Moeller's own words, such systems consist 'not of you and me, but different communication systems such as politics, the economy, and education [...] – of what is said, printed, and broadcast.'¹¹⁹ The medium of a social system, then, is communication: consisting of announcement, information and understanding.¹²⁰ Moeller summarizes an important point in Luhmann's system's theory, that something does not need to be understood correctly in order to be understood. He states that 'typically, understanding is misunderstanding without

¹¹⁸ This is to say, the narrator not only inhabits the narrative frame of the novel's current telling, but as the telling cannot be reconciled with the past tense narration, the narrator also exists as a protagonist somehow disconnected from his future self (as narrator).

¹¹⁹ Moeller, *Luhmann Explained*, pp. 226; 225.

¹²⁰ Moeller, *Luhmann Explained*, p. 217.

understanding the “mis”.¹²¹ In order for communication to occur, there must first be an announcement, then for it to become information, or of any use, it must be (mis)understood.¹²² This tripartite understanding of communication offers an awareness of psychic (mis)understanding being contingent upon the social announcements of the system. In other words, there must first be a relationship between things producing a ‘text’ which must be observed if it is to have any meaning.

The implication here is that there are many observational acts at work. In this case, the text observes itself metafictionally precisely through the narrator narrating about his detached former self; as textual disruption the novel observes its constructedness; and with relation to the reader, meaning is produced in reading. Indeed, the relations between things (social), the acts of observation (psychic), and the materialization of new things (technology) overlap and intertwine as emergent events. The focus here is not on the observation of the reader upon the narrator, but the narrator upon himself. That is, the narrator as a simultaneous diegetic and non-diegetic entity in *TTP*.

By separating the teller from the story, *TTP* helps verify the tenet of operational closure, which deems systems as simultaneously closed in their self-organization, yet open in that they are coupled to, and draw influence from, the environment. Luhmann considers the environment a system that is part of ‘a necessary correlate of self-referential operations’.¹²³ He further contends that open systems differ with closed systems by ‘[...] the question of how self-referential closure can create openness.’¹²⁴ In other words, he is concerned with how a system that is seemingly closed within its own boundaries, can autonomously create change in itself.

¹²¹ Moeller, *Luhmann Explained*, p. 217.

¹²² Moeller, *Luhmann Explained*, p. 217.

¹²³ Luhmann, *Social Systems*, p. 9.

¹²⁴ Luhmann, *Social Systems*, p. 9.

Secondly, the paradox of the narrator inhabiting two frames helps reaffirm the primacy of observation in autopoietic systems as a ‘producer’ and ‘process’ of change. All autopoietic systems contain this ‘cognition’ to make necessary distinctions to the autopoietic trajectory. It is the second-order nature of autopoietic systems that allows observation to be metaleptically embedded within other levels of observation at different scales into an endless trajectory of (mis)understandings. *TTP* shows that it is possible for the observer to observe themselves, and for the reader to observe the narrator, affecting changes in those various levels. Separating the narrative act from the agent is a self-referential move towards opening up the agent from the seeming confines of their own metaleptic level. It is a necessary condition of Clark’s posthumanist narratology – outlined in the introductory chapter, and which is essentially a way for viewing texts and ourselves as second-order systems – that allows disparate systems like social, psychic and technological ones to coeval and materialize the fiction-realities we know. This is not to say that these entities can, or do, exist before the cognizing act, but that, as an act of disruption, the cognizing act allows for the subversion of iterating materials and the intra-penetration of narrative levels. Luisi summarizes in biological terms, what can be taken here as a narrative act. He writes:

The interaction with the environment, according to autopoiesis, is seen from the internal logic of the living system. [...] the consequence of the interaction between an autopoietic unit and a given molecule X is not primarily dictated by the properties of the molecule X, but by the way in which this molecule is “seen” by the living organism.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Luisi, ‘Autopoiesis’, p. 54.

The environment is embedded with the living system through observation: the observation (narrating act) creates the reality (storyworld). Like the autopoietic unit and molecule X, *TTP* metafictionally emplots itself with the narrative environment – or the narrator emplots himself with the rest of the storyworld – through the event of observing; not by its, or the environment’s physical properties.

The double duty of *story*, is not unlike the double duty of metafiction, nor the double duty of second-order systems: there is an observing agency, whether it be a narrator, a reader, or an object-system. This so-called double duty *is* the metaleptic instance of ongoing autopoiesis: it is the generation of storyworlds from linguistic and social conventions; it is the emergence of new technologies and objects in the world from our changing behaviors; and it is the re-configuring of various conventions. Without oversimplifying the process, it appears that metafiction, autopoiesis, and neocybernetics *are* performatively metaleptic – the very act of observation *is* the object-system’s own distinction from its environment, *and* therefore its own redefining of its relations with the other object-systems of the environment which it influences, and sometimes, haunts.

Though systems are operationally closed, their metalepses are telepathic. Clarke writes, speaking of social and psychic systems:

The boundaries of metabiotic autopoietic systems are the respective surfaces of two-sided forms where differential system-environment distinctions are put into play and renegotiated from moment to moment. To that extent, the environmental “outside” of one boundary is available to the systemic “inside” of the reciprocal system. The reciprocity of minds and societies in the interpenetration of psychic and social systems could be figured as the reciprocal phantom telepathy by which the ever-

renewed impressions of meanings bind one consciousness to communications even while maintaining respective systemic closures.¹²⁶

Not unlike tele-pathic technologies like the *telephone* and *television*, there is a proverbial *telepath* connecting object-systems to each other.¹²⁷ Reminiscent of Derrida's hauntology, we (object-systems) are at once bodies and ghosts – our own autopoietic systems, and co-participants with other object-systems occupying other narrative levels or frames. Observation works simultaneously in this 'internal' and 'external' fashion, in its material emergence. Here, however, it is helpful to think about observation from a more conventionally narrative perspective.¹²⁸

The simultaneous inhabitation of the diegetic and non-diegetic levels of the novel are understood as two different systems coupled to one another. They are elements of the same second-order system but can be regarded as encompassing the narrator within the story (diegetic) and the act of narration outside the story (non-diegetic) communicating with the reader. Additionally, the non-diegetic aspects double as cognizing acts of the psychic system, and the diegetic aspects as the 'cognitive' capabilities of the novel (the technological system). This sets up the third problem by indicating that in second order systems the diegetic and non-diegetic, the psychic and the technological, are inseparably coupled. In other words, as disparate as the narrated story is to the narrator telling it, there must be an internal 'bio-logic' to the superficial incoherence. For metafiction, this means each narrative plane, and their distinctive

¹²⁶ Clarke, *Neocybernetic Narrative*, p. 36.

¹²⁷ Though the 'path' of *telepath* signifies thoughts which are communicated via distance (tele), my use of the telephone and television is to suggest that through different means, thoughts are still communicated via distance, albeit through emphases on aural and visual forms.

¹²⁸ To reiterate, Clarke does not necessarily consider the technological system to be autopoietic, though it is certainly metabiotic, and therefore telepathically coupled to the other autopoietically metabiotic systems. The primary contribution of performativity theories to neocybernetics is the autopoieticization of the technological system.

elements in their many ontological formations, are object systems in-forming and re-forming each other across various narrative planes to manifest a particular story in the world; and in the case of *TTP* it appears that this is the story not only of the protagonists' downfall and seemingly eternal suffering, but also, as we will see, the reader's role in his redemption and John Divney's inescapable justice.

The question remains, however, whether the inherent 'bio-logic' of the novel is consistent with autopoietic theory; the answer is 'yes.' Since the narrator exists outside of the storyworld of the novel, he is not bound by the logic of the novel. The implication is that narrating agents, though materializing the storyworld, are not necessarily of the same metaleptic plane of the storyworld that they are in the process of telling. In this way, looking at the narrating agent as part of the environment of the novel, rather than an essential component of the novel, the paradox makes sense: the narrator is outside the story conveying the *fabula* of the story. The paradox occurs by conflating the teller with the story, something which should not be assumed. As such, the narrator embodies one particular logic, while the story embodies another. And while these different systems come together (amongst other systems) to form *TTP*, the narrator and the storyworld need not occupy the same (non)diegetic frame. That these systems work together to formulate *TTP* is a testament to the neocybernetic processes in the novel, implying the bio-logic of *TTP* itself.

The Third Problem and Technology's Bio-Logic

The story the narrator presents to us should not exist. The first-person narration characterizes the narrator with faulty memory, but also a meta-awareness of his own faulty memory, thereby explicating the loss of memory that would logically inhibit his capabilities to narrate the novel in the first place. The crux of the third problem is that the novel – now understood as a

neocybernetic model – appears bio-logically animate as a *storyteller*. This discussion pulls together the threads of this chapter and outlines the causal processes and possibilities of such speculative storytelling capacities.

TTP represents a *storytelling*: a clear model of a neocybernetic system of entanglement and emergence of social, psychic, and technological systems. It demonstrates how metabiotic systems coeval and how *TTP*, as a model, is itself an object-system *co*-evolving with the reader. We see how acts of observation defy subject-object distinctions and specifically how the narrator occupies many systems – novel/storyworld (technological); narrative act (psychic); and contextual conventions (social) – and that this inter/intra-connectedness and emergence of narrative is necessary if *we* are to have any story at all. By considering *TTP*, and the technological system in general, as inherently autopoietic, we see how the entirety of our object-systems are not only events, but in constant co-participatory *tellings* of fiction-realities (e.g., systemic emergence of meaning) occupying diegetic and non-diegetic planes.

As artifact, *TTP* is inanimate technology. However, as metafiction, it represents *and* engages in processes constituting our realities. Linda Hutcheon, in *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (1980) writes on metafiction and the affective and co-creative boundary between life and art:

Within the critical context of what will here be called process mimesis, such a separation would prove impossible. Reading and writing belong to the processes of “life” as much as they do to those of “art.” [...] On the one hand, he [the reader] is forced to acknowledge the artifice, the “art,” of what he is reading; on the other,

explicit demands are made upon him, as a co-creator, for intellectual and affective responses comparable in scope and intensity to those of his life experience.¹²⁹

Metafictions differentially scaffold material artifacts as well as discursive realities, requiring an ethos of reading and writing in order to construct fiction-realities.¹³⁰ *TTP* is representative of an autopoietic unity, with a plot trajectory analogous to living autopoietic systems in its self-perpetuation through an ongoing process of iteration-subversions. Metafictions critically question the strict duality between life and art, thereby raising serious questions about reality itself.¹³¹ *TTP*, raises questions about living systems, particularly in how autopoiesis works and how autopoiesis explains self-reference and paradox as necessary to our fictionally realistic lives. *TTP*, in short, shows how *we are metafictions* in a neocybernetic reality.

Observation, or cognition, is crucial to the autopoietic system. Luisi writes:

[T]he environment brings to life the organism and the organism creates the environment with its own preceptory sensorium. [...] Once this view is accepted, there is no separation between the cognitive act and the organic structure of life – they are one. And if this is so, the traditional Cartesian division between matter and mind disappears.¹³²

¹²⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013 [1980]), p. 5. The topic of mimesis will be explored in greater depth in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis.

¹³⁰ More in-depth discussions of fiction-realities, as the material-discursive, are covered in Chapter Four.

¹³¹ See, for example, Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 2.

¹³² Luisi, 'Autopoiesis', p. 55.

The function of observation then, is to abstract composite unities into structures.¹³³ Observation occurs at the unity level and at the organizational level, or in other words, within the autopoietic system (storyworld), and within an environment of systems that are organizationally coupled (real world).

In literature, these observational distinctions occur as the narrating act at the level of the narrator and as reading at the level of the reader. *TTP* superficially draws attention to this seeming disparity between observers, in a magnified way – between narrator and storyworld, and novel and reader; my claim throughout has been that this is necessarily true of all object-systems. Furthermore, I have argued, and will continue to argue, for metafiction as simultaneously self-aware of its performative and neocybernetic processes and situatedness. As Waugh notes, ‘[...] metafiction is simply flaunting what is true of *all* novels’.¹³⁴ I would change this to ‘metafiction is simply flaunting what is true of all object-systems’, that is, acts of observation occurring within the object-system itself ensuring autopoietic emergence, and with other object-systems ensuring environmental emergence.¹³⁵

The act of observation is also an active rather than passive endeavor. This is the inherent paradox of autopoietic systems – they are autonomous, and yet dependent on their environments as well, and at both levels they make observations rather than receive information about how ‘things are.’¹³⁶ This is an important readerly difference because a passive reader accepts the

¹³³ Maturana, ‘Introduction’, p. xx.

¹³⁴ Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 9. As discussed in the introductory chapter, and elaborated upon in Chapter Two, metafiction differs from ‘all novels’ in that they are self-aware of these processes, whereas realist novels attempt to suppress this self-awareness. For this reason, metafiction is best situated to foreground these processes and, performatively speaking, lend themselves heuristically for ‘reading’ reality metafictionally (as demonstrated analogously through the bio-logical model of the metafictional novel). This is not to imply an either/or nature to novels as either metafictional or realist, but rather to suggest that metafictionality is inherent to all novels, and that from a genred context, the metafictional form puts its metafictionality to work, whereas the realist form seeks to suppress its metafictionality.

¹³⁵ Indeed, the following chapter explores this claim more deeply, and reconciles the seemingly contradictory claim that metafiction (which seems to oppose any sense of realism) is inherently realist.

¹³⁶ Luisi, ‘Autopoiesis’, p. 54.

reality (i.e., literary realism), but an active reader knowingly co-creates it (i.e., metafiction).¹³⁷ *TTP*'s deeper meaning is that it heuristically encourages active reading so as to sustain itself enough to tell a story in the first place.

I mentioned earlier that the narrator narrates themselves into existence, but I have also claimed that the reader is necessary, as well, for the narrator's existence to manifest. Both are equally true. At the systemic level, the narrator must enact its own observational dynamics. Likewise, being tethered to an ecology of other object-systems, it must sustain itself by remaining attached to the elements of its environment – in this case, the reader. It is necessary then, for a living reader and a living narrator (across different planes of existence) to engage in the same bio-logical processes. Quoting Varela (2000), Luisi metaphorically notes, 'there is no particular nutrient value in sugar, except when the bacterium is crossing the sugar gradient and its metabolism utilizes the molecule so as to permit the continuity of its identity.'¹³⁸ Since the technological system, in a neocybernetic environment, takes on living cognitive dynamics, the metaphor helps illustrate that living systems are themselves non-teleologically emergent but at the same time teleologically feed off each other.¹³⁹ That is, object-systems are not goal-oriented towards taking on particular forms, but towards remaining alive in an environment through its relationships with the objects of its environment. Luisi continues, '[a]ctually, the compounds that the living organism extracts from the environment to "create its own world" can be seen as something that the organism itself lacks – something that is missing and therefore must be obtained from the outside.'¹⁴⁰ This does not mean that an autopoietic system *seeks out* that

¹³⁷ Chapter Four of this thesis discusses, and problematizes, the differences between realism and metafiction with regards to active co-participatory reading.

¹³⁸ Francisco Varela, *El fenomino de la vida* (Santiago de Chile: Dolmen Ediciones, 2000); quoted in Luisi, 'Autopoiesis', p. 54.

¹³⁹ This is to say, systems emerge without a predetermined goal, though their actual continuous emergence (no matter the form it ends up taking) is a type of goal in itself. Systems are teleological in the sense that they attempt to stay alive by feeding off of their environment, but not in the forms they must take in order to stay alive.

¹⁴⁰ Luisi, 'Autopoiesis', p. 54.

which it lacks, but it certainly *draws it in* as it comes in contact with relevant substances. This is a difficult case to make neocybernetically, since the psychic and social infrastructure ensures certain teleological intention in creating and utilizing technology. The technological system however, does not represent a presence, or lack, of cultural value to our social and psychic systems, but instead emerges from the lacking relationships between these metabiotic systems (which includes the technological system). That which is lacking in the reader becomes a ‘nutrient value’ in the text; any (un)intended ‘values’ associated with an artifact emerges, in the moment of interaction with its environment, as *a* value.

It is not that readings are imposed on the system of the novel, but that the novel contains the possibilities for those readings within itself, catalyzing those readings only after certain interactions with the environment, i.e., the psychic system of the reader.¹⁴¹ This is not to argue for the primacy of the text in criticism – like the New Critics did. It is neither that particular meanings are inherent to a text, nor that readers impose all meanings upon a text. Instead, the contention is that when two (or more) bio-logical object-systems meet, there is a reaction that influences changes in both (or more) systems in accordance to their own bio-logics. Luisi writes, ‘the environment has its own structural dynamics and, although independent of the organism, it does not prescribe or determine the changes in it. It induces a reaction in the organism, but the accepted changes are determined by the internal structure of the organism itself.’¹⁴² In *TTP*, this accounts for the fact that the novel, while it can be read as absurd, can also be read as sensible through autopoiesis and neocybernetics. For example, as already mentioned, the plot trajectory makes sense as a system on an ongoing trajectory of changing states, rather than a constant ‘revisiting’ of the ‘same’ starting state with random changes every time. In fact, the

¹⁴¹ See, for example, Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*. 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 61-68.

¹⁴² Luisi, ‘Autopoiesis’, p. 54.

paradox of the plot trajectory is that its randomness actually reveals an inherent order about itself – an autopoietic order. The irony is that the plot’s recursion is actually a linear progression along time’s arrow, as all living things continue to evolve towards eventual finitude.

Autopoiesis, in addition to dramatizing the boundary between what is natural and artificial, also questions the boundary between what is physical and what is cognitive. Luisi summarizes, ‘living and cognition represent two aspects of the same process – the process of life.’¹⁴³ Metafictions, then, are alive, engaging the reader as we engage them, and materializing as object-systems capable of entangling with other object-systems in order to maintain biological life. In the language of Part Two of this thesis, they are both matter, and all matter *is* an observing agency – things-in-phenomena (as opposed to things-in-themselves) that observe because they are materialized and materialize because they are observing. The following chapter explores the causal structure of this dynamic.

Conclusion: The Reader’s Nutrient Value

TTP can be seen as two distinct things. On the one hand it is a non-living artifact (physically speaking) and therefore allo-poietic. It is a product that does not recursively perpetuate the system that created it on its own. However, the novel is also a unity within a larger system living in an environment coupled to social and psychic systems that further help perpetuate additional artifacts. In this way, the technological system is coupled to the social and psychic systems in co-evolutionary ways.¹⁴⁴ Despite being an allopoietic artifact, the content of its metafictional form creates artifactual representations of autopoietic systems. Clarke writes, ‘[n]arrative embedding is the primary textual analog of systemic self-reference. The zigzag play and sequence of embedded and embedding narrative frames reenacts the essential paradoxicality in

¹⁴³ Luisi, ‘Autopoiesis’, p. 54.

¹⁴⁴ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 19.

the operation of observing systems.’¹⁴⁵ It is for this reason that metafiction can be said to be analogous representations of autopoietic/neocybernetic systems and we come to see *TTP* as a self-contained autopoietic representation. They are systemic as technology in a neocybernetic reality, and they are systemic in their metafictionality as a novel.

The question that arises then, is what is it that *TTP* has drawn from us, the readers? Indeed, we have problematized modern notions of anthropocentrism, and have therefore disrupted classical subject-object, and living-nonliving distinctions. If Chapter Two of this thesis is any indication, with regards to the necessity for readers to engage with narratives – particularly metafiction – for the paradoxical purpose of delaying their own finality (e.g., death) while simultaneously moving towards it (e.g., maintaining life) in fiction as in life, then what is clear is that *TTP* is drawing from its readers its own life-source – its nutrient value.¹⁴⁶

TTP is a story about a narrator in a seemingly repetitive ‘afterlife’. This can be regarded as representing the fear of any self-conscious living system – that is, a person leading a life ‘not worth living’ – mundane, repetitive, and no sense of purpose with the world. In this way, Cartesian interpretations are valid since they represent the fears of an inherently modern readership. But, as this chapter discussed, *TTP* is actually a model and component of living systems, and for this reason the reader can sympathize with the narrator. Not only this, but there is something obviously living about the novel – the fact that the narrator is no longer occupying that mundane existence, which according to its modern parameters, he can never escape. *TTP*, then, seems to offer some hope to readers who perhaps have a sense of their inevitable finality. *TTP* communicates a sense that its living-ness is not necessarily biological, but necessarily involves a bio-logic, requiring it to remain tethered to an environment. If there is any lesson,

¹⁴⁵ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 94.

¹⁴⁶ As we learned in the previous chapter, we too draw this source from the novel in our own particular way.

from a neocybernetic perspective, it is that as living metafiction, we must strive to remain open to our environments – Chapter Five of this thesis explores this ethicality.

To speak a little more about what the narrator gets from us: the reader is the narrator's redemption from the 'hell' he is telling us about. Our reading, and his telling, are the same redemptive act of observation.¹⁴⁷ In this way, *TTP* can be seen as a telling of a 'condemned' or 'dead' system, trapped in modern practices with the world, but that our reading of the novel liberates the narrator from that trap. We give the narrator 'life', and since he is alive, he is capable of telling us – from somewhere since – about three specific days of his mundane existence when Divney finally got what was coming to him.

But this interpretation of the narrator's sense of justice is minuscule compared to the fact that the metafictional paradoxes in narration and plot trajectory are proof that the story is alive, and that it could not live without the reader – if this were not the case, the narrator would still be stuck in that particular diegetic frame, and the novel – or at least the story – would never exist for the reader in the first place: modern paradigms would ensure it. Perhaps in this way, the novel also represents a deeper human desire to live on in the speech and thoughts of others after we have died. Despite the spiritual tones of these ideas, *TTP*, then, can also be seen as the search for a meaningful 'afterlife'. Of course, this paradoxically reinforces our anthropocentricity as it assumes our consciousness/soul will somehow carry over.¹⁴⁸ Whether this is true or not, the point is the human neocybernetic system still carries human thoughts, emotions, and feelings, and *TTP* is a model that represents this and if anything, cautions against living a life not worth living. It is perhaps this lesson – the nutrient value of *TTP* – that the

¹⁴⁷ This dimension of ethical practice is the subject of Chapter Five. Furthermore, Chapter Four of this thesis explores observation as an emergent phenomenon, not a trait possessed by entities. There I explore the agential and causal implications of emergent observation.

¹⁴⁸ See also, the introductory chapter which outlines this necessary anthropocentric paradox to this thesis. Also, as Hyotyniemi notes, religions should be taken seriously as they represent some of the most fundamental patterns of human thought. See, for example, Hyotyniemi, 'Philosophical Consequences', slide 50.

psychic systems *of the world* can integrate into their self-conscious practices *with the world*. That is, readers gain from *TTP* a lesson in metafictionally sustaining our ongoing storying with the world.

Indeed, to be alive in any bio-logical sense requires the simultaneous iteration-subversion of convention and openness to the environment in which those conventions are being iterated-subverted – this has been the objective of Part One of this thesis. The self-referential act of presenting one’s identity, with disruptions, and the ability to take into consideration changes in the environment that are reacting to those disruptions, which in turn stimulate further identity iteration-subversions, constitutes a living system of conventions. If we take the plethora of human experiences/probabilities (and assume an afterlife exists, in this case) as elements of our ecology/environment, then the afterlife is one such system within that ecology that is coupled to other systems of the environment and stays alive by drawing its sustenance from that environment.¹⁴⁹ Object-systems are simultaneously autonomous *and* inter/intra-connected by way of observing the changes in the environment and observing and reacting to some sort of ‘value’ in the way that ‘value’ catalyzes changes and ongoing ‘life’ in systems and across environments.

An autopoietic system *is* a metafictional act of self-reference, recursions, and a feeding off of the feedback of the environments in which it is situated. This description not only encapsulates the ideas of Chapter Two – metafiction as object-events – but also illustrates the ways that different systems such as the technological, psychic, and social, as self-sustaining systems, are coupled to each other in an environment of co-participatory sustenance. Metafiction *are* system-environments, and in this way, the neocybernetic approach can be

¹⁴⁹ This is not argue for or against any afterlife, but to make the analogous point that modern understandings of human scale are problematized; and something more easily conceivable, such as an afterlife helps illustrate how different narrative planes may exist individually separate, but also coupled to each other in the larger field of our experiences.

regarded as seeing all things (object-events) as performatively systemic metafiction in constant states of metafictioning – discussed in depth in Part Two.

PART TWO

IV.

METAFICTION AND INTRA-ACTIVE OBJECTS: JERZY KOSINSKI'S *BEING THERE* AS A 'MIMESIS' OF PHENOMENA

We should take the title *Being There* as an admixture of components, [...] which, I assert, invites meaningful participation.¹

Introduction

This marks the beginning of Part Two of this thesis, which goes beyond strict textual analysis and explores the reader's (mis)readings as a natural condition of *being with* the text and explores differential causal structures. This chapter argues that metafiction exhibits, what I call a '*mimesis*' of phenomena which can be read into everyday life, and resolves the implicit question as to what will replace the linear paradigms Part One problematized.

Jerzy Kosinski's *Being There* (1970) is a deceptively metafictional novel questioning the ontological relationship between observer and artifact (i.e., reader and book).² Kosinski's novel offers an understanding of how observers and artifacts are not as different as conventional notions of the living and nonliving imply. To put this in the language of thinkers such as Andrew Pickering (2010) and Karen Barad (2003; 2007), objects (both human and non-human) are relatable to each other in a 'dance of agency' which creates meaning as a 'thing-in-phenomena'.³ Not only are all entities (living and nonliving) objects, but they enact (as opposed

¹ Mary Lazar, 'Jerzy Kosinski's *Being There*, Novel and Film: Changes Not by Chance', *College Literature*, 31 (2004), 99-116, p. 104.

² Jerzy Kosinski, *Being There* (London: Black Swan, 1970).

³ Regarding 'dance of agency', see, Andrew Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 19-22. By this, Pickering means that the world manifests as a result of things in relation to each other. Humans control things as much as things control humans; see,

to possess) agency in their ‘ongoing reconfigurings of the world’.⁴ Barad notes that objects can be engaged in two mutually exclusive ways: as explorations of the apparatus itself, *and/or* as investigations of the patterns that emerge as information is processed through the apparatus.⁵ With performative and autopoietic understandings, the metafictional novel serves as an apparatus (or interface) through which cultural patterns are accounted for as living objects.⁶ Agency is a consequence of objects observing one another, not an inherent trait.⁷ Therefore, to speak about objects is to speak about observing agencies that manifest in the act of coming together as phenomena. *Being There* illuminates these agential dimensions between objects, thereby offering a different understanding of metafiction as simultaneously a representation of, *and* a performance with, a world of agential objects – a ‘mimesis’ of phenomena.

Linda Hutcheon (1988) writes that Kosinski calls his type of fiction ‘autofiction’: ‘[...] “fiction” because all memory is fictionalizing; “auto” because it is for him, “a literary genre, generous enough to let the author adopt the nature of his fictional protagonist – not the other way around” (1986, 82).’⁸ Autofiction allows the writer to be affected by the way stories and our realities feed off each other and emerge as different literary objects. Hutcheon goes on to

Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain*, pp. 18-19. My use of this term signifies its extension into new materialism, in which Karen Barad locates an intra-activity to things. That is, things do not pose agency, but agency itself manifests out of the coming together of things (in phenomena). See, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 72. See also, Karen Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter’, *Signs*, 28 (2003), 801-31, p. 817, where she uses the term ‘things-in-phenomena’ to mean that the world *is* an intra-related becoming of matter, and not a world of objects. As she writes, ‘[p]henomena are constitutive of reality’.

⁴ Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity’, p. 818.

⁵ See, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 73. Barad adds that though they are mutually exclusive, ‘[...] nonetheless, as our understanding of the phenomenon is refined we can enfold these insights into further refinements and tunings of our instruments to sharpen our investigations and so on.’

⁶ See, Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity’, p. 816 for a definition of ‘apparatus’ as open-ended practices – phenomena with no distinct boundaries.

⁷ That is, agency emerges out of things affectively, and mutually, engaging each other. See, Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity’, p. 818.

⁸ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism : History, Theory, Fiction* (New York ; London: Routledge, 1988), p10; see also, Jerzy Kosinski, *Oral Pleasure: Kosinski as Storyteller: Compiled, Transcribed, and Selected by Kiki Kosinski*. ed. by Barbara Tapa Lupack and Kiki Kosinski (New York: Grove Press, 2012), p. 149.

state that Kosinski's autofiction is an attempt arising from a '[...] need to rid ourselves of illusions of totalizing explanations and systems of ethics'.⁹ Kosinski writes:

[...] I call my book an "autofiction" and leave it to the reader to distinguish what is truth and what is fiction.

It's about a state of mind. It is about what takes place in a creative man's head when it sets itself to create a work of fiction – what kinds of associations a novelist enters with, by himself in life, outside of his typewriter and upon his typewriter, so to speak. In other words, what is the play and interplay of forces within his imagination? Where does he reach, both in his life and in his fantasy?¹⁰

In this narrative ecology, Kosinski has actively attempted to break down fixed representational assumptions and find a style of writing allowing these (non)fictions to affect each other – on page as in reality.

Being There has received little attention from critics beyond the 1990s.¹¹ Some theses have covered Kosinski's work in metafictional and phenomenological approaches. In particular, 'The Phenomenological Self in the Works of Jerzy Kosinski' by Tracey Allen Houston (2003), posits

⁹ Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 10.

¹⁰ Kosinski, *Oral Pleasure*, p. 149.

¹¹ See, for example, Jerzy Kosinski, *Oral Pleasure: Kosinski as Storyteller: Compiled, Transcribed, and Selected by Kiki Kosinski*, ed. by Barbara Tapa Lupack and Kiki Kosinski (New York: Grove Press, 2012); Mary Lazar, 'Jerzy Kosinski's *Being There*, Novel and Film: Changes Not by Chance', *College Literature*, 31 (2004), 99-116; Mary Lazar, *Through Kosinski's Lenses: Identity, Sex, and Violence* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2006), and two theses that deal with *Being There* and phenomenological and or metafictional approaches: Tracey Allen Houston, 'The Phenomenological Self in the Works of Jerzy Kosinski' (The University of Maine, 2003), pp. 1-42; and Mei-yee Sung, 'Likeness and Unlikeness in Postmodern Fiction' (The University of Hong Kong, 2003), pp. 4-78, as examples of work completed post-2000s.

that, '[a] scholar who wishes to examine the works of Jerzy Kosinski faces a problem not found in the study of many other authors: Kosinski's personal history, [...] is filled with fictions, contradictions, and unverifiable events.'¹² Houston situates Kosinski's life as the tenth text to his nine novels, and makes the distinction between a 'subjective (or true) self' and a 'phenomenological self' – the latter constructed by the perceptions of others.¹³ This theme of life imitating art (and vice versa), which informs the novel's production, and the constructed similarities of both (Kosinski's) reality and fiction are expanded upon here. As argued in this chapter, the affectual dynamics of a so-called 'phenomenological self' is the 'true self'. That is, metafiction as analogue representations of reality remind us of the phenomenological nature of the metafictioning manifold and thereby constitute a 'mimesis' of phenomena. While Houston's point is that Kosinski utilized the 'phenomenological self' in dealing with others so as to protect the 'subjective self' (or 'true self'), the affective quality of the 'phenomenological self' is expanded in this chapter to define the emergent and entangling dynamism of all objects when they encounter each other by imposing their contexts. This chapter establishes a phenomenally mimetic quality to metafiction by investigating the affective dynamics between the protagonist and the cast of characters, as well as the critic/reader with the text and the world.

Being There: Plot Trajectory and Tensions

Being There is about a man named Chance who in the span of four days, becomes one of the most important men in American finance and politics. However, despite Chance's rising fame and social importance, he remains oblivious to his changing role in society. With little sense of self, Chance's existence has been defined solely by his work as a gardener and by the television

¹² Houston, 'Phenomenological Self', p. iii (abstract).

¹³ See, Houston, 'Phenomenological Self', pp. iii-iv (abstract). This idea that Kosinski appealed to his 'phenomenological self' so as to protect his 'true self' is not uncommon amongst critics, which I outline below.

shows he watches when he is not busy tending his plants. It is only from this knowledge of television and gardening that Chance draws when interacting with others. Likewise, it is a knowledge that he is seemingly unable to move or grow beyond. What results from his limited knowledge and increased social interaction is a comically improbable trajectory from reclusive gardener to prospective Vice-Presidential candidate. *Chance* and *Chauncey* are used interchangeably to name the character, as even his identities resist clear labels.

The novel opens with our getting to know Chance (9-13).¹⁴ We learn he was born ‘by chance’ to a mother whose ‘[...] mind was as damaged as his’, and that he was adopted by the Old Man who sheltered Chance out of fear that he would be sent to a ‘[...] special home for the insane’ (12).¹⁵ Chance is a dim-witted character not unlike his plants – experiencing the world experientially – and who watches television and thereby considers the world around him as images of his mind (9-11). This interplay of experiential (i.e., performative) and representational aspects is important to this chapter. By the end of chapter one, we learn that the Old Man has died (13). Upon learning of the Old Man’s death, and saying a last goodbye, Chance proceeds unfazed to his room to watch television (13).

Things change the next day when two lawyers, Mr. Franklin and Miss Hayes, come to settle the estate’s affairs (18-24). Undocumented and unable to legally prove his identity, Chance is forced to leave the estate (18-28). Furthermore, Chance cannot read or write, and therefore cannot sign anything that the lawyers present to him, nor leave a paper trail in the

¹⁴ Future references to page numbers will be made in-text.

¹⁵ See, Barbara Tapa Lupack, ‘Chance Encounters: Bringing *Being There* to the Screen’, in *Critical Essays on Jerzy Kosinski*, ed. by Barbara Tapa Lupack (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998), pp. 208-20, p. 208, where Lupack writes that it has been suggested that ‘he [Chance] is the Old Man’s son by one of the domestics.’ See also, Barbara Tapa Lupack, *Plays of Passion, Games of Chance: Jerzy Kosinski and His Fiction* (Indiana: Wyndham Hall Press, 1988); and Barbara Tapa Lupack, ed., *Critical Essays on Jerzy Kosinski* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co, 1998), as major works on Kosinski by Lupack.

social world (24). Chance, Herbert B. Rothschild (1988) writes, is most ‘present’ when he is ‘most absent’, that is, when others cannot represent him accurately/legally.¹⁶

Once on the streets, Chance has the uncanny feeling he has seen all this social reality before (as it resembles programs on television), and it is around this time he is hit by a limousine carrying Elizabeth Eve (EE), the trophy wife of Benjamin Rand – an old and dying financier (28-29). EE, who misunderstands Chance’s name, comes to call him ‘Chauncey Gardiner’ (judging by his business-like appearance), after misunderstanding *Chance, the Gardener* (30). It is from this point onwards that Chauncey, not Chance, inhabits the social world and the popular imagination.

The full absurdity of the plot unfolds after the limousine accident and EE’s insistence that Chauncey get his leg examined by doctors at the Rand house (29-34). Chauncey meets Benjamin Rand, who takes a liking to him and offers to introduce Chauncey to the members of the board at First American Financial Corporation, of which Mr. Rand is the CEO (35-38). Similarly, each encounter with characters leads to the manifestation of new opportunities for Chauncey as a rising public figure.

The next day, the American President is scheduled to speak at the annual Financial Institute meeting and calls upon Benjamin Rand for a brief chat before appearing (41-47). Chauncey meets the President and engages him with the same literal utterances (which are interpreted metaphorically), with the President similarly taking a liking to Chauncey (45-46). Their conversation – about the current slump in the stock market – offers a clear example of the sort of verbal exchanges Chauncey has with various characters:

¹⁶ See, Herbert B. Rothschild, ‘Jerzy Kosinski’s “Being There: Coriolanus” in Postmodern Dress’, *Contemporary Literature*, 29 (1988), 49-63, p. 61.

[...] [S]uddenly the President addressed him: “and you, Mr. Gardiner? What do you think about the bad season on The Street?”

Chance shrank. He felt the roots of his thoughts had been suddenly yanked out of their wet earth and thrust, tangled, into the unfriendly air. He stared at the carpet. Finally he spoke: “In a garden,” he said, “growth has its season. There are spring and summer, but there are also fall and winter. And then spring and summer again. As long as the roots are not severed, all is well and all will be well.” [...] The President seemed quite pleased.

“I must admit, Mr. Gardiner,” the President said, “that what you’ve just said is one of the most refreshing and optimistic statements I’ve heard in a very, very long time.” [...] Many of us forget that nature and society are one! Yes, though we have tried to cut ourselves off from nature, we are still part of it. (45-46)

Barbara Lupack (1998) explains:

The fact that Chance never responds directly to the specific question posed to him is easily overlooked; ironically, his evasiveness is hailed as directness and lauded as political and social virtue [...] similarly, his inability to contemplate or calculate is praised as a naturalness that most public figures lack.¹⁷

Furthermore, Lupack writes, “[w]ords simply mean something different to him than they do to others.”¹⁸ Chance’s utterances are always literal but taken by the listener as metaphorical and profound. We are reminded that all understandings are (mis)understandings. Like EE, Mr. Rand,

¹⁷ Lupack, ‘Chance Encounters’, p. 209-210.

¹⁸ Lupack, ‘Chance Encounters’, p. 211

and the President, interactions with Chauncey have the same thing in common – everyone projects their own meanings and interpretations upon him.

The consequence of meeting the President is that he decides to mention Chauncey by name at the Financial Institute meeting (47-48). Consequently, the country learns of Chauncey and as no one knows anything about him, he is thereafter assumed to be an adviser to the President. Later, when newspaper reporters try to talk to Chauncey about his Presidential relationship they are met with so little response they are forced to spin a story about him, thus further constructing his public image (48-49). Chauncey is then invited to appear on *This Evening*, a television program, and speaks with the same platitudes, leaving the program with the honorary title, ‘financier, Presidential adviser, and true statesman!’, bestowed by the host (55).

The next day, Chauncey escorts EE to the UN fete (68-74) where he rubs elbows with diplomats including the Soviet Ambassador, Vladimir Skrapinov, who admires Chauncey’s ‘down-to-earth philosophy’, and the West German Ambassador, Count von Brockburg-Schulendorff, who compliments Chauncey’s ‘naturalistic approach to politics and economics’ (69-70). At the fete, the Soviet Ambassador assumes, as a consequence of Chauncey’s learnt body language, that Chauncey is a speaker of Russian and is familiar with Krylovian fables (69-70).

Afterwards, reporters want to know which newspapers Chauncey reads, and he replies that he does not read, but watches TV, thus further concretizing his preference for the direct experience of observation (73-74). These events demonstrate Chance’s ability to apply in new contexts what he observes and mimics. By not ‘reading’, he is not concerned with acquiring knowledge, but with engaging it. That is, watching television and being with others enacts the same openness to the (social) environment through which he develops patterns of behavior.

Consequently, both the US and Soviet governments seek additional information on Chauncey (74-76). While the President orders an in-depth background check, after a routine search only turns up the transcript from the *This Evening* broadcast, Skrapinov prepares a secret report to the Soviet government requesting all available information on Chauncey. Skrapinov, who later gives a speech to the International Congress of the Mercantile Association in Philadelphia, takes a chance, by including a paragraph on Chauncey (after it had been pre-approved by the Soviet government) (76-77). The press notices the mention, and as the Soviet Ambassador sits at home in the evening watching reports on his speech, one announcer comments: “within the space of two days, [Chauncey has been] cited by both the President of the United States and the Soviet Ambassador to the United Nations” (77). This exemplifies the way in which characters projecting meaning upon Chauncey, as disparate ideologies (represented by the American and Soviet governments) claim his words as representative of their political positions.

Meanwhile, EE is falling in love with Chauncey, and Benjamin Rand, sensing his death is near, ‘gives’ his wife to him (58). EE attempts to seduce Chauncey, but only having experienced sex on television (presumably a more censored style of 1960’s and 70’s American television), Chauncey does not react to her advances (60-62). She considers Chauncey a man of restraint – a trait she has never experienced in a man, and soon thereafter, confesses her love to him (62). After EE can no longer resist her physical attraction to Chauncey, she comes to his room seeking to seduce him (84-87). Again Chance does not react, but upon confronting him about his lack of interest, Chauncey answers, ‘I like to watch you’, which has by this time become a catchphrase illustrating his preferential form of engagement with others (86).¹⁹ Understanding this as a request to masturbate, EE proceeds until reaching orgasm while

¹⁹ In this context the ‘you’ is utilized, though the general sentiment of the phrase ‘I (like to) watch’ is what Chauncey often communicates to others.

Chauncey watches, after which, he continues watching television (87). The text suggests that, through this experience, EE comes to free herself from her objectification by men; she comes to own her sexuality and becomes a ‘complete’ person (87).

Stating that EE is liberated by being watched by a man may seem objectionable at first. But as we will see, their genders are not immediately the point; in the same way that the differences between Chance and the general public, or the reader for that matter, are not the point. The more ontological focus of this chapter frames EE and Chance as phenomenal objects. Chance is an object, though biologically male; and does not engage with the world as a male (though society certainly projects male-ness upon him), but as an observer. EE, a female, demonstrates someone who has been locked into a societal perversion of her gender identity and suffers accordingly from those constraints. The point can be made that if Chance lived by similar societal perversions of male-ness, he too would suffer in his own ways. The relationship between EE and Chance does not make EE a complete *woman*, as might be interpreted from the scene conventionally speaking, but a more ‘complete’ observing/able object performing in/with the world. EE’s objectification and sense of liberation is discussed in more depth below. Of importance, however, is the way the act of observation – of observing and being open to observation – help EE *be there with* as opposed to being *in relation to* others. Perhaps the greater theme of the novel, and implications for metafiction(ality) is precisely this paradigmatic shift from living representationally (defined by others), to living performatively (affecting and being affected by others).

The Soviets analyze Chauncey’s *This Evening* television segment and conclude that they cannot determine his ethnicity nor place his accent with any particular region in the country (95). They deem Chauncey one of the most emotionally well-adjusted American public figures, and because of his enigmatic nature, they code-name him ‘Blank Page’ and speculate that he is

‘a leading member of an American elitist faction that has for some years been planning a *coup d’etat*’ (95-96). Likewise, American Intelligence cannot uncover any background on Chauncey and suspect him of being a foreign agent (98).²⁰ The Soviet agent who reports his findings to Ambassador Skrapinov, holds up an actual blank page when he reveals Chauncey’s code-name, alluding to the earlier scene with the lawyers who cannot get any administrative proof that Chance exists. This gesture can be interpreted symbolically as indicating the paradigm shift that this chapter argues for – from a representational paradigm to a performative paradigm. It is not that Chance became Chauncey, and then became Blank Page, but that Blank Page is a contingent representation (as opposed to a fixed representation) of the nature of ‘Chance’s’ reality. That is, Chance was never Chance to begin with, but was always the proverbial blank page. When the Soviet agent holds up the blank sheet of paper, it is as if he is telling the Ambassador (and the reader), two seemingly paradoxical things: that ‘paper’ (i.e., legal records) do not constitute who we are, but also that like (blank) ‘paper’, anything can be written on Chance. Chance’s life, as a phenomenal object, is testament to both. He does not cling to the representations that have come to define him socially, and in doing so, opens himself up to the world. The US government learns that there are eight other countries investigating Chauncey, and the President wonders if the government is being undermined (98-99). The final chapter concludes with Chauncey being named as possible Vice-Presidential candidate since he has no background, and therefore cannot be objectionable to anyone (104). The novel ends with Chauncey at the Capitol Hill Ball, attended by EE and other important members of society (104-105). He slips away from the ball

²⁰ In concluding that Kosinski is part of an elitist faction planning a *coup*, they project their ideologies and feelings upon Chance. See, Kosinski, *Being There*, p. 96. Likewise, the cast of characters project their own representations upon Chance (as do the critics below) throughout the novel, including the lawyers, EE, CEO Benjamin Rand, the US President, the host of ‘This Evening’, Soviet Ambassador Vladimir Skrapinov, and the political committee discussing viable candidates for Vice President in the upcoming Presidential election; see, Kosinski, *Being There*, pp. 30, 35, 45-46, 53-55, 68-70, 81-84, 84-87, 96, 99, and 103-104, for examples of characters projecting their own representations upon Chauncey.

and exits into the garden as effortlessly as he entered society in chapter two (105). With nothing gained, or lost, the novel ends as it began, with Chance ‘aimlessly’ navigating his environment, by chance.

Critics’ (Mis)Readings of Being There

This section illustrates the ways critics have tried to make sense of the novel by projecting meaning onto the story. From a representational perspective, critics of Kosinski’s work, especially with *Being There*, fall into the same trap as metafiction theorists who vary in defining metafiction. Wenche Ommundsen (1993) writes:

While some critical consensus seems to exist regarding the basic definition of metafiction or reflexive fiction (it is *about* fiction), critics vary considerably in their accounts of the phenomenon. The implications of fictional self-referentiality, the “meanings” of metafiction, are disputed, so too are the delimitations of the genre. The very terms chosen to designate this type of fiction tend, as Robert Siegle (1986: 2-4) points out, to reveal the critic’s assumptions about the category.²¹

Substituting ‘metafiction’ with ‘*Being There*’, or even ‘Kosinski’, makes for an equally true statement. Though critics agree on some points, this does not necessarily make anything written about Kosinski or *Being There* ‘true’. Instead, certain patterns are easily discernible depending on the contexts and perspectives of those writing on the subject. However, the variety of these

²¹ Wenche Ommundsen, *Metafictions?: Reflexivity in Contemporary Texts* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1993), pp. 14-15. Ommundsen writes this with regards to terms like self-conscious, (self-)reflexive, self-referential, introspective, introverted, narcissistic or auto-representational, surfiction, antifiction, fabulation, neo-baroque fiction, and postmodern fiction that often appear as synonymous and at times to contain subtle differences. See also, Robert Siegle, *The Politics of Reflexivity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

patterns suggest something more phenomenal (as alluded to by the title, *Being There*) rather than representational. As Ommundsen suggests in the quote above, there is something inherently perceptible yet intangible in trying to justify what is real and fictional – what Mark Currie (2011) calls the ‘myth-fact paradox’.²²

Jack Hicks (1981), connects social movements to literary art, and contends that disruptive literatures of the 1960’s and 1970’s are a result of American social movements of the time.²³ Jerome Klinkowitz (1982) summarizes four types of disruptive literature that Hicks outlines: metafiction, the fiction of postmodern consciousness, emergent ‘Afro-American prose’ (as ‘resonant folk stories’), and ‘the contemporary meditations on public power and private terrors, as witnessed in Jerzy Kosinski’s keloid romances (p. 269).’²⁴ Hicks shares what many critics of *Being There* have argued: that it’s a novel depicting the somewhat dystopic decline of culture.

Neither *Being There*, nor Kosinski, have been analyzed through performative lenses, except to be mentioned in an ethnographic context by John Borneman and Abdellah Hammoudi (2009).²⁵ Borneman and Hammoudi write from an anthropological perspective: ‘being there’ resonating with the idea of an anthropological researcher being present with their subjects, rather than observing them from a distance:

²² That is, the differential co-creation of fiction and criticism, or more generally, fiction and reality. See, Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*. 2nd ed. edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

²³ Jerome Klinkowitz, ‘In the Singer’s Temple: Prose Fictions of Barthelme, Gaines, Brautigan, Piercy, Kesey, and Kosinski by Jack Hicks (Review)’, *Studies in American Fiction*, 10 (1982), 118-19, p. 118. See also, Jack Hicks, *In the Singer’s Temple: Prose Fictions of Barthelme, Gaines, Brautigan, Piercy, Kesey and Kosinski* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

²⁴ Klinkowitz, ‘Singer’s Temple’, p. 118; see also, Hicks, *Singer’s Temple*, p. 269.

²⁵ John Borneman, and Abdellah Hammoudi, ‘The Fieldwork Encounter, Experience, and the Making of Truth’, in *Being There: The Fieldwork Encounter and the Making of Truth*, ed. by John Borneman and Abdellah Hammoudi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 1-24.

To be sure, within anthropology, except for some reference to witnessing, the notion of Being There has lost its tragic register. Its relation to visuality changed forever with the 1971 publication of Jerzy Kosinski's novel by that name. In the 1979 film made from the book, Chance (played by the incomparable Peter Sellers), when asked what kind of sex he liked, replied: "I like to watch." Yet anthropologists need not reduce themselves to the comedic and performative senses of *Being There*, to being the voyeur or tourist who watched and then, depending on textual skills and mastery, cynically decodes what is seen. *Co-Presence* is also a source of knowledge that makes possible a transformation of what we know, specifically of the anthropologist's own self-understandings.²⁶

The passage deals with ways of conducting fieldwork with the understanding that the researcher's presence constitutes a co-participation in the creation of meaning. Borneman and Hammoudi make a larger point – that we should not be concerned with making judgments from afar (representational paradigm), but, in a performative manner, blur the subject-object divide by producing knowledge as co-present objects.²⁷ That is, meaning emerges when two contextually distinct objects open up to each other. In Chapter Three, neocybernetics focused more on the observing instance perpetuating autopoietic processes, but here we focus on that instance as it appears between objects – their performative causal structure rather than a systemic view of observation that privileges entities such as a human reader.²⁸

²⁶ Borneman and Hammoudi, 'Being There', p. 14, italics not in original. See also, Lisa Stevenson, 'The Suicidal Wound and Fieldwork among Canadian Inuit', in *Being There: The Fieldwork Encounter and the Making of Truth*, ed. by John Borneman and Abdellah Hammoudi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 55-76, which is being referred to by Borneman and Hammoudi. See also, Hal Ashby, 'Being There', (United Artist, 1979).

²⁷ Borneman and Hammoudi's use of the word *performative* is not used in the phenomenal sense, but instead as assuming that the researcher is independent from their object of investigation and that as pre-existing entities they interact (as opposed to intra-act).

²⁸ This is not to suggest that the systemic view is wrong, but congruent with the work of Part Two of this thesis,

Geoffrey Wolff (1998) summarizes the conventional reading of *Chance* and the novel, writing that '[h]e is like the plants he tends: "it cannot help growing, and its growth has no meaning, since a plant cannot reason or dream"'.²⁹ This novel, as Wolff states, is about a main character seemingly incapable of abstract thought outside the spheres of television and gardening. Similarly, Dan Fass' (1990) essay describes *Chance* as a 'brain-damaged orphan' and maintains that 'Kosinski's narrative technique is highly appropriate for describing 'dead souls'.³⁰ Arnold Miller (1980), in a review of the film version of the novel, notes that *Chance* 'portrays [...] an autistic adult grappling with the problem of making human contact'.³¹ Ernest Rigney (1989) describes *Chance* as an 'illiterate gardener'.³² Film reviewer Irene Oppenheim (1980) maintains *Chance* is an 'illiterate dullard', while Andrew Horton (1980) goes so far as to describe *Chance* as 'humanoid'.³³ Lupack, notes that *Chance* is 'an innocent Gulliver possessed of a Lilliputian intellect'.³⁴ These descriptions have one thing in common: they paint a picture of *Chance* as someone who functions in society, but is extremely limited in capability. Furthermore, they are attempts to define *Chance* in anthropocentric terms – that is, in relation to humanistic ideals which center upon the human as the seat of knowledge.³⁵

There are readings of the novel focusing on its manipulative and social nature. For example, William Kennedy (1998) sees *Chance* as a 'con' (i.e., 'confidence', 'control', 'confound', 'connive', 'and more') who 'intuits a survival truth from TV', which he puts to use

constitute two mutually exclusive perspectives depending if one takes metafiction as an object (e.g., a living object-system), or metafictionality more generally as a condition of the metafictioning manifold (e.g., as an intra-active materialization of meaning).

²⁹ Geoffrey Wolff, 'Last Brave Wish to Try Everything', in *Critical Essays on Jerzy Kosinski*, ed. by Barbara Tapa Lupack (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998), pp. 78-79, at p. 79.

³⁰ Dan Fass, 'Dehumanizing People and Humanized Programs: A Natural Language Understanding View of Being There', *ACM Sigart Bulletin*, 1 (1990), 3-7.

³¹ Arnold Miller, 'Autism as Metaphor or Diagnosis? A Film Review of *Being There*', *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 10 (1980), 245-46, at p. 245.

³² Ernest G. Rigney Jr., 'Review', *Teaching Sociology*, 17 (1989), 529-30, at p. 529.

³³ Irene Oppenheim, 'Being Where There's No There', *The Threepenny Review* (1980), 24, at p. 24; and Andrew Horton, 'Review', *Cineaste*, 10 (1980), 36-37, at p. 36.

³⁴ Lupack, 'Chance Encounters', p. 208.

³⁵ See, for example, Pramrod K. Nayer, *Posthumanism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), p. 5.

after being forced out of the recently deceased Old Man's house.³⁶ Additionally, the novel has yielded political and cultural criticisms about the disintegration of American culture.³⁷ For example, Gerald Weales (1998) writes that *Being There* is 'an indictment of American society and values' while John W. Aldridge (1998) comments that::

Being There has to do with a totalitarianism of a much subtler and even more fearful kind, the kind that arises when the higher sensibilities of a people have become not so much brutalized as benumbed, when they have lost both skepticism and all hold on the real, and so fall victim to those agencies of propaganda which manipulate their thinking to accept whatever the state finds it expedient for them to accept.³⁸

Weales and Aldridge maintain that the novel offers a glimpse of a darker cultural turn, in which the American population becomes passively superficial, chasing a world of appearances and empty gratification in exchange for emotional and psychological sustenance. Aldridge continues:

The hell depicted in *Being There* is clearly contemporary America but raised to the ultimate power of electronic derangement and populated with creatures who perceive

³⁶ William Kennedy, 'Jerzy Kosinski: On Still Being There', in *Critical Essays on Jerzy Kosinski*, ed. by Barbara Tapa Lupack (New York: G.K. Hall & Co, 1998), pp. 66-69, at pp. 66-67.

³⁷ See, John W. Aldridge, 'The Fabrication of a Cult Hero', in *Critical Essays on Jerzy Kosinski*, ed. by Barbara Tapa Lupack (New York: G.K. Hall & Co, 1998), pp. 70-74; and Gerald Weales, 'Jerzy Kosinski: The Painted Bird and Other Disguises', in *Critical Essays on Jerzy Kosinski* ed. by Barbara Tapa Lupack (New York: G.K. Hall and Co, 1998), pp. 142-52. See also, Barbara Tapa Lupack, 'New Tree, Old Roots {Review of Revised and Expanded *the Devil Tree*}', in *Critical Essays on Jerzy Kosinski*, ed. by Barbara Tapa Lupack (New York: G.K. Hall & Co, 1998), pp. 80-86, p. 80, implying *Being There* as a 'contemporary American fable of power'.

³⁸ Weales, 'Jerzy Kosinski', p. 151; and Aldridge, 'The Fabrication of a Cult Hero', p. 72.

life wholly in terms of the image offered them on the television screen in the image of their hopes for themselves.³⁹

Despite his exaggeratedly dystopian perspective, Aldridge makes an important point: namely, that *Being There* depicts the relationship between something not unlike an image (e.g., a constructed object) which is cognized by other characters, who project their own value judgments upon that image. This aspect of the novel earns Chance his other pseudonyms – names projected upon him by people in differing contexts.⁴⁰ What the critics fail to understand, however, is that the image also projects its contexts upon the observer. In both cases, Chance's unintentional pseudonyms are illusory – objects (representationally speaking) that have emerged through Chance (and Chauncey and Blank Page) and characters in observation of each other. That characters project their own (mis)readings onto Chance, is not unlike the work of the critics mentioned above, nor of my own reading, which is precisely the point: meaning is phenomenal and emerges through the differential co-presence of objects. The difference in the approach taken here is that this chapter does not seek to make representational value judgments about the phenomena of objects in acts of observation. So, rather than being concerned with the potential correctness, or otherwise, of the projections made by human characters, the interest is in how meanings emerge when objects come together.

The critics above are no different than the cast of characters in the novel, as they too have been engaging with the image as if they were separate and removed from the novel.⁴¹ That is, they have not considered that they too are objects – things-in-phenomena with *Being There*, Kosinski, and myriad other fictions and realities weaving in and out of them – which co-present

³⁹ Aldridge, 'The Fabrication of a Cult Hero', p. 72.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Kosinski, *Being There*, p. 30; p. 95.

⁴¹ This is not intended to portray the cast of characters in negative terms, but to make the point that they are caricatures of us, and the critics, who operate in the world attempting to attribute meanings to things.

and co-produce meaning. Recalling Kosinski's concept of autofiction, these critics bring their contexts and assumptions about the world with them, the same as the Rands, reporters, and politicians in the novel. Both critics and characters are co-present and co-producing the novel and storyworld – creating Chance and *Being There* in the same way that Chance and *Being There* participate in the perpetuation of their own assumptions and ideologies. This is evident in the utilization of Chauncey for US *and* Soviet purposes – he participates in their narratives as they participate in his.

Larry McCaffery (1980) argues that Kosinski is one of many non-traditional authors of the 1960s who, though 'warmly received by reviewers' was largely ignored by popular audiences and often 'misrepresented by critics'.⁴² He notes that critics have also tended to focus on the charges against Kosinski (of plagiarism, using ghostwriters, hiring translators, and lying – such as in eliciting help from the CIA) and leave out his 'exoneration' from his later experimental work which fully embraces his autofictional approach.⁴³ This is to say, critics failed to grasp the intentions of his autofictional approach to writing fiction, which is most overtly employed in *The Hermit of 69th Street: The Working Papers of Norbert Kosky*. Kosinski was accused of plagiarizing *Being There*, which is similar to an earlier Polish novel titled *The Career of Nikodem Dyzma* (1932).⁴⁴ James Park Sloan (1997), Kosinski's biographer, writes that 'ultimately the text of *Being There* resembles the text of *Nikodem Dyzma* in ways that, had

⁴² Larry McCaffery, 'Donald Barthelme and the Metafictional Muse', *Substance*, 9 (1980), 75-88. Other novelist mentioned, include: Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Donald Barthelme, and William H. Gass, among others.

⁴³ Larry McCaffery, 'Nobody's Instrument: Jerzy Kosinski', *Contemporary Literature*, 31 (1990), 564-69, p. 565. See also, Kosinski's final work, Jerzy Kosinski, *The Hermit of 69th Street: The Working Papers of Norbert Kosky* (New York: Seaver Books/Henry Holt & Company, 1988), which embraces autofiction and was written as a response to accusations of plagiarism.

⁴⁴ Tadeusz Dolega-Mostowicz, *Kariera Nikodema Dyzmy (the Career of Nikodem Dyzma)* (New York: Roy, 1950 [1932]). See also, Barbara Tępa Lupack, 'Introduction', in *Critical Essays on Jerzy Kosinski*, ed. by Barbara Tępa Lupack (New York: G.K. Hall & Co, 1998), pp. 1-43, p. 2, where she notes the publication of the cover story in the *Village Voice* in June 1982, which '[...] accused him of being a lifelong liar, a CIA stooge, and a literary fraud [...]']'.

Dolega-Mostowicz been alive and interested in pressing the matter, might have challenged law courts as to a reasonable definition of plagiarism'.⁴⁵ Barbara Tępa (1977) similarly writes:

Both Nikodem Dyzma and Chance skyrocket to national recognition and the highest respective governmental positions [...] as the result of mere accident. Their careers are unforeseen and unplanned, yet develop rapidly due to the situation of their respective societies which are so broken down by deteriorating economy and the lack of responsible leadership that they become vulnerable to mass hypnosis.⁴⁶

Tępa summarizes similarities between both books in familiar degenerative cultural terms. However, of particular interest is the similarity in plot trajectories. It is this particular trajectory, which comes to appear in Kosinski's own life, which could itself be considered a plagiarized fiction of sorts. Sloan writes:

[t]he last recondite turn of the screw was that Kosinski's best defense [regarding the accusation of plagiarism] lay in his own personal history. *Being There* resembled *The Career of Nikodem Dyzma*, yes, but so did his own life that drew unduly upon the Dolega-Mostowicz text. He had taken it as a manual for climbing to the top by exploiting the lack of acuity of the ruling class. Thus art imitated life which had imitated art.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography* (New York: Plume, 1997), p. 292.

⁴⁶ Barbara J. Tępa, 'Jerzy Kosinski's Polish Contexts: A Study of "Being There"', *The Polish Review*, 22 (1977), 52-61, p. 56.

⁴⁷ Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski*, pp. 292-293.

Kosinski's life, resembling that of the protagonists of both novels, further blurs the distinctions between fiction and reality. It is useful, then, to elaborate upon the co-participation and co-reaction of fiction-realities.

Chance and Kosinski are 'nothing' without others. The irony in endeavoring to construct fictions about oneself, is that such deception requires other people in order to work: Kosinski must be secretive *and* extroverted. Kennedy's view of Chance being a 'con' is not far off, as Kosinski, whose life resembled that of Chance, had a knack for manipulating his social situations.⁴⁸ Indeed, if one were to take Kosinski's life as a key to the novel, Kennedy's criticisms would offer interesting insights as to possible motivations for surviving the Old Man's death. But Kosinski's life is not necessarily a key. It's a co-present participant in our co-present reading of what we are distinguishing as a 'mimetically' phenomenal metafictional novel. Again, manipulative perspectives are not the concern of this chapter. Rather the interest in Kosinski's life is in how it contributes to the intra-active nature of the novel. Sloan summarizes Kosinski as someone who embraced the constructedness of identity, recognized the contingency of these constructions upon acts of observation, and the contingency of others to necessitate fictional constructions. Sloan comments on the writing of *Being There*, that:

[t]he result was a portrait of himself [...] a man profoundly at odds with his own being, for whom "being there" was both an achievement of the greatest heights and simultaneous "being" and "not being": a man who felt unable to exist unless he was being seen.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Kennedy, 'On still Being There', p. 66. In particular, not only for upward mobility, but also as a defense mechanism by concocting and perpetuating the fictions of his identity.

⁴⁹ Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski*, p. 293.

Embracing his fictional selves only worked if there were others there to observe him. As the narrator writes, Chance himself intuits a sense that, like the characters of television programs, to not be seen is to fade out (18). Existence is therefore contingent upon being seen. Kosinski, like Chance, and the readers, are simultaneously here and not here. Though the above critics largely try to define Kosinski's autofictional universe, in terms of cultural decline, and methods of manipulation, it is the autofictional proclivity to avoid identifiability (as opposed to trying to label aspects of it) that were the concern for Kosinski, and which offer the affectual and imitative dimensions of the novel and its production and reception contexts. The following section explores *Being There*'s metafictionality in light of this phenomenal approach.

Being There as 'Mimesis' of Phenomena

Being There disrupts conventional notions of observation and the causal structures that make such materializations (i.e., the plot trajectory) possible. It allegorically questions the act of reading as something that is not performed by one object (i.e., the reader) upon another (i.e., the novel). Consequently, this novel appears as a metafictional subversion of our human-centric views, begging us to consider ourselves as objects – simultaneously fictional and real – navigating our experiences with other objects as co-producers of meaning and not as inherently knowledgeable entities. The fact that *Being There* is an object questioning the way we *read* objects, makes it mimetic, though as we shall see, in drastically unconventional ways.

Theorists of metafiction generally agree that metafictions draw the reader's attention to the construction of the text *and* the fictionality of the storyworld.⁵⁰ These theorists also

⁵⁰ See, William H. Gass, 'Philosophy and the Form of Fiction', in *Fiction and the Figures of Life: Essays* (Boston: Nonpariel Books, 1979 [1970]), pp. 3-33; Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative : The Metafictional Paradox* (New York ; London: Methuen, 1980); Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction : The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1984); Mark Currie, 'Introduction', in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 1-18; Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*. 2nd ed. edn

recognize metafiction's capacity to act as a commentary upon the reader's perceived reality. Robert Alter (1975) defines metafiction as 'a [fiction] that systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice and that by so doing probes into the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality'.⁵¹ Fiction and reality share characteristic similarities and therefore the conventions of storytelling have something to tell us (allegorically) about reality; metafiction is a form that takes this inseparability between fiction and reality as fundamental.

Alter notes that neither fiction nor reality are static in their perceived organization. To have a 'relationship' between fiction and reality implies mutual influence. On one hand, metafictional conventions must be re-examined. On the other, re-examined narrative conventions are analogously applicable to the reader's reality. This is metafiction's relational dimension: it is one of narrative perpetuation, re-definition, and analogous application, epistemologically (regarding our knowledge of the world) and ontologically (regarding our experience of the world). *Being There* accomplishes this by perpetuating narrative via (mis)readings and ongoing re-readings which disrupt the fixity of the reader's perceived reality.

Ironically, *Being There* is not easily characterized as an overt metafiction. Hutcheon differentiates between two types of metafiction: overt and covert.⁵² Both of these forms are narcissistic, 'not as pathology, but as descriptor of engaged self-reflection'.⁵³ In overt metafiction the diegetic and linguistic components are thematized, while in the covert kind, they are actualized. Overt metafiction concerns itself with the '[p]ower of storytelling to create (diegetic) worlds' and the (linguistic) '[p]ower and limits of fictive language' by engaging the

(Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); R.M. Berry, 'Metafiction', in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. by Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons and Brian McHale (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 128-40; Norman N. Holland, 'Don Quixote and the Neuroscience of Metafiction', in *Cognitive Literary Studies: Current Themes and New Directions*, ed. by Isabel Jaen and Julien Jacques Simon (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2012), pp. 73-88; and John Wolfgang Roberts, 'Metafiction: An Introduction on Dramatizing the Boundaries of Social Discourse', *Aichi University: Language and Culture*, 58 (2014), 19-46.

⁵¹ Alter, *Partial Magic*, p. x.

⁵² See, Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 154, for a concise diagram outlining overt and covert metafiction.

⁵³ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. xi.

reader in active interpretive participation. Readers co-create worlds and re-structure language. Covert metafiction focus on models: (diegetic) models of genre (i.e., ‘detective, fantasy, game, erotic’) and (linguistic) models of language (i.e., ‘riddles, jokes, anagrams, and puns’). It passively engages the reader in creating the fictional world (similar to traditional realism).⁵⁴ While it might be noted that literary realism also constitutes a genre model with particular conventions, covert metafiction differs from realism by not attempting to portray the world as it really is, but by disrupting it through novel forms of representation. Conversely, realism ‘[...] minimizes its status as a constructed artifact’, actively minimizing disbelief in the reader.⁵⁵

These metafictional types are self-referential, but whereas the overt works to teach the reader new ways of reading (‘freedom of reader’), the covert assumes that the ‘reader already knows the story-making rules’ (‘freedom of reading’).⁵⁶ Overt metafiction gives freedom to the reader as co-creator, and covert metafiction frees up the reading process by minimizing textual disruptions. Therefore, overt metafiction is both self-reflective (recognizing the linguistic limits) *and* self-conscious (aware of narrative processes), but the covert is only self-reflective since ‘the linguistic structures employed must be immanent and functional within the text’.⁵⁷ Covert metafiction maintain the integrity of their storyworlds; accentuated by their use of language. However, covert genres such as westerns, fantasy, etc., being clearly constructed, stretch the conventional anti-representational limits of the novel as a genre. Hutcheon contends that covert metafiction’s objective is ‘more unification than disruption’, suggesting narrative

⁵⁴ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 154.

⁵⁵ Marina MacKay, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 203. See also, Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 154 for a list of diegetic forms of covert narcissism (i.e., metafiction).

⁵⁶ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 71; see also, I. Raucq-Hoorickx, ‘Hutcheon (Linda). Narcissistic Narrative. The Metafictional Paradox’, *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire*, 63 (1985), 599-602, p. 599; regarding ‘freedom of reading’ see, Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 154.

⁵⁷ See, Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, pp. 22-23; p. 118; and p. 154.

subversions in covert contexts more conventionally serve to perpetuate *and* re-define the parameters of the novel.⁵⁸

Being There resists labels by accomplishing both overt and covert forms. Containing an unbelievable beginning and plot, it is easier to read *Being There* as a covert metafiction as its narcissism is largely actualized; the plot follows an unforeseeable, but logical, progression of cause-and-effect, *ad absurdum*. Linguistically, the novel uses puns and dramatic irony to perpetuate story. However, its covertness is easily complicated. For one, the theme of its narrative structure is that of (mis)reading.⁵⁹ This means that the very elements of covert metafictionality – the actualization of its story and language to maintain narrative integrity – *are* the overt elements as well. That is, the covertness of the storyworld ‘mirrors’ the actions of the reader who is also engaged in the act of observation (reading) and (mis)interpretations. Though the linguistic side of its metafictionality actually accentuates the novel’s storytelling parameters (covertly), they also thematize the ‘power and limits of fictive language’ (overtly).⁶⁰ The connection between language, observation, and plot force the reader’s attention towards the diegetic ‘power of storytelling to create worlds’.⁶¹ *Being There* projects this theme into the reader’s reality – the larger theme of the novel being this very issue: that people’s (mis)readings of each other create the world.⁶² Ironically, by disrupting any sense of reality as fictional, metafictions also communicate a sense of reality to the fictions themselves.

Metafictions can be seen as realistic and imitative (mimetic), and in *Being There* this becomes most obvious by the foregrounding of the observer’s (reader’s) role.⁶³ As Matthew

⁵⁸ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 129.

⁵⁹ More generally, as we shall see, (mis)observing each other’s utterances.

⁶⁰ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 154, this is the exact wording used to describe overt linguistic metafiction.

⁶¹ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 154, this is the exact wording used to describe overt diegetic metafiction.

⁶² As we will see, this chapter is not focused on ‘people’s (mis)readings’ necessarily, though this anthropocentric understanding serves as a springboard into the object theories that will ultimately offer a performative (and posthumanist) view of the novel and of the nature-culture environment.

⁶³ David Foster Wallace makes a similar point, writing: ‘[m]etafiction, for its time, was nothing more than a

Potolsky (2006) writes on this mimetic relationship between message and reception: ‘artist and audience share a set of conventions so familiar that neither side recognizes [conventionally speaking] that it is trafficking in conventions rather than describing objective reality’.⁶⁴ This is true of *Being There* – that both fiction and reality are imitative of each other *and* presuppose and inform the emergence of the other. The implication, here, not only refers back to the differential emergence of iterations and subversions, and their autopoietic processes, but also that the very events of these phenomena *are* mimetic. Mimesis, in other words, is a necessary element to entangling emergent processes to our fiction-realities. Addressing the work of Hutcheon in the mimetic aspects of metafiction, this extends her ideas by emphasizing the representational – iterative – aspect inherent to these phenomenal processes.

Hutcheon writes: ‘[e]ven Aristotelian mimetic theory, essentially objectivist in nature, allowed room for the imitation of creative process, since art was perceived as an active revival of the ordered and ordering processes of nature itself [...]’.⁶⁵ That is, in Aristotelian mimetic theory, the imitation of art maintains a semblance of objectivity in that the imitated construction is imitating aspects of a natural totality, harmoniously designed towards logical ends.⁶⁶ This Aristotelian conception of mimesis problematically assumes a fixed objectivity pre-existing in nature from which artifacts emerge from and are measured against.⁶⁷ But metafiction ruptures the coherence of the mimetic endeavor by questioning not only the accuracy of the imitation but also the efficacy of any apparently imitated ‘reality’. Hutcheon writes:

poignant hybrid of its theoretical foe, realism: if realism called it like it saw it, metafiction simply called it as it saw itself seeing itself see it’. See, David Foster Wallace, ‘E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction’, *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 13 (1993), 151-94, pp. 161-162. Barad’s theories of performativity – *agential realism* – explicitly deal with this perceived irony.

⁶⁴ Matthew Potolsky, *Mimesis* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 4.

⁶⁵ See, Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 40.

⁶⁶ See, Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 40.

⁶⁷ See, Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 41, where she writes that metafiction demands a re-working of the Aristotelian theory of mimesis.

To read is to act; to act is both to interpret and to create anew – to be revolutionary, perhaps in political as well as literary terms. There is much freedom-inducing potential in metafiction generally, not when seen as a degenerate version of a moribund genre, but when recognized as a significant “vital” mimetic form of literature.⁶⁸

By asking how our stories (imitations) change our realities (as opposed to measure up to them), ‘mimesis’ (in inverted commas) assumes a different role of engagement with the world in ongoing reconfigurations of our fiction-realities.⁶⁹

Hutcheon’s contribution to metafiction studies elevates the reader and the reading process towards creating texts. This occurs with all texts, but with narcissistic narrative, it is a ‘process made visible’.⁷⁰ That metafiction concerns itself with the processes of storytelling by incorporating processes of reading is a key ingredient in Hutcheon’s shift from understanding traditional realism as *mimesis of product*, to metafiction as a *mimesis of process*.⁷¹ The process of reading occurs in all fictions, but in metafiction (whether overt or covert), the reader is made self-aware of their role in realizing the text. *Being There* is a mimetically processual metafiction, since the reading process is simultaneously *actualized* and *thematized*, thereby amalgamating the characteristics of overt and covert metafiction. That *Being There* successfully thematizes (or represents), and actualizes (or performs) its readerly processes, illustrates that a new approach for theorizing metafictions taking into account the actualizing and thematizing

⁶⁸ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, pp. 161-162.

⁶⁹ This is to suggest that the world’s artifacts are autopoietic systems reconfiguring with the environment. See, Chapter Three and Five, this thesis, for deeper discussions on this point.

⁷⁰ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 6. See also, the work of Roman Ingarden, i.e., Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1974), and Wolfgang Iser, i.e., Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), on the reading process, and whose work Hutcheon draws upon and derives much of her vocabulary from.

⁷¹ See, for example, Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, pp. 36-47.

processes of *all* objects and their acts of observation is necessary.

While Hutcheon writes that '[t]he act of reading, then, is itself, like the act of writing, the creative function to which the text draws attention [in a metafictional mimesis of process]', *Being There* asks us to reconsider this process without the conventional assumptions of a reader or writer composing or understanding a text, but with the text also 'composing or understanding' the writer/reader into the world.⁷² The central question is: how does *Being There*, as an overt/covert metafiction, reveal the creation of meaning through the phenomenon of/between seemingly dissimilar objects that do not technically possess agency (in the conventional Humanist sense)? *Being There* at once represents (mimetically as story) and performs (as phenomenal artifact) its agential possibilities to, and with, the reader. Similarly, Chance's encounters with the cast of characters are mimetic *and* phenomenal. Reading is not a strictly epistemological endeavor, but also a performative and ontological one elevating the artifact as a co-creator of meaning along with the author, reader, and its various contexts – an idea currently missing from theories of metafiction, and which is understood in this thesis as a 'mimesis' of phenomena.⁷³ That is, metafictions are definitely mimetically processual, but this characteristic is applicable to all materials encountering each other in the metafictioning manifold to produce meaning. Coming sections investigate this dynamic in greater depth.

Metafictional Objects

Metafictionists have written much about the co-creative agency of the reader in realizing, along with the author, the meaning of the text(s).⁷⁴ However, less has been said with regards to the

⁷² Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 39.

⁷³ As will be discussed, theories of metafiction tend to mention the artifact, but in relation to the reader, and not as objects, which like the reader and author, help produce meaning.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Currie, *Postmodern*, p. 7; Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 39; and Waugh, *Metafiction*, pp. 33-34.

role of the artifact or, to use the terminology of Currie, *object-text*.⁷⁵ The theories of Hutcheon, Waugh, and Currie, together offer a view of metafiction as a processual enactment of meaning, as well as an understanding of reality as a narrative construction; implying a role for objects which can be expanded upon via theories of performativity.⁷⁶ This section outlines the problematization of subject-object relations which exist particularly in the theories of Hutcheon, Waugh, and Currie, and which can subsequently be expanded upon in coming sections.

As suggested in Chapter Two, when foregrounding the role of the reader, the rhetorical aspects of metafiction suggest that it is not that meaning is inherent to a text, but that meaning is affected in the reader alongside the text.⁷⁷ As such, attention was given to the object-text, in passing, for its power to elicit certain responses in the reader. According to this rhetorical approach, however, the fictional circuitry – of author, reader, artifact, and cultural contexts – remains in a representational paradigm, foregrounding the linguistic structures of reality. Characteristic of this view, Ommundsen writes that ‘metafiction serves as a reminder that everything in the human world is mediated through systems of representation.’⁷⁸ Despite metafiction being seen as inherently disruptive of the larger epistemological structures, it paradoxically disrupts those structures by way of maintaining assumptions regarding the primacy of representation (epistemological structures).

The object-text fits into this framework, but only as a separate entity with relation to, and interacting with, the author, the reader, the narrative, and the various contexts that surround

⁷⁵ Currie, *Postmodern*, p. 66. Here Currie discusses James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Jacques Derrida’s ‘Ulysses Gramophone’, ultimately to suggest a certain agency away from any sense of objectivity in the text. See, Jacques Derrida, ‘Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce’, in *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Andrew J Mitchell and Sam Slote (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013); and, James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1932).

⁷⁶ See, for example, Currie, *Postmodern*, pp. 2-4; Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, pp. 38-40; and Waugh, *Metafiction*, pp. 18, 88.

⁷⁷ The purpose of this chapter and thesis are not necessarily to address the rhetoric of metafiction, but simply to suggest that in its rhetorical aspects the text affects the reader. See, for example, Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 145.

⁷⁸ Ommundsen, *Metafictions*, pp. 18-19.

it. In this representational approach, the object-text continues to play a subservient role to the human subject who seeks to rectify coherent meaning in the wake of ludic narrative disruptions. Furthermore, conventional theories of metafiction assume the object-text's subservient status to humans as mirroring fixed reality. The result of these ongoing representational disruptions is a narcissistic trap that fails to acknowledge that these disruptions play important roles in changing the meanings of the conventions in question.⁷⁹ In other words, theories of metafiction do not fully account for the metamorphosing, or worlding consequences or patterns such disruptions catalyze into the world.

As Barad notes, a key aspect of a reflexive methodology (i.e., representationalism) is its 'preexisting determinate boundary between subject and object' (as things-in-themselves).⁸⁰ A reflexive approach sees the reader, object-text and world as inherently separate. An approach based upon a performative paradigm, however, considers 'subject and object [to] not preexist as such, but emerge through intra-actions'.⁸¹ This allows the object-text to be re-situated out of its representational anthropocentricism into an experiential metamorphosing intra-activity. Whether overt or covert, metafictional narcissism only seems disruptive in a representational paradigm that believes in entities as fixed things-in-themselves. But in a performative paradigm,

⁷⁹ Recalling the myth of Narcissus, representationally speaking, there is merely a back-and-forth between Narcissus and his reflection. Conventional theories of metafiction ignore the performative element that eventually these narcissistic disruptions lead to his despair and eventual metamorphosis into a flower. See, for example, Ovid, 'Metamorphoses Book III', in *The Metamorphoses*, ed. by A.S. Kline (Online: University of Virginia Library, 8), lines 339-510. There are different versions of the Narcissus myth, though they all involve a sixteen-year old boy who unknowingly falls in love with his reflection at a pool of water, eventually becoming a daffodil – or Narcissus flower. As more commonly known, this myth is attributed to Ovid, and involves Narcissus' withering away, as opposed to a bloody suicide, from his reflection's unrequited love; Ovid, 'Metamorphoses Book III', lines 339-510. See also, David Keys, 'The Ugly End of Narcissus', *BBC History Magazine*, 5 (2004), 9, which mentions an earlier version of the Narcissus myth, in which Narcissus does not become a flower, but commits suicide. In either case, he suffers the same fate as many of the mocked and scorned nymphs who sought his love; as prophesied by the seer. Narcissus would live long if he did not 'discover himself'; Ovid, 'Metamorphoses Book III', lines 339-358. The lesson being, his downfall came not from his *beauty*, but from his *narcissism* – his pathological preoccupation and inability to self-reflect on the representations presented before him.

⁸⁰ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 88.

⁸¹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 88.

these disruptions are merely the observing agencies of a materializing and reconfiguring manifold of intelligible (fiction/reality) structures.⁸² *Being There* teaches us how to begin becoming literate with this performative view by showing us how we must become co-present with all the (mis)readings around us. Chapter Five more fully explores these deeper lessons, but here Chance's ability to merely observe – that is, just be co-present and object-like – and consequently morph into different social manifestations, is demonstrative of both a performative approach (from Chance's perspective) and a representational approach (from the other characters' perspectives).

Conventional theorists of metafiction often speak of objects in ways that suggest they have some agential ability, but none explore these lines of investigation further. An oft-cited rhetorician, Wayne Booth (1961), appears in the works of both Hutcheon and Currie.⁸³ Hutcheon writes, '[e]very word he [the author] writes, according to Booth, will guide his reader's response in some degree to certain values and beliefs upon which the work depends'.⁸⁴ Though Hutcheon speaks more about the rhetorical power of the author, we do begin to see some capacity in the written word, as surrogate, to mediate those rhetorical utterances. Booth, via Hutcheon, draws our attention to the idea that a work of fiction is a rhetorical device revealing a certain aspect of itself to the reader since its distinction as a particular work 'depends' upon mediating functions to impart particular values and beliefs. Hutcheon continues: '[e]very sentence will contribute to making the reader see what he has never seen before, to moving him into a new order of perception and experience – imaginative, presumably as well as more directly "vital"'.⁸⁵ Hutcheon, therefore, reinforces the idea that the words of a novel manipulate

⁸² Overt and covert metafiction are discussed in more depth further below.

⁸³ See, Currie, *Postmodern*, pp. 27-38; Hutcheon, p. 149; Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

⁸⁴ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 149.

⁸⁵ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 149.

the emotions and experiences of the reader while also implying a more dynamic role to the work of fiction. By stating that a work of fiction moves the reader into a new ‘perception and experience; imaginative [as well as] “vital”’, Hutcheon comes to echo Horace (c.19 BC) in *The Art of Poetry*, who claims that art both entertains and edifies.⁸⁶ Though not fully ascribing agency to the artifact, Hutcheon suggests the work of fiction itself contains some quality to affect the reality of the reader. Yet this is still suggested from an anthropocentric position which places the human agency of the reader center stage.

Waugh similarly focuses on the descriptions of things, and consequently, on the state of those very descriptions being things in their own right. Despite this more performative view of descriptions as objects that do things in the world, she too remains representational in nature. The following quote draws from the work of J.L. Austin (1962). She writes:

All literary fiction has to construct a ‘context’ at the same time as it constructs a ‘text’, through entirely *verbal* processes. *Descriptions* of objects in fiction are simultaneously *creations* of that object. (*Descriptions* of objects in the context of the material world are determined by the existence of the object outside the description.)⁸⁷

Waugh differs from Hutcheon in that the object is given agential recognition. Of note is a reciprocal relationship between context and text as differentially co-creating each other, though this formulation is entirely in ‘verbal’ terms.

⁸⁶ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 149. Horace quoted in, John Rodden, ‘How Do Stories Convince Us? Notes Towards a Rhetoric of Narrative’, *College Literature*, 35 (2008), 148-73, p. 149. See also, Horace, ‘Ars Poetica’, Poetry Foundation, (2019) <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69381/ars-poetica>>2019].

⁸⁷ Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 88; see also, J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975 [1962]).

Implicitly, there is no fundamental difference between the physical novel and the descriptions contained in the storyworld since both novel and description contingently exist in their forms because of past novels and descriptions that inform their current creation (or re-creation upon reading).⁸⁸ The physical novel and its storyworld are both cultural artifacts informed by, and contributing to the culture *and* the metamorphosing (mis)interpretations of the novel. Not unlike Chance, whose trajectory morphs with every new entanglement with other characters, objects work to give meaning to the world by mediating their contexts into new forms. This is to say that in Waugh we begin to see performative trajectories of iteration and subversion, and the object-text as something that is not solely a device for rhetorical suasion. In Waugh's formulation, objects begin to do things outside the authoritative reach of the author and reader. Namely, by iterating a context via a description it also recreates that context through the creation of the text.⁸⁹ Here we glimpse the formulation of an agential ability in the object-text that is not addressed by Waugh but remains latent, allowing us to read her statements autopoietically and performatively. For example, Waugh writes: '[m]etafictional texts explore the notion of "alternative worlds" by accepting and flaunting the creation/description paradox, and thus expose how the construction of contexts is also the construction of different universes of discourse.'⁹⁰ Again, while linguistically formulated, Waugh reminds us of a differential and emergent dynamism associated with the engagement with metafiction, which helps construct the world informing its reading.

Currie echoes the sentiments of Hutcheon and Waugh, and recognizes the essentially subversive nature of metafiction. However, he also maintains a representational outlook. Though recognizing, like Hutcheon, that a co-operation between the reader and the text exists

⁸⁸ This is to say both exist as constructed, *and* as (ontologically) distinct entities in the world.

⁸⁹ See, Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 88; see also, Chapter Two, this thesis, on the differential nature of objects recreating their contexts through iteration and subversion.

⁹⁰ Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 90.

and, like Waugh, that there is a differential dynamic between text and context, Currie only goes so far as to synthesize the theories of Hutcheon and Waugh, in representational terms, as constitutive of metafiction, instead of investigating their implications beyond the context of metafictional (postmodern) fictions.

Writing about James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Jacques Derrida's 'Ulysses Gramophone' (2013), Currie speaks of the imitative aspects of Derrida's essay on Joyce's work.⁹¹ Referencing the work of J. Hillis Miller (1982), Currie pinpoints an essential quality to Joyce's *Ulysses*, which paradoxically pre-supposes its own disruptive and subversive (i.e. deconstructive) nature. Currie writes:

The implication is clear enough: some narratives are more theoretical than others. But the paradox is also clear: if some narratives are more theoretical than others, they must be theoretical in themselves, objectively or intentionally, and not merely construed, constructed, created or invented as theoretical by the reading. There are many accounts of deconstructive criticism that give the impression that the critic is unconstrained by the objective structure of the authorial intention of a text – free to make anything of it that he or she pleases. But [J. Hillis] Miller seems to be saying something different: that there is something about Joyce's writing that invites, licenses, or prescribes deconstruction because it knows deconstructive narrative theory in advance.⁹²

⁹¹ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1932); Jacques Derrida, 'Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce', in *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Andrew J. Mitchell and Sam Slote (Albany State University of New York Press, 2013).

⁹² Currie, *Postmodern*, p. 63-64. See also, J. Hillis Miller, 'From Joyce to Narrative Theory and from Narrative Theory to Joyce', in *The Seventh of Joyce*, ed. by Bernard Benstock (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 3-4.

Currie acknowledges that it's not so much that the intentions or creativities of the author and reader are able to imbue certain theories and meanings into a narrative, but that the narrative contains the potential for theoretical interpretations. There is something outside the anthropocentric control for meaning, inherent to the theoretical fiction object-text itself, that is helping to make such creative and critical meanings possible.

Currie seems to be skirting the performative role of the object-text by claiming that the recursive nature of deconstruction in *Ulysses* is a metaphysics that remonumentalizes the object-text. To remonumentalize, for Currie, is to define theoretical fiction as an inherently paradoxical object-text that will ultimately be destroyed or deconstructed, but in doing so, calls attention to its status as an artifact. His theory is grounded in the assumption that things-in-themselves can be constructed and deconstructed, instead of differentially re-configured. He writes,

To argue that poststructuralist critical language operates under the obligation to repeat, to imitate or to parody the myth-fact paradox [for example, the dramatized boundaries of fiction and reality] would be to argue for the remonumentalisation of the text as an object – as a monument to aporia [inherent paradox] that prescribes the metaphysical assumptions of further response to that monument.⁹³

In other words, the object-ification of the theoretical fiction depends upon representational parameters, as aporiae suggests paradox and logical inconsistency set forth in representational terms. For Currie, the object-text is not fully a performative thing in expression with the author and reader, but a deconstructive mediator of the symbolic systems that dictate the boundaries

⁹³ Currie, *Postmodern*, p. 66.

of narrative convention and their limits.

From this representational vantage point, Currie posits a problem that can be avoided by a paradigmatic shift to performativity. Currie writes: '[t]he trouble with this new, performative mode for criticism and theory is that it leaves the subject-object relation between a text and its reading mysteriously untheorized.'⁹⁴ Currie recognizes the lack of acknowledgement for object-texts as *dramatis personae* in the co-creation of meaning. The problem for Currie appears to be that he is trying to maintain representational superiority over this performative mode, and as such subject-object relations are hard to reconcile. This is not to challenge the dominant representational mode of literary criticism, but to focus instead on the readerly processes that actively reconfigures the subject-object relationship between reader and text as an area of criticism necessarily entangled with the representational mode, but which remains 'untheorized' in Currie's formulation. From a performative approach the focus should be on the changes to objects that the act of reading creates, not what can be revealed about their relations. That is, the researcher should be co-present with the metafiction. What has been largely missing in metafictional theories to date is how the object-text comes to perform and contribute to meaning without being a mere tool for anthropocentric approaches to (de/re)construct narrative conventions. As Chance illustrates, he is both the subject (Chance) and object (Chauncey) as much as the reader is the subject and object of a particular literary act and culture. Metafictions work by mimetically suggesting the reality of metafictionality in the differential processes of subject-object relations and emergent materials. *Being There*, as shown below, establishes this metafictioning drive to materializing metafiction(ality).

Gardening and Television: Chance as 'Machina Speculatrix'

⁹⁴ Currie, *Postmodern*, p. 66.

Machina speculatrix was a term given by William Grey Walter to robot tortoises he invented, which navigated their environment performatively, and despite being robots, exhibited interesting behavioral patterns. These robots and their relevance to Chance are discussed further below.⁹⁵ *Being There* opens with Chance in his garden (9). As mentioned above, Chance lives a life not unlike his plants, merely ‘being there’ and encountering the environment as the processes of life unfold around him. In the opening chapter, the narrator describes Chance in a naturalistic way, as occupying the present moment, and moving aimlessly through his garden. Kosinski writes:

What was particularly nice about the garden was that at any moment, standing in the narrow paths or amidst the bushes and trees, Chance could start to wander, never knowing whether he was going forward or backward, unsure whether he was ahead of or behind his previous steps. All that mattered was moving in his own time, like the growing plants. (10)

Chance is described similarly to the plants he tends, as having an experiential existence rather than a representational one, and as someone who does not register anthropocentric notions of time and space. He is directionless and timeless in that he *is* part of the space he occupies. Chance is directionless and his sense of time is not linear and purposeful in any goal-oriented sense, but cyclical and co-operative in an ecological sense.⁹⁶ Chance, who is like the growing plants, fulfills his purpose as an entity of the garden – being its gardener; not as one who keeps a garden, but as someone who is an element of gardens.

⁹⁵ See, William Grey Walter, *The Living Brain* (London: Duckworth, 1953).

⁹⁶ That is, Chance is cyclical in that the seasons inform how he understands the world. The seasons, however, should be similarly understood in the terms of Chapter Three – though they return, they are always different and the world proceeds along time’s arrow.

This experiential aspect sets the nonmodern foundation to this performative paradigm shift. Kosinski can be seen as subverting modern notions of scale with regards to space, time, and matter. Pickering notes that the word ‘modern’ is incredibly nuanced, but generally defined as comprised of the Cartesian assumption of a duality between mind and matter, and with the Newtonian assumptions that matter contains specific properties ‘independent of any human knower’.⁹⁷ Additionally, Pickering recognizes the Enlightenment’s project of reason, being a defining property of modern human subjects.⁹⁸ Chance, in these opening pages appears to disrupt the Cartesian, Newtonian, and Enlightened parameters of the modern engagement with the world.

A garden symbolically shows, as opposed to using, a wild forest, for example, that our intelligibility of the world will always be mediated through the human apparatus, *and* that continuous engagement with the world depends on proverbial ‘gardening practices’.⁹⁹ Though the garden represents Chance’s naturalistic understanding of the world, it is important to note that gardens are man-made. This suggests that while Chance disrupts Enlightenment frameworks, there is still a human-centeredness that is inescapable.¹⁰⁰ But this constraint serves to foster growth, in the garden as in the plot trajectory. Chance cannot experience his garden in any way that is wholly ‘non-human’, though it does appear that way from a (representational) perspective that assumes particular boundaries and parameters to ‘human-ness’. While Chance is like his plants, and though he appears object-like in his lack of Enlightened faculties, he subverts our representational understanding of the world, not necessarily our experiential ones. The ability to nurture a fruitful existence appears to be mediated through a larger storytelling

⁹⁷ Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain*, p. 405n2.

⁹⁸ Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain*, p. 405n2.

⁹⁹ Again, the issue of practices is the subject of Chapter Five, while the apparatus is the larger focus here.

¹⁰⁰ This anthropocentric paradox was outlined in the introductory chapter and has been elaborated upon throughout.

frame (e.g., the gardener as storyteller/the original human condition), rather than solely simplistic methods of representation. The point is that a gardener is *active*, rather than passive in their garden's continued emergence.

Barad's idea that intelligibility (i.e., meaning) is determined by each intra-action helps drive the point that frames or boundaries are necessary.¹⁰¹ Barad writes:

Intra-actions always entail particular exclusions, and exclusions foreclose the possibility of determinism, providing the condition of an open future. But neither is anything and everything possible at any given moment. Indeed, intra-actions iteratively reconfigure what is possible and what is impossible – possibilities do not sit still.¹⁰²

Every phenomenon produces new possibilities. At the same time, these new possibilities are 'constrained' by the object's iterated past and ongoing iterations. All materials, in other words, are actions of iteration and subversion, and this ensures the possibility of future manifestations of meanings.

The idea of intra-activity is central to this chapter because it identifies agency not as a trait possessed by a particular object (i.e., solely with the reader), but as an enactment produced by objects that come into contact with each other (intra-actively to produce different objects). This intra-activity counters the idea that objects are inherently meaningful as things-in-themselves and that they merely *interact* with each other. Barad writes:

¹⁰¹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 176.

¹⁰² Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 176.

The neologism “intra-action” *signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*. That is, in contrast to the usual “interaction,” which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action.¹⁰³

An object, then, comes to exhibit distinguishable boundaries by way of various intra-actions constituting the object as an entity. Every object is a present-time manifestation of the network of entities making its materialization continuously possible. Books and readers are particular intra-active objects in themselves. But, put together, they constitute a new intra-active object in an entangled and emergent activity as things-in-phenomena. According to Barad, the world is a becoming of intra-activity within and between *matter*.¹⁰⁴ “‘Matter’”, Barad writes, ‘does not refer to an inherent, fixed property of abstract, independently existing objects; rather “matter” refers to phenomena [“the smallest material units (relational “atoms”)”] in their ongoing materialization’.¹⁰⁵ Intra-activity is the materialization (mattering) of new meanings through emergent reconfigurings of the world. As Barad mentions, the ongoing becomings of the world occur ‘within’ as well as ‘a part of’ the objects under observation.¹⁰⁶ Artifacts, such as the novel, cast of characters, or the reader and the contexts of their reality are intra-actively co-creating meaning – an agential process made self-conscious by *Being There*, which appears to take as its subject the intra-activity that occur in the storyworld, between the novel and the reader, and between the reader and their reality.

Barad writes that, in the classical modern sense, ‘time [is] a series of moments evenly

¹⁰³ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁴ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p.151.

¹⁰⁵ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 151.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 89.

spaced along a line that goes to infinity in both directions [...], [and] space[...] is assumed to be uniform and unchanging'.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the Kosinski quote at the opening of this section assumes a classical sense of space and time as the norm. Kosinski's description offers a look into a (story)world where the human does not intentionally navigate their surroundings, but rather engages with it intra-actively. Chance does not go forward or backwards because there is no spatial distinction that assumes those directions. This may appear at odds with the autopoietic nature of Chapter Three of this thesis, in which as a system, metafiction and objects necessarily move along time's arrow. But this is also consistent with another point made in Chapter Three: namely, that living things are goal-oriented in perpetuating their emergence as living things, and not necessarily so in the diverse forms their emergence takes. The forms a story or organism take are not necessarily teleologically determined. Chance is unsure of being ahead or behind his previous steps, because if there is no forward or backward, then there is no sense of human movement signifying progress – there is just movement. Finally, in saying that like his growing plants, Chance moves in his own time, Kosinski is alerting the reader to the idea that despite no fixed spatial boundaries or temporal markers, Chance is still able to exist and change in a world where space-time does not follow classically Newtonian parameters. This is not to suggest that these parameters should be shed, but that Chance allegorically reveals a different performative relationship with the world.

Chance and his plants are contingent upon each other, and (intra-actively) co-create the distinctions (measurements) of things that are conventionally regarded as space, time, and matter. Kosinski writes:

¹⁰⁷ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 437 n82; Barad also differentiates between Einstein's theories of General and Special Relativity, as maintaining a classical distinction since they do not account for matter in the space-time equation – which quantum mechanics does in the form of spacetime-matter.

[W]ith all its life, even in the peak of its bloom, the garden was its own graveyard. Under every tree and bush lay rotten trunks and disintegrated and decomposing roots. It was hard to know which was more important: the garden's surface or the graveyard from which it grew and into which it was constantly lapsing. [...] There were some hedges at the wall which grew in complete disregard of the other plants; they grew faster, dwarfing the smaller flowers, and spreading onto the territory of weaker bushes. (10)

Kosinski shows us that despite the lack of a typically anthropocentric presence in the garden, there are still intelligible materializations and patterns. Plants exist in relation to each other, both in the ecological (autopoietic) ways that plants die and nurture the growth of other plants, and in the way that plants live within their environments.¹⁰⁸ Peter-Paul Verbeek (2005) helps us understand *Being There* in this more ecological and intelligibly emergent sense, as the conscious practice of all things being present to, and co-shaping each other. In *What Things Do: Philosophical Reflections on Technology, Agency, and Design*, Verbeek writes:

Not only are they [subject and object] intertwined but, they co-shape one another. Human beings can only experience reality by relating to it, which does not involve any reality-in-itself but rather reality-for-them. As consciousness (perception, experience) can only exist as consciousness of something, reality is always reality for someone; in their engagement with reality, human beings always disclose it in a specific way. At the same time, humans themselves are constituted in this relation.

¹⁰⁸ I am purposely overlooking the competitive tone of the quote, which would suggest a more political (capitalist) and Spenserian 'survival of the fittest'. These tones are representational in nature, and therefore do not help us address *how* the garden is *performing*.

The environment with which they are involved always co-determines in which ways they can be present to the world and each other.¹⁰⁹

The suggestion is that consciousness – the experience of perception – is not contained in the brain necessarily, but in an environment.¹¹⁰ In this way it is not a question of Chance's (lack of) consciousness, but that the entire garden constitutes a conscious system – which includes its gardener.

Chance shows flashes of conscious thought throughout the novel – consciousness he does not *possess*, but which *emerges* depending on the intra-activity of the environment he finds himself in. For example, Chance is able to express his preference to 'watch' things, rather than engage with those things in other ways.¹¹¹ Likewise when at a television studio, he is able to ponder and be amazed by the way that television can portray itself (e.g., the recursive circuit of cameras, monitors, people, etc.) (50).

However, his *thinking* processes are described as being as free-flowing as his physical movements: like '[t]he wind, mindless of direction, intermittently sway[ing] the bushes and trees (10). His cognitive abilities, like his physical engagement with the world, are not intentional attempts to *interpret* the world, but instead to *perform* with it. Indeed, to distinguish between Chance's physical and cognitive engagements with his surroundings is, in many ways, an unnecessary distinction as they essentially form the same experiential expression of being. This is not to say that the novel does not deal with epistemological aspects of the human

¹⁰⁹ Peter-Paul Verbeek, *What Things Do: Philosophical Reflections on Technology, Agency, and Design* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), p. 112.

¹¹⁰ See, Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 289, where she writes, '[t]he situation of modern humans is akin to that of Searle in the Chinese Room, for every day we participate in systems whose total cognitive capacity exceeds our individual knowledge [...].'

¹¹¹ See, for example, Kosinski, *Being There*, p. 30, when he notices that EE has changed his name to Chauncey in the limousine.

experience, but instead that the epistemological is contingent upon the performative.¹¹² Chance is indistinguishable from the experiential manifestation of his garden, as well as any environment he finds himself in. Metafictionally, then, Chance reminds us that metafiction is indistinguishable from their situated frames in the metafictioning manifold. Whatever is fed into their creation/reception, is reflected back and the original conditions, reconfigured. This is the differential nature of the observational act.

Agency is an important concept in *agential realism* – Barad’s formulation of performative intra-activity.¹¹³ Barad writes: ‘*matter is substance in its intra-active becoming – not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing [i.e., always reconfiguring agential matter] process of iterative intra-activity*’.¹¹⁴ It is agency that gives the universe its objects, and since objects are always reconfiguring, it is agency that makes possible the causal chains of these materializations. As Barad tells us, ‘matter emerges out of and includes as part of its being the ongoing reconfiguring of boundaries.’¹¹⁵ This means all objects contextually inform, and actively (de/re)construct materials from which new materials emerge. As Barad writes, ‘[p]henomena are constitutive of reality’, and metafiction as performative phenomena, self-consciously do this by differentially disrupting their conventions and thereby their materiality in the world to produce novel expressions of meaning.¹¹⁶

Barad calls this indeterminate practice of (re)configuring meaning, the material-discursive, though I am appropriating the term in a more literary context.¹¹⁷ Barad writes, ‘*[m]aterial-discursive practices are specific iterative enactments – agential intra-actions –*

¹¹² See, Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain*, p. 25, where he writes, ‘[...] *performative epistemology*, [...] a vision of knowledge as *part of* performance rather than as an external controller of it.’

¹¹³ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 170.

¹¹⁴ Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity’, p. 822.

¹¹⁵ Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity’, p. 822.

¹¹⁶ Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity’, p. 817.

¹¹⁷ Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity’, pp. 822-823.

*through which matter is differentially engaged and articulated (in the emergence of boundaries and meanings), reconfiguring the material-discursive field of possibilities in the iterative dynamics of intra-activity that is agency.*¹¹⁸ Elsewhere, she calls this material-discursive field an enfolding spacetime-mattering manifold.¹¹⁹ In this simultaneously fictional (constructed) and real (objective) manifold of cleaving matter the materializations and reconfigurations of possibilities and meaning takes place.

Barad sees the discursive differently from the material, but only in as much as the discursive is ‘local’: that is, it is immediately intelligible within a specific context. They are both, however, intra-active ‘matterings’, and of the same manifold. While the manifold is indeterminate and largely unintelligible, via apparatuses – ‘specific material practices through which local semantic and ontological determinacy are intra-actively enacted’ – we come to understand aspects of the manifold, though not all at once.¹²⁰ Apparatuses can be anything from tools, institutions, ethical practices, or our simple Paleolithic bodily senses (which make all other apparatuses usable). Barad writes that ‘apparatuses are the exclusionary practices of mattering through which intelligibility and materiality are constituted’.¹²¹ An apparatus is an interface that makes part of the manifold aware of itself in terms of knowledge and ontological distinctions. Any object, then, is by definition a self-reflexive (metafictionally emergent, constructed, and objective) aspect of the universe.

For example, given our bodily senses, cognitive capabilities and technologies and our place within the manifold that is the universe, we are able to understand the nature of that universe (albeit in a limited perspective).¹²² All phenomena *are* material observations, the

¹¹⁸ Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity’, pp. 822-823.

¹¹⁹ See, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 176-177.

¹²⁰ Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity’, p. 820.

¹²¹ Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity’, p. 820.

¹²² This is to suggest that perhaps humans are the manifold’s way of pondering itself. What becomes ‘our world’ stands in contrast to the indeterminate field from which our intra-active intelligibility and materiality manifest.

meaning-making practices of the manifold observing itself via apparatuses. The manifold is not populated by objects that pre-exist and which can be known, but instead, is a field of possibilities that manifest into objects when a part of the universe makes itself intelligible to another part of the universe – there is only phenomena in which materially knowable objects arise.

Being There is a novel that demonstrates the causal implications of such an intra-active manifold in the storyworld (and for the reader) with regards to enacting material-discursive meaning. Causes do not necessarily follow their effects, as conventionally understood, but are simultaneously and differentially co-created. Chance does not inhabit a world of actions and reactions between the cast of characters, but shows that cause and effect are solely a matter of perception and that they in fact co-create each other through performative non-linear engagements. Barad notes that '*[d]iscursive practices are causal intra-actions – they enact local causal structures through which one “component” (the “effect”) of the phenomenon is marked by another “component” (the “cause”) in their differential articulation*'.¹²³ All phenomena are apparatuses making the manifold intelligible to itself in some way. Chance, television, audience, and the emerging society all are phenomena that create each other in the 'eyes' of each other. These phenomena are inherently causal. That is, 'in [their] causal intra-activity, “part” of the world becomes determinately bounded and propertied in its emergent intelligibility to another “part” of the world'.¹²⁴ Neither of these entities pre-exist the other, but in fact co-exist in the present moment as differentially reconfiguring and co-creating phenomena. Therefore, although it may not appear so at first glance, this novel is metafictional precisely because it reflects (and performs) this observational aspect to all object/agents in the world.

¹²³ Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity', p. 821.

¹²⁴ Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity', p. 821.

With regards to television, Chance exhibits agency slightly different from that which is informed through his role as gardener. Kosinski writes:

By changing the channel he could change himself. He could go through phases, as garden plants went through phases, but he could change as rapidly as he wished by twisting the dial backward and forward. In some cases he could spread out into the screen without stopping, just as on TV people spread out into the screen. By turning the dial, Chance could bring others inside his eyelids. Thus he came to believe that it was he, Chance, and no one else, who made himself be. (10-11)

It is important to note that Chance's relationship with television is fundamentally similar to the way in which he is co-present with/in his garden. Kosinski writes that 'he sank into the screen. Like sunlight and fresh air and mild rain, the world from outside the garden entered Chance [via television], and Chance, like a TV image, floated into the world, buoyed up by a force he did not see and could not name' (11). From a performative perspective there is no difference between gardening and television, but television drives a nuanced point: learned behavior is contingent upon the experiential. That is, Chance's determinism – his engagement with gardening and television and his inability to think representationally – do not preclude his agential exercise of preferred engagements with the environment. Chance is still able to exhibit an ability to 'think' about his preferences for engaging with the world.

This epistemological tension reappears throughout the novel. Not only does Chance take the initiative to change channels at his own leisure, he also corrects his utterances when sensing unsatisfactory communication. Furthermore, Chance is able to engage in abstract thought and

learn, as is the case when pondering how television could portray itself, when he sees himself in the monitors at the television studio (52). As Kosinski writes, Chance understands that ‘[o]f all the manifold things [...] only TV constantly held up a mirror to its own neither solid nor fluid face’ (52-53). This suggests that, despite ‘limitations’, Chance is attuned to practicing the sedimentized knowledge written into him (i.e., gardening and TV), *and*, that new sedimentizations – or knowledge – are possible despite perceived limitations.

Though this thesis does not deal with AI, it is helpful to mention that Chance-like robots were invented by Grey Walter in the late 1940’s.¹²⁵ These robots – tortoises named Elise and Elmer – were of simple design. They consisted of three wheels (two in the back and one in the front), a battery-powered electric motor for the front wheel, and another motor for pivoting the front axle.¹²⁶ If the tortoise hit an obstacle, a switch on the body would cause it to change directions.¹²⁷ Additionally, a photocell wired to the front fork would cut off its rotation whenever the tortoise encountered a light source, allowing it to recharge its battery by heading towards its source.¹²⁸ Furthermore, the forks would switch back on when encountering ‘above a certain level of intensity of illumination’.¹²⁹ In Pickering’s analysis, ‘the life of the tortoise was one of perpetual wanderings up to and away from lights. [...] When their batteries were low, however, the tortoises would not lose interests in light sources; instead, they would enter their hutches and recharge themselves’.¹³⁰ In other words, the tortoises, though *Machina Speculatrix* (Walter’s name for his new ‘inorganic species’), were able to engage with their environments, in ways that allowed them to ‘watch’ for light sources, and when there was none near, to ‘think’ about returning to their hutches to recharge themselves. These machines learned

¹²⁵ See, Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain*, p. 43.

¹²⁶ See, Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain*, p. 43.

¹²⁷ See, Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain*, p. 43.

¹²⁸ See, Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain*, p. 43.

¹²⁹ See, Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain*, p. 43.

¹³⁰ See, Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain*, p. 43.

certain behaviors, from the fact that they were designed to lock onto light sources. Pickering writes:

The running lights were originally intended simply to signal that a given tortoise was working properly, but they bestowed upon the tortoise an interesting sensitivity to its own kind. It turned out, for example, that a tortoise passing a mirror would be attracted to the reflection of its own light, which would then be extinguished as the tortoise locked onto its image; the light would then reappear as the scanning rotation of the front wheel set back in, attracting the tortoise's attention again [...]. The tortoise would thus execute a kind of mirror dance [...] "like a clumsy Narcissus". Likewise, two tortoises encountering one another would repetitively lock onto and then lose interest in one another, executing a mating dance [...] in which "the machines cannot escape from one another; but nor can they ever consummate their "desire" (Walter 1953, 128, 129).¹³¹

This is not unlike Chance, who is never able to fully 'consummate' any 'objective' understanding with the cast of characters. While Chance and the characters engage each other in perpetual observation for a proverbial light source, we too seek out meaning in things which differentially change the second we *lock onto them*. Metafictionally, we are called upon by this novel to ponder our own bio-cognitive-cultural speculative mechanisms from which emerge our own behaviors.

To return to the example of his viewing of television, it is not that Chance learns how to interact with people from this, but that the practice of engaging with television sedimentizes

¹³¹ See, Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain*, p. 43. See also, Walter, *The Living Brain*, pp. 128-129.

certain behaviors and knowledge about the world which he is able to put into ‘real practice’ once evicted from the estate. In this way, like these tortoises with rudimentary motors, axels and sensors, Chance is able to change the channels of the television, engage with people outside the estate, and intuit a feeling that he ‘brings others inside his eyelids [...] believ[ing] that it was he, Chance, and no one else, who made himself be’ (11). In essence, television represents the contingent epistemological component to the performative ontological foundation of experience evidenced through gardening. Chance, without his ‘sensors’ – his proclivity to watch – would be an indistinguishable entity in the wild forest of experience. But it is his sensory capability that not only allows him to be a gardener, but also a functional human being by ‘bringing others inside his eyelids’ (distinguishing them from the intra-active fabric of possibilities), and ‘make himself be’ (sedimentizing behaviors that make him intelligible to the other). In this way, rote intelligence is inconsequential. What truly matters is that this ‘*Machina speculatrix*’ does what it does whether confined in an estate or released upon the world. Final sections below elucidate upon this causal structure between the materials of the metafictioning manifold.

Chance as Phenomenal Object

This chapter has been concerned with an interpretation of human and non-human objects as phenomenal, observing agencies of differentially materializing manifestations. The paradox of Chance – the humanoid dullard with little sense of self, who learns nothing of/from his growing importance to the social structure of the storyworld, but who has perceivably been able to ‘learn’ about society through television and about the processes of life through gardening – is reconciled through a performative lens. *Being There* appears to be comic, or dystopic, depending on the critic, but only from representational perspectives. From a performative point

of view, the novel can be seen as making a deeper argument about the contingent natures of ontology and epistemology, in what Barad calls, *onto-epistem-ology*.¹³²

This section focuses on the agency of observation. Chance is first *seen* outside the routine of his everyday existence by the death of the Old Man (13). That is, Chance and the Old Man's deathly state *observe* each other as phenomena. It is not that the Old Man has died which is important, but that in one instance he is one object (a living man) participating in the 'normal' intra-active routine that is the estate, and in the next instance he is a different object (a dead man) which reconfigures the routine of the estate and Chance's identity.¹³³ The estate, as Chance has always known it, depended on certain objects – people, television, and gardening – to create the object known as 'Chance'. After Chance is forced from the estate, there is no option but to assume a different identity.¹³⁴ The mistake of the critics mentioned throughout stems from the assumption that Chance was his own person to begin with, when in fact he was always an entity in a larger ecology of entities settled in its own systemic equilibrium; and in the wake of the death of the Old Man, became a completely different entity within a different ecology of things. Kosinski illustrates this in the way that Chance is invisible to the law. He has no record or legal history with which the lawyers (who come to take care of the Old Man's estate) can identify him. The message is clear: (Chance's) identity is not fixed or knowable and cannot be represented on paper (18-24). Though Chance is a caricature of these dynamics, this is true of all things in as much as any representation will fail to communicate the entirety of a person's

¹³² See, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 89, for a simplified definition of the term as well as its situatedness in relation to reflective understandings of ontology and epistemology as separate fields. This term is outlined in greater depth in the following chapter, but essentially signifies that ontology and epistemology are not separate but features of the same materializing phenomena (along with ethics). See also, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 90.

¹³³ This presentation of two different Old Men is made to simplify the argument. As will be seen further below, it is not actually the case that there are two Old Men, but there are phenomenal residual effects that continue to play roles in the onto-epistem-ological manifestations.

¹³⁴ See, Kosinski, *Being There*, pp. 27-28, where Chance goes out into the real world.

identity *and* paradoxically, as we have seen throughout this thesis, all attempts to capture such knowledge differentially reconfigures that thing's ontological and epistemological makeup.

Granted, Chance does *know* that his name is Chance (29-30), and while he tells EE his name at one point (30), for the rest of the novel he continues to answer to Chauncey as if that is who he is. This initial display of knowledge (of being named Chance) is merely residual knowledge from his time at the estate – a sedimentized effect. It is not that Chance is a pre-existing object fixed in his identity as Chance, nor does this mean that he becomes a completely new object necessarily. These ideas also fall into a representational paradigm as they assume Chance is different entities-in-themselves at different points in the story. More accurately, and in the terms of this thesis, when EE enters the picture the residual effect that is Chance, *and* his knowledge that he is Chance, intra-actively couples with the new objects of the situation (EE) and turns him into something new – Chauncey. The world of Chance is written into the world of Chauncey, who is nothing other than the sum-total of intra-activity that plays into his current manifestation. Chance allegorically (and ironically) represents an object that is not beholden to any sense of identity.

Barad and Pickering both note the ontological primacy of our engagements with the world. Generally, Barad terms this understanding of the world *onto-epistem-ology*, and Pickering terms it the *nonmodern ontological theatre*.¹³⁵ They contend that entities are indeterminate and unknowable in any fixed way and what they come to mean depends upon how they relate to other entities at any given moment. It is not that we live in a world that is largely unknowable in which we strive to know more, but that the world is largely indeterminate and as parts of the world become (momentarily) determined (intelligible) to us, representations

¹³⁵ See, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 89; Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain*, pp. 18-19. In both cases, representations follow performances, not the other way around.

emerge.¹³⁶ We see this occurring throughout the novel, particularly in the way the characters engage with Chauncey. From a performative perspective, there are memorable instances in which Chauncey communicates an understanding of this indeterminate base to reality.

A good example of this is the scene with the lawyers. They take his unwillingness to sign away his claim to the estate as a refusal based upon a sense of entitlement (24). Chance, however, is merely unable to sign (thus guaranteeing his ‘paper-less-ness’). Here, Chance represents a base reality of indeterminacy in the way he is incapable of leaving his mark, responding earlier in the scene with, ‘you have me, I am here. What more proof do you need?’ (23). Again, Chance is an allegorical character representing, in this case, the fundamental nature of reality from a performative point of view. This is not to suggest that a performative approach involves resisting the structure of social forms. Rather, this allegorical scene is important because Chance’s base approach demonstrates how, in a performative sense, Chance is allowed to ‘leave his mark’ in the form of social change. That is, it is his being in the world as opposed to social signifiers (the legal documents) that point to the signified ‘Chance’. Chance/Chauncey is the foil to believing in the primacy of representations.

Another instance of Chance’s ontological primacy comes in a revealing encounter with Ronald Steigler of Eidolon Books, who wants to publish a book by Chauncey (78-80).¹³⁷ Though this scene does not re-contextualize Chance the same way that the scene with EE does, it does underscore the fact that objects (e.g., Chance) are observers. Chance responds to Ronald Steigler with ‘I can’t write’, followed by, ‘I can’t even read’, while having a short discussion about publishing the book (79). Though Steigler takes these statements to suggest Chauncey does not have the time to write a book, and the public no longer reads anymore (implying the

¹³⁶ And also that this representational emergence differentially reconfigures the performative landscape.

¹³⁷ See, ‘Eidolon’, in *Dictionary.com* (Online: Dictionary.com, LLC, 2019) for the definition of ‘eidolon’, which means an idealized person, or a phantom.

publishing industry needs to re-evaluate itself), Chauncey implicitly accepts once the conversation switches to gardening as a metaphor for the publishing industry.¹³⁸ Steigler says, “Who has the time [to read]? One glances at things, talks, listens, watches. Mr. Gardiner, I admit that as a publisher I should be the last one to tell you this...but publishing isn’t exactly a flowering garden these days” (79). The obvious trigger-words at the end of the quote elicit Chauncey’s response. In fact, Chance is no different from the other characters, as he too projects his penchant for gardening and television upon others. Steigler’s lament to the publishing industry is symbolic of a modern representational world coming in conflict with a nonmodern performative world, whereby Chauncey represents that performative core. His inability to read highlights the incapacity to amass large quantities of rote knowledge – with the lesson of the novel being that this has little effect upon Chance’s success.

In a representational paradigm we tend to read things as one object (i.e., the reader) standing in relation to another object (i.e., the book), through which the reader seeks to uncover information that is thought to be inherent to the artifact.¹³⁹ Chauncey demonstrates that he does not seek to uncover knowledge, but to co-produce it. One of the catch-phrases of the novel appears in different forms similar to: ‘I like to watch’.¹⁴⁰ To watch is to observe, and in the scene with Steigler, Chauncey appears to spurn a representational approach to the world by not engaging with reality as a *reader*, but as a *watcher*.

Watching, at first, seems a complacent activity in comparison to reading but the plot trajectory negates this bias. If Chance were merely a passive watcher, then he would not become an international celebrity and influential political figure. Embracing his performative and

¹³⁸ This is a common trope in the novel as there are many instances where gardening is a metaphor for business practices and the American economic situation. See, Kosinski, *Being There*, pp. 35, 45-46, 53-55, 79-80. This trope is discussed in more depth further below.

¹³⁹ See, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, pp. 48-49.

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, Kosinski, *Being There*, pp. 74, 82, and 86.

indeterminate approaches to the world, observing (watching) is a way in which we engage without judgmentally precluding or preferring certain things over others.¹⁴¹ It is precisely his openness to the world that allows the world around him to blossom with him in it. His refusal/inability to write or read are in fact refusals/inabilities to close himself off from his world through judgments.

Conversely, it is the cast of characters who are interested in maintaining their identities as CEO's, Presidents, Soviet agents, talk show hosts, homosexual men, book publishers, etc., who *read* into Chance the things that help them preserve their sense of self. Indeed, these *readings* by the other characters are what make for much of the novel's comic aspects. Chance, who can only think and speak upon the topics of television and gardening, forces others into formulating their own interpretations based on the contexts that they are projecting upon Chauncey. The protagonist is an observing agency – a being performing *with* their environment. When Mr. Rand asks Chauncey whether the accident of being hit by the limousine will prevent him from doing his work, Chance says:

“It is not easy, sir, [...] to obtain a suitable place, a garden, in which one can work without interference and grow with the seasons. There can't be too many opportunities left any more. On TV...”[...] “I've never seen a garden. I've seen forests and jungles and sometimes a tree or two. But a garden in which I can work and watch the things I've planted in it grow...” (35)

¹⁴¹ Again, these ethical matters are discussed in more depth in Chapter Five.

As mentioned previously, Chance's style of response to others is characteristic of his speech. Mr. Rand's answer is equally characteristic of the representational responses Chauncey typically receives. Kosinski writes:

Mr. Rand leaned across the table to him. "Very well put, Mr. Gardiner – I hope you don't mind if I call you Chauncey? A gardener! Isn't that the perfect description of what a real businessman is? A person who makes a flinty soil productive with the labor of his own hands, who waters it with the sweat of his own brow, and who creates a place of value for his family and for the community. Yes, Chauncey, what an excellent metaphor! A productive businessman is indeed a laborer in his own vineyard!" (35-36)

Not only is Mr. Rand representationally (mis)interpreting Chance, who is speaking literally of gardens, but the very act of interpretation serves to further concretize Mr. Rand's identity as a businessman. Chance, on the other hand, who is not necessarily beholden to any fixed identity, enters the world of American finance since Mr. Rand's enthusiasm for Chauncey's response inspires him to introduce Chauncey to the US President (44-47). In this way, Chance not only becomes Chauncey, and later, Blank Page, but also becomes a businessman, a statesman, a fluent speaker of Russian, a homosexual, a heterosexual seducer, and a possible Vice Presidential candidate.¹⁴² At the same time, the characters re-enforce who they (think) they are

¹⁴² Kosinski, *Being There*, pp. 35-36, 55, 70, 83, 87, 103-104. This helps confirm Kennedy's argument that Kosinski/Chance represent 'cons' – deceptive entities concerned with survival. The functionality of moral codes are however outside the scope of this chapter and thesis. The following chapter does address the ethical practice of engaging with the world performatively but does not address morality. The work of Barad and Pickering suggest new ethical engagements with the world, that do not moralize or try to make definitive judgments about the world, but that try to formulate (shifting) judgments around the performative understandings of the ecology and understand that such judgments are actively reconfiguring the world (which necessitates new judgments). This is also not to say that Chance embodies these different identities, but that these identities are 'images' as is Chauncey, which emerge and serve as additional material to further the plot trajectory.

by iterating themselves towards certain identifiable ends, while Chance performatively reinvents himself. Chance too re-affirms his identity as a gardener, however, when he reads gardening into the other characters' utterances – proving the point that a sense of identity is inescapable as long as humans are actively entangling in the larger manifold. The difference between Chance and the others is that while they are actively preserving labels they live by, Chance is not beholden to labels, but to performing – watching – with others, and manifesting different labels. Symbolically, this dynamic fits within the master trope of 'gardener' as someone who actively and necessarily maintains an active presence with their 'garden' in order to nurture fruitful yields (engendering ongoing acts of co-presence and co-creation between subject and object).

Conclusion: EE's Performative Liberation

Chance often tells people he 'likes to watch'.¹⁴³ Leaving the UN fete, reporters take this phrase to mean he prefers television news to newspapers (73-74). Later, at the house of EE's friend for a party, Chance responds in the same way to a man who propositions him for sex (81-84). The result of this encounter is that the man mistakes Chance's response as a request to masturbate in front of him (83). Similarly, when EE tries to seduce Chance, the same thing happens, but with the difference that EE becomes liberated by the encounter. Again, the issue is not Chance and EE's respective genders, but the fact that they constitute two observing/able objects co-present with each other. This is not to minimize the gendered dynamics that can no doubt be elaborated upon in more social contexts. Though the fact that the man is not liberated by the encounter could certainly be further explored along gender lines and societal influences, my own metafictional understanding of the situation is that the homosexual man is immediately

¹⁴³ See, for example, Kosinski, *Being There*, pp. 74, 82, 86.

satisfied, whereas EE's desires are constantly disrupted throughout the novel. The man immediately fulfills aspects of his identity as a sexually active homosexual man, but EE cannot so easily iterate her identity as a sexually active heterosexual trophy wife. These constant disruptions force EE to reconsider her identifiable roles as such and create in her a desire for deeper fulfillment rather than immediate satisfaction. EE teaches us how we may begin moving towards more informed performative engagements with the world. This concluding discussion analogizes the implications of a performative paradigm shift which will inform the ethical explorations of performative metafiction in the next chapter by focusing on EE's response to Chance.

This scene importantly demonstrates a character being changed by Chance. Outside of Chance himself, EE appears to be the only character able to shed her representational parameters, and live a more performative life. She says, "I am so free with you. Up until the time I met you, every man I knew barely acknowledged me. I was a vessel that he could take hold of, pierce, and pollute. I was merely an aspect of somebody's love-making" (87). While lamenting her treatment as an object for the use of men, EE also recognizes how her own behavior has engaged in iterations of this role – for example, as trophy wife and adulterous lover. She and her lovers merely used each other to perpetuate their own fixed senses of self. Here, the act of masturbating while Chauncey watches her, symbolically casts them both as true observers – vulnerable in the sense that they are entirely open to their immediate environment of watchers as self-referential observers performing in an observing environment.¹⁴⁴ Contrary to continued associations of metafiction to masturbation, this section emphasizes that the

¹⁴⁴ 'Metafiction as masturbatory form' is a common metaphor employed to describe metafiction's self-referential and narcissistic tendencies (as in the pathological self-love of the Greek Narcissus). See, for example Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), p. 218; and Tom Corby, 'Digital Bop Poetics', in *Network Art: Practices and Positions*, ed. by Tom Corby (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 128, as an example of the breadth in time and contexts acknowledging this association.

elements of metafiction which are considered ‘masturbatory’ (such as its narcissistic self-reference), are not to be taken pejoratively, but should illustrate the necessary dynamic of self-referential engagement with the narrative ecology that is fundamental to the ongoing life of materials in the world. This act, in a sense, creates a narcissistic self-awareness coupled to an equally self-aware environment – not unlike how emergent metafiction is entangled in an equally emergent metafictional ecology.

After climaxing, EE says: “[d]earest... You uncoil my wants: desire flows within me, and when you watch me my passion dissolves it. You make me free. I reveal myself to myself and I am drenched and purged” (87). This statement appears, at first, narcissistic, as EE speaks about revealing herself to herself, about Chauncey watching her, and about her desires being dissolved by her own passion.¹⁴⁵ However, what EE actually implies, here, is that both she and Chauncey constitute a circuit of bodies, contingent selves that affect and are affected by each other in a way that their mutual benefit is dependent upon. They are observing agencies intra-actively reconfiguring one another inwardly and outwardly.

When EE says Chauncey ‘uncoils her wants’, she not only says that her happiness is to some degree dependent on him, but that her ‘wants’ *are* the desires of a representational self – seeking to perpetuate itself. It is not that ‘uncoiling’ means satiating, but perhaps something more along the lines of organizing or being aware of, and not impulsively succumbing to. A ‘coiled want’ could be seen as a tool for impulsively diving into something, while an ‘uncoiled want’ metaphorically loses its projectile sense, relegating those wants to mere figments of the mind. The *awareness* of these wants as representations and not as impulsive needs, *makes* them performative objects. This is because these (uncoiled) wants no longer drag EE around. Rather, in this new formulation, EE and her wants are able to come together as phenomena and

¹⁴⁵ Again, from a representational point of view, in which objects pre-exist as entities-in-themselves, this would be a valid interpretation.

materialize a new ‘drenched and purged’ object – that is, EE accepts her reality, not as between her and the world, but as a sea of objects observing and changing each other. In the act of observation (of observing and being observed), freedom arises, as EE tells us. This is because agential objects are no longer prisoners to representational parameters. Therefore, when EE says, ‘I reveal myself to myself’, she is not making a narcissistic statement about a newfound centrality and self-importance in the world (87). She means: I (EE) reveal (observe) myself (my representations/illusory/subjective self) to myself (my performative and objectively phenomenological self), and I am drenched and purged (embrace my place in the world as a changing object).¹⁴⁶

Being There deals with objects with affective qualities. We see this in EE’s transformation, as opposed to the lack of transformation in other characters persistently projecting fixed meanings upon Chance. Another neologism by Barad is worth mentioning in this context: namely, *response-ability*, or the ability to respond (ethically). When EE and Chauncey open themselves to watching, they are bodies affecting and being affected by each other. This two-way affection between bodies is what Barad terms an ethical, or response-able event. Barad writes, “‘responsibility’ is not about right response, but rather a matter of inviting, welcoming, and enabling the response of the Other. That is, what is at issue is response-ability – the ability to respond’.¹⁴⁷ This is not to suggest an ‘anything-goes’ approach to identity, but that identities (representations) and practices (performances) must ultimately act congruently in

¹⁴⁶ That is, she is purged from her limiting identities that were stifling her well-being. This was foreshadowed at the beginning of the chapter by the work of Houston, ‘Phenomenological Self’, pp. iii-iv (abstract). Indeed, Houston’s position is that the subjective self is the ‘true self’, that is, in the words of this thesis, the belief in individual identities as fixed things in themselves. She argues that the ‘phenomenological self’ is that co-constructed identity, which, with regards to *Being There*, is illustrated the phenomenological natures of Chance and EE. My contention throughout this chapter has been that the phenomenological self *is* the ‘true self’ – objectively, rather than subjectively speaking – in that metafictionality in fiction-realities, are a phenomenally intra-active condition of the metafictioning manifold. This objectivity, has been explored both in the discussions on metafiction as a genre, as a necessary element, and in agential realism, which locates the conditions for reality in the intra-active processes of our material-discursive realities.

¹⁴⁷ Karen Barad, ‘Intra-Actions’, in *Mousse*, ed. by Adam Kleinman (2012), p. 77.

the spirit of affecting ongoing performative and neocybernetic processes and materializations. This is also not to make any moralistic claim to any iteration of identity politics that may be projected upon my argument in this thesis and chapter. The purpose, instead, is to foreground the processual ethos of things in phenomena which must maintain an affectual response-ability, and self-awareness, to maintain ongoing meaningful reconfigurations. In this chapter we see how *Being There* simultaneously performs with, and represents, the metafictioning manifold.

From a phenomenal perspective, *Being There* proves to be a novel differentially manifesting its myth-facts in the storyworld and with the reader, suggesting that classical attempts at categorizing things as fictional or real require rethinking. This novel illustrates the paradoxes of engaging the world representationally, and instead offers a glimpse of a paradigmatic shift to performatively intra-acting with the world. *Being There* presents a world, embodied by Chance and discovered by EE, that functions on an ethos of being co-present with others first, and taking note of the information that emerges from such intra-actions second. As such, *Being There* is a metafictional ‘mimesis’ of phenomena – it is an analogue representation of a phenomenal manifold reality, and as such, serves as material that works to reconfigure the reality it is supposedly mimicking. Though my claim is that reality is a fiction (and vice-versa), I am not claiming that reality does not exist. *Being There* makes this clear: the novel does not illustrate a storyworld where reality is fictitious because of its (mis)read construction, but shows how these fictitious realities have real consequences. Though there is a narcissistic element to observers reading their own preferences into the utterances of other characters, what is more important is the way in which these readings produce changes in the novel.

Being There shows us that the causal structures between subjects and objects are differentially co-creative, thus blurring the subject-object distinction. As a metafiction, *Being There* extends the argument of Chapter Three in two ways: by establishing a performative

material approach to metafiction, that takes into account the differential dynamism of fiction-realities; and by establishing this open-ended process as a convention of metafictionality – as a ‘mimesis’ of phenomena. Implicit then, is an ethicality that allows subject-objects to maintain proverbial dialogue with each other. This implication is addressed in the next chapter.

V.

**METAFICTION AND DIFFRACTION: THE PRACTICE/S OF THE
METAFICTIONING MANIFOLD THROUGH MARK Z. DANIELEWSKI'S *THE
FAMILIAR: ONE RAINY DAY IN MAY*, VOLUME ONE**

The Familiar will ask us not only to ponder the very small (for example, why is “familiar” in pink [...]), but also to consider the fundamental questions about subjectivity, connectivity, and temporality – in other words, being (“self-worlds”), being with others and being across time, from the deep past to the distant future, as well as in an immediate present.¹

Introduction

This chapter locates a new diffractive reading practice in living metafiction and materials by mediating the arguments and discussions of the past three chapters. While in Part One metafiction was established as object-systems in a metafictioning manifold, and in Chapter Four I located a paradigmatic shift for understanding the manifold, in this chapter I uncover the ethos for such a manifold to continue perpetuating itself with, and through, readerly co-participation with the other materials of the narrative ecology. This chapter explores metafiction’s heuristic ethos in fiction and reality, an ethos that perpetuates ongoing stories through a ‘conversational’ ethic with other materials, thereby eliciting in the reader a reading practice of being influenced by other materials, and an openness to influencing those materials in turn.

¹ Jeremy Douglass, Caterina Lazzara, Tyler Shoemaker, and Rita Raley, ‘The Unfamiliar’, *Los Angeles Review of Books* 2015, p. 4.

This chapter is also about metafictional works encouraging more ethical lives. Whereas the other chapters of the thesis utilized texts that modeled aspects of a metafictioning manifold, Mark Z. Danielewski's *The Familiar: One Rainy Day in May* (Volume 1) (*TFv1*) serves to model the manifold itself while simultaneously participating in it.² That is, while the other novels foreground important aspects of the manifold, *TFv1* is an emergent work of art that appears to be self-conscious of its status as a model of, and participant in, this emergent narrative ecology. I demonstrate here that it is a communicative ethos within and between object-systems that gives metafictional works their ongoing relevance in the world, which in turn ensures a continued perpetuation of further metafictioning materials and meanings. In this way, this chapter contributes to one of the overall objectives of this thesis: to re-energize metafiction studies in new posthuman discourses such as second-order cybernetics and new materialism to show that metafictional works are analogous representations of living intra-active materials while exhibiting that very phenomenality in the world. Chapter Five, as a concluding chapter, demonstrates how the metafictioning manifold's object-systems work together to co-tell and co-materialize the world's storied material reality. I ultimately argue that the metafictional novel is one such apparatus that draws our attention to our entanglements and becomings, and encourages us to engage the world with a metafictional ethic so as to co-participate in a thriving material experience.

Danielewski's *TFv1* is a metafictioning novel that performs what I will argue are ethical acts of recursive entanglement across metaleptic levels, from the various narrators' storylines to the reader's cultural environments.³ *Ethics*, often expressed in this chapter as *practice/s*, is

² Mark Z. Danielewski, *The Familiar: One Rainy Day in May* Vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 2015).

³ See also, Chapter Four, this thesis, for discussion on 'mimesis' of phenomena as a metafictioning process. This chapter extends the arguments of Chapter Four as they exist in the novel as analogous of the reader's roles, and applies them as very real practices in the materialization of *TFv1*. Regarding the abbreviation, *TFv1*, this formulation is used when referring to the first volume, and *The Familiar* is used when referring to the novel project in its entirety. To be clear, only volume one is used for actual textual analysis for reasons addressed

the simultaneous action of an inherent driving force (e.g. something's *ethos*) and a method towards maintaining that principle of action. As outlined in the introductory chapter, my use of ethics is performatively grounded as a spirit or action in which things affectively work to reconfigure themselves, others, and the environment(s) they are situated in. This is opposed to a representational ethical context that seeks to make moralistic value judgements on things or actions based on particular ontological distinctions rather than the communicative potency of things as they potentially are as 'things-in-phenomena'.⁴ Ethical practices, in this interpretation, do not necessarily entail moral behaviors or distinctions (though this is not precluded), but rather the ability to affect and be affected by change as phenomenal 'building blocks' for scaffolding the meaningfulness of our experiences. This distinction is clarified throughout the chapter, but, essentially, ethics must be an inseparable component of the metafictioning manifold's emergence, since meaningful things could not emerge without a drive towards iterating and subverting those processes into new materialities.⁵ This understanding of ethics as an ongoing informed practice is preferable in that it locates an inseparable ethicality to the ontological and epistemological emergence of the world as framed herein as the metafictioning manifold. It's a practice that, contrary to nonsensical assumptions to postmodern (and many metafictional) works, situates a clearly affective ethicality that promotes a plurality of expression rather than a fixed morality (or lack thereof).

In this chapter, I use *TFvI* to comment on the inseparable ethical dimensions of the metafictioning manifold, defined as, 'the living processes of narrative-relations that extend

below.

⁴ See also, Chapter Four of this thesis for an extended discussion about 'things-in-phenomena'. This formulation is meant to describe the performativity of the material-discursive in contrast to representational understandings as 'things-in-themselves'.

⁵ This is described throughout, but it is worth noting that the tri-partite formulation of an ethico-onto-epistemology is taken from, Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 89-90, and contributes to my formulation of the metafictioning manifold (which includes the differential performativity of the material-discursive and the ethical dimensions of their affectivity).

beyond the perceived boundaries of fiction and reality, and which continually reconfigure and redefine its own ontological and epistemological dimensions'. The practice/s by which this metafictioning process self-perpetuates itself as a manifold (i.e., the ever-reconfiguring media environment) enfolding back on itself to re-define its own systems and intra-active relations suggests that the manifold is a living system.⁶ The manifold's practice/s of differential emergence makes it inherently autopoietic – perpetuating itself via the ongoing rupturing and (re)constructing of its fiction-reality boundaries, which emerge out of a neocybernetic context.⁷ This describes a performative object as well in the way the rupturing of convention *must* re-affirm that convention while reconfiguring its expressive potential.

Taken together, Chapters Two and Three argue that the autopoietic and performative processes evident in the metafictional novel mirror that of our larger narrative ecology and all the things in it scaffolding our experiences. But the metafictional novel does not merely 'mirror' reality, but instead *diffracts* it. That is, the metafictional novel (which is simply self-aware of what is happening with all objects) constitutes a sort of apparatus that it participates in, while also commenting on the larger ecology, what I have called here a '*mimesis*' of *phenomena*, inverted commas and all. It is therefore neocybernetic, analogously and self-referentially manifesting the storyworld of the novel, and materializing in reality, as one of myriad objects entangling with and also self-referentially co-participating in our experiences. Metafictions, as I have demonstrated, are performative, alive, neocybernetic, mimetic, and participatory in

⁶ See, for example, Humberto Maturana, and Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company 1980), pp. 78-79, who define an autopoietic system in similar terms.

⁷ See, Chapter Three, this thesis, on neocybernetics and its associated posthuman narratology, as formulated by Bruce Clarke. As will become evident in this chapter, the intra-active metafictioning manifold is inherently neocybernetic in that observers (i.e., minds/readers), contexts (i.e., societies/polyphonous meanings), and technologies (i.e., tools/novels) are an intra-active circuitry for generating and perpetuating fictions and realities as conventionally iterated and continually subverted.

material-discursive phenomena, and, as I will argue below, therefore constitute a *diffractive* genre.

Diffraction offers a methodology which ethically unifies these concepts as necessarily active and self-conscious in metafiction. Indeed, metafiction self-referentially diffract the concepts and conventions informing them, and therefore their uses in the real world, precisely because they are performative, autopoietic, and neocybernetically situated as mediating objects. Diffraction allows us to speak conceptually about the processes in metafiction, despite, but also precisely because, metafiction elude strict conceptual definitions.

A diffractive methodology offers a way of affecting patterns of difference, and as readers, becoming literate with those differences. Diffractive methodologies provide conceptual frameworks for understanding the performative and neocybernetic components of metafictionality as unified processes of living (autopoietic) and intra-active (performative) object-systems affecting and being affected by their environments (neocybernetics). That these processes can and do occur implies an ethicality that must therefore be addressed by the frameworks of this thesis – indeed, those theories converge in the analysis of *TFvI*.

Diffraction – as opposed to reflection (which carries narcissistic implications) – suggests a thing's potential to reconfigure its own material conditions.⁸ Furthermore, as a methodology, diffraction does not seek to elucidate how things differ (representationally speaking), but to locate the patterns of difference – that is, where diverse elements of the environment generate change.⁹ And, equally important to the two preceding points, a diffractive methodology *is* one

⁸ See, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 72. See also, Donna Haraway, 'The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/D Others', in *Cultural Studies*, ed. by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 295-337, at pp. 299-300. Reflection, as opposed to diffraction carries narcissistic implications in that it is a framework concerned with imitation and accuracy of that which is a reflection. Diffraction on the other hand is the performative displacement of conventions and their active reconfiguration.

⁹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 72.

such thing in the world serving to diffract the world's constitutive make-up, while also measuring said patterns of difference. In other words, diffraction is metafictionally oriented as it self-consciously models *and* reconfigures the ethico-onto-epistem-ological dynamics of the metafictioning manifold while also curating snapshots of the manifold as intelligible objects.¹⁰ Therefore, the central aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that metafiction *are* a diffractive genre as opposed to a reflective one, and with this comes a new affective ethicality that bonds the reader with the metafiction, and other objects of the world, as co-participatory storytellers.

This chapter therefore utilizes a diffractive methodology, building on work by Barad, in order to first argue that *The Familiar*'s metafictionality is a precondition for its status as a 'living book'. Second, this chapter argues that the novel's storying quality – its living-ness – is best understood in autopoietic and performative terms that dramatize conventional ontological, epistemological, and ethical dualities between subjects and objects such as author, reader, book, and culture. This chapter completes this thesis by putting the previous chapter's arguments into play with one another, while also taking as its subject the theory and methodology of diffraction.

The Familiar (volume 1): Living Form and Content

TFv1 is an eight-hundred-and-eighty-page volume about a twelve-year-old girl named Xanther who finds a cat. This event, somehow, is the thread which draws the various storylines together. There are nine different storylines of varying lengths and frequency, each containing their own narrator. Reviewer Raymond Cummings (2016) sets out the sheer range of the cast:

¹⁰ Again, Barad's formulation of ethico-onto-epistemology serves to identify a differentially performative spirit of ongoing reconfigurations. This so-called spirit is the ethic with which indeterminant ontological and epistemological boundaries materialize and continuously reconfigure.

The narrative bounces between nine storylines, each stubbornly committed to a unique form. Danielewski's primary avatar is Xanther Ibrahim [...] – precocious, awkward, withdrawn, troubled – whose epilepsy is perpetually a hair away from triggering. Her narrative is intertwined with those of Astair, her Ph.D. candidate mother, and Anwar, her video game designer stepfather. Elsewhere in L.A., gangbanger Luther Perez struggles to steer his crew clear of trouble; police detective Ozgur “Oz” Talat, who broods in the style of the noir antecedents he grew up admiring, orbits a series of strange investigations; and Armenian cabbie Shnorkh Zildjian dies slowly.

In Mexico, cryptic OCD fixer Isadorno oversees the delivery of expensive cargo and drifts through an audience with his merciless employer. In Singapore, small-time criminal Jing-Jing cohabitates with and cares for an elderly healer. Aged computer scientist Cas and her husband, Bobby, crisscross the United States; they're among a dwindling cohort of fugitives in possession of mysterious orbs that demand inordinate amounts of processing power to operate.¹¹

Though the connection between storylines is not entirely clear, they appear in chronological order and we revisit each narrator between two to five times for a total of thirty chapters.¹² In addition to these chapters, there are five “entr’actes” in sometimes un-paginated sections.¹³ These sections include short stories (before the novel proper begins), resembling television advertisements of storylines to come in future volumes, a coming attraction for volume two at

¹¹ Raymond Cummings, ‘Entropy and Infinity in *the Familiar*’, *Splice Today* (2016), 1-2.

¹² See, the online forum dedicated to *The Familiar*, where the readership is able to discuss and share data concerning the novel: heartbreak, ‘Table of Contents- Vol. 1: One Rainy Day in May’, in *The Familiar*, ed. by Mark Z. Danielewski (Online: vBulletin Solutions, 2016).

¹³ See, Wikipedia, ‘The Familiar, Volume 1: One Rainy Day in May’, (Online: Wikipedia, 2016), which contains lists and summaries, and various updates by at least one person associated personally with Danielewski.

the end of the novel proper, and three sections within the actual novel (12-43; 853-880).¹⁴ Two of these sections are characteristic of the image-text play within the entire novel, with one featuring orbs with text (messaging) floating on what seems to be a screen (i.e., a smartphone) by rawgrl, and the other a short comic taking place in Venice, Italy regarding the hypothetical eating of human flesh as an example of the types of acts required for staying perpetually young (434-435; 620-621). The more important entr'acte however, regards a sixteen-page chapter containing various Narrative Constructs (Narcons), which simultaneously inhabit the storyworld and reality (563-578). Cummings writes, '[...] "narrative constructs" [...] offer readers helpful hints, cough up capsule biographies, and further deepen a prevailing crepuscular unease, much as many characters sense something supernatural is stalking them from just beyond the cusp of perception, readers sense some force quietly anticipating our questions'.¹⁵ Douglass et al. summarize the Narcons as 'nigh-omniscient' entities 'that edit, ventriloquize, and otherwise give voice to characters whose "data points" they claim to know in their entirety'.¹⁶ Narcons exist via specific parameters, and at five hundred and sixty-three pages in, provide the necessary metacommentary for a better understanding of how to read the book. My primary focus here are these Narcons, as the Narcon chapter serves a didactic purpose, offering glimpses into the rules and laws of the diegetic level, but also dramatizes the boundary between the novel and reality, hailing both story and reader into a cohabited space of ongoing story production.¹⁷

¹⁴ Future references to page numbers will be made in-text.

¹⁵ Cummings, 'Entropy and Infinity', p. 1.

¹⁶ Douglass et al., 'The Unfamiliar', p. 2.

¹⁷ This thesis does not focus explicitly on theories of interpellation, but instead recognizes it as an inherent feature of the diffractive project. Beginning with Louis Althusser's work in 1970, interpellation has appeared as a regular feature in theories of metafiction/postmodernism, queer and gender studies, new materialism, and to a lesser extent – though seemingly tailor-made for – second order systems theory. In effect, the discourses of posthumanism feature interpellation as a feature of resisting strict subject-object binaries and the ecological (as in systems of narratives) in which we are situated. See, for example, Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001 [1970]). See also, Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*. 2nd ed. edn

In its entirety, *The Familiar* is proposed to comprise a staggering twenty-seven volumes, only five of which have appeared in print.¹⁸ Currently, however, the project is on hold (the implications of this are discussed further below).¹⁹ This chapter, however, focuses on the first volume since it sets the tone for the entire project and teaches the reader how to engage with the series.²⁰ Furthermore, though the Narcons manifest throughout the five volumes, only volume one contains a self-referential section wherein Narcon 9 discusses and performs with the other Narcons (3 and 27) the dynamics of all Narcons. As we will see, the Narcons embody what can be seen as certain performative principles inherent to all narratives – a diffractive dimension – and for this reason, volume one lends itself particularly well to this chapter.

Originally, *The Familiar*'s series of twenty-seven volumes (a total of 21,000 pages) were scheduled for release – one volume roughly every six months – until the years 2027 or 2029.²¹ However, before the project was put on hold, the final volume of season one was published in

(Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 35-39; Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.Femaleman(C)_Meets_Oncomouse(Tm): Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 49-52; and Iris van der Tuin, 'Diffraction as a Methodology for Feminist onto-Epistemology: On Encountering Chantal Chawaf and Posthuman Interpellation', *Parallax*, 20 (2014), 231-44, pp. 236; 241.

¹⁸ See, for example, Mark Z. Danielewski, *The Familiar: Into the Forest*. Vol. 2 (New York: Pantheon Books, 2015); Mark Z. Danielewski, *The Familiar: Honeysuckle & Pain*. Vol. 3 (New York: Pantheon Books, 2016); Mark Z. Danielewski, *The Familiar: Hades*. Vol. 4 (New York: Pantheon Books, 2017); and Mark Z. Danielewski, *The Familiar: Redwood*. Vol. 5 (New York: Pantheon Books, 2017).

¹⁹ Regarding the project's hiatus, Danielewski announced on his Facebook page that due to a lack of sales (possibly from its overly ambitious style) volume six, which would have begun season two of his project, would not be released and the project would go on indefinite hiatus. See, Mark Z. Danielewski, 'Mark Z. Danielewski (February 3, 2018)', Facebook, (2018) <<https://www.facebook.com/MarkZDanielewski/photos/it-is-with-a-heavy-heart-that-i-must-report-the-familiar-has-been-pausedtheres-n/1788256297885651/>> [Accessed February 6 2019]. See also, Various, 'R/Thefamiliar', reddit, (2018) <https://www.reddit.com/r/TheFamiliar/comments/7x3lly/is_the_hiatuscancellation_that_surprising_to/> [Accessed February 6 2019], for a short conversation between fans regarding the hiatus.

²⁰ Arguably, this makes volume one slightly more metafictional than the others, as this didactic element is a little more overt.

²¹ See, Douglass, 'The Unfamiliar', p. 1, for projected final publication date in 2027; see also, Inge van de Ven, 'The Serial Novel in the Age of Binging: How to Read Mark Z. Danielewski's 'the Familiar'', *Image [&] Narrative*, 17 (2016), 91-103, for projected final publication date in 2029. By my own calculation, had the project not been put on hold, 2029 seems closer for a goal of twenty-seven volumes, though 2027 appears to be consistent with the numerological aspects of the novel concerning 3, 9, 27. Danielewski himself mentioned to interviewer Arun Rath that he planned to release two or three volumes a year; see, Arun Rath, 'Danielewski Returns with a Long, Sideways Look at *The Familiar*', NPR Books, (2015) <<http://www.npr.org/2015/05/10/404917355/danielewski-returns-with-a-long-sideways-look-at-the-familiar>> [Accessed 31 December 2016], p. 1.

2017.²² This is to say the trajectory of publication has always been largely uncertain and dependent upon unforeseeable factors. Another interesting example of this is explained in the same interview with Arun Rath (2015), where Danielewski admits that the writing of the tenth volume made possible a clear ‘page one re-write’ for volumes one and two.²³ The staggering of publication dates allowed (and could still allow) Danielewski to incorporate emerging elements into earlier volumes before their official publications, illustrative of its nonlinear and entangled emergence. This ensures the influence of critical and cultural developments in the evolution of the novel.

This development reinforces my research as it offers an explicit example of a bio-logical performative system facing an entropic reality. What is especially unique about this novel is that it takes as its model serial television shows of the 21st century to inform the development and release of future volumes: they are contingent upon continued interest, public conversation, and input from the readership. I address these two points below in turn: *TFvI*’s similarities to serial television shows, and the systemic implications of this analogous form.

Danielewski has mentioned repeatedly in interviews that his novels are influenced by different types of media. For example, *House of Leaves* (2000) incorporates elements of film; *Only Revolutions* (2006) is influenced by music; and *The Fifty Year Sword* (2012), by campfire storytelling.²⁴ Drawing upon serial television programs like *Mad Men*, *The Sopranos*, and *Breaking Bad* – what Danielewski describes as, ‘[...] visual novels that have come into our living rooms and bedrooms [telling] a story in much greater detail and with much greater

²² Fandom, ‘The Familiar’, Fandom, (2016) <http://the-familiar.wikia.com/wiki/The_Familiar> [Accessed 31 December 2016].

²³ Rath, ‘The Familiar’, p.1, [Accessed 31 December 2016].

²⁴ Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2000); Mark Z. Danielewski, *Only Revolutions* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006); and Mark Z. Danielewski, *The Fifty Year Sword* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012). See also, Mark Z. Danielewski, ‘Mark Z. Danielewski November 7, 2015 San Francisco Ca’, You Tube, (2015) [Accessed December 20, 2016], and Mark Z. Danielewski, ‘Mark Z. Danielewski: “The Familiar” / Talks at Google’, You Tube, (2015) [Accessed December 20, 2016] where Danielewski mentions the media influences for each of his books.

patience [than standard television programming]’ – *The Familiar* seeks to draw out its story with detail over long periods of time.²⁵ Unlike the heavily-edited storylines designed to fit in strict televised time slots, the defining feature, which differs from this form of novel storytelling shared by these serialized television shows and *The Familiar* is that they, unlike standard television programming and the serialized novel, embrace real-time pacing while maintaining a specific narrative arc.²⁶

The Familiar’s 27 ‘episodes’ were planned to be broken down into seasons consisting of 5 volumes each. *TFv1* further resembles serialized television in that it contains 30 beats (chapters), loosely compared to television’s standard 25 beats, or scenes.²⁷ Specific to the novel, however, each chapter is color coded in the upper right-hand corner of the page with a timestamp. The chapters are chronologically ordered from 08:02:05 in the morning till 23:32:09 at night, on May 10th. *TFv1* can be seen as a sort of pilot episode introducing the nine main characters’ storylines. *TFv1* concludes with what can be analogously compared to television credits. In these credits, the more conventional copyright information is located (842). Furthermore, there are lists detailing the various specific fonts used for each character, each of which carry specific meanings unique to that character (843).²⁸ There is also a reference list circling around cat’s eyes, special thank you’s, and the names of translators who helped convert sections of the book into Armenian, German, Hebrew, Mandarin/Cantonese, Russian and Turkish.²⁹ The concluding section ends with a coming attraction – the first twenty-seven pages

²⁵ Rath, ‘The Familiar’, p. 1. Similar to Chapter Four, television has proven to have a direct influence on these particular novels in different ways. Though outside the scope of this thesis, research into the influence of television upon the novel and storytelling are worth exploring, seeing as how the novel as a genre has always been entangled with technological advancements [i.e., the printing press].

²⁶ Danielewski, ‘Google’, 2015.

²⁷ van de Ven, ‘Serial Novel’, p. 94.

²⁸ See also, Douglass et al., ‘The Unfamiliar’, p. 3, which mentions some deeper meanings regarding the fonts, for example, the character Ozgur, a detective, who is written in Baskerville, recalls *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and more generally the Sherlock Holmes franchise. See also, Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Sweden: Wisehouse Classics, 2015 [1902]).

²⁹ Danielewski, *TFv1*, pp. 844-845, for attribution credits circling cat eyes; pp. 846-847, for thank you’s and

– for volume 2: *The Familiar: Into the Forest*.³⁰ In fact, all published volumes share the same general features (except that different animals appear typologically.³¹ Additionally, as may already be apparent, numbers play a significant role as they are multiples of 3. For instance, one trailer takes place in the year 243,243 (adding up to 9,9), at 5:04pm (adding up to 9), and there are three Narcons (so far), Narcon 3, Narcon 9, and Narcon 27. As for the Narcons, their chapter appears on white paper as opposed to the cream-colored paper of the novel. Finally, like the characters who often hear the faint haunting sounds of a cat, the reader too ‘hears’ these in the form of stylized – pink – ellipsis that appear throughout in different font sizes (intensities).³² There is a strong sense in *TFv1* that its level of detail, the significance of which is largely unknown, serves important functions in unlocking the depth and meaningfulness of the story, which no doubt requires reader participation.

Danielewski states that *The Familiar* is not ‘a performative bit of invention’, which means that his intentions are not so much an attempt to see what patterns emerge out of the randomness of intersecting storylines, but, rather, he makes specific use of various cultural systems for weaving a new kind of novel entangling pre-existing storylines and watching them metamorphose.³³ According to the theories utilized in this thesis, however, Danielewski’s books are indeed performative, but in terms of the processes of making specific use of the available storied ecology. As Inge van de Ven writes (2016), ‘[...] the narrative of *The Familiar*

translator names.

³⁰ See, Danielewski, *TFv1*, pp. 853-880, which introduces an owl to the series.

³¹ See, for instance, Danielewski, *TFv2*, pp. 843-880 (a markhor); Danielewski, *TFv3*, pp. 855-880 (a polar bear); Danielewski, *TFv4*, pp. 845-880 (a boar); and, Danielewski, *TFv5*, pp. 845-880 (a hyena). See, Fandom, ‘The Animals’, Fandom, (N.D.) <https://the-familiar.fandom.com/wiki/The_Animals> [Accessed 9 September 2019]. The reason behind the different animals at the end of each volume is not immediately clear.

³² Lindsay Thomas, ‘Why We Read Novels’, *Contemporary Literature*, 56 (2015), 386-93. See also, Danielewski, *TFv1*, p. 153, 271, 296, 390, 413, 433, 437, 470, 486, and 490, for stylized ellipsis.

³³ Danielewski, ‘Google’, 2015. This is akin to the motivations of the protagonist in *This is not a Novel* by David Markson, in Chapter Two; see, David Markson, *This Is Not a Novel* (2001; London: CB editions, 2010).

dramatizes a social network'.³⁴ That is, *The Familiar* utilizes the (non)living, (non)human, and (meta)physical materials of the narrative ecology in its ongoing emergent storytelling processes.

The Familiar series is entirely performative, neocybernetic and metafictional, dependent upon systems of societies, technologies, and readers, and exhibiting a living-ness and self-consciousness about its own novelistic emergence. In fact, any conversation about the novel is an overt act of (*re*)writing the novel into the world and contributing to its reconfiguring shape. This is true of all materials, but *The Familiar* seems to be designed to thrive on exploiting such relationships with the narrative ecology.³⁵ For instance, comments in Danielewski's original post regarding the halting of *The Familiar* reveal fan's willingness to help fund the coming volume(s), and are encouraging Danielewski to set up a GoFundMe account to elicit funding from the general public so Danielewski can self-publish for loyal fans.³⁶ This further development suggests *The Familiar*'s success (indeed its livelihood) is perhaps dependent on freeing itself from the publishing industry into a freer democratic space. It is therefore worth pondering whether the pause might be a calculated move on Danielewski's part.³⁷ As van de Ven notes, *The Familiar* is collectivizing the readership. She writes, '[...] *The Familiar* seeks to reinvent the literary novel as a social experience, a topic to discuss communally online and in "real life"'.³⁸ This is apparent as Danielewski keeps websites dedicated to each of his novels

³⁴ van de Ven, 'Serial Novel', p. 94.

³⁵ A quick example of this can be seen in Danielewski, *The Familiar: Honeysuckle & Pain*, pp. 2-3, where pictures of two works of criticism appear in the front matter. See, Joe Bray, and Alison Gibbons, eds., *Mark Z. Danielewski* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), and Sascha Pohlmann, ed., *Revolutionary Leaves: The Fiction of Mark Z. Danielewski* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012).

³⁶ See, Danielewski, 'Mark Z. Danielewski (February 3, 2018)', Facebook, (2018) <<https://www.facebook.com/MarkZDanielewski/photos/it-is-with-a-heavy-heart-that-i-must-report-the-familiar-has-been-pausedtheres-n/1788256297885651/>> [Accessed February 6 2019]. See also, Various, 'R/Thefamiliar', reddit, (2018). Furthermore, there is indeed a precedent regarding eliciting public funds for TV serials. See, for example, Rob Thomas, 'The Veronica Mars Movie Project', Kickstarter, (2019) <<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/559914737/the-veronica-mars-movie-project>> [Accessed October 29 2019].

³⁷ It remains uncertain if this is the case, but as will be discussed below, the novel is so ambitious, that it almost seems destined to fail – or to be re-born in a different cultural space.

³⁸ van de Ven, 'Serial Novel', p. 98.

where the readership is able to discuss, solve and problematize the many puzzles, references, voices and strategies for reading.³⁹

More to the point, however, is that the disrupted nature of the text, both in its emergence as a halted project, and in its formal qualities, cannot help but catalyze readerly participation. In *The Familiar*, these highly stylized disruptions include words that fall upon the page like heavy rain, text stretched out over pages designed to control the reader's pace, text that wraps around a moving orb, and random squiggly-lines deep in the gutter of most pages throughout the book whose significance is not yet fully understood in its entirety, but certainly speculated upon by the readership.⁴⁰

Consequently, it's layout requires a different sort of reading. Douglass writes: 'page layout [...] modulates the pace of reading, with the material presentation of the text itself part of the content of the work', encouraging different reading strategies by dramatizing the boundary between text and image.⁴¹ van de Ven writes of the 'signiconic' (sign + iconic), as used to describe the way that the typological uniqueness of each character (i.e., with fonts, colors and voice) '[...] surpasses the affective powers of either words or images'.⁴² 'Signiconic' is a term developed by Danielewski to describe his style of writing.⁴³ van de Ven further explains, '[t]hese patterns constitute[...] a powerful visceral and visual rhythm that adopt the medium-specific properties of the TV serial to the form of the novel'.⁴⁴ Danielewski is

³⁹ See, for example, the official forum for *The Familiar*: Mark Z. Danielewski, 'The Familiar', Mark Z. Danielewski, (2016) <<http://forums.markzdanielewski.com/forum/the-familiar>> [Accessed December 20, 2016].

⁴⁰ See, for example, Danielewski, *TFv1*, pp. 478-479; pp. 754-772; pp. 133-157. This is not to suggest that all aspects of the novel have been planned by Danielewski, but that he actively employs particular strategies whose significance is enriched as the story develops.

⁴¹ Douglass et al., 'The Unfamiliar', p. 2.

⁴² van de Ven, 'Serial Novel', p. 98.

⁴³ See, Sinicus1, 'Does Danielewski Draw, Write, or Both at the Same Time to Bend Our Minds?', Discussion Board for Mark Z. Danielewski's THE FAMILIAR, Volume 1., (2015) <<https://thefamiliar.wordpress.com/category/imagetext/signiconic/>> [Accessed 31 December 2016]. See also, Danielewski, *TFv1*, p. 33, where the term appears in the novel.

⁴⁴ van de Ven, 'Serial Novel', p. 98. See also, Douglass et al., 'The Unfamiliar', pp. 4-5.

attempting, in *The Familiar*, to analogize the act of viewing within the act of reading; this will be a principle focus for this chapter as it touches upon the affect and agencies of observation between entities in play with each other to diffract the story.

The interplay of cultural references; ‘puzzles and ciphers in the form of acrostics, anagrams, etymological riddles, collages, and suggestive epigraphs’, are important to the novel.⁴⁵ Perhaps the most revealing of these (utilizing online forum discussions, and discussed later below), regards the connection between Anwar (Xanther’s computer programmer step-father), the word ‘paradise’, the metafictional disruptions of the novel, and the gaming program Anwar is writing. One blogger writes:

The most INTERESTING example of the fourth wall breaking comes when Xanther and Anwar are discussing the etymology of Paradise and the meaning behind Paradise Open [Anwar’s computer program]. Paradise is conceptualized in the discussion as a “surrounding wall”, “enclosed garden”, or “protected place”. Yet the title of Anwar’s project hints that he opens up the enclosed area or removes some of the protection to allow others inside – hence Paradise OPEN.⁴⁶

The Familiar is one such ‘program’ – open and receptive to its (neocybernetic) environment. Its openness – as ‘Paradise Open’ is the subversion of the fourth wall so that that storyworld may be openly influenced by the culture as it plays into the creation of the novel and its ongoing perpetuation. This dynamic, along with the novel’s readerly implications are explored in more

⁴⁵ Douglass et al., ‘The Unfamiliar’, p. 2.

⁴⁶ elombard22, ‘Danielewski’s World’, Discussion Board for Mark Z. Danielewski’s *THE FAMILIAR*, Volume 1, (2015) <<https://thefamiliar.wordpress.com/?s=etymology>> [Accessed 31 December 2016]; see also, Danielewski, *TFv1*, p. 379, where the gaming system, ‘Paradise Open’ is first introduced.

depth regarding their affective agency between storying systems and the dramatized social network.

To shift focus slightly from the inter-play of cultural references to a more relational *intra*-play the following provides a nuanced understanding important to grasping the various ‘voices’ contributing to the emergence of *TFv1*. Here, we see how the novel dramatizes the plethora of individual voices – the entities that already exist as so-called ‘fixed artifacts’ in our cultural environments. Here it is not so much about narrative systems coupling to other narrative systems, but more so about the polyphonous ‘objects’ of the world stretching across time and space and intra-acting in, and through, the artifact in our hands. There are ‘intensive intertextual references, situating the volume within a massive cultural archive that encompasses everything from Norse mythology to Lady Gaga.’⁴⁷ There are indeed many ‘voices’ necessary to the novel’s manifestation. For example, though Pantheon Books is the publisher, the novel is produced by the fictional ‘A Circle Round A Stone’, the same fictional ‘company’ that published *House of Leaves*.⁴⁸

To make one final point, Danielewski brings to the fore, ‘vernacular and academic writing in continuous interplay, the virtuosic and raw language of ordinary speakers intertwined with elite literary and philosophical discourses (a dynamic that extends to his audiences).’⁴⁹ At first, this seems to reiterate the previous points. However, Douglass et al. are making an

⁴⁷ Douglass et al., ‘The Unfamiliar’, p. 2.

⁴⁸ See, QuiteBaffled, ‘An Attempt at a Rough Sketch of Tf’s Surrounding Meta Story.’, vBulletin Solutions, Inc., (2015) [Accessed September 10 2019], who references the semi-mythical first edition of *House of Leaves*, which was supposedly published by A Circle Round A Stone. This publishing company appears throughout *The Familiar* series and appears to be a fictional creation which is part of the Danielewskian fictional universe, which metafictionally utilizes aspects of his own biographical information. QuiteBaffled speculates that A Circle Round A Stone, might be a secret group of academics trying to create an alternate fictional world, producing ‘works of scholarship on the impossible’. There appears to be some connection to Danielewski’s father, who might have been associated with a group called A Circle Round A Stone, which was/is/might have been a group not unlike the one represented in Jorge Luis Borges’ ‘Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’; See, Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’, in *Ficciones* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1962), pp. 17-36. Within the novel this is analogized by the characters of the book who live in locations as diverse as Los Angeles, Singapore, Texas and Mexico, bringing with them elements unique to those locations, as well as their professions, contributing various cultural contexts.

⁴⁹ Douglass et al., ‘The Unfamiliar’, p. 3.

important distinction regarding representations. They suggest Danielewski's works are generally representative of the collective narrative/relational influences feeding off from, and into, *The Familiar*; language, both vernacular and academic, is not only representative of his style, but representative of the audiences who possess a sort of authorial agency in their own right. Indeed, this idea of narrative play recursively feeding back into the novel is one of the more important points of this thesis, and also one that in many ways incorporates the first four points: collectivizing the readership, modulating the pace of reading, utilizing intertextual references, and dramatizing the narrative ecology's polyphonous voices.

Danielewski himself acknowledges the difficulty for critics to engage with such work, since critics would have to justify speaking about things that will change, and which the act of criticizing risks altering the trajectory of the novel's emergence. The risk is in having their criticisms fall short and becoming obsolete in the face of an emerging novel.⁵⁰ The approach taken here, however, by focusing on the nature of perpetual metafictional emergence, and by shifting focus away from *what* things mean to *how* they mean, reduces the fear of producing an outdated critique. In fact, this work of criticism is conducted on the same terms as the novel: as emerging entanglements between stories. In other words, it is not so much what *The Familiar* is imparting to the reader, but how the novel is changing the reader while the reader changes the novel, and this chapter participates in this ongoing conversation with the reader and the neocybernetic system (societies, readers, and technologies) that will come to influence the trajectory of the novel's as yet unwritten story.⁵¹ *TFv1* not only draws upon the storied ecologies

⁵⁰ Mark Z. Danielewski, 'Galley Discussions of the Familiar V1 with Mark Danielewski', English Department, (2015) <<https://transcriptions.english.ucsb.edu/galley-discussion-of-the-familiar-v1/>> [Accessed 29 December 2016].

⁵¹ While Danielewski has admitted that he knows the ending to the novel (though, not necessarily *his* ending to *The Familiar*), the novel as a whole (all twenty-seven volumes) remain largely unwritten and/or unpublished. See, Mark Z. Danielewski, 'Mark Z. Danielewski February 13, 2017 Salt Lake City, UT', You Tube, (2017) [Accessed April 3, 2017].

of the reader's reality to construct its narrative, but also plays a role in changing those storied ecologies, which in turn make *The Familiar*'s own narrative unfolding emergent and unpredictable. As Danielewski acknowledges, *The Familiar* is a 'living book', and this chapter explores the ways in which this novel is 'living' in a larger living narrative ecology.⁵²

Collectivizing the Readership

The incomplete and emerging nature of *The Familiar* is likely a significant cause for a lack of critical literature in the field. This has forced me to search for relevant information in less traditional venues for literary research: online forums, book reviews, and Q&A sessions at readings.⁵³ But this also offers a further example of the narrative ecology orbiting the emergent novel.⁵⁴

As is the case for all of Danielewski's novels, *The Familiar* comes with its own online forum for readers to discuss and share the dynamics of the novel.⁵⁵ For example, forum posts related to *TFv1* turn up submissions that offer a clearly organized table of contents (organized by chronology and by narrator), discussions relating to the Narcons and the parameters by which the Narcons operate, and interpretations regarding ambiguous pictures that appear in the front matter that come to appear in the novel.⁵⁶

⁵² Danielewski, 'Galley Discussions of the Familiar V1 with Mark Danielewski'.

⁵³ My use of forums, reviews and readings are in a large part focused on the first volume, since it is the focus of this chapter and exemplifies the metafictional and diffractive terms of the novel.

⁵⁴ This is not to say these venues and mediums do not exist for other works of art, but that they are self-consciously integral to *The Familiar*.

⁵⁵ Mark Z. Danielewski, 'The Familiar', Mark Z. Danielewski, (2016)

<<http://forums.markzdanielewski.com/forum/the-familiar>> [Accessed December 20, 2016].

⁵⁶ See, heartbreak, 'Table of Contents- Vol. 1: One Rainy Day in May', in *The Familiar*, ed. by Mark Z. Danielewski (Online: vBulletin Solutions, Inc., 2016); jsimmsphx, 'Metanarcons & Parameters', vBulletin Solutions, Inc, (2016) <<http://forums.markzdanielewski.com/forum/the-familiar/the-familiar-aa/159629-metanarcons-parameters>> [Accessed January 4 2017]; and Ellimist, 'Pictures and Images', vBulletin Solutions, Inc, (2014) <<http://forums.markzdanielewski.com/forum/the-familiar/the-familiar-aa/157316-pictures-and-images>> [Accessed January 4 2017].

A second forum, named ‘Discussion board for Mark Z. Danielewski’s THE FAMILIAR, Volume 1’, consists of academic discussions between university classes ranging across disciplines such as ‘contemporary literature to methods of literary analysis and media studies’.⁵⁷ These online discussions, monitored by Danielewski, culminated in a streamed video across various campuses that included Danielewski himself.⁵⁸ For this project, various classrooms were provided galley copies of the novel for class content. Students shared their readings and insights on the website. This forum differs slightly from the previously mentioned one in that the galley forum was conceived for the purpose of helping to ‘frame the discussion’, that is, to lay the groundwork for reviewers and critics on how to talk about the novel.⁵⁹ The website’s list of contents reveal the depth and breadth of material: discussions on genre, relationships between the images and texts, the novel’s *inventio* (speculative connections), issues of language (including the use of braille, dialects, and programming languages, to name a few), narrative theories, technoculture, and time.⁶⁰

van de Ven, with ‘The Serial Novel in an Age of Binging: How to Read Mark Z. Danielewski’s *The Familiar*’ (2016), has published perhaps the only serious, peer-reviewed, undertaking. van de Ven’s focus is on how *The Familiar* trains the reader to incorporate different reading strategies and interpretive tactics, namely, ‘slow reading’ and taking advantage of the ‘collective intelligence,’ transforming the possibilities of the novel as a genre

⁵⁷ Rita Raley, Amy J. Elias, Alison Gibbons, Kate Marshall, Trenea Balds, Julia Panko, and Lindsay Thomas, ‘Discussion Board for Mark Z. Danielewski’s the Familiar, Volume 1’, Blog at WordPress.com, (2015) <<https://thefamiliar.wordpress.com/>> [Accessed January 4 2017].

⁵⁸ Mark Z. Danielewski, ‘Galley Discussions of the Familiar V1 with Mark Danielewski’, English Department, (2015) <<https://transcriptions.english.ucsb.edu/galley-discussion-of-the-familiar-v1/>> [Accessed 29 December 2016].

⁵⁹ Mark Z. Danielewski, ‘Galley Discussions of the Familiar V1 with Mark Danielewski’, English Department, (2015) <<https://transcriptions.english.ucsb.edu/galley-discussion-of-the-familiar-v1/>> [Accessed 29 December 2016].

⁶⁰ Rita Raley, Amy J. Elias, Alison Gibbons, Kate Marshall, Trenea Balds, Julia Panko, and Lindsay Thomas, ‘Discussion Board for Mark Z. Danielewski’s the Familiar, Volume 1’, Blog at WordPress.com, (2015) <<https://thefamiliar.wordpress.com/>> [Accessed January 4 2017].

in the digital age.⁶¹ Elsewhere, Lindsay Thomas' 'Why We Read Novels' (2015) is a useful book review containing strong emphases on the role of the reader, both in terms of strategies of, and motivations for, reading.⁶²

As can be deduced by the Thomas review, some non-peer-reviewed book reviews are exceptionally insightful and revealing. Perhaps the most important of these reviews is the *Los Angeles Review of Books* by academics involved with the Galley Discussions project.⁶³ This review contextualizes *The Familiar* by outlining some of the major points for discussion, including reading strategies, the phenomenal aspects of the novel, and offering probing speculative ideas about the trajectory that this 'living book' will take. A couple of other reviews, though not comprehensive, touch on a lot of the entangled and emergent themes from the above references. For example, Cummings' 'Entropy and Infinity in *The Familiar*' implies that the reader is ultimately engaged in an interpretive endeavor to find order out of the chaos.⁶⁴ Another, Lydia Millet's, 'Mark Z. Danielewski's "The Familiar" a Monument to Semantic Encryption' (2015) touches upon important performative dimensions to the novel.⁶⁵ Recognizing the novel as a performance between various texts and contexts, Millet identifies the novel, in terms synonymous with the discussion in the first chapter of this thesis, as being simultaneously iterative and subversive. As she writes, the novel is both '[...] brashly contemporary and deeply

⁶¹ van de Ven, 'The Serial Novel', pp. 91-103.

⁶² Lindsay Thomas, 'Why We Read Novels', pp. 386-93. Thomas is listed as one of the participants in the Galley Discussions. Other than the above two main articles, *The Familiar* is beginning to receive passing mentions in articles related to modern American literature. See, for example, David Watson, 'Vanishing Points; or, the Timescapes of the Contemporary American Novel', *Studia Neophilologica*, 88 (2016), 57-67, at p. 60. Furthermore, academic presentations are beginning to appear, as is the case with Alex Blazer's paper presentation at the SouthEast Coastal Conference of Language and Literature (SECCLL) where he spoke about the metafictional nature of the novel, the relationship between representations and non-representations (reality), and how this 'animates the reading process' for the reader. See, Alex Blazer, 'Sooooooooo Real, Sooooooooo Much Trouble: The Familiar Tormenting Textuality of Mark Z. Danielewski', in *SouthEast Coastal Conference on Languages & Literatures (SECCLL)* (Coastal Georgia Center: 2016).

⁶³ Jeremy Douglass, Caterina Lazzara, Tyler Shoemaker, and Rita Raley, 'The Unfamiliar', *Los Angeles Review of Books* 2015.

⁶⁴ Cummings, 'Entropy and Infinity' pp. 1-2.

⁶⁵ Lydia Millet, 'Mark Z. Danielewski's 'the Familiar: Volume 1' Is a Sprawling Postmodern Monument to Semantic Encryption', *Los Angeles Times* 2015.

traditional'.⁶⁶ Indeed, it is interesting to note that, currently, the more complex and meaningful examinations of *The Familiar* occur through book reviews rather than strictly academic articles. Granted, it is predominantly academics that are writing these reviews, but there remains an emphasis on public reaction rather than more formalized literary analysis and argumentation; academic activity surrounding the novel therefore exists in a format used to express primarily what the novel is doing and how its complexity is being received, as opposed to producing particular truth-claims about e.g., plot or style. The performative and metafictional framework of this thesis, however, works to speak to *The Familiar* in a hybrid way, to argue for its open-ended (metafictive and performative) diffractive nature and thereby contribute to further development of the novel.

Another well of information on the text comes from Q&A sessions at public readings. There, Danielewski often speaks about and explains his aesthetic philosophies, which help elaborate one of his main points at the Galley Discussion video meeting: that he is mainly concerned with capturing the conversation between forms, not necessarily defining them (a point I will return to below).⁶⁷

Lastly, there are peer-reviewed articles on his other novels that are applicable to this chapter. The first collection of essays on Danielewski's work appear as part of the Contemporary American and Canadian Writers series at Manchester University Press, titled

⁶⁶ Millet, 'Familiar', p. 3.

⁶⁷ Danielewski, 'Galley Discussion', accessed 29 December, 2016. See also, Mark Z. Danielewski, 'Mark Z. Danielewski May 18, 2015 Athens Ga', You Tube, (2015) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnnv9ltnmhI&t=2071s>> [Accessed January 4, 2017]; Mark Z. Danielewski, 'Mark Z. Danielewski May 19, 2015 Tulsa Ok', You Tube, (2015) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hwDNRrDN8c>> [Accessed January 4, 2017]; Mark Z. Danielewski, 'Mark Z. Danielewski: "The Familiar"/ Talks at Google', You Tube, (2015) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mw0bGiVDTMI&t=1418s>> [Accessed December 20, 2016]; Mark Z. Danielewski, 'Mark Z. Danielewski November 7, 2015 San Francisco Ca', You Tube, (2015) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltIxPAWO340&t=1903s>> [Accessed December 20, 2016]; Mark Z. Danielewski, 'Mark Z. Danielewski June 20, 2016 Los Angeles Ca', You Tube, (2016) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-LBJuHvWgU>> [Accessed January 4, 2017]; and Mark Z. Danielewski, 'Mark Z. Danielewski June 21, 2016 Phoenix Az', You Tube, (2016) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1TVmBxvHCo>> [Accessed January 4, 2017].

simply, *Mark Z. Danielewski*.⁶⁸ Predating the release of the *TFvI* by four years, this collection contains chapters on *House of Leaves*, *The Fifty Year Sword*, and *Only Revolutions*.⁶⁹ Of particular interest are the chapters relating to the intertextual and interpretive nature of Danielewski's work, the online forums, the circularity of works in progress, spatial aesthetics, media and materiality entanglement, and the act of reading.⁷⁰ Shortly thereafter, another collection of essays, *Revolutionary Leaves: The Fiction of Mark Z. Danielewski* (2012) compiled essays that were given at the first academic conference on Danielewski's work.⁷¹ N. Katherine Hayles, in her article 'Saving the Subject: Remediation in *House of Leaves*' (2002) discusses the cycling of different media in order to produce new and emerging objects – in this case, the print novel.⁷² And Mark B.N. Hansen, in 'The Digital Topography of Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*' (2004), similarly discusses the recursive dynamics of the novel mediating through '[...] text and body, where it makes no difference which is the container and

⁶⁸ Joe Bray, and Alison Gibbons, eds., *Mark Z. Danielewski* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

⁶⁹ Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2000); Mark Z. Danielewski, *The Fifty Year Sword* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), the US trade edition was published in 2012; and Mark Z. Danielewski, *Only Revolutions* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006).

⁷⁰ See, Joe Bray, and Alison Gibbons, 'Introduction', in *Mark Z. Danielewski*, ed. by Joe Bray and Alison Gibbons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 1-13; Alison Gibbons, 'This Is Not for You', in *Mark Z. Danielewski*, ed. by Joe Bray and Alison Gibbons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 17-32; Paul McCormick, 'Houses of Leaves, Cinema and the New Affordances of Old Media', in *Mark Z. Danielewski*, ed. by Joe Bray and Alison Gibbons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 52-67; Mel Evans, 'This Haunted House: Intertextuality and Interpretation in Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) and Poe's *Haunted* (2000)', in *Mark Z. Danielewski*, ed. by Joe Bray and Alison Gibbons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 68-85; Bronwen Thomas, 'Trickster Authors and Tricky Readers on the Mzd Forums', in *Mark Z. Danielewski*, ed. by Joe Bray and Alison Gibbons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 82-102; Dirk Van Hulle, 'Only Evolutions: Joyce's and Danielewski's Works in Progress', in *Mark Z. Danielewski*, ed. by Joe Bray and Alison Gibbons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 123-140; N. Katherine Hayles, 'Mapping Time, Charting Data: The Spatial Aesthetics of Mark Z. Danielewski's *Only Revolutions*', in *Mark Z. Danielewski*, ed. by Joe Bray and Alison Gibbons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 159-177; Mark B.N. Hansen, 'Print Interface to Time: *Only Revolutions* at the Crossroads of Narrative and History', in *Mark Z. Danielewski*, ed. by Joe Bray and Alison Gibbons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 178-199; and Joe Bray, '*Only Revolutions* and the Drug of Rereading', in *Mark Z. Danielewski*, ed. by Joe Bray and Alison Gibbons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 200-215.

⁷¹ Sascha Pohlmann, ed., *Revolutionary Leaves: The Fiction of Mark Z. Danielewski* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012). See also, Sascha Pohlmann, and Hans-Peter Soder, *Revolutionary Leaves*, (Munich, Germany: 2011) (Conference).

⁷² N. Katherine Hayles, 'Saving the Subject: Remediation in *House of Leaves*', *American Literature*, 74 (2002), 779-806. See also, Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines, Mediawork Pamphlet* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), in which the same article appears in a slightly edited form.

which the contained, since in either case the fictional narrative garners its “reality effect” through the reality *affects* it stimulates its readers to produce’.⁷³ Building upon these lines set forth by Hayles and Hansen, Jessica Pressman in her oft-cited article, ‘House of Leaves: Reading the Networked Novel’ (2006), notes the way in which the novel, in the digital age, ‘[...] is never a discrete and complete object but always a node in an ever-changing network of information [...]’.⁷⁴ Amy J. Elias’ ‘The Dialogic Avant-Garde: Relational Aesthetics and Time Ecologies in *Only Revolutions* and *TOC*’ (2012), offers a reading of Danielewski’s work through theories of relationality to position the novel as part of a new avant-garde based on an ethos, or ethical relations of collaboration ‘[...] between artist and audience, audiences and works, audiences and other audiences.’⁷⁵ And, finally, Nick Lord’s article, ‘The Labyrinth and the Lacuna: Metafiction, the Symbolic, and the Real in Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*’ (2014), though focused largely on representations, offers a useful discussion about how gaps in the text (otherwise known as ruptures or disruptions) catalyze critical engagements with that which cannot be fully represented, and this collaboration of action serves to expand the proverbial labyrinth.⁷⁶

It is worth noting that most of these tangential works relevant to *The Familiar* are associated with *House of Leaves*, Danielewski’s debut and most commercial and well-received novel. In fact, there is much that the two novels share, for instance, a labyrinthine polyphony of embedded voices and narratives and an overt modulating of the reader’s pace of reading. However, they differ mainly in the way that *House of Leaves* is, in Danielewski’s words, ‘[...]’

⁷³ Mark B.N. Hansen, ‘The Digital Topography of Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*’, *Contemporary Literature*, 45 (2004), 597-636, p. 634.

⁷⁴ Jessica Pressman, ‘*House of Leaves*: Reading the Networked Novel’, *Studies in American Fiction*, 34 (2006), 107-28, p. 120.

⁷⁵ Amy J. Elias, ‘The Dialogic Avant-Garde: Relational Aesthetics and Time Ecologies in *Only Revolutions* and *Toc*’, *Contemporary Literature*, 53 (2012), 738-78, p. 740.

⁷⁶ Nick Lord, ‘The Labyrinth and the Lacuna: Metafiction, the Symbolic, and the Real in Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*’, *Critique*, 55 (2014), 465-76. See, in particular, p. 475.

a book that's pretty self-contained [...]. It's a playpen that has all the toys that you're going to need to sort of involve yourself in'.⁷⁷ *The Familiar*, however, though discontinued, remains unfinished with the potential for future development through systemic and relational practice/s such as by efforts through the publishing industry and the fan base. This implies that *The Familiar* is metafictional just like *House of Leaves*, and the other novels of this thesis, but its metafictionality is raised exponentially. *The Familiar* presents a metafictional object-system unlike the other metafictional works explored in this thesis in that it is self-conscious of its need to live and thrive in a field where it self-perpetuates by overtly drawing upon such tangential criticisms and speculative reviews, both in academia and popular culture, for the sake of staying alive. Such circles constitute part of the literary culture associated with *The Familiar* and also help describe many of the performative principles that make it possible, such as the re-mediation of cultural materials, the ongoing emergence of information and its networked fabric, and the necessary co-operation and co-creative spirit between people and things.

Collectivized conversation is necessary for *The Familiar* because, as Danielewski notes, such a book is 'risky'.⁷⁸ The current reality is that Danielewski was under contract from Pantheon Books for two seasons – ten episodes.⁷⁹ Douglass et al., ask the pertinent questions:

⁷⁷ Mark Z Danielewski, 'Mzd Answers the Question "How Did You Write It" (Columbia 3)', You Tube, (2006) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6D1imPyoksY>> [Accessed February 21 2017].

⁷⁸ Danielewski, 'Talks at Google', 2015.

⁷⁹ Like a serial television show, if the audience is not involved, the show gets cancelled. Danielewski, acknowledged early on that it was uncertain whether the novel would be completed, see, Danielewski, San Francisco, 2015. Furthermore, upon getting his two-season deal from Pantheon Books, only the first season was written; Danielewski, San Francisco, 2015. In his interview with Rath, however, Danielewski mentions that he has finished writing the tenth volume; Rath, 'The Familiar', p.1. The inconsistencies here are irrelevant – the point is he was contracted for two seasons, and has supposedly finished drafts of ten volumes. As mentioned, the series was paused after volume five, and so it is uncertain what happened or will happen to the next five volumes which are supposedly written. Regardless, just because the project is paused, it does not mean it is a 'dead' project.

How, then will the new teleholics-cum-‘novelholics’ make sense of this new work, this ‘living book,’ as it evolves over the years? What forms of attention will it compel and what practices and communities of reading will it inspire? And if the series remains incomplete, will speculative fan fiction emerge to finish what Danielewski has started, transposing *The Familiar* into the very media forms it so underscores? [...] For this endeavor, they [the readership] will need a full arsenal of sense-making practices, from interpretation to speculation, to make the questions raised by the text ‘manageable. Or better: answerable’. [...] In this sense, they (we) may need conversation most of all.⁸⁰

Douglass et al. echo what Thomas considers to be the novel’s larger motivation: to address ‘why we read novels at all’.⁸¹ For Thomas, the length of the novel, the co-agential affect within and between elements of the dramatized social network, and the reading strategies influenced by the novel are all intertwined. She writes:

The sensation of lasting and enduring that we feel when we read the novel – the sense of being in suspense – is of course a direct result of the fact that the novel must end. At the same time, this sensation is a kind of wager against this inevitable end; it is a stretching out, a daring to go on [...] [B]ecause reading, as we read, is a wager against the moment when it all must end. It’s a wager against the frailty of our bodies and of the bound bodies of books. We read for that sense of not yet; we read to feel as if we endure. In the end, *The Familiar* champions novel reading as a felt experience [with

⁸⁰ Douglass et al, ‘The Unfamiliar’, p. 16; see also, Danielewski, *TFvI*, pp. 837-839, for the final quote within the block quote.

⁸¹ Thomas, ‘Why we Read’, p. 386.

the reader and the larger social network] that lasts through time and that is about the feeling of lasting through time.⁸²

Thomas recognizes the deeper psychology of such a project: giving life to a system that exists in the world because it is of the world and carries the same anxieties of the living things of such a world which seek to carry on as affecting bodies. That is, this book is about *conversation*.⁸³ To draw upon one conversation exploring this very issue, this novel was almost made to fail as the twenty-seven-volume task is immense. It seems that failure, on the part of the traditional author, is imperative if the conversation is to endure with its ‘mimetically’ phenomenal (i.e., metafictional) capacities.⁸⁴ The perceived failure of such a project would be a gift to the various characters of the story who are taking on emergent lives of their own, as well as to the fan base who are already involved in online discussions, and who could easily be encouraged to carry those characters’ lives forward into the future via works of fanfiction.⁸⁵ The spirit with which Danielewski conceived this project seems to overtly empower an ethos of fan-fictive co-creation and co-participation. This is not to say that the series’ ‘pause’ is intentional, but that it is congruent – perhaps coincidentally so – with the ethos of the novel’s creation and continued emergence.⁸⁶ Danielewski, in other words has not merely created a narrative artifact, so much as materialized an organism designed to thrive in its cultural ecology with the self-awareness

⁸² Thomas, ‘Why we Read’, pp. 392-393.

⁸³ Douglass et al, ‘The Unfamiliar’, p. 16. See also, Mark Z. Danielewski, ‘Mark Z. Danielewski February 13, 2017 Salt Lake City, UT’, You Tube, (2017) [Accessed April 3, 2017], where he speaks of the larger conversation in nature – his reason the ‘animality’ of *The Familiar*.

⁸⁴ This is not to suggest that finished novels are ‘culturally dead’, but that a ‘complete novel’ affixes a sort of lasting signature upon a work that suggests an authenticity to a perceived set of fixed parameters.

⁸⁵ Douglass et al, ‘The Unfamiliar’, p. 16.

⁸⁶ Though fanfiction related to *House of Leaves* abounds, at the time of this writing, there does not seem to be any fanfiction connected to *The Familiar*. See, for example, Various, ‘Archive of Our Own Beta’ (N.D.) <https://archiveofourown.org/works/search?utf8=✓&work_search%5Bquery%5D=Danielewski> [Accessed September 10 2019]. This disparity is most likely due to *House of Leaves*’ commercial success and accessibility as a self-contained – albeit labyrinthine – work of fiction. Conversely, *The Familiar* eludes traditional intelligibility, and the realm of fanfiction has only been speculated about by critics, as mentioned in this chapter.

that it is doing so. With conversation as the goal, a different reading practice is necessary – one that does not focus on revealing information, but which encourages an affective ethicality to engaging with the world in the spirit of co-generating a shared story with the world as we continue to face our approaching finality.

The Practice/s of Reading

With *The Familiar*, Danielewski is attempting to capture the conversation that occurs between forms. In particular, he is concerned with the voice one speaks with, which is itself an intertextual composite of voices collected over time, and which becomes so familiar to us that we begin to tune out the other voices of our environment.⁸⁷ Voice, for Danielewski extends beyond the physical human capability of vocal expression. At one of his public readings in Athens, Georgia, Danielewski spoke about the other voices that surround us, and how they have been silenced:

[T]here's a cacophony of different languages that we can't quite hear, and sometimes we just become deaf to, you know, we, we are so good at finding patterns that are familiar and that are our own, that we have become completely blind to the dialogue that's going on. I mean, even in this space, think of the mute dialogue that is going on between these paintings and sculpture, I mean, there's a whole dialogue of material color that's surrounding us, but right now we're all tuned to a certain grammar and a certain language.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Danielewski, 'Athens GA', Accessed January 4, 2017.

⁸⁸ Danielewski, 'Athens GA', Accessed January 4, 2017.

For Danielewski, not only is voice comprised of many voices, but also, the disruption of the familiar ‘monolithic’ voice, is one such method for ‘beginning to access a wide range of voices’.⁸⁹ All artifacts have something to tell of their connection to the metafictioning manifold, if we are able and willing to listen within this discursive and narrativizing environment.⁹⁰ For example, the Narcons help us think about the metafictioning manifold, either directly (as is the case with Narcon 9), metaphorically (as is the case with Narcon 3), or elaboratively (as with Narcon 27).⁹¹ But also, as is covered in greater depth below, the characters themselves, who we learn are manifestations of Narcon 9, constitute the expressive potential of not only Narcon 9, but the entire manifold since the manifold is the formal expression of narrative constructs. The metafictioning manifold, in other words, tells us about itself (and our selves) through the forms (e.g., narrative constructs) which emerge.

In *The Familiar*, Danielewski is not only trying to capture that conversation – that is, to represent it – but also, he is engaging the very process of conversation – that is, participating in it. There is a deeper connection – a conversation – occurring between the novel and the reader, where we are ‘[...] made to feel the lived – living – experience of the novel’s characters as it intersects with our own’.⁹² Barad, whose work is not usually associated with literary scholarship, helps us locate the ethical dimension to performative material which situates the reader and text in an affective relationship of conversation. In the case of this thesis, the very materiality of the metafictioning manifold, in its emergent and reconfiguring forms, is made possible through its diversity and proclivity to maintaining openness to that ‘other’s’ influence. Barad writes, ‘the very nature of matter entails an exposure to the Other. [...] It [intra-active matter] is an iterative

⁸⁹ Danielewski, ‘Athens GA’, Accessed January 4, 2017.

⁹⁰ See, Andrew Bennett, and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. 4th ed. edn (Harlow: Longman, 2009), p. 54, who make the same point that all stories have a metafictional dimension that teach us about stories themselves.

⁹¹ The specifics of each Narcon are elaborated upon in greater depth in coming sections.

⁹² Thomas, ‘Why We Read’, p. 393.

(re)opening up to, an enabling responsiveness.’⁹³ Barad’s point is that matter, or more generally the manifold, is fundamentally rupturing and (de/re)constructing – the emergent forms of which are engaged in an ongoing response with other forms. There is much to learn from this understanding of an intra-connected wholeness whose main ethos or practice is to create differences that affect and are affected by its very differentiations. As a practice, diffractive reading is a way of engaging with differences responsibly. This is an ethical approach as well as a practice.

The Familiar teaches us how to become literate with ongoing narrative conversations. The connection between serial television and reading becomes apparent here. van de Ven writes:

Reading increasingly becomes participatory under the influence of serial media, and these novels [*The Familiar* series] envision new ways to mobilize social configurations of readers. This happened to television before, with the rise of the internet [sic]. Once considered a private activity, television-viewing has become a collaborative affair, where online forms allow participants to share their knowledge and interpretations. Inspired by these developments, *The Familiar* seeks to reinvent the literary novel as a social experience, a topic to discuss communally online and in “real life”.⁹⁴

While it is unclear as to how much viewer participation goes into the actual writing of a script for serial television episodes, *The Familiar* seeks to turn the consumer into what van de Ven

⁹³ Karen Barad, ‘Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/Continuities, Spacetime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come’, *Derrida Today*, 3 (2010), 240-68, p. 265.

⁹⁴ van de Ven, ‘Serial Novel’, p. 99. See also, Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 26, referenced in van de Ven.

calls ‘prosumers’.⁹⁵ A ‘prosumer’, unlike a consumer, also participates in the production of the product being sold. van de Ven locates three particular ways in which the prosumer collectively participates with the production of the serial medium: collective intelligence, shared waiting, and crowdsourced contents.⁹⁶

Collective intelligence can be seen in the ways discussion surrounding *The Familiar* exists via the forums. Readers, who range from academics and students trained in ‘reading’, to the more general fan-base are not only offering Danielewski conversations from which to pull, but are also proverbial keepers and discoverers of the larger discussions intra-acting with the novel. As Henry Jenkins (2006) writes, ‘[...] consumption has become a collective process. [...] None of us can know everything; each of us knows something; and we can put the pieces together if we pool our resources and combine our skills’.⁹⁷ The Internet is a type of interface that acts as a sort of strange-attractor for the larger conversation of the metafictioning manifold regarding and informing *The Familiar*. Though the Internet is not necessary for maintaining such reading communities, it helps collectivize various ideas, perspectives, and interpretations into accessible spaces for readers. As van de Ven notes, *The Familiar* is a book that ‘necessitates such a collective intelligence. It calls for analyses from many different angles and areas of expertise’.⁹⁸ This is most obvious in the inclusion of Armenian, German, Hebrew, Mandarin/Cantonese, Russian, and Turkish sections, as well as the more colloquial pidgins of Singlish and Spanglish, all of which required translators/speakers to be intimately involved with the book’s production and fan reception.⁹⁹ *The Familiar* is a novel that begs the reader to seek out such reading communities so as to situate meaning within particular conversations. *The*

⁹⁵ van de Ven, ‘Serial Novel’ p. 100.

⁹⁶ van de Ven, ‘Serial Novel’, p. 99.

⁹⁷ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, p. 4; quoted in van de Ven, ‘Serial Novel’, p. 99.

⁹⁸ van de Ven, ‘Serial Novel’, p. 99.

⁹⁹ See, Danielewski, *TFvI*, p. 847 (unpaginated) for a list of translators.

Familiar is actively aware of its status as a collectivized object, and of its power as a collectivizing interface. This is to suggest two things: first, that we occupy such internal and external collectivizations – as do all object-systems – and second, that metafiction works to actualize this network of collectivized/ing structures while also being aware of their status as interfaces. This means that we should ethically engage others in a spirit of affectual ‘conversation’, so as to engage the objects and artifacts, which carry – as inherently metafictional object-systems – an undeniable affective potency. *The Familiar* heuristically reminds us of this potential.

The second point that van de Ven makes, via Jenkins, is that there is an element of shared waiting in readers. This point emphasizes the collective experience in relation to the object. Whereas collective intelligence produces a body of knowledge and interaction that intra-actively reconfigure the book as new discussions are had, collective waiting points to the body of readers themselves who share the same emotions – anticipations and anxieties, for example – towards the development of story and characters. The reading community, in other words, is bonded, and bonds together, as Anne Kustritz (2014) writes, ‘[...] intensify[ing] the audience’s self-experience as an imagined community’.¹⁰⁰ Readers here are affected by each other. As a collective they contribute not only to the becoming body of knowledge, but also come together as a community.

As *TF-Narcon 27* tells us, “Narcons embody Affect-Intersectional Motivations or AIMs from IDENTITY sets” (565). That is, narrative constructs are fundamentally motivated by affect – affecting and being affected by other Narcons: the perpetuation of conversation. The metafictioning manifold is one such AIM conversation in which readers affect one another.

¹⁰⁰ Anne Kustritz, ‘Seriality and Transmediality in the Fan Multiverse: Flexible and Multiple Narrative Structures in Fan Fiction, Art, and Vids’, *TV/Series*, 6 (2014), 225-61, quoted in van de Ven, ‘Serial Novel’, p. 100.

Thomas writes, '[t]he novel runs on affect [...]. The novel extends this attention to affective states to the reader, prompting us to experience certain sensations, particularly the sensation of length or of lastingness'.¹⁰¹ That is, there is something deeply affecting about a shared wait. The sensation of length and lastingness speaks to a dynamic fundamental to conversation: the need to carry on (conversing) reciprocally and response-ably. In order for a conversation to continue, relationships between conversing parties must be willing to change and be changed by the other. Conversation is maintained when parties are able to speak, but also listen actively and respond accordingly, not by judging and silencing the other.¹⁰² As philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer writes (1975), '[...] the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner'.¹⁰³ This is what is understood by Barad as an ethical (intra-)action. She writes,

Ethics is not simply about the subsequent consequences of our ways of interacting with the world, as if effect followed cause in a linear chain of events. Ethics is about mattering, about taking account of the entangled materializations of which we are part, including new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities [...].¹⁰⁴

Conversation is a materializing event of ongoing materializations, perpetuating the conversation and being aware of the delicate AIMs necessary for maintaining narrativization. Conversation is not about judging the other, but of accounting for the other's contribution to the conversation: that is, remaining open to being changed. Shared waiting is a way that serial mediums like *The*

¹⁰¹ Thomas, 'Why we Read', p. 390.

¹⁰² See, for example the work of philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004 [1975]).

¹⁰³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 385.

¹⁰⁴ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 384.

Familiar encourage conversational affect within the collectivized readership. As Thomas notes, this conversational collectivization taps into a deeper ethos shared by all living systems: to live.¹⁰⁵ ‘The feeling of lasting through time’, Thomas writes, ‘is important to the question of why we should take the time to read the series at all’.¹⁰⁶ Thomas notes that suspense is employed in ways that are not just forcing the reader to wait for something to happen, but also ‘[...] involves the feeling of being suspended between the beginning and the end, the ongoingness of the middle’.¹⁰⁷ In fact the sheer immensity of the project, leaves the reader suspended – suspended in lasting conversations, in the novel’s unfolding, and in the co-participatory production of the novel, not unlike the narrator of *The Third Policeman* (TTP), who maintains existence, by being collectivized with the reader.¹⁰⁸

van de Ven, notes that *The Familiar* encourages slow reading in a culture of binge watching.¹⁰⁹ Elsewhere she states:

With these techniques, Danielewski offers his readers a temporal experience that is highly dependent on the perspective of his characters, their moods and story arcs. While adapting to new forms of representation and modes of reading, monumental novel series like these also harbor a potential counterforce to binge-viewing and consumption “on-demand”: a promise of pleasure and reflection (sometimes by way of frustration and boredom) in a culture that privileges directness, speed, immediacy.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ See, Thomas, ‘Why we Read’, p. 392.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas, ‘Why we Read’, p. 391.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas, ‘Why we Read’, p. 390.

¹⁰⁸ See, Chapter Three, this thesis. See also, Flann O’Brien, ‘The Third Policeman’, in *The Complete Novels* (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), pp. 219-406.

¹⁰⁹ Taken from van de Ven’s subtitle, ‘Slow Reading in a culture of Binge Watching’, see, van de Ven, ‘Serial Novel’, pp. 100-103.

¹¹⁰ Van de Ven, ‘Serial Novel’, p. 102.

This temporal experience of slow reading is not only about avoiding a tendency towards finality, but, as van de Ven notes, the ‘promise of pleasure and reflection’. *The Familiar* is a communal emotive endeavor of reading and conversing. The ethos of *The Familiar* is to endure, like any living system, and to bring pleasure and reflection upon the notion that this particular living system endures because the conversations endure. *The Familiar* forces the reader to reflect upon their contributions to the conversation and take pleasure through the emotive journey of being a part of a process in its becoming. Even with the discontinuation of the series in 2018, the content of the first five volumes encourages discussion so as to navigate and understand its cryptologic dynamics.

The third point made is that serial narratives crowdsource contents. This has been alluded to throughout this chapter, and coming sections unpack this aspect further, including with relation to the text itself. It is not that slow reading is a function of the reader upon the text, but also the text upon the reader.¹¹¹ In other words, the conversation requires that receptive parties contribute and affect each other bidirectionally, and this is no different for a novel that converses with its readership which serves as metafictional analogue to a diffracting reality.

In terms of the emerging story, there is evidence of the readership affecting the narrative in *TFvI*. First, as van de Ven explains, twenty-seven months before the publication of *TFvI* (as a pre-publication campaign), followers of Danielewski’s social media accounts attempted to solve puzzles that resulted in one of the trailers at the beginning of the book: ‘Our Common Horrors/Astral Omega’ (13-17).¹¹² Another instance van de Ven cites are the pictures of the readerships’ cats printed in the back matter (849).¹¹³ Its greatest crowdsourcing contributions,

¹¹¹ This was discussed in depth in Chapter Four.

¹¹² van de Ven, ‘Serial Novel’, p. 100.

¹¹³ van de Ven, ‘Serial Novel’, p. 100.

however, might be yet to appear: as conversations increase around the first five volumes, it will be intriguing to see the ways the readership truly co-author the novel. Considering the ambiguous nature of *The Familiar*'s trajectory as a living novel, and the different reading practices it necessitates through its overtly performative and neocybernetic style, focusing on diffraction and the Narcons themselves does not help foresee its emergence any more than has already been speculated upon. But it does help us theorize and anticipate the diffractive ethicality of its conversation with the readership and the culture as a crowdsourcing storytelling practice.

Setting the Diffractive Field

Diffraction, physically speaking, is a natural phenomenon – sometimes called an interference pattern – that occurs when waves encounter obstacles that in turn reconfigure the wave. One way to imagine this is to picture a stone being dropped into a pond; the ripples that radiate out are diffraction patterns. One can also observe this phenomenon by locating a wave moving through an opening in a barrier, such as a breakwater. In this case, the openings reconfigure the wave from a large wave into smaller sets of waves – the wave has been diffracted.¹¹⁴ Diffraction patterns are disturbances in a field produced by diffraction gratings – the things that entangle into the reconfigurations of the field; i.e., new discussions reconfiguring the development of *The Familiar*. Agential realism is the term for Karen Barad's project of applying the micro theories of quantum mechanics to the macro sphere of the experiential world.¹¹⁵ She advocates, '[...] *a relationality between specific material (re)configurings of the world through which boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted*'.¹¹⁶ Diffraction is the

¹¹⁴ See, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, pp. 75-79, for illustrative examples of the above.

¹¹⁵ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 85.

¹¹⁶ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 139. Italics in original.

methodology by which this agentially real manifold is simultaneously made intelligible and differentially reconfigured (e.g., iteration-subversion) by the act of making it intelligible. Barad's work on agential realism is deeply rooted in theoretical quantum mechanics (particularly the quantum philosophies of Niels Bohr), and also draws heavily upon Donna Haraway's (1997) diffractive methodology, offering a framework for approaching metafiction in their fullest performative capacities as emergent fictions and materializations of reality.¹¹⁷ While grounded in a scientific discourse, diffraction offers a description of metafiction's ability to exploit the complexity of its contexts and perform emergent fiction.

Diffraction originates in the physical sciences, particularly with regard to the perceived classical paradoxes of the nature of light (as either a wave or a particle), and continues to have significant relevance in fields as diverse as quantum mechanics and cultural studies, both of which have much to say, and ask, about the contingency of the epistemological, ontological, and ethical dimensions of material realities, particularly in feminist and queer studies.¹¹⁸ Diffraction's inherent quality of disrupting narrative articulations is perhaps a significant reason it has found purchase in cultural theories outside the sciences. That conventions and their sequential (i.e., narrative) articulations are in a constant state of flux rather than representing fixed epistemological and ontological distinctions and expressions allows for a performatively diffractive view of culture; one in which the materials of the world and our co-operation simultaneously iterate and subvert our neocybernetic processes of entanglement and emergence.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, pp. 71-94; 97-131, two chapters that deal with the exploration and elaboration on theories by Donna Haraway and Niels Bohr, respectively. See also, Niels Bohr, *The Philosophical Writings of Niels Bohr: Essays, 1933-1957, on Atomic Physics and Human Knowledge*. Vol. 2 (Woodbridge: Ox Bow Press, 1963), as important contributions informing the theories used in this thesis. Regarding Haraway's work on diffraction, see, Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.Femaleman(C)_Meets_Oncomouse(Tm): Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 16, where she describes diffraction theory as her 'invented category of semantics.

¹¹⁸ See, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, pp. 71-94, where she discusses the scientific underpinnings of a diffractive methodology, and offers a general background on diffraction. See, especially pp. 86-87, where she notes the similarities and differences of theorists from both scientific and cultural camps.

Diffraction more fully fits a metafictional context since narrative reconfiguration is the ‘rule’, rather than a means towards locating hybrid formulations.

Haraway first proposed diffraction as an alternative metaphor to reflection to better express the contingent nature of differences.¹¹⁹ On reflexivity, Haraway writes, ‘reflexivity has been much recommended as a critical practice, but my suspicion is that reflexivity, like reflection, only displaces the same elsewhere, setting up worries about copy and original and the search for authentic and really real’.¹²⁰ The issue with reflexivity is that it fundamentally upholds boundaries between things (for example fiction and reality) suggesting that their differences are inherent, and metafiction is conventionally understood as reflexive in this sense.¹²¹ On the one hand metafiction disrupts held narrative conventions and assumptions about the nature of reality, but on the other hand, by doing so, they continue to imply a fixed – albeit elusive – reality through its processes of conventional negation according to conventional understandings. Vivienne Bozalek and Michalinos Zembylas (2016), note, ‘[r]eflexivity starts off with preconceived assumptions of binaries rather than investigating how boundaries or binaries are produced through the methodology itself. In reflexivity, there is a researcher as an independent subject who is actually the locus of reflection’.¹²² Reflexive approaches seem to side-step the notion that the knowledge derived from a reflexive analysis fails to take into account that the methodology itself is playing a role in producing something called a researcher and an independent subject. A diffractive approach, however, understands that gazer and mirror are situated in such a way that whatever information is obtained is a product of their intra-play

¹¹⁹ See, for example, Haraway, ‘Promises of Monsters’, pp. 63-124; Haraway, *Modest_Witness*, p.273.

¹²⁰ Haraway, *Modest_Witness*, p. 273.

¹²¹ See, for example, Currie, ‘Introduction’, p. 1, where he describes the general terms associated with metafiction in the 1970’s and the illogicality and inconsistency with postmodern literary theories. See also, the introduction to this thesis which outlines the conventionally anti-illusory nature to metafiction and postmodern narratives.

¹²² Vivienne Bozalek, and Michalinos Zembylas, ‘Diffraction or Reflection? Sketching the Contours of Two Methodologies in Educational Research’, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* (2016), p. 6.

– knowledge is situationally produced, not universal.¹²³ Bozalek and Zembylas write that ‘[d]iffraction is thus predicated on a *relational ontology*, an ongoing process in which matter and meaning are co-constituted’.¹²⁴ In other words, independent subjects and objects are required to help constitute someone as a researcher, just as those things themselves do not exist as fixed subject and object things-in-themselves without the necessary relationship to a researcher.

Diffraction as a methodology is a matter of differences – how differences are made and how they continually engage with other differences – diffracting into new patterns of differentiation. Diffraction is also a practice; as Barad summarizes, ‘[...] diffraction not only brings the reality of entanglements to light, it is itself an entanglement’.¹²⁵ In other words, diffraction is not just a methodology for measuring particular patterns, but is itself (as in, the act of taking those measurements are) an act of diffracting. This is to say that a diffractive methodology allows us to speak *about* the storying process while also acknowledging the fact that to do so *is* to contribute to the storying under investigation. In literary terms, criticism of a particular work not only says something about that work, but is also active in restructuring the metafictioning nature of the work, as is the case with this thesis, and which metafictioning are self-conscious of.¹²⁶

Taking account of these expressive patterns of difference requires the observer to understand that their role is necessarily entangled into those diffractive processes.¹²⁷ A diffractive methodology does not teach us anything about the world – as if it exists somehow

¹²³ See, Haraway, ‘Manifesto for Cyborgs’, pp. 7-45, on situated knowledge.

¹²⁴ Bozalek and Zembylas, ‘Diffraction or Reflection?’, p. 2.

¹²⁵ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 73. Barad says this with regards to the larger implications of the two-slit experiment, which is foundational to her conception of a diffracting (intra-active) world.

¹²⁶ As mentioned in Chapter Four, these two purposes are mutually exclusive. See also, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 73, where she writes that, ‘[...] nonetheless, as our understanding of the phenomena is refined we can enfold these insights into further refinements and tunings of our instruments to sharpen our investigations and so on.’

¹²⁷ This becomes more apparent further in this section.

outside us, which we can observe objectively – but instead causes us to see the patterns in the world that emerge when we – who are of the world – entangle with other differences to produce certain contingent patterns that are measurable. As Haraway writes, ‘a diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the effects of differences appear’.¹²⁸ Diffraction seeks out the effects of things that come together or are torn apart – the emerging patterns of differences, not the things themselves.¹²⁹ Brigit Kaiser and Kathrin Thiele (2014) summarize the concept as a critical term in this way:

Diffraction is [...] [an] alternative vocabulary and different technology for critical inquiries: as an image of thought and – or better even ‘as’ – a praxis of analysis that foregrounds differentiability; provides alternatives to [a] ‘reflection’ as metaphor for our epistemologies; affirms our knowledge-practices as mattering here-and-now and merely recording after-the-fact; and highlights the fundamental material relationality of a diffracted/-ing world.¹³⁰

This methodology is a type of measurement, but it is also a form of participation. Furthermore, as Kaiser and Thiele continue, it is about ‘[...] the desire to re-trope our tools of meaning-making [...] [and to] become literate with-in them’.¹³¹ Much like the heuristic qualities of metafiction that catalyze the reader into re-interpreting disrupted conventions, there is an

¹²⁸ Haraway, ‘The Promises of Monsters’, p. 300.

¹²⁹ See, Karen Barad, ‘Diffracting Diffraction’, *Parallax*, 20 (2014), 168-87, p. 168. Barad defines diffraction as being synonymous with intra-action as cutting together-apart. This is similar in terms to Ira Livingston’s ‘cleave’, see, Ira Livingston, *Between Science and Literature : An Introduction to Autopoetics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 109. In metafictional terms, diffraction is about being open with the narrativizing processes of iteration-subversions.

¹³⁰ Brigit Mara Kaiser, Kathrin Thiele, ‘Diffraction: Onto-Epistemology, Quantum Physics and the Critical Humanities’, *Parallax*, 20 (2014), 165-67, p. 166.

¹³¹ Kaiser and Thiele, ‘Diffraction’, p. 166. See also, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 90 for a table detailing the inseparability of ethics from the onto-epistemological nature of a diffractive methodology.

inseparable ethic, a heuristic practice, dedicated to better connecting with the metafictioning manifold (the neocybernetic intra-actions in which we materialize and participate in). Diffraction is a way of being part of *and* being active with the differences of the world, and *The Familiar* exemplifies this in the way the reader is able to think about the emerging patterns of the novel. Metafiction, then, in line with all of the above, is best understood as a diffractive genre and not necessarily a (self-)reflective one.

The Narcons' Exponential Ethos

This section outlines the different natures of each Narrative Construct (Narcons). There are three Narcons: TF-Narcon 3, TF-Narcon 9, and TF-Narcon 27, who interject throughout the novel serving different functions depending on the Narcon's specific purpose. The Narcons appear to exist in clear boundaries with regards to their functions in the novel. Despite this, they also transcend their boundaries. This means that the Narcons cannot be explained by clear representational definitions of existing within certain parameters and outside of others – they represent aspects of a metafictioning manifold slowly making aspects of itself intelligible to itself.¹³² As Douglass et al., write:

The interruptions by TF-Narcon³, TF-Narcon⁹, and TF-Narcon²⁷ suggest that they too are embedded somewhere in *The Familiar*'s diegetic world. They see, voice, and know the manifold permutations of the characters, but they are “programmed,” operating according to strict yet contradictory parameters. In other words, the Narcons do not constitute a frame, or outer matryoshka doll, nor do they look in on the novel from a bird's (or owl's)-eye view. Turtles then – or is it cats? – all the way

¹³² See, Chapter Four, this thesis, for larger discussion on agential realism.

down. [...] [T]hey observe the world of *The Familiar* as if through a wormhole from some distant universe.¹³³

The Narcons do not exist in a space and time separate from the storyworld of the novel (nor of the reader, for that matter), but are participatory in the same happening, or becoming, of the metafictioning manifold which consists of various intra-active narrative planes. They are intra-active spacetime-matterings – specific manifestations of the metafictioning manifold (as are the novel and reader) – becoming intelligible to and with other entities as the metafictioning manifold recursively feeds back into itself.¹³⁴ As Douglass et al. write, they are ‘programmed’ with strict, yet contradictory, parameters. It is yet uncertain as to whether the storyworld of *The Familiar* is in fact a large simulation or computer program (perhaps designed by Anwar – Xanther’s step-father), but for the purposes of this thesis and the exploration of the larger cultural conversation, it is beside the point. Narcons do not follow the cultural mythologies or representational logic of things existing independently as-things-in-themselves, but instead as living intra-active becomings whose ‘parameters’ are only contradictory if attempting to comprehend them linearly.

The Narcons exhibit different characteristics worth mentioning in addition to their specific parameters. First, they are written in different fonts. Like the other characters, whose font styles reveal something about their personality traits, the Narcons too are contained as such.¹³⁵ For example Narcon 3 is written in *manticore* – a mythological chimeric sort of being. Narcon 9 is written in *MetaPlus-*, and is perhaps a play on Narcon 9’s overtly metafictional

¹³³ Douglass et al., ‘The Unfamiliar’, p. 9. Douglass et al.’s use of superscript to refer to Narcons 3, 9, and 27, appears to be in error. The only superscripted narcons (e.g., narcon subsets) are the various formulations of Narcon 9, which are, the various narrators themselves.

¹³⁴ See, introductory chapter, this thesis, for discussion on the term, ‘spacetime-mattering’ to describe the ongoing spatial and temporal materialization of things in the world.

¹³⁵ Douglass et al., ‘The Unfamiliar’, p. 11.

nature. Narcon 27 is written in Arial Mt, and this might serve to play on Narcon 27's more 'aerial omniscience' of the storyworld. Narcon 27's font also may be alluding to the larger idea of a computer program (as the Arial font was originally designed for IBM in 1982 and later made standard in Microsoft suites in 1992).¹³⁶ Narcon interjections appear bracketed by braille, and while Narcon 3 appears throughout the novel as italicized and indented block text, Narcon 9 is un-indented and in standard MetaPlus-.¹³⁷ Furthermore, Narcon 27 is in bold and indented block text. Though their purposes are confusing, at least until the interjecting sixteen-page chapter at page 563, the fonts help identify the Narcons.

The more omniscient Narcon 27 tends to offer the reader useful, though not necessarily always needed information. For example, in one of the trailers at the beginning of the novel, titled: "Twin Rivers Ochre Artifact" (braille-brackets appear as double quotes here in this text), about a (paleolithic) boy and girl in the depths of a cave, Narcon 27 begins:

"243,243 years ago. Three days before vernal equinox"

"5:04 PM."

"Southwest of present-day Lusaka, Zambia. Not so far from, -15.5607, 28.13061."

"Fire dims and fills cave with smoke. Outside the rain falls harder. Trees shake and crack. As the storm grows so does darkness." (35)

¹³⁶ 'Arial', fonts.com, <<https://www.fonts.com/font/monotype/arial/story>> [Accessed February 8 2017].

¹³⁷ The braille open quote is the brail word for 'the', and the braille close quote is the braille letter, 'n'. See, captain_britain, 'The Meaning of the Two Braille Symbols', in *The Familiar* (Online: Mark Z. Danielewski, 2015), who posed the question on the blog. When searching for the braille, they misread the 'N' as a 'Z' (due to their similar, though inverted shape). This misreading, interestingly, draws attention to Mark Z. Danielewski who employs his middle initial in his works. On the other hand, ThereIsNoDarkSky concluded that the two brails spell out the word, 'then'. See, ThereIsNoDarkSky, 'The Meaning of the Two Braille Symbols', in *The Familiar* (Online: Mark Z. Danielewski, 2015). This interpretation serves as a sort of narrative propellant as 'then' in effect frames Narcon 27's dialogue. Conversely, Xenophule discovered that the same brail for 'N' also means 'not', which adds a paradoxical element to Narcon 27 as both 'the' and 'not the' omniscient force of the novel. See, Xenophule, 'The Meaning of the Two Braille Symbols', in *The Familiar* (Online: Mark Z. Danielewski, 2015). Lastly, TBHalo implies that the 'N' signifies 'Narcon' – whether TBHalo means that the dialogue is coming from 'the narcon (27)', or *not* from them (i.e., from Mark Z. Danielewski, perhaps), remains uncertain. See, TBHalo, 'The Meaning of the Two Braille Symbols', in *The Familiar* (Online: Mark Z. Danielewski, 2015).

Narcon 27 appears to be an objective narrator imparting storyworld facts in the form of setting and background information. Additional interjections include the transmission dates for *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009) (52); the meaning of the acronym “hdb” (housing development board) (101); and explaining that despite Xanther’s uncertainty of her success at breathing life back into the cat she has found, the cat was indeed receiving her breath (810).

Narcon 9 serves a different purpose. Whereas Narcon 27 is largely concerned with explaining or supplementing information about the novel to the reader, Narcon 9 is limited to the diegetic level. As mentioned above, the Narcons are somewhere beyond conventional metaleptic understandings, but nonetheless, in trying to understand who or what they are and the perceived limitations they have, it is useful to offer a preliminary characterization of their ‘realities’. If Narcon 27 is an extradiegetic narrator – existing somewhere outside the storyworld – then Narcon 9 is diegetic and occupies the same plane of reality as the nine other narrators we encounter. As Narcon 9 describes itself, it is nothing but zeros and ones, programmed to ignore any philosophical inquiry, and is cognizant of the fact that it has such limitations and is comprised of subsets: TF-Narcon⁹ Isn; TF-Narcon⁹ Shn; TF-Narcon⁹ Oz; TF-Narcon⁹ L; TF-Narcon⁹ Anw; TF-Narcon⁹ W; TF-Narcon⁹ Ast; TF-Narcon⁹ JJ; and TF-Narcon⁹ X – the nine character/narrators of *The Familiar* (565-567, unpaginated).¹³⁸ In other words, Narcon 9’s purpose is to construct the storyworld, or rather, *is* the storyworld itself, though the vastness of knowledge contained within the storyworld can never be completely known to Narcon 9. It

¹³⁸ The Narcon’s section is unpaginated. However, were they to be paginated, they would be from 563 to 578. I will reference these implied page numbers whenever engaging the Narcon’s section for greater ease in locating references in the text. Again, these Narcons stand for: cryptic existentialist, Isadorno; cabbie, Shnork Zildjian; police detective Ozgur Talat; L.A. gangbanger, Luther; Xanther’s videogame designer stepfather, Anwar; computer scientist, Cas (aka, The Wizard); Xanther’s PhD candidate mother, Astair; Singaporean small-time criminal, Jing Jing; and epileptic protagonist Xanther Ibrahim, respectively. See, Cummings, ‘Entropy and Infinity’ pp. 1-2; and ‘Tfv01 Narcon Interruption (Annotated)’, Fandom, (N.D.) <[https://thefamiliar.fandom.com/wiki/TFv01_NARCON_INTERRUPTION_\(annotated\)](https://thefamiliar.fandom.com/wiki/TFv01_NARCON_INTERRUPTION_(annotated))> Accessed June 18 2020].

writes:

“[a]ny TF-Narcon9 subset supports an infinite variety of embodiments. For example, TF-Narcon9 X (Spoken) would provide only those words spoken aloud by Xanther. TF-Narcon9 X (Route) would map wherever Xanther moved.” [...] “By contrast, TF-Narcon X (Total) is too vast to represent. [...] [T]o cover every sensory experience re-experienced through cerebral classifications and subsequent evaluations, combined with analytical, affective, or predictive faculties [...] a density of data so extreme that though finite is way beyond my capacity to calculate.” (568, unpaginated)

Despite Narcon 9’s limitations, what is clear is that Narcon 9 has the ability to think and quantify the storyworld, for example having the knowledge that protagonist Isodoro’s empathetic registry is 00.02%, Xanther’s epileptic likelihood is 21.12%, and Jing Jing’s addiction proclivity is 91.44% (569, unpaginated). According to Narcon 9, it cannot tell you (the reader) anything that exists outside the immediate storyworld of *The Familiar*, and likewise has no “personal agendas or desires” (572, unpaginated). Narcon 9 writes, “[a]s the old Narcons put it: “There is not space in the universe to tell the universe to the universe. Therein lies the peculiar beauty and sadness of stories: to tell it without it all” (558, unpaginated). Narcon 9 touches upon an understanding of the storied(ing) universe as comprehensively unknowable, though through one’s limited or subjective view, intelligible in smaller, though no less meaningful ways. Narcon 9 locates a sort of affectual humbleness, that is, a gracious attitude for knowing that it comes from a larger intra-active fabric, recognizing the vastness of that fabric, and being content with its limited situatedness within that fabric. It appears that Narcon 9 is an analogue representation

of the reader – with a diffractive understanding of the manifold.

Narcon 9 also feels (556, unpaginated).¹³⁹ There are times when Narcon 27 interjects, leaving Narcon 9 dizzy and breathless (556, 561, unpaginated). What this demonstrates is that there is an affective power that overrides any conditional bracketing of metaleptic realities.¹⁴⁰ Though Narcon 9 is not ‘programed’ to interact with Narcon 27 and Narcon 3 (who conversely tends to soothe Narcon 9) there is nonetheless an affective connection that permeates throughout.¹⁴¹ This affective quality also occurs throughout the novel between the characters, the cat, and the reader, as flagged by the appearance of pink ellipses.¹⁴² These pink ellipses appear in *TFvI* at various points in the novel, and in different storylines.¹⁴³ Indeed, different narrators come to hear the meowing of a cat wherever the ellipses appear – exemplifying metaleptic jumps within the storyworld. The reader, like the characters (manifestations of Narcon 9) are all subject to the same affective elements. The major implication here is that if Narcon 9 is an analogue of the reader, then the reader too must exhibit, and be receptive to a similarly affective quality with others living out their own narrative realities, as well as with the other things that enter in and out of our daily realities.

Narcon 3 differs from Narcons 9 and 27 in that Narcon 3’s language is largely experiential. As various bloggers write, Narcon 3 is one of the hardest to understand for the

¹³⁹ This affective quality is given its own section following this one, in order that this affective nature may be more fully unpacked. Here, the concern is to outline the various Narcons and theorize about how they are situated in relation to each other and the overall manifestation of the narrative.

¹⁴⁰ Conventionally speaking this metalepsis is a standard feature of metafiction, though the affective quality of entities programed not to interact with each other, but nonetheless interacting together, is analogically similar to a protagonist and a reader, for example, being affected by each other. We do not normally see ourselves as affecting a protagonist because of our ‘programing’ (in a representational paradigm), though a performative ‘mimesis’ of phenomena would suggest otherwise. For this reason, the Narcons suggest that our sense of ‘programing’ is misguided (and constructed at best) and that metaleptic affect is a standard feature of a metafictioning manifold.

¹⁴¹ Regarding Narcon 3, see, Danielewski, *TFvI*, p. 566 (unpaginated).

¹⁴² See, for example, Danielewski, *TFvI*, p. 153 (unpaginated), 296 (unpaginated), 354 (unpaginated), 390 (unpaginated), 433 (unpaginated), 437 (unpaginated), 470 (unpaginated), and 486 (unpaginated).

¹⁴³ See, for example, Danielewski, *TFvI*, pp. 153; 296; 354; 390; 413; 433; 437; 470, where ellipses appear in different storylines, whose narrators hear the meowing of a cat wherever the ellipses appear.

simple fact that it does not necessarily fit the diegetic parameters of Narcon 9, nor does it possess the omniscient knowledge of Narcon 27. For example, mhood71 calls Narcon 3 ‘the artistic narcon’, and cloyd3 writes that Narcon 3 ‘[...] has a penchant for poetry and vague prose’.¹⁴⁴ It appears that Narcon 3 occupies a space of experiential phenomena and contingent representations.¹⁴⁵ If Narcon 27 represents a higher order of omniscience (i.e., $3 \times 3 \times 3 = 27$; 3 to the 3rd power), and Narcon 9 represents a self-conscious or self-aware diegetic Narcon (i.e., $3 \times 3 = 9$; 3 to the 2nd power, or a second-order narrative construct), Narcon 3 seems to represent the base order, or fundamental phenomenal level which later self-awareness or representations are contingent upon. Another way of seeing this metaleptically is that Narcon 3 is embedded deep into the manifold, out of which second-order and third-order Narcons emerge, which are predominately self-referential and inter/intra-active with the larger narrative ecology.

In the trailer, “Twin Rivers Ochre Artifact”, there is a dialogue between Narcon 9 and Narcon 3. Narcon 9 speaks what appear to be the thoughts of the boy and girl in bold, while Narcon 3 speaks the actions of the boy and girl in italics. For example:

“But no matter how hard Girl tries, her stones produce no spark.”

“Give.”

“But no matter how hard Boy tries, no spark leaps forth. Girl Whimpers.”

“Mother brings stars. When others return”

“Girl whimpers more. Boy keeps smashing stone against stone until Girl’s stone

¹⁴⁴ mhood771, ‘Omniscient Narrators as Characters’, in *Discussion Board for Mark Z. Danielewski’s THE FAMILIAR, Volume 1* (Online: 2015); cloyd3, ‘Tf-Narcon3’, *Discussion Board for Mark Z. Danielewski’s THE FAMILIAR, Volume 1*, (2015) <<https://thefamiliar.wordpress.com/?s=3>> [Accessed February 10 2017]. Likewise, Thomas notes that Narcon 3 seems to lack self-awareness, though in later volumes Narcon 3 appears to be able to converse with other Narcons, thus demonstrating a certain self-awareness: Thomas, ‘Why We Read Novels’, p. 387. See also, jsimmsphx, ‘Metanarcons & Parameters’, vBulletin Solutions, Inc., (2016) <<http://forums.markzdanielewski.com/forum/the-familiar/the-familiar-aa/159629-metanarcons-parameters>> [Accessed January 4 2017].

¹⁴⁵ See, Chapter Four, this thesis on this contingency.

breaks apart.”

“See! No Stars but color!”

“Color?”

“Ha! Color!” (38)¹⁴⁶

Narcon 3’s experiential situatedness in the diegetic chain exists at the base level of phenomenal experience. In the Narcon chapter, Narcon 3 demonstrates a dynamic that has appeared throughout, which is not only the experiential grasping of a situation, but also the illustrating of the experiences that inform the language being used. For example, after Narcon 9 writes that it is nothing but ‘zeros and ones’ and that it ‘[...] has no interest in knowing that or where in the first place such integers come from, which [it] gathers is a squirrely matter’, Narcon 3 draws upon the metaphorical squirrel, stating: “racing each around, bark to branches, the whole length of the trunk, a trident pine, ponderosa, rooted in granite, with dusk cloaking play and pine cones mortaring a roof” (565, unpaginated). Narcon 3, in other words, is indeed poetic (representing a commonly experienced image), or more to the point, novelistic, in that it is metafictionally aware of the polyphony that intra-acts with the language being used. Narcon 3 not only occupies a base experiential level of the text, but brings the vast ocean of narrative constructions (polyphony) across time into the present experience of the novel’s telling. A ‘squirrely matter’ is not only a metaphor for an annoyingly elusive endeavor, but also draws upon the reader’s experiences of squirrels darting up trees and making noise. Narcon 3 is more metafictionally intra-active and therefore exhibits a practice of returning to the boundaries of the diegetic level

¹⁴⁶ This discovery of ochre may or may not have future significance to the novel series. There are some formatting differences here as well. While Narcon 3 is in italics, it is not indented as it is in the Narcon chapter. Likewise, Narcon 9 is bold and indented, though throughout the novel Narcon 9 is not indented. This may be due to the fact that they may be ‘old narcons’ (see, pp. 571-572, where ‘old Narcons’ are mentioned), suggesting that this trailer may show the infancy of narrative constructs – perhaps the origins of story as associated with the imaginative flights made possible by the discovery of color.

by extending beyond the conventional storyworld into the conversations of the metafictioning manifold. This is to say, *The Familiar* constitutes a particular frame that contains within it, a particular omniscience (Narcon 27), a materializing logos (Narcon 9), and a metaleptic affectual spirit (Narcon 3) in performance within the novel, but also, implicitly, as we will see in the next section, analogously models the processes of our larger realities.

The Narcons' Affective Ethos

In the Narcon chapter, Narcon 9 sets forth five parameters that show the diffractive potential of Danielewski's work (573-575, unpaginated). These parameters demonstrate how all Narcons are inherently metafictional and how all metafiction is Narcon; how Narcons interact with each other affectively; and how there is no such thing as a non-Narcon. Narcons are indeed bracketed (e.g., framed) in different pluralistic ways, and those brackets are in a constant state of becoming and reconfiguration – all of this occurs despite the novel's stating the opposite.¹⁴⁷ In the same way Chapter Two argues a conventional realism to storying parameters, this section extends that argument by establishing realism's inherent metafictionality despite attempts to negate them. This section helps develop the concept of storying into a metafictioning manifold by arguing that all things – including the reader – are Narcons operating in this metafictioning reality.

The first parameter reads, 'MetaNarcons Do Not Exist' (573, unpaginated). This is not true. First, Narcon 9 is an unreliable narrator and so we cannot accept any absolutism as truth. There are two obvious examples of this, the first being the telling of a bad joke. Narcon 9 states "It's an old joke around here: 'I MetaNarcon. No, I'm not.' Haha". Its irony permeates many

¹⁴⁷ Though framing and bracketing are different philosophical moves, whereby framing offers context to a subject/object, and bracketing removes that subject/object from enquiry, I am highlighting the fact that both actions serve as two sides of the same action – that is, both work to foreground certain possibilities while at the same time foreclosing on others. One move, in other words, implies or invokes the possibility of the other.

levels. On one hand, it metaleptically addresses the reader since, the second clause implies an ironic self-reference to the reader who will presumably understand the joke that it did not in fact meet something classified as a Narcon. Also, though regarding itself as separate from the cast of characters, Narcon 9 appears to be of the same diegetic level – that is, a character in a novel (a narrative construct). This leads to the second point, though it is a joke, Narcon 9 is telling the reader it *is* a MetaNarcon, both in the first clause, and also in the self-referential denial of the first clause, whereby Narcon 9's self-reference works to negate the denial of the second clause. That is, the joke can be read as containing a kernel of truth, whether it realizes it or not. As the rest of the parameters are discussed, it will become more evident that this is one of the fundamental elements of all narrative constructs.

Narcon 9 illustrates how all self-conscious beings are metafictional narrative constructs (character and reader alike), but sometimes fail to embrace our meta-construction in favor of a realist sense of experiencing the world within fixed realist parameters. In fact, Narcon 9 falls into similar realistic assumptions while referring to itself as it addresses the reader – possessing an illusory sense of self. We can contend that MetaNarcons *only* exist. The irony of this statement is that to say that they only exist is not to make a fixed claim (as is the case with 'they do not exist'), but to make a case for the primacy of ongoing reconfigurations. This is because to say that Narcons do not exist, for example, is to make a fixed epistemological and ontological claim about reality. It is, in other words, equivalent to saying disruptive narrative forms do not exist, and therefore, the world is fixed and knowable. 'MetaNarcons only exist' suggests there are *only* disrupted narrative forms in the world, and therefore the world can never be completely known since narrative constructs will always be self-referential, performative, and in the process of re-configuration. The irony of this original parameter informs how the rest of the parameters should be taken: ironically. Narcon 9's unreliability also forces a diffractive ethos

to the novel's actively living reconfigurations, calling into question the veracity of all the parameters. But as we shall see, these parameters are only problematized to a readership concerned with fixed identities (situated in a representational paradigm). To the reader engaged with a metafictional and intra-active understanding of metafiction they gain a new sort of performative truth – that MetaNarcons only exist.

The second parameter reads, 'Narcons Cannot Interact With Other Narcons. (Though rumor has it we can sometimes hear each other.) (I can't.)' (573, unpaginated). Despite this statement Narcons do indeed begin to interact with each other in future volumes.¹⁴⁸ In this volume we see the beginnings of these dynamics – though the Narcons do not overtly and knowingly engage with one another, it is obvious that they affect each other in various ways. For example, the redacted sections in the Narcon chapter, assumed to be Narcon 27 actively withholding information from the reader, are followed by Narcon 9's uneasiness as mentioned above (566, 569, unpaginated). In one instance, Narcon 9 states, "Oh-oh. That breathless, frantic thing again" (570, unpaginated). Elsewhere, after admitting that it does not know what happened to Xanther's therapist, Mrs. Goddard, Narcon 27 interjects with its omniscient telling of exactly what happened to Mrs. Goddard, and Narcon 9 proceeds with, "Uneasy again. As if something, just now, gross in its intrusion, leaves me unsettled. A little queasy too. And thirsty. If that's possible" (575-576, unpaginated). The effect upon Narcon 9 by Narcon 27's intrusion is more than mere crosstalk, instead having deep physiological implications. While the reason for Narcon 9's anxiety and nausea are uncertain, it is most likely due to its inexperience with metaleptic ruptures.¹⁴⁹ It is becoming clear in this first volume that Narcons do indeed interact

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, Danielewski, *TFv2*, p. 573. Here, there is an example of Narcon 9 reacting to Narcon 27's utterance of the word 'process'.

¹⁴⁹ See, for example, Norman N. Holland, 'Don Quixote and the Neuroscience of Metafiction', in *Cognitive Literary Studies: Current Themes and New Directions*, ed. by Isabel Jaen and Julien Jacques Simon (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2012), pp. 73-88, which outline the neurological 'fight-or-flight' responses triggered by metafiction's ability to short-circuit the clear distinction between fiction and reality. If Narcon 9 maintains

with other Narcons, though these interactions may not yet be intentional.

Additionally, we know from Narcon 9, that each of the protagonists are its subsets (i.e., embedded narrative constructions) (567, unpaginated). Therefore, a Narcon interacting with other characters is a matter of Narcons interacting with other Narcons. Again, though Narcons are not yet interacting with others, here we see how parameter 2 is false because ‘interact’ is being used in a way that presupposes a representational interaction between fixed identities – i.e., between Narcons 9 and 27. From a performative perspective, their interactions need not be representational. In the same way that encountering an artifact like an ancient painting may catalyze physiological responses such as sadness, anxiety, love, or spirituality, so too are the Narcons experientially interacting and affecting each other. In other words, Narcon 9 further confirms its unreliability by following parameter 2 with the parenthetical statement that Narcons are rumored to hear each other (though it cannot).

This unreliability and ambiguity between what constitutes a Narcon brings us to parameter 3: ‘Narcons Cannot Interact With Non-Narcons. And Vice-Versa. No Matter What’ (574, unpaginated). According to the new understanding of parameter 2, parameter 3 appears to be true. In its explanation of parameter 3, Narcon 9 writes:

“I can’t speak to Xanther and she can’t speak to me. She can’t even see me. Though I admit, sometimes I wonder. Xanther demonstrates not only self-awareness but selves-awareness bordering on transparency. Maybe this gets back to how extraordinary I think she is. Sometimes I swear she can see – without mediation, without processing, without artifice, definitely without me – other people’s Narcons! Sometimes she even seems close to seeing me and in a way too that suggests

realist assumptions – and constitutes the storyworld ‘reality’ – then its biological/neurological processes are also ‘real’ despite being models of human processes.

exceeding even my possible awareness. Which is impossible. Categorically impossible. I can't even see myself.” (574, unpaginated)

Narcon 9 appears to contradict itself by believing, with regards to parameter 3, that the other protagonists, especially Xanther, are non-narcons. Parameter 3, however, implies that all the novel's characters *are* Narcons. It is clear, Xanther, not unlike Narcon 27, affects Narcon 9 psychologically. Parameter 3 is true because the emphasis should be on the word 'cannot', not on 'Narcons'. In other words, parameter 3 does not imply that non-Narcons exist, but instead that if a non-Narcon ever existed, then a Narcon would not be able to interact with it. Parameter 3 suggests that the metafictioning manifold cannot interact with that outside the metafictioning manifold because the manifold is autopoietically self-contained. Anything existing outside the metafictioning manifold cannot necessarily be cognized because it exists outside the purview of the manifolding itself. Everything within the metafictioning manifold *is* a narcon, and therefore the universe that is intelligible to us *Homo sapiens sapiens* must be intelligible precisely because it is of the metafictioning manifold.¹⁵⁰ Together, from the polyphonous base of Narcon 3, up the metadiegetic ladder, to the reality of the reader, whose cultures are enfolding

¹⁵⁰ This is not to suggest that there are not things outside the metafictioning manifold – in fact the idea of framing our nature-culture bio-cognitive realities presupposes an outside environment to this metafictioning system. Remembering the work of Hyotyniemi (see, Hyotyniemi, 'Philosophical Consequences', Slide 50) who notes the importance of religious principles revealing some of the most basic patterns of human thought, and Flann O'Brien's own religious background, (super)natural ruptures would be congruent to the theories herein. Consequently, if any metadiegetic rupture were to take place at such a (super)natural scale, the intelligibility of it would depend upon the conventions of the manifold which make our experiences intelligible in the first place. See also, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 207, where she writes '[p]henomena are sedimented out of the process of the world's ongoing articulation through which part of the world makes itself intelligible to some other part. Therefore we are responsible not only for the knowledge that we seek but, in part, for what exists.' See also, Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Signs*, 28 (2003), 801-31, p.829, where she writes that '[w]e do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because "we" are *of* the world in its differential becoming.' This is to suggest that humans and the metafictioning manifold differentially create each other because they are materially (i.e., intra-actively and neocybernetically) inseparable. The metafictioning manifold is the (ethico-onto-epistem-ologically) intelligible universe from a (posthuman) re-calibrated anthropocentric perspective.

and informing Narcon 3's activity, are *all* Narcons occupying the same metafictioning reality.¹⁵¹ In this way, non-Narcons cannot exist since anything characterized as a non-Narcon could only be identified as such through a limited representational view, but the fact that the viewing is even possible in the first place suggests from a performative point of view, that it (Narcons) and we are of the same autopoietically intra-active system-environment. These Narcons may seem unfamiliar, but in fact they should be very *familiar* – they are us; we share their experiences because they capture the experiences of the metafictioning manifold.

This brings us to parameter 4, 'All Narcons Are Bracketed' (574, unpaginated). This fourth parameter does not contain an explanation by Narcon 9, but in light of the discussion thus far, important insights can be drawn related to the metafictioning manifold, and the storyworld of *The Familiar*. The word 'bracketed' can be taken in two ways with regards to language. One use is illustrated by the paired symbols, '()', that serve to contain an idea or thought, signifying that there is a particular context within which someone or something is situated – a frame.¹⁵² Another dimension of the word is not to point at the context of something, but instead to draw someone's attention to information that is separate, but nonetheless related, to the context, (as is sometimes used in academic writing, for example). This second use draws the observer's attention inward/outward into the polyphonous conversation that is the metafictioning manifold, while the first use is primarily concerned with representations. Additionally, bracketing can be used to remove something from analysis. But this just serves to re-enforce the second use. That is, removing from analysis juxtaposes different voices and puts

¹⁵¹ See, Chapter Three of this thesis. We know from Chapter Three that autopoietic systems are operationally closed. That is, they recursively manifest themselves yet are able to draw upon their environment so as to help perpetuate its autopoietic trajectory. However, what is also known from the same chapter is that systems are environments and environments are systems, and so what may appear from our limited perspective as a system feeding off of its environment might appear, from a less limited or alternate perspective, to be a larger ecology with autopoietic momentum. In either case, these are living systems.

¹⁵² Of course, actual brackets do not necessarily need to be used, as the term can be used figuratively.

them in play though they pretend to stand separately.

Parameter 4 is unique. First, it is the only parameter written in the positive form, and suggests Narcons do possess some sort of identity despite the subversive nature of the other parameters. In other words, a fundamental feature of this simultaneous iteration-subversion is the ability of the manifold to bracket itself so that each bracket – that is, each Narcon – simultaneously manifests a sense of self *and* opens up to the storying ecology that sustains it precisely through its bracketing and bracketed potential.¹⁵³ Parameter 4 appears upon first glance, from a representational perspective, to suggest that Narcons are all separate entities removed, somehow, from everything else in the storyworld. However, this is not the case, and performative and autopoietic theories show us why: all bracketed entities ((non)living, (non)human, (meta)physical) are manifestations of the living manifold framed in such a way that they are intra-actively drawing upon the brackets that constitute it and at the same time (re)influencing the manifold and its bracketing possibilities.¹⁵⁴

If parameter 4 shows us how the manifold generates different forms, then in parameter 5, we see how the various brackets contain within them the manifold itself. In fact, parameter 5 merely confirms what the above paragraph made explicit. Parameter 5 reads, ‘Form Is Not A Narcon Limit’ (575, unpaginated). Narcon 9 writes, “[i]n other words, Narcons can take on multiple shapes whether textual, musical, figurative, abstract, even performative. Narcons

¹⁵³ See, Livingston, *Between Science and Literature*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁵⁴ This is not unlike Edmund Husserl’s concept of ‘bracketing’ (or *phenomenological epoché*) which considers the experience of reality (or the *natural attitude*) to be somewhat obfuscated by concepts and ideas – the bracketed material of our experiences. Husserl finds that in practicing to remove bracketed material so as to arrive at an essential understanding of the natural attitude (and thereby suspending judgment on the nature of reality), one finds themselves in a phenomenal existence with blurred differentiation between subjects and objects (i.e., the *reduction proper*). In practicing to bracket off the material of the world so as to arrive to the natural attitude, in other words, we realize that such an endeavor *is* the acceptance of a bracket-able idea of *bracketing*, thus realizing the phenomenal differentiation between the *human I* and the *phenomenalizing I*. The essence of human experience, in other words, from a phenomenological perspective, is not the human as a thing-in-itself, but as a thing-in-phenomena, to use Barad’s terminology. See, for example, Eugene Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation: The Idea of a Transcendental Theory of Method*. trans. Ronald Bruzina (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 39-47.

cosplay extremely well” (575, unpaginated).¹⁵⁵ This means that within the metafictioning fabric, any piece of itself can take on an aspect of the universe as we are able to know it. The manifold is the conversation that autopoietically perpetuates its own conversation. Again, my use of the ‘metafictioning manifold’ is not to make a blanket ontological statement about the nature of reality, but instead merely to bracket a piece of that reality (paradoxically as a representational distinction), the piece that is intelligible to humans, as containing all objects that are knowable through technology and ultimately our fundamental bodily senses.¹⁵⁶ This is what is meant by engaging with difference: making distinctions and understanding the observer’s participatory role in creating that reality. Hans-Georg Moeller (2012) notes an often-cited dictum originating with George Spencer Brown, and often quoted by Niklas Luhmann: ‘Draw a Distinction!’¹⁵⁷ Moeller writes, ‘[s]imply put, reality is irreducible to any form of identity. It is, so to speak, hopelessly pluralistic. If reality emerges as an effect of contingent modes of cognitive observation, then it emerges in multiple ways that are incommensurable with one another.’¹⁵⁸ This is to say there are multiple realities (though not necessarily multiple worlds), depending on who or what is making a distinction – existing in relation to another object.¹⁵⁹ ‘Form’ as parameter 5 puts it, is an intra-active activity of the manifold observing itself and drawing distinctions about itself.

Narcon 9 goes on to imply that it is not just an aspect of culture – that which is seemingly

¹⁵⁵ Cosplay is a verb and noun to describe the dressing up as characters from books, movies, or videogames. This is especially popular with regards to Japanese animation characters. See, ‘Cosplay’, in *Dictionary*, ed. by Apple Inc. (Online: Apple, 2019).

¹⁵⁶ This paradox is characteristic of a fundamental tension between theories of autopoiesis and agential realism that are actually justifiable. While agential realism is primarily an ontological engagement with contingent representations, autopoiesis is an epistemological engagement with contingent ontologies. Both theories (Barad’s agential realism and Luhmann’s systems theories) are actually saying the same thing, that observing agencies affectively materialize what is and what is known, differentially.

¹⁵⁷ Moeller, *Radical Luhmann*, p. 83. See also, George Spencer Brown, *Laws of Form* (London: Allen & Unwin 1969).

¹⁵⁸ Moeller, *Radical Luhmann*, p. 83.

¹⁵⁹ See, Moeller, *Radical Luhmann*, p. 83.

separate from our biology – that change in the larger manifold, but also physical forms themselves.¹⁶⁰ Narcon 9 writes:

If not conflicting with superset protocols or subset specifications [i.e., sedimentized distinctions], Narcons may even appear as animals. Say a killer whale, boar, hyena, even a markhor, or an owl. This is often the case when personality factors determined to be significant are compressed in order to preserve future renderings of the character.
(575, unpaginated)

There are particular limits to a Narcons' form, but these limits do not ontologically pre-exist them as limits. Instead, the limits themselves are (narrative) constructions as much as any manifesting form, and therefore the superset protocols and subset specifications emerge along with the forms. Form is not a Narcon limit *because* all forms are evolutionary progressions (as opposed to teleologies – performative events whose being in the world differentially influences or changes the supersets or subsets that are determining the types of forms that continually manifest.¹⁶¹

Parameter 5 relates to the reader in an important way. Supporting the argument thus far that there is nothing but the manifold of narrative constructs. Danielewski writes:

The question of character brings up a thorny issue: a superset is always a subset. I'm

¹⁶⁰ Barad's performativity theory understands all objects in the universe as intra-active happenings.

Neocybernetics, as primarily envisioned by Clarke, separates the biotic from the metabiotic initially, though it is clear that they ultimately cannot be separated. The implication – which is outside the purview of this thesis, is that biological forms are also formal aspects of the metafictioning manifold. In fact, diffraction (and performativity and neocybernetics) help problematize the dichotomous view of biology and culture.

¹⁶¹ For example, genetic mutations, from a biological perspective. This is not to suggest that all progressions are making 'progress', but instead that each moment of iterative and subversive materialization re-define the distinction and the possibilities for further reconfiguration. Likewise, the ontological status between supersets and subsets is akin to the relational difference between a system and an environment.

the superset of my subsets where I'm also an I. Just as I am a subset of a superset where I is also I. You for example, are a one-persona subset in an unnamed superset. Accepting this, it also follows that there are supersets with entirely different taxonomies and natures. (575, unpaginated)

In metafictional terms, every thing exists in a metadiegetic relationship with/in other narrative levels. Narcon 9 makes the point that this system-environment manifold extends from the various diegetic levels of the characters all the way up to the diegetic level of the reader, and beyond. In other words, we are connected to the storyworld, not necessarily as readers that are separate self-contained entities relating to a novel object, but as manifestations of the manifold. Our 'unnamed superset', named here as "metafictioning manifold", shows that characters are subsets, and that we similarly exist in such a relationship with other texts, out of which, distinctions and differences are sedimented into ongoing system-environments and object-relations. Since all Narcons are expressions of the same metafictioning manifold, we are nothing and everything simultaneously – form is indeed not a limit in our metafictioning manifold superset. As bracketed beings we are intra-connected/ing with the entire reconfiguring manifold of narrative constructs. That is, we are metamorphosing materializations, along with, and drawing upon, all (non)living, (non)human, (meta)physical things, as these similarly draw upon us.

Since everything in the metafictioning manifold is bracket-able, bracketed, and bracketing, there is no fundamental sense of 'I' – no fixed identity – and so different forms or identities are always possible. This, however, is not to say that the reader can become a cat, or that any sedimentary distinction can shape shift completely; paradoxically, this fits with parameter 5. Indeed, form is not a Narcon limit, but it is also true that Narcon forms are limiting.

As already mentioned, supersets and subsets determine the types of forms that emerge within the manifold. Forms are limited because it's those very limits, or distinctions, that create differences within the manifold. While it seems irreconcilable that Narcons are unlimited in the forms they can take, while also being limited by the parameters of their forms, we are reminded by Narcon 9 that our superset (or metafictioning manifold) is one particular form in what can only be speculated as a vast ocean of unknowable supersets. In other words, the metafictioning manifold is not a theory-of-everything, but a theory of our narrativizing superset that provides us with the limits and forms that perpetuate the superset as it reconfigures itself. Narcons may appear as whales, boars, hyenas, novels, characters, readers, planets, and cats because in this present moment, these are the forms that narrative constructs take in our reality.

Conclusion

Danielewski calls *The Familiar* a 'living' novel, and *The Familiar* also represents an attempt to produce a novel about the conversations occurring around us, *and* an attempt to allow the reader to connect with the voices of these conversations. *Conversation* is a term that is used by Danielewski to suggest more generally that the environment in which we find ourselves is already abuzz with meanings that are playing off, and with/in each other, and that we are generally deaf to this cacophony.¹⁶² In the metafictional terms of this thesis, this can be translated as Danielewski's attempt to produce a work that heuristically draws our attention to the living processes of conversation – to participate in and become literate with the metafictioning manifold.

As *The Familiar* makes obvious, it is not only *about* these processes, but also *a part of them* as well. While I have argued that this is the case for all novels (and more generally all

¹⁶² Danielewski, 'Athens GA', Accessed January 4, 2017.

material-discursive phenomena), *The Familiar* occupies a unique space in that it is overtly and self-consciously engaging these dynamics/dimensions. In other words, while the novels of Chapters Two, Three, and Four address aspects of the metafictioning process, and are no doubt part of those processes as well, they are also ‘finished’ books. This is not to say that these novels are fixed. Indeed, their differential ontologies and epistemologies are ever-changing and reconfiguring, as is the case with *The Familiar*. The difference here is that *The Familiar*’s ‘fixed parameters’ are fundamentally open and intended to be changed by outside social (contextual), technological (via the utilization of various media), and psychic (i.e. readerly) factors – the larger neocybernetic circuitry. Though *The Familiar* does not do anything differently than what the things inhabiting the material-discursive fabric are already doing, it is different in that it is a (living) representation of these metafictioning processes. *The Familiar*’s metafictional nature draws overt self-conscious attention to narrativizing autopoietic and performative processes by performing those very processes, as opposed to merely representing, or commenting on particular conventions – it is an example of a ‘mimesis’ of phenomena aware of its status as a ‘mimesis’ of phenomena. From the perspective of mediating the theories of agential realism (performativity) and neocybernetics (autopoiesis), *The Familiar* is an ethico-onto-epistemological artifact that is self-aware of its ethico-onto-epistem-ology: a sort of ‘meta-metafictioning’. This chapter serves to cohere a metafictional theory of metafictioning that is not only applicable to the novel form, but also to all objects ((non)living, (non)human, (meta)physical) in the human experience – as mediums that have much to teach about their processes of coming into being as well as their ongoing processes of reconfigurations, the living fabric of conversation.

By focusing on *TFv1*, we see how *The Familiar* is an autopoietic and performative *living ecology in the act of writing itself*. *The Familiar* is a novel demonstrating, not so much as an

artifact, but as a performance within the metafictioning manifold, the explicit simultaneity of intra-connectivity and influence with/in the world's objects (system-environments/object-relations) that in turn influences its own emergence. This is not to say that *The Familiar* is a reflection of the world's narratives as they inherently *are*, but rather, conversely, it is a diffraction – an active practice interfering with and reconfiguring the patterns of our storied ecologies of which *it* is a part – a reflection and diffraction of what they *do*.

As implied in the preceding chapters, this does not mean that *The Familiar* presents a *new* novel so much as that the novel as a genre has always allowed itself to become attuned to these metafictioning processes of phenomena. *TFvI*, and *The Familiar* more generally speaking, is situated in the present moment, and, like all living things, its successes or failures are contingent upon the ethical practices that the many narrative constructs employ in order to maintain ongoing conversation, reconfigurations, and ultimately an emergent and unforeseeable novel trajectory.

This chapter shows how practice/s are built into the theory, and built into our (intra)actions with the world. Again, ethics is not a moral stance so much as an ethos of practicing and maintaining affect between entities – conversation. Ethics is about being aware of the diffractive potential of every moment and engaging with every situation in a way that seems best. What is 'best' is subjective, but what *TFvI* illustrates is that as living literary organisms, maintaining life is ideal. In the same way a conversation struggles with belligerent parties, *TFvI* too cannot maintain itself without the participatory, communal, and crowdsourcing capabilities of the readership. The ethical – affective – practice/s of things and systems ensures diffractive emergence (response-able account-ability of others), as diffraction is the ability of differences to make a difference in the world. *TFvI* is inherently diffractive since by relying on and encouraging interference patterns, that is, generating discussions in the

readership, the readership too diffractively interferes with the trajectory of the novel, thus writing itself into the novel. *TFvI* is a living monument to differences as they are response-ably affecting and being affected by each other, showing diffraction as a feature of all things in the metafictioning manifold of the human experience.

VI.

EPILOGUE:

THE DIFFRACTING METAFICTIONING NOVEL APPARATUS

Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality.¹

The study of metafiction *is* the study of our entangling, emergent, and diffractive natures in relation with the object-systems around us. The purpose of this thesis has been to re-energize metafiction studies through the frameworks of performativity, neocybernetics, and diffraction, and to bridge a gap between now-conventional theories of metafiction and constructivist strands of literature and science studies. I argued that metafiction disrupts the modern Enlightenment sense of self and world; are performatively living objects *and* systems in, of, and with the human experience; exhibit a ‘mimesis’ of phenomena instead of a mimesis of process; and are a diffractive genre as opposed to a reflective one. I also located the reader, technologies, and social contexts as necessary literary conventions for the genre’s, and for our own, ongoing metamorphosis. The metafictional novel self-referentially foregrounds these elements, and analogously suggests an inherent metafictioning quality to all human stories.

¹ Kenneth Burke, ‘From Language as Symbolic Action’, in *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, ed. by Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001), pp. 1340-47, p. 1341. Italics in original.

My research throughout has not sought to disprove past metafictionists, but in the affective and diffractive spirit of this thesis, expand past theories in ways that see metafiction – and in particular the metafictional novel – as events rather than fixed artifacts; alive in a (narrative) ecology as opposed to being inanimate objects; and differential acts of ethically informed and heuristic performances with the reader who also is performatively and neocybernetically co-operating with (metafictioning) object-systems. Furthermore, this thesis has shown that the metafictional novel, in particular, tends to be self-conscious of these entangling and emergent performative dynamics rather than of ludic reflections of linguistic and narrative elements, teaching its readers ways to engage the world metafictionally.

In the epigraph to this chapter, Kenneth Burke (2001) notes the potential of representations – reflections – to deflect reality. While in agreement, his words also contextualize the assumptions from which this thesis expanded upon (without necessarily disagreeing with). First, we are reminded of the language-centric foundations of prior metafictionists, like Linda Hutcheon (1980), Patricia Waugh (1984), and Mark Currie (2011), and their anti-illusory tendencies to problematize representational conventions rather than encourage their plurality.² While such disruptions *are* cultural interventions, I argued in the introductory chapter that representational paradigms assume fixed ontological boundaries, including language's nature as an incomplete system for truly reflecting reality. Secondly, Burke implies a 'worlding' potential to everyday materials (*a la* terminology) to both reflect *and* deflect reality. Suggested, therefore, is a

² See, for example, Brigit Neumann, and Ansgar Nünning, 'Metanarration and Metafiction', in *the Living Handbook of Narratology* (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2012), who claim such a dynamic to the works of Hutcheon and Waugh. Currie, I argue is also anti-illusory in his predominately postmodern context, which is anti-realist, and thereby implicative of the illusory nature of knowledge claims. See, for example, Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*. 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 2-3, regarding his anti-realism. See also, the works of: Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (London: Methuen, 1980); and Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984).

diffractive potential, a differential dynamic to both reflect and change material reality, a notion especially gestured towards by Hutcheon and her concept of a mimesis of process – that metafiction foregrounds the reader's role in realizing the text – and Waugh, whose creation-description paradox problematizes subject-object relations by locating an interplay between text and context.³ Lastly, Burke's reflect-deflect simultaneity is entirely performative – that words *do* things by the fact that they *are* things recasts objects not as inanimate, but as events. Currie suggests this in his analysis of metafiction both in the way metafiction *dramatize* rather than blur the boundaries of fiction and reality, and how they simultaneously disrupt their own referentiality while commenting on their inter/extra-textual references (the *myth-fact paradox*).⁴

The above implications reveal three gaps in the study of metafiction, which when pressed during this project, showed metafiction as events, alive, and ethical. First, Currie notes an agential and performative element to metafiction, which 'leaves the subject-object relation between the text and its reading mysteriously untheorized'.⁵ This is largely the focus of Chapter Two on performativity, and underpins the entire thesis, especially with Chapter Four's work on the causal relationships between objects and subjects through new materialism. Essentially, it's the investigation of this performativity to metafiction that opens up a field of investigation regarding its processes of materiality in the world, and its inter/extra-textual referentiality.

The second gap is contextualized by Waugh, through the creation-description paradox, suggesting a differential process of co-creation between 'subjects' and 'objects', but which, in so doing, implies a drastic shift away from the centrality of semiotic systems into what is eventually understood here as a material-discursive materiality.⁶ Also, Waugh's stance on the

³ See, Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, pp. 36-47, and Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 88. This is elaborated upon further below.

⁴ Mark Currie, 'Introduction', in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 1-18, p. 5; and Currie, *Postmodern*, p. 66.

⁵ Currie, *Postmodern*, p. 66.

⁶ Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 88. The material-discursive comes from Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*:

differential relationship between subjects and objects further implies a bio-logic through the simultaneous creation of context and text – an idea reminiscent of autopoietic processes in things that self-produce their own (con)textual parameters.⁷ The term ‘bio-logical’ is coined by Heikki Hyotyniemi (2006) to signify the processes of systems to analogously imitate living organisms, despite being, broadly speaking, technological.⁸ Though Waugh remains language-centric, she notes ‘the “alternative worlds” of fiction, as of any other discourse, can never be totally autonomous’.⁹ Waugh’s implications scaffold a bridge between theories of neocybernetics and new materialism in that she locates an ontological and epistemological indeterminacy to fiction and reality. These autopoietic theories, which situate new materialism as part of its performative ecology of things, prompt the diffractive approach in Chapter Five.

Thirdly, Hutcheon, helps inform these differential processes through her notion of a ‘mimesis of process’, but also locates the human in these entangling and emergent strands. Hutcheon’s reader-response approach solidifies the reader/observer as a necessary convention to autopoietic and material-discursive processes, endowing an inherent storytelling capacity to mediate material changes into the world.¹⁰ When put into conversation with Currie and Waugh, Hutcheon’s insights inform a diffractive practice towards metafiction. That is, after establishing metafiction as living object-systems (e.g., performative and neocybernetic) Hutcheon reminds us that texts exist because there is a reader co-creating meaning, and that

Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 152-153, to describe matter as not being reducible to any ontologically or epistemological boundaries, but are differentially produced through intra-active processes.

⁷ See, for example, Pier Luigi Luisi, ‘Autopoiesis: A Review and a Reappraisal’, *Naturwissenschaften*, 90 (2003), 49-59, p. 51 for comparable and analogous definition of autopoiesis.

⁸ Heikki Hyotyniemi, *Neocybernetics in Biological Systems* (Helsinki: Helsinki University of Technology, 2006), n.p. This information can be found in the preface.

⁹ Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 100.

¹⁰ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 1. See also, Sigmund Freud, ‘On Narcissism, an Introduction’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, ed. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1914), pp. 67-102, whom Hutcheon uses to establish storytelling as the human condition.

metafictions are aware of these readerly processes.¹¹ Hutcheon tempers the risk of producing a metaphysical theory-of-everything by foregrounding the human observer's role in perpetuating the metafictioning manifold. This sentiment persists throughout the chapters here – in Chapter Two with the establishment of the reader as a necessary convention to metafiction; in Chapter Three by foregrounding the reader's complicity in keeping the bio-logical artifact *alive*; in Chapter Four with the causal investigations of the relationship with people and things which elude clear (non)living, (non)human, and (meta)physical boundaries; and in Chapter Five by establishing ethical practices towards metafictioning realities.

Theories of performativity and neocybernetics, though complimentary here, differ in certain respects. Performativity, and by extension, new materialism, are more ontologically and metaphysically oriented, assuming a(n agential) reality. Conversely, autopoiesis, and by extension neocybernetics, is more epistemological and focuses on self-referential processes of entanglement and the emergence of systems in the world. Despite these differing emphases, both are considered constructivist, are performative in their resistance to representational approaches, and balance each other through their ontological and epistemological tensions, creating a metafictioning framework.

This tension and balance between these theories illustrates the ethos of this thesis, where “ethos/ethics” is to be understood as a characteristic driving force, *and* a proclivity toward certain types of action.¹² Furthermore, metafictionality heuristically allows the reader to

¹¹ See, for example, Karl Steel, ‘Medieval’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 3-15, who notes the posthuman is inherent in humanist claims. This is to say, any attempt to decenter the human from the narrative ecology, for example, performatively re-affirms the human's necessary presence.

¹² See, for example, ‘Ethos’, in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, ed. by Douglas Harper (Online: Hangzhou Maoning Tech LTD., 2018); and ‘Ethic’, in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, ed. by Douglas Harper (Online: Hangzhou Maoning Tech LTD, 2018), which are defined as a characteristic spirit of a place and time's habitual disposition, and the moral principles relating to a group, respectively. More precisely, my understanding of ethos/ethics is meant to unpack Barad's use of *responsibility*, or response-ability, that is, the ability to respond to

become literate with the metafictionality around them. That is, metafictional ethicality catalyzes the reader to be a co-creative co-participant within a metafictioning manifold. Consequently, through conventional disruptions, metafiction is also ‘tools of the nonmodern self’ – a term coined by Andrew Pickering (2010) to distinguish self-referential materials that disrupt our modern sensibilities by showing us our performative and (neo)cybernetic fiction-realities.¹³ To study metafiction, in other words, is to study our own entangling, emergent, and diffractive nature with the object-systems around us, as decentered, yet integral constituents to these worlding processes.

To date, I am unaware of research considering the entirety of the human experience as a performative and neocybernetic metafictioning material reality.¹⁴ This thesis makes three particular contributions to metafiction studies. First, it identifies and utilizes aspects of a developing trend since the 1990’s, to approach metafiction(ality) from scientific perspectives, and in this lineage constitutes the first book-length study of metafiction(ality) derived from such approaches.¹⁵ Secondly, it draws upon these constructivist theories in order to more fully

difference in the world in order to make a difference in the world. *Responsibility*, in other words, is both a driving force that materializes change in the world, *and* it is a proclivity – an ‘ethical call’ or ‘invitation’ – to meaningfully encounter the world by engaging the world’s differences. See, Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, pp. 391-396, especially at p. 396. See also, Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 95, whose work regarding responsibility is heavily relied upon by Barad; and Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence*. trans. Alphonso Lingis (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981).

¹³ Andrew Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 176. ‘Technologies of the nonmodern self’ is taken from Pickering to describe certain artifacts that draw our attention to the entanglement and becomings between people and things.

¹⁴ See, however, Noel Gough, ‘Rhizomantically Becoming-Cyborg: Performing Posthuman Pedagogies’, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 36 (2004), 253-65; and Noel Gough, ‘Manifesting Cyborgs in Curriculum Inquiry’, *Melbourne Studies in Education*, 36 (1995), 71-83, as rare examples in the field of educational pedagogy which takes a performative Deleuzian and Harawayian approach, which suggests a metafictionality in students worth harnessing in the classroom. Notice also that Stefan Herbrechter, ‘Postmodern’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (2017), pp. 54-68, p. 59, speaks of metafictionality’s pedagogical capabilities for glimpsing our constructed realities. He, however is speaking of the postmodern novel and does not make the claim that I am making, namely that both novel and human carry the same metafictional capacities.

¹⁵ See, for example, James Burton, ‘Metafiction and General Ecology: Making Worlds with Worlds’, in *General Ecology: The New Ecological Paradigm*, ed. by Erich Hörl and James Burton (London: Bloomsbury Academic,

explore implications to be found in past metafictionists' thought: namely, that metafiction is a phenomenal event through performativity theory; living bio-logical organisms through autopoiesis and neocybernetics; are co-present affective models of these dimensions with the human observer through new materialism; and while modeling these dynamics, simultaneously contribute to the entangling and emerging intelligibility of the world through diffraction theory.¹⁶ Thirdly, this thesis contributes to the understanding of metafiction as a 'genre' and as a 'methodology' – a *metafictioning methodology* – allowing an exploration of metafiction while maintaining a phenomenal, entangling, and emergent ethos with/in/between the things of the material-discursive world.¹⁷

2017), pp. 253-83, at p. 256; Norman N. Holland, 'Don Quixote and the Neuroscience of Metafiction', in *Cognitive Literary Studies: Current Themes and New Directions*, ed. by Isabel Jaen and Julien Jacques Simon (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2012), pp. 73-88; John Wolfgang Roberts, 'Metafiction: An Introduction on Dramatizing the Boundaries of Social Discourse', *Aichi University: Language and Culture*, 58 (2014), 19-46; John Wolfgang Roberts, 'Entanglement and Emergence in the Neocybernetic Posthuman (Presented at Culture Typhoon 2016, Tokyo University of the Arts)', *Philologia* (2017), 77-85; John Wolfgang Roberts, 'Metafictionality as *Ethic*: Affecting Change in Our Narrative Ecologies (Presented at the Post-Media Research Network Conference 2018, Tokyo University of the Arts)', *Philologia*, 49 (2018); and John Wolfgang Roberts, 'The Nonmodern Ontological Theatre', *Constructivist Foundations*, 13 (2018), 398-401; and Peter Stoicheff, 'The Chaos of Metafiction', in *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science*, ed. by N. Katherine Hayles (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 85-99.

¹⁶ See, for example, the works of Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Bruce Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Signs* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); Bruce Clarke, *Neocybernetics and Narrative* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Bruce Clarke, and Mark B.N. Hansen, eds., *Emergence and Embodiment: New Essays on Second-Order Systems Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Donna Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004); Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*. trans. John Bednarz jr. and Dirk Baeker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Humberto Maturana, and Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980); and Andrew Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), to name the most important theorists pertaining to this thesis' arguments.

¹⁷ The 'met' of 'method' etymologically originates with the 'meta' prefix, which is Greek for 'after, behind, [...] changed, altered, [...] higher, beyond, [...] in pursuit of [...].' We see in the 'meta' prefix that we are concerned with things that have 'come before', as well as the ongoing trajectory of change which we are 'in pursuit of'. The 'hod' of the same word comes from the Greek word 'hodos', meaning a way of doing something. The point here is that this methodology aims to show how all things 'meta' – from metafiction, to humans, to methodologies – are on a pursuit of navigating certain materials in the world. See, Online Etymology Dictionary, 'Method', Douglas Harper, (2019) <<https://www.etymonline.com/word/method>> [Accessed September 17 2019]. Indeed, these new dimensions to metafiction imply an ethical spirit with which we as readers, and observers of our world(s), learn to become literate with the processes of our materializing realities. See, for example, Brigit Mara Kaiser, Kathrin Thiele, 'Diffraction: Onto-Epistemology, Quantum Physics and the Critical Humanities', *Parallax*, 20 (2014), 165-67, p. 166, who claim this with regards to diffraction.

In these ways, this thesis presents the metafictional novel, and by analogy all object-systems of the human experience, as diffractive apparatuses. Simply, all object-systems – simultaneously performative and bio-logical – tell us something about the world while simultaneously reconfiguring the intelligibility of the world. The metafictional novel re-affirms convention while re-inventing its expressive potential; it lives in a narrative ecology (including our storying existence) drawing its sustenance from us as we draw sustenance from their meaningfulness; they interpellate the reader/observer into a dialogue for materializing meaning in the world; and they teach us to remain accountable and responsible to maintaining that ethos of ‘*communio*’ with the other object-systems of the environment.

The (metafictional) novel seemed, from the beginning, the best tool for investigating the active worlding potential of metafictions. More than other literary forms, the novel as genre has historically exhibited a metafictional proclivity to elude strict identifiability, and is therefore characterized precisely by its categorical elusiveness while at the same time communicating meaningful aspects of the human experience.¹⁸ I noted that all literary forms do this, performatively, neocybernetically, and diffractively speaking. But whereas other genres maintain their own formalism, the novel as a genre developed and continues to emerge by embracing its own disruptive entanglements with readers and things, exhibiting a penchant for reconfiguring the expressiveness of its own conventions *precisely* by problematizing its own epistemological and ontological, formal and historical, dynamics.¹⁹ In other words, metafiction’s performativity, neocybernetic dimensions, and diffractiveness, are uniquely

¹⁸ See, for example, Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 3; and Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 9.

¹⁹ See, for example, Alter, *Partial Magic*, pp. xi; xiv; and Marina MacKay, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 21, who note this elusive feature to the novel as a genre. See, Chapter Two for a discussion on this point.

novelistic, and therein we find the realism of the metafictional genre to model these aspects of the human storying condition.

The novel form presents itself as the best *apparatus* for understanding the processes of metafictionality *and* its materiality in the world. Barad, whose performative theories and diffractive methodology are a major inspiration to this thesis, defines the apparatus as such: ‘[apparatuses] are understood as material reconfigurings through which “objects” and “subjects” are produced. [...] *Hence apparatuses are boundary-making practices*’.²⁰ As ‘material reconfigurings’, apparatuses are created, and changing, while at the same time mediating the world around them and producing the necessary frames to color our experiences and understandings of particular phenomena. In the case of this thesis, the ‘phenomena’ is the ongoing storying human experience, and the metafiction(al novel) is an apparatus (not unlike this thesis) by which we are able to self-referentially mediate the narrative ecology of object-systems that inform our reality, and thereby self-referentially reform our reality.

Metafictions, like all apparatuses, work towards changing themselves as well as the parts of the world they are informed by. This is to say, according to Barad, that the world is made up of phenomena in constant states of becoming, and in this phenomenon, things (objects and subjects) do not exist as such until an apparatus is able to make those semantic and ontological distinctions. She writes:

It has now become routine to use diffraction experiments to determine different features of matter [material-discursive practices]. Generally this works in two complementary ways: sometimes the goal of a diffraction experiment is to learn about

²⁰ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 148; emphasis in original.

the nature of the substance that is being passed through a diffraction grating, and sometimes it's to learn about the diffraction grating itself.²¹

This means an apparatus has two exclusive features for investigation. On the one hand a person can investigate the construction of the actual apparatus (i.e., the metafictional novel), and, on the other, one can focus on the differences, or emerging subject-object distinctions by applying the apparatus to particular phenomena (i.e., intelligible reality). In the case of this thesis, the objective was to locate the performative and neocybernetic structures associated with the metafictional apparatus, and thereby metafictionally comment on the diffractive dynamics of the human experience *through* diffractively exploring the metafictional apparatus. Indeed, Part One was primarily concerned with the apparatus itself – the conventions of the metafictional novel, and Part Two took the diffractive patterns of a metafictioning reality as its focus.

This thesis demonstrates that the metafictional novel offers unique insights as *diffracting* apparatus: whatever can be said of the form of the diffracting apparatus can also be said of the patterns being diffracted out into the world, and whatever can be said about a metafictional novel can analogously be said of a similarly constituted human experience. Such mimetic attributes have been associated with metafictions in the past.²² The difference here, however, is that as a diffracting apparatus, the metafictional novel does not merely imitate, but differentially re-creates in some way the imitated, which in turn implies a shortcoming to the imitation, which then encourages a renewed imitative engagement.²³ Implied *is* the ethical drive to continue

²¹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, p. 83.

²² See, for example, Robert Scholes, 'Metafiction', in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 21-38, pp. 22-23; Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 2; and Wenche Ommundsen, *Metafictions?: Reflexivity in Contemporary Texts* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1993), p. 4.

²³ See, for example, Herbrechter, 'Postmodern', pp. 60; 62, who discusses our human nature as the 'story-telling animal' as an attempt to arrest history. But in trying to tell a history, a story must be told that itself exists outside the present moment of reality (as a memory). In being told, however, history paradoxically is articulated after the fact (in the future compared to the event) and thereby re-organizes the past and thus brings the past back into the present moment so that the future once again becomes 'an open question'. See also, Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics*

drawing towards further engagements – a driving force absent from purely representational approaches to metafiction. This is not to say that this ethos is an anti-illusory endeavor to perfect meanings and understandings about the world, but rather, as I have argued throughout, to accept the irreconcilability of meaning as necessary to the ongoing emergence, entanglement, and sustenance of the human story.

I also argued that renewed attention should be given to metafictionality, and in particular to metafictional artifacts, which act as apparatuses that mediate, that is, simultaneously reflect the current material conditions *and* diffract those aspects of the human experience so as to offer insights to better engage with our material reality as co-participant storytellers alongside the objects and systems around us. The heuristic potential of metafiction is not to reveal truths about the human experience, so much as to live a performative truth of maintaining a conversational ethos with the world that values the ongoing intra-action of things.

In Chapter Two, I used David Markson's *This is Not a Novel (TNN)* to look at the performative aspects of the metafictional novel.²⁴ Performativity theory, which has had many incarnations in the fields of linguistics, ordinary language philosophy, discourse studies (i.e., literary, gender, politics), performance theory, and science and technology studies, not only provides the necessary theoretical foundation to this thesis, but allows better theorization to the worlding potential of metafiction.²⁵ Markson's *TNN* is a conventional novel without being a traditional

of Postmodernism : History, Theory, Fiction (New York ; London: Routledge, 1988): Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction project is about this recursive problematization of the production of knowledge offered by metafiction – the subversion of concepts (historically established), reconfigures what the past means to us.

²⁴ David Markson, *This Is Not a Novel* (London: CB Editions, 2010, 2001).

²⁵ See, J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); J.L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*. 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Signs*, 28 (2003), 801-3; Karen Barad, 'Interview with Karen Barad', in *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies*, ed. by Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012), pp. 48-70; Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 1999); Judith Butler, 'Performative Agency', *Journal of*

one, that is, by subverting novelistic conventions, it emphatically re-affirms them, and positions the reader as a necessary novelistic convention. Addressing the gap in knowledge set forth by Currie above, *TNN* showed that it, and all metafictional novels, are objects and events, differentially iterating and subverting conventions, not for the sake of disruption, but for reconfiguring their own expressiveness. In this way, the implication of metafictional object-events living and changing in the cultural sphere – necessarily tethered to the reader – further implies their bio-logic, (addressed in Chapter Three).

The third chapter on Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* (*TTP*), explored the biological implications of metafiction, arguing that these object-events are *living* in the way they self-perpetuate themselves as self-contained systems situated in larger environments of readers, societies, and technologies.²⁶ Autopoiesis – self-production – is a theory of what constitutes a living entity, and has had many interdisciplinary uses from the fields of biology and sociology in cybernetic contexts, to mathematics, and more recently in literary strands of neocybernetics.²⁷ Neocybernetics is a narrative variant of autopoiesis, largely formulated by Bruce Clarke (2008; 2014) – offering a tripartite narratology for reading social, technological, and psychic systems

Cultural Economy, 3 (2010), 147-61; Judith Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', in *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Chicago University Press, 1988), pp. 1-23; Michael Kirby, *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1965); Jerzy Kutnik, *The Novel as Performance: The Fiction of Ronald Sukenick and Raymond Federman* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986); Andrew Parker, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, eds., *Performativity and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1995); Andrew Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency and Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Andrew Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010); John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); John Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969); Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974); Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982); and Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987).

²⁶ Flann O'Brien, 'The Third Policeman', in *The Complete Novels* (London: Everyman, 2007), pp. 219-406.

²⁷ See, for example, Bruce Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Signs* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); and Bruce Clarke, *Neocybernetics and Narrative* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

as entangled and co-emergent. This narratology corresponds to the contexts, storyworld, and narration, respectively within texts; and to society, objects, and observers, respectively, in the real world.

Metafiction, which by nature dramatizes fiction/reality boundaries, models the intra-related neocybernetic reality as analogue stories. *TTP* is a living metafiction, continuously disrupting Enlightenment systems of logic and thought by challenging the linearity of Cartesian and Newtonian assumptions prevalent in the nonlinearity of its formality, and the overt absurdities of its storyworld. Neocybernetics makes linear sense of its nonlinearity in terms of its geometric shape and temporal emergence as living systems tethered to other living systems (rather than inanimate works of fiction). As such the (living) reader is re-positioned as a necessary element of the living narrative ecology generating meaningfulness and materials in the world and storyworld. This chapter, by demonstrating the incapability of a modern (Enlightenment) paradigm to explain such basic processes as ‘life’ begs for a paradigm shift that more fully elaborates upon the co-creative entanglement and emergence of ‘meaningfulness and materials’ in a unified (differentially emerging) epistemological and ontological fabric (explored in Chapter Four).

In Chapter Four, Jerzy Kosinski’s *Being There* demonstrated the nature of a simultaneous reflection and diffraction applicable to both novel and reader in what I termed a ‘*mimesis*’ of *phenomena*.²⁸ By more fully engaging Barad’s work in new materialism, her concept of ‘agential realism’ offered a performative paradigm shift to understanding

²⁸ Jerzy Kosinski, *Being There* (1970; London: Black Swan, 1987).

metafictionality in texts and world.²⁹ Barad's agential realism takes intra-activity as its core and helps establish object-systems as emergent things-in-phenomena through acts of observation.³⁰

Metafictions, as *'mimetically' phenomenal*, are imitative of the intra-active (performative and neocybernetic) metafictioning manifold *and* exhibit an understanding of their metafictive processes and participation in the narrative-scape. 'Mimesis' (with inverted commas) signifies the act of imitation *being* the phenomena of changing material conditions, making the imitated possible in the first place. A 'mimesis' of phenomena models and participates in the world's *agential realism*.

Agential realism here offers theoretical substance to the combined implications of Chapters Two and Three, which were largely generated out of Currie's and Waugh's work on metafiction. Much of Chapter Four addressed the role of observation – not as inherent trait, but as manifesting material when objects and systems come together. The implications of Chapter Four are that objects and humans are not so different since human subjects, too, are object-systems co-materializing meaning as we encounter other ontologically indeterminate and epistemologically contingent and reconfiguring things.³¹ This begged the question as how to reconcile this democratization of object-systems across the metafictioning manifold, while also maintaining the necessary existence of the human observer.³² The final chapter resolved this perceived incompatibility by homing in on metafiction(ality)'s diffractive and ethical nature.

²⁹ See, Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Signs*, 28 (2003), 801-31; Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Karen Barad, 'Intra-Actions', in *Mousse*, ed. by Adam Kleinman (2012), pp. 76-81; and Karen Barad, 'Interview with Karen Barad', in *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies*, ed. by Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012), pp. 48-70.

³⁰ See, Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity', p. 817, where she uses the term 'things-in-phenomena' to mean that the world *is* an intra-related becoming of matter, and not a world of objects. That is, materiality emerges by being co-present and co-participatory with other materials, which in turn leave traces in the world: the material-discursive things that continue to shape and frame the intelligibility of the world around us.

³¹ This is to say, humans are not reading meanings into things but helping to materialize meaning by virtue of *being there*.

³² This is different to, Levi Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (Ann Arbor Michigan: Open Humanities, 2011); whose 'ontology' proposes a 'flat ontology' – where nothing is reducible to other objects, and 'eternal essences'

Chapter Five, re-calibrated our anthropocentric perspective, suggesting that our experiences of, and contributions to, the metafictioning manifold *are* ethical practice/s. Building upon Chapter Four's paradigmatic shift, Mark Z. Danielewski's *The Familiar* was shown to embody the ideas of the previous chapters, mediating those insights into a simultaneous description and performance of the novel's continued emergence.³³ The lesson of Chapter Five was that ongoing reconfigurations of performative and living object-systems are ethical practices of putting in play – and acting in ways that promote – ongoing *communio* (i.e., communion, community, communication, etc.) with/in/between object-systems of the metafictioning manifold. *The Familiar* is a novel project (if currently on hiatus), but one which thrives in and on a narrative culture of readers, technologies, communities, and industry to actively feed into its continued development. In this way, *The Familiar* is a potent example of performative and living objects mediating that which sustains them in the narrative ecology as it differentially reconfigures its ecology.

This thesis, overall, is about simultaneities – objects and systems, products and processes, living and nonliving, fiction and reality – and the way navel-gazing texts enact and teach us about the metamorphosing nature of these framed simultaneities that are subsequently framed in one way or another depending on the contexts with which they are engaged.³⁴ It is, in short, about *all* object-systems, whether speaking of the traditional literary text, or the reader, technologies, or

do not exist. See also, Open Humanities Press, 'The Democracy of Objects', Open Humanities Press, (N.D.) <<http://www.openhumanitiespress.org/books/titles/the-democracy-of-objects/>> [Accessed 20 September 2019]. I, conversely, while establishing a sort of democratization of object-systems as well, also hold to autopoietic and neocybernetic principles of operational closure. The metafictioning manifold is the totality of the human material-discursive experience, but by its very existence, neocybernetically speaking, must exist in a larger environment of manifolds, perhaps separate from, but possibly at times, intersecting with our own.

³³ See especially, Mark Z. Danielewski, *The Familiar: One Rainy Day in May*. Vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 2015).

³⁴ Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, p. 94, considers narrative embedding – or in our terms, metaleptic movement between different narrative structures – to be the analogue representation of systemic self-reference.

societies, that are ‘unborn’ and alive precisely through their self-referential abilities to continue (re)connecting with/in their ecology. In establishing the human experience as *being* a metafiction in the process of metafictioning a reality that consists of ‘texts and transactions with other things and living things’, it has also shown metafictionality and materiality as being the causes for having stories at all to tell, embody, identify with, or subvert.³⁵ This thesis, in other words, tells *a* story about stories that are aware of their status *and* dynamism as performative, neocybernetic, and diffractive stories. Whether packaged as literature or lived or embodied as (bio-cultural) experiences, stories are always *storying* – that is, continuously reconfiguring into different manifestations and worlding properties.

The early metafictionist Robert Scholes contends that metafiction problematizes the boundary between fiction, begging the question: ‘[w]hen are we truly ourselves, truly authentic?’³⁶ He answers with, ‘[...] when we are posing, telling stories, making fictions’.³⁷ I do not disagree with Scholes, but would add that it is not so much *when*, but *as* we tell our many ‘unborn stories’ that any sense of ‘authenticity’ can be located with/in ourselves and our storied ecologies. In other words, metafiction not only reflect our realities, but diffract them, and turn us, its readers, into co-participatory tellers, rather than mere interpreters, *as* we navigate the metafictioning manifold.

Metafiction, then, model for us, and in different ways, a world of metafictioning; they perpetuate themselves precisely through their ability to ‘close back’ on themselves. They show us that the stories of the world are always (re)splicing with/in each other in the same way that

³⁵ Ira Livingston, *Between Science and Literature : An Introduction to Autopoetics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 109. I see this as firmly situated in the genealogy of Donna Haraway’s project, particularly with regards to the cyborg. See, for example, Donna Haraway, ‘A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s’, in *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 7-45, p. 7 where she writes that we are (in the lens of socialist feminism), to paraphrase, ironic creatures of world-changing fiction.

³⁶ Scholes, ‘Robert Scholes, 'Metafiction: Introduction', in *Elements of Literature*, ed. by Carl H. Klaus, Robert Scholes, Nancy R. Comley and Michael Silverman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 493.

³⁷ Scholes, ‘Metafiction’, p. 493.

metafictions cleave with the reader's, and its own, shared cultural conventions. To cleave, as Livingston notes, is 'one of those rare words that is its own opposite – meaning *dividing* and *joining together*'.³⁸ In either cloven case, metafiction is aware of themselves as models of, and as co-participants in a larger manifold of stories storying story by dramatizing our pre-conceived notions of the world.³⁹ They suggest that stories *tell us into the world* rather than our simply *telling stories*.

³⁸ Livingston, *Between Science and Literature*, p. 109.

³⁹ See, for example, Scholes, 'Metafiction', pp. 22-29, who notes that metafictional processes are inherently critical of the structural (i.e., fictions/constructions), formal (i.e., ideas/conventions), behavioral (i.e., existential realities), and philosophical (i.e., essential natures) aspects of our realities.

VII.

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