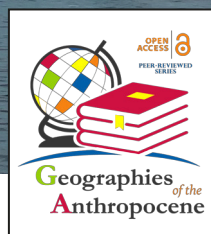


NARRATIVES IN THE ANTHROPOCENE ERA

Charles Travis, Vittorio Valentino (Editors)

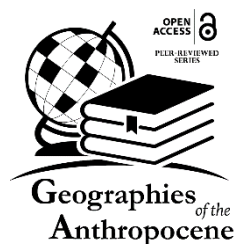
Preface by Kirill O. Thompson

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Editors



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Charles Travis, Vittorio Valentino (Eds.)

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6. Countering Anthropos with Trans-Corporeal Assemblages in Rita Indiana's Tentacle

Sarah Sierra¹

Abstract

Rita Indiana's 2015 novel *La Mucama de Omicunlé*, translated in English as *Tentacle* in 2018, portrays an attempt to intercede in the events leading to an ecological disaster in the year 2024 by appealing to the agent of the Anthropocene, Anthropos, to restrain from world-destroying behaviors. Characterized by an exceedingly autonomous and individualistic nature, Anthropos is compelled by an incessant and singular focus to fulfill personal desires. Seemingly isolated from the enviroing world, Anthropos – as an embodiment of human exceptionalism – fails to comprehend that every subject lives entangled with diverse agents at any given moment. The character of Anthropos emerges, then, as a destructive force that interprets the powerless human and more-than-human entities as expendable objects reserved for the improvement of its privileged position in the world. In contradistinction to the self-perceived exceptionalism of Anthropos, Indiana's novel also generates trans-corporeal assemblages. Successful aversion of the apocalyptic ecological event depends upon these assemblages created by the dispersed consciousness of a prophesied savior, Olokun. This figure's power emerges from the ability to exist simultaneously in distinct moments of time, what Walter Mignolo characterizes as 'pluriversal' that counters the Western hegemonic idea of unilineal temporality and hierarchical classification of subjectivity. However, avoiding the catastrophe that decimates all oceanic life will depend upon a decisive moment when Olokun is forced to choose between his individualistic pleasures to live in the present or to sacrifice himself and his avatars by altering the timeline that would prevent his emergence. In spite of Olokun's doomed human struggle between self-preservation and the collective good, he engenders multi-temporal and intersubjective assemblages capable of altering the disembodied perspective that guides the Anthropos. These diverse entities that he creates - or actants to use Jane Bennet's terminology - unite and display the dynamic and productive

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experience of converging with the richly populated disenfranchised human and more-than-human inhabitants of the planet. The constellation of actants generates potent connections across temporal and spatial boundaries and produces an alternative ontology that resists conceiving of humanity as removed or above a vibrant and diversely inhabited world.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Anthropos, Trans-corporeal, Rita Indiana, *Tentacle*, *La Mucama de Omicunlé*, Environmental Disaster.

1. Introduction

Rita Indiana's 2015 novel *La Mucama de Omicunlé*, translated in English as *Tentacle* in 2018, portrays an attempt to intercede in the events leading to ecological disaster in the year 2024 by subverting the world-ending behavior of the agent of the Anthropocene, Anthropos. This figure emblemizes a specific positioning toward the world that locates members of what Val Plumwood (1993, p. 23) terms the master model of the human species that sits at the apex of a hierarchy that allows for exploitation of the marginalized human and more-than-human occupants of the planet.² This hierarchy establishes western binary structures that have perpetuated exploitative practices. The concept of Anthropos does not represent all of humanity, but rather defines the ontological position of the occupants of the master model on the power side of the binary who claim their human exceptionalism against a passively receptive nature (Oppermann, 2018, 6). Aníbal Quijano posits that this dyad structure emerged as a new global power in the sixteenth century with the conquest of America (2000, p. 533). He explains that the new model of global power, which he terms "coloniality of power", inheres in the idea of Modernity. This naturalized discourse imagined an essential distinction between the conquerors and the conquered through the idea of race and as a "new structure of control of labor and its resources and products" (2000, p. 534). Quijano continues that it presupposed "a [...] different biological structure that placed some in a natural situation of inferiority to the others" (2000, p. 533). The legacy of

² In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Plumwood explains the category of the master model in terms of its oppression of both nature and the feminine. She elaborates that it is a "[f]ramework of assumptions in which the human/nature contrast has been formed in the west [and] is one not only of *feminine* connectedness with and passivity towards nature, but also complementarily one of exclusion and domination of the sphere of nature by a white, largely male elite..." (1993, pp. 22-23).

this Eurocentric ontology directly bears on the perception of a naturalized inferiority, read as a primitive and historically less-developed state of a vast majority of human and more-than-human inhabitants of the planet. Stripped of their agency within this hegemonic interpretation of the world, the disenfranchised suffer on the powerless side of the binary and are continuously subjected to the consequences of Anthropos's overreach.

Walter Mignolo elaborates that Modernity is a fictional discourse that perforce silences its exploitative processes in order to sustain the machinery of progress. He adds that "[t]o say it explicitly would be to run against the very promises of modernity. It cannot be said that slavery is the exploitation of human beings for the benefit of other human beings" (2018, p. 141). In this light, we see Anthropos as the figure that emerges as protagonist of Modernity and the principle agent of the Anthropocene that suppresses the testimony of the exploited entities inhabiting the planet. As Serpil Oppermann elaborates: "...the anthropos conceals rather than reveals personal traumas, injustices, climate-related diseases, or even loss of habitat and 'trans-boundary pollution'" (2014, p. 6). By analyzing the identifying tendencies of Anthropos as a pathogenic condition of Western hegemony, we pursue decoloniality that "delinks from the narratives and promises of modernity..." (Mignolo, 2018, p. 146). Decoloniality rejects the unilateral depiction of time and space as linear and hierarchical, which opens intersubjectivity to an "awareness of the integral relation and interdependence amongst all living organisms" (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, p. 1).

In this manner, Indiana's novel, *Tentacle*, is decolonial in that it directly challenges the Anthropos posture buttressed by human exceptionalism reserved for a small percentage of the world's population by asserting a trans-corporeal assemblage of agents. Stacy Alaimo explains trans-corporeality's role to agents

...as a theoretical site, [...] where corporeal theories, environmental theories, and science studies meet and mingle in productive ways. Furthermore, the movement across human corporeality and nonhuman nature necessitates rich, complex modes of analysis that travel through the entangled territories of material and discursive, natural and cultural, biological and textual (2010, p. 3).

For Alaimo, here, transcorporeality is a node of convergence that challenges homogenized and hierarchical classifications, echoing Alonso

Quijano's and Walter Dignolo's decolonial thinking. For her part, Jane Bennett selects the term 'actants' over 'agents' as the former comes to express the distributed "collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces," thus creating an assemblage of vibrant materiality (2010, p. 21). Indiana's novel invites a temporal and spatial capaciousness that traverses and subverts bounded limitations imposed by the hierarchies embedded in the rhetorical fictions of Eurocentric Modernity. Through a distributed tripartite consciousness, Indiana's protagonist(s) Acilde/Giorgio/Roque exist simultaneously in distinct historical times, producing assemblages who are motivated by an ecological imperative to restrain Anthropos from triggering the decimation of oceanic creatures.

2. Anthropocene, Anthropos, and Material Ecocriticism

Anthropocene writings have prompted insightful endeavors in mediating the environmental crisis, but they also have provoked reactionary responses that criticize the human-centered focus of the "informal" geological term. As has been well documented, Eugene Stoermer and Paul Crutzen suggested the new epochal designation to mark what Dipesh Chakrabarty has conveyed as the transgression of humans from biological agents to a geological force (2009, p. 206). Stoermer and Crutzen predicate their proposed name change from Holocene to Anthropocene by stating that "[t]he expansion of mankind, both in numbers and per capita exploitation of Earth's resources has been astounding" (2000, p. 17). In spite of Jason Moore's shift to the use of the term Capitalocene he acknowledges that Anthropocene writings have brought much needed attention to human-induced climate change: "The Anthropocene argument shows Nature/Society dualism at its highest stage of development. And if the Anthropocene- as a historical rather than geological argument- is inadequate, it is nevertheless an argument that merits our appreciation. New thinking emerges in many tentative steps" (2016, p. 3). While others analyze the (in)adequacy of the term 'Anthropocene,' Oppermann turns toward the aggressive subject who stands behind the epochal nomenclature: "The anthropos (the so-called 'mankind') of the Anthropocene in affecting these processes [human-driven alterations of the planet] is so overpowering that even after its extinction, writers proclaim, its signature will be operative through unthinkable geological time spans" (2018, pp. 1-2). While necessary work continues to bring focus to the human and more-than-human

populations that have not participated in anthropogenic geological change, Menely and Oak Taylor affirm that “[t]he point is not that *all* humans are transforming the Earth system but that a single species in the biosphere is transforming the planet, a significant event in geologic time” (2017, p. 9). My analysis accepts this proposed use of the Anthropocene as stratigraphic trace of human-as-species while also accepting that the destructive forces on the planet cannot be attributed to the entire human population, but rather to a privileged small sector who has exerted the power of domination and exploitation on the disenfranchised entities of this world.

Material ecocriticism hones in on the complexity of the Anthropocene that defies simple classification of the term as a geological phenomenon. This is not to state that the term Anthropocene is definitively inadequate, but rather a material approach expands the concept and speaks to the intersectionality of issues that the anthropogenic impact has realized on the biosphere. The materiality of the Anthropocene invites an intermingling of stories that Serenella Iovino envisions as “an emerging paradigm [that] elicits not only new nonanthropocentric approaches, but also possible ways to analyze language and reality, human and nonhuman life, mind and matter, without falling into dichotomous patterns of thinking” (2014, p. 2). Anthropos assumes a particular perception of the world, but one that perforce excludes active and vibrant more-than-human/nonhuman stories of material participants. It envisions a dematerialized individualistic subject isolated from the external material world- the privileged Eurocentric subject of Mignolo’s elaboration of Modernity. For Anthropos, objects of nature and exploitable populations lack an ontological status when perceived through the lens of human exceptionalism.

3. La Mucama de Omicunlé / Tentacle

Tentacle begins in the year 2027 depicting an environmentally degraded Dominican Republic after a catastrophic accident had spilled chemical waste into the Caribbean three years prior. The incident decimated all oceanic life and transformed the water into a vast contaminated sludge. The disaster triggers a series of encounters that brings together different assemblages of people, species, and objects unified by a prophesied savior capable of undoing the ecological disaster. A particular series of encounters initiate the events beginning when Eric Vitier, a Cuban doctor and one of the acolytes of the *santería* priestess, Esther Escudero, discovers the mark of the predicted savior- legitimate son of Olokun- by the seven moles circling

the head of an adolescent female, Acilde, while she works as a prostitute. Eric delivers Acilde to Esther with the promise that the priestess will financially support the young woman's dream of becoming a chef. Acilde's culinary dream is only second to her desire to undergo transition from female to male, particularly after learning of the non-invasive Rainbow Bright- a pill that generates a cellular level alteration without undergoing invasive surgery.³ Frustrated with the slow progress toward her transition, she discovers in a closed-off room of Esther's house a rare anemone, one of the last living sea creatures after the ecological disaster.

Coordinating with Morli, a black-market dealer, Acilde prepares to steal the anemone; however, her relationship with the elder woman evolves into a unique bond that causes Acilde to hesitate in her self-serving desires. The thieving Morli, anticipating the financial windfall from such a rare acquisition, breaks into the home killing Esther, but Acilde prevents him from stealing the anemone with which she flees in search of Eric. She proposes to the Cuban doctor a trade of the anemone for Rainbow Bright. Without realizing it, Acilde fulfills the first preliminary preparations of the prophecy for which both Eric and Esther had prepared. Eric oversees Acilde's gender transformation and, once completed, the doctor attaches the anemone to the crown of moles thus disseminating the tripartite consciousness across time into the 1600s as Roque, the late twentieth century as Giorgio, and Acilde's consciousness in 2027 to activate the prophetic mission. The narrative follows the events in the three timelines but avoids a linear progression as Indiana presents the shared consciousness through simultaneous juxtaposition. Once projected across time, Roque/Giorgio/Acilde collaborate to arrange the circumstances manipulating encounters that potentially diverge the timeline away from the catastrophic environmental disaster. Ultimately, the crucial moment dramatizes the antagonism between the individualistic *Anthropos* and the intermingled and trans-corporeal actants.

³ In Paul Humphrey's analysis of Indiana's novel, he outlines alternative readings of the novel, one of which examines the implications of pharmacological abuse on bodies. He elaborates: "The process of rapid transition from a female to a male body by taking Rainbow Bright, an almost exclusively chemical procedure that does not require invasive surgery, lends itself to analysis in light of Paul B. Preciado's work on pharmaco-and biopolitics. He examines gender as a "techno-political ecology" in which contemporary politics regarding sex, gender, body, image, and reproduction are closely intertwined with the pharmaceutical and technological industries" (2016-17, p. 112).

4. The Prophecy: Human Exceptionalism or Trans-corporeal Revolution

In Guillermina de Ferrari's reading of *Tentacle*, she considers the messianic tone as pervading the work in considering the tripartite distribution of Acilde's consciousness (2020, p. 5). As she states, *Tentacle* does not produce a martyred sacrificial savior, but rather a conflicted and very human subject. Whereas de Ferrari emphasizes the high sacrifice expected of Acilde/Giorgio/Roque as savior, this analysis considers his/their struggle between an identity immersed in the bounded and isolated Anthropos and a trans-corporeal assemblage, which becomes more conspicuous in light of the additional allusion in the novel to a specific Greek mythical hero. The prophecy vaguely outlines Acilde's mission, which is to save humanity and to save the sea. Prophecies are stubbornly resistant in revealing detailed instructions and thus the specific role assigned to Acilde in rescuing the environment remains obscure. It does, however, present certain problematics. Does the prophecy elevate a singular being to rescuer of the world? If so, that invites perpetuating the Anthropos exaltation of humanity above the diversely inhabited planet. As we shall see, human arrogance does emerge as the fatal flaw and appears with a degree of subtlety in the novel with a suggestive reference to Achilles. When Acilde enters the room where Esther worships Yemayá-goddess of the sea- she notices a "replica of a Greek jar three feet tall" upon the altar (Indiana, 2018, p. 19). The design that encircles the vessel features "an image of a woman holding a boy by the ankle as she goes to submerge him in a pool of water" (Indiana, 2018, p. 19). The Greek design on the vase recalls the myth of the nearly infallible hero when Achilles's mother Thetis, a sea nymph, had feared for her mortal son's vulnerability. By dipping him into the river Styx, she fortified his skin with the powers of immortality, except for the small area around his ankle from where she gripped his body. This remaining vulnerable spot preserved a connection with his mortal identity, but it also signals a weakness that metaphorically symbolizes a mortally dangerous flaw.

In *Tentacle*, human exceptionalism and self-serving desires endanger not only the hero, but the entire biosphere, again emphasizing the interconnected relation of all life on the planet. The similarity in nomenclature between Acilde and Achilles further emphasizes the heroic potentiality of the future Olokun, but not without effectively warning against incurring this fatal human tragedy. Contributing to this struggle is

Acilde's predisposition toward self-interested individualism arising, in part, from her materialistic egoism, but also from a traumatic childhood in which her grandparents subjected her to "corrective rape" when she demonstrated masculine tendencies. Yet, her desire to undergo a transition to the male gender implies an openness that belies the rigidly bounded self. These two poles present a constant tension in Acilde's character.

Before transitioning, the young woman's behavior emblemizes that of Anthropos in which the environing and vibrant external world exists for her either as a personal benefit or as lacking value. The opening scene of the novel presents Acilde employed as a servant in Esther's home, which is replete with items that reflect the elder woman's deep connection to the ocean as her *santería* name reflects, Omicunlé-cloak that covers the sea. The doorbell had been altered to produce a simulacrum of a wave gently breaking on the shore creating an acoustic reproduction of the sea that accompanies the many visual displays of the ocean in Esther's home. The decor suggests an invigorating space infused by the natural world, but the items are fragments of a dead ocean that can only persist through cheapened replicas. Esther attempts to conjure the memory of the sea through the diverse items, but the enclosed isolation of her home in which there are just a few remnants of the ocean accentuates the ecological loss.

Acilde moves about the space inattentive to the significance of the seascape that surrounds her. Furthermore, the young woman filters her perception through electronic implants she uses that buffer her connection to a vibrant world. As a result, she lacks a sympathetic response to suffering and observes the extermination of human and more-than-human entities with cold detachment. As example, while cleaning Acilde notices a desperate individual pressing the doorbell to Esther's flat "to its limit and unleashes the sound over and over, canceling out the beach-like effect of the bell" (Indiana, 2018, p. 9). The individual's assault on the button converts the peaceful replica of a wave into a violent rupture. Distanced by a thick security wall, Acilde "sees one of the many Haitians who've crossed the border, fleeing from quarantine declared on the other half of the island" (Indiana, 2018, p. 9). She briefly considers the intolerable conditions for the Haitians, but quickly draws back from that empathetic position. As she watches impassively, "[r]ecognizing the virus in the black man, the security mechanism in the tower releases a lethal gas and simultaneously informs the neighbors, who will now avoid the building's entrance until the automatic collectors patrolling the streets and avenues pick up the body and disintegrate it" (Indiana, 2018, p. 9). The alert to avoid the front entrance

erases the value of the man's life converting him into waste of which the neighbors can comfortably ignore until his body has been disposed.⁴

Nevertheless, this distance represents a false security as the contaminated biosphere presses on the boundaries of the edifice. As the refugee dies, Acilde looks on indifferently only to verify that "he stops moving" and then she "disconnect[s] and return[s] to cleaning the windowpanes, encrusted on a daily basis with sticky soot" (Indiana, 2018, p. 9). The human refuse and the sticky soot constantly threaten to breach the boundary of the isolated and separate space, but Acilde continually tries to sanitize the border demarcating the inside from the outside. This act reifies the rhetoric of Modernity that imagines the elimination of its darker side, coloniality, through silencing or extermination of dissonant voices or images that belie the myth. Carlos Garrido Castellano elaborates that "[e]l universo distópico que inicia la novela conforma un paisaje apocalíptico, donde las personas sobreviven aisladas en edificios de alta seguridad..." [The dystopic universe that begins the novel conforms to an apocalyptic landscape, where people survive isolated in buildings with heightened security] (2017, p. 354). The isolation conveys the status of what emerges in the novel as the condition of *Anthropos*. It is an insistence in perceiving humanity (again, only those belonging to the master model) as isolated and separate from the environing world. Whether on a small scale, as in Acilde's daily removal of pervasive environmental waste along the edge of the windows, or the numerous cases of 'human' waste eradicated by the automatic collectors, it becomes clear that *Anthropos* views its by-products of Modernity as contamination. However, it also establishes the impossibility of the privileged to live beyond or outside of the environment; that which had been expelled beyond the social sphere of *Anthropos* begins to creep back into its perceived protected space.

⁴ The Haitian refugee exemplifies the pervasiveness of extensive environmental abuse that has turned his body into a biological toxin produced by the excessive chemical dumping in Haiti. In their analysis of the novel, Deckard and Oloff articulate the extensive abuse of Haiti predominantly by US interference: "In Haiti, the 1915-1934 US Occupation brought changes to landholding patterns that dispossessed scores of farmers, transforming them into a mobile workforce employed in Cuba and the Dominican Republic in low-paying jobs" (2020, p. 7). They add that the longstanding interventionist stance led to destabilization of the territory's ecological health: "Haiti's contemporary levels of extreme deforestation and environmental degradation are a well-documented result of over a century of US resource extractivism and economic restructuring" (2020, p. 7). The Haitian refugee seeking asylum at the doors of Esther's apartment building represents what Elizabeth DeLoughrey calls the "urban wastescape" (2019, p. 122).

Accepting Acilde as savior in light of her indifference toward human and more-than-human suffering provokes Eric to attempt to bypass her ascension to Olokun. He attaches the anemone to himself becoming severely ill with what appears to be an allergic reaction, but also suggests a divine rejection of his usurpation of the prophetic role. Acilde's flawed and arrogant humanity necessitates that she realizes the mission, because it is her struggle with this human exceptionalism that makes the potential sacrifice worthy. She comes to represent the Anthropos tendency that envisions the world in terms of self-serving needs and desires, a tendency she must struggle against by transitioning into a new disseminated actant entangled across diverse times and spaces. This experience dismantles the unyielding binary that separates Anthropos from the world.

Acilde's transition from female to male becomes an integral part of the prophecy in that he becomes the legitimate son of Olokun. The transition conveys an openness that defies the closed and often dematerialized exceptionalism of Anthropos. Breaking down these rigid barriers also allows for fluid exchanges across entities that refute a hierarchical and static structuring of identities and value. The totalitarian president Bona Said, follower of Esther, shares the priestess's posthumous holographic message revealing the mission to the newly formed male Acilde: "If you're seeing this, it means everything's gone well," said the ghost, smiling and calm. 'Eric initiated you and now you know you are Omo Olokun: the one who knows what lies at the bottom of the sea. Said depends on me, so use the powers you have begun to discover for the good of humanity. Save the sea, Maferefún Olokun, Maferefún Yemayá'" (Indiana, 2018, p. 83). Acilde, now as Olokun, reproduces his avatars in the past thus initiating the mission to alter the events that led to Said's catastrophic decision in which "he agreed to warehouse Venezuelan biological weapons in Ocoa, [but] the 2024 seaquake had done away with the base where they'd been kept and dispersed their contents into the Caribbean Sea. Entire species had vanished in a matter of weeks. The environmental crisis had spread to the Atlantic" (Indiana, 2018, p. 82). Acilde/Olokun's power emerges as a shared consciousness across three different moments in time yet connected through a simultaneity that defies the linear hegemony of temporal experiences of Anthropos.

5. Distributed Assemblages

Assemblages of diverse actants challenge the hegemony of the bounded/isolated and self-serving *Anthropos*. Bennet reminds that “[a]ssemblages are not governed by any central head: no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group” (2010, p. 24). Collaboration and entanglement provide the most effective force against singular desires of one entity. Individualism against assemblages: this contrast permeates the novel as all characters navigate the tension between individual desire (*Anthropos*) and trans-corporeal assemblages, but it is only in the latter that they emote any connection to the refugees of the world, both human and more-than-human.

The dispersal of Acilde’s mind across the 1600s, 2001, and post-2027 initiates subgroupings of human actants that work in concert toward the environmental rescue mission of the prophecy, albeit unbeknownst to most of them. The three groupings chronologically occur in different times, but the dispersed consciousness interconnects the different groups producing a juxtaposed simultaneity rather than linear time. In the post-2027 years, Acilde, an old Iván de la Barra- discredited art curator, and the totalitarian president, Said Bona interact as a specific assemblage. In 2001, Giorgio Menicucci and his wife Linda-an environmental biologist- live on the coast with Ananí and Nenuco-Taíno guardians of the portal for Olokun. They invite a young Iván de la Barra to guide a group of up- and- coming artists for the Sosúa Project to create innovative pieces for the Menicucci Contemporary Art Gallery that will fund the couple’s environmental rescue operation for endangered sea creatures. Giorgio/Acilde identify these artists from a documentary to celebrate Dominican Republic artists in the post-disaster future. Giorgio seeks the younger versions in his time and brings Argenis Luna, Malagueta Wolcot, and Elizabeth Méndez to Playa Bo to participate in the launching of the art experiment. The assemblage of artists has an accidental effect as the painter, Argenis Luna, enters the bluish underwater cave that houses the anemones through which Giorgio had emerged years earlier as Olokun. Argenis’s allergic reaction triggers another dispersal of consciousness locating his avatar in the earlier 1600s alongside Roque/Giorgio/Acilde, and other buccaneers abandoned on the island, which completes the third grouping.

The central constellation of events centers on the 2001 Sosúa Project and the self-absorbed Argenis Luna. His character displays misogynistic, racist, and homophobic tendencies while indulging his ego in excessive self-pity.

As a failed artist with impeccable technique imitable to that of Francisco de Goya, he feels the world has betrayed him by not rewarding his talent. In the School of Design at Altos de Chavón, his professor, using his nickname, strives to inculcate a new direction in Argenis that stimulates a socially engaged artistic focus: “Wake up, Goya, get it together. You have impeccable technique but nothing to say. Look around, damn it, do you think a bunch of little angels is what’s needed here?” (Indiana, 2018, p. 30). Argenis’s participation in the Sosúa project offers him a chance to implement this artistic entanglement with the world, but his self-absorbed posture prevents him from escaping his isolation. Once his bifurcated consciousness traverses temporal boundaries, however, a trans-corporal engagement stimulates artistic innovation in the present and the past. Argenis of the 1600s, diverges from the bounded Anthropos and achieves a unique convergence with the enviroing world: “At dawn he covers the plates with canvas and contemplates the loneliness of the landscape surrounding him, neither prosperous nor cozy, the border between the beach and the forest at the mercy of a lethal attack from a Spanish crew....” (Indiana, 2018, p. 96). He recognizes nature here as independent from human materialistic value as well as its vulnerability to human aggression. However, when the Spanish finally do attack, Argenis flees with Roque and the other buccaneers as they are all pursued with equal ferocity by nature and human aggressors. Succumbing to the bites from swarms of mosquitos and gnats Argenis “overflowed with venom” (Indiana, 2018, p. 109). The nature referenced here is not the pure virginal one conquered by Anthropos, but rather one full of trans-corporeal movement, which recognizes “that the environment [...], is, in fact, a world of fleshy beings with their own needs, claims, and actions” (Alaimo, 2010, p. 2). Nature is indeed vulnerable but also defensive against attacks underscoring that humans are not above our outside of the enviroing world. In spite of an apparent consciousness-raising through the Argenis of the past, that avatar pays for the crimes of the 2001 man, the one who refuses to dismantle his hierarchical exceptionalism. With his ego significantly battered by the Sosúa Project co-members, Argenis lashes out and kills Linda’s beloved dog.

The present Argenis realizes that Giorgio/Roque are the same, also straddling two temporal periods with the intent to use the artist’s engravings from the 1600s to fund the present environmental project. Argenis comprehends that Giorgio intends to dig up the buried images ‘accidentally discovering’ priceless artefacts. Simultaneously in the past and present, Argenis rushes toward the spot to detain Giorgio in the present and to remove the engravings in the past where he had just buried the chest as they

fled from the Spanish conquistadors. Roque/Giorgio look directly at Argenis, in both times, conflating them into one experience and asks the artist in unison “[a]nd now what is the matter with you?” (Indiana, 2018, p. 117). Argenis fails to recognize the interconnected temporal conditions of life and Giorgio takes advantage of the artist’s self-absorbed behavior to benefit the Sosúa environmental project. Roque/Giorgio’s manipulation of the artist provokes a violent reaction and leads to Argenis’s murder in the past and his present removal from Playa Bo and the Sosúa project, relegating him to an unrecoverable obscurity. His stubborn disconnection with the external world in the end isolates him to this non-location in time and space.

The other participants fluctuate between self-serving desires and an openness to the world that influences their artistic expression as well, but unlike Argenis the lessons learned keep them integrated in the assemblage of heterogeneous elements of life. Elizabeth, member of the wealthy elite in the Dominican Republic, displays shifting interests across diverse pop-culture media often motivated by a general tedium of the passé. She represents the drive of modernity to propel toward a continual newness equated with progress. Indicative of an increasing consumer culture, referenced in her reading of Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), Elizabeth appears depthless treating others with varying degrees of indifference. Nonetheless, no one character is irredeemable. They all move beyond the status of the arrogant Anthropos in moments of tremendous convergence with the marginalized. In spite of Elizabeth’s self-absorption, a transcendental musical experience disrupts her isolated positioning in relation to the external environment provoking instead an empathetic assemblage or interconnection:

Under a canopy of branches, three long drums had kept beat of an all-encompassing rhythm, unfurling hysteria in the polyphonic horns that sought out a marching movement in everybody’s legs and bellies. [...] An old man possessed by Papá Candelo walked on coals toward her patiently picking one up to light his pipe. When he stood by her side, she felt infused by his presence and discovered, specifically and eloquently, the extreme poverty suffered by Haitian workers, the tragic ties with which the ancient ceremony held on to the present, the permanency of a kind of slavery that now dressed itself up as paid labor, and the power of a music that lodged deities in human bodies.... (Indiana, 2018, pp. 112-113).

Elizabeth's opening to the experiences of the marginalized also alters her perception of time as an isolated and hierarchical chronology to an interconnected temporal existence. This moment permeates her music producing a multi-sensorial homage to the endangered sea.

Malagueta's compassionate treatment of others emerges from a life of dehumanizing experiences. He recognizes in Argenis a pervasive prejudicial vein that imposes differentiation and mistreatment on the marginalized populations in the Dominican Republic: "They'd come to his childhood beach and look at him and his little friends as though they were dirty pigeons from the plaza. They'd enjoy the sea and sun, avoiding their dark little bodies as if they were dirt balls obscuring the view" (Indiana, 2018, p. 118). Conflated with useless nature, they are seen as waste and Malagueta's alignment with these nonhuman/more-than-human categories expands his perception of the vibrant world. Through his experience at Sosúa, Malgueta finds a voice to articulate the way in which the powerless absorb the systemic abuse:

'Black,' he heard himself say as he breathed smoke out of his mouth. A small word swollen over time by other meanings, all of them hateful. Every time somebody said it to mean poor, dirty, inferior, or criminal, the word grew; it must have been about to burst, [...]. His body was a vessel containing the word, inflated now and again by the odious stares from those others, the ones who thought they were white. He knew Argenis, curiously the darkest of them all after Malagueta, didn't see it this way, and his condescending look, the same look he used with animals, women, and faggots, hurt him. (Indiana, 2018, p. 120).

Malagueta, unlike Argenis, seeks trans-corporeal empowerment through an expansive interconnection across multivalent categories. His broad conceptualization of vibrant life imbues his work as a performance artist with powerful activation of the material world.

Linda only reluctantly participates in the artists' commune, limiting her activities to observing the potential of the artists to generate financial support for her life's work in protecting the coral reefs. She negates arrogant human exceptionalism manifesting instead a potent empathetic entanglement with oceanic life: "Where others saw a gift from God, given for enjoyment of humankind, she saw an ecosystem fallen victim to a

systematic and criminal attack” (Indiana, 2018, p. 98). Linda distinguishes herself from *Anthropos* through her trans-corporeal connection with the more-than-human life, which endows her with a unique perceptive gift: “Where others saw scenery, Linda Goldman saw desolation. Where others heard relaxing subaquatic silence, she heard the shrieks of life disappearing” (Indiana, 2018, p. 98). Her openness to the more-than-human world imbues material actants with vibrancy. While these references may suggest a reduction of ecological diversity to a mere anthropomorphic projection, Jane Bennet reminds us: “Maybe it is worth the risks associated with anthropomorphizing [...] because it, oddly enough, works against anthropocentrism: a chord is struck between person and thing, and I am no longer above or outside a nonhuman ‘environment’” (2010, p. 120). Her empathetic passion to save and protect the endangered sea and its creatures is what first draws Giorgio to Linda aligning his mission as *Olokun* with her efforts. However, as it becomes apparent and predicted by the earlier reference to the images of the heroic but flawed Achilles, Giorgio confronts a difficult choice.

In spite of the mission to save humanity and save the sea, Acilde/Giorgio/Roque suffer a myopic view toward the vibrancy of the natural world. With the power to fold back on time and adjust events to avoid the environmental catastrophe, the *Olokun* assemblage has two paths before them: one to save the world through sacrifice, or one that prioritizes individualism. Considering the specific interactions with the diverse assemblages they create across time, it becomes apparent that the tripartite assemblage collapses back into human exceptionalism. Through diverse avatars, Roque/Giorgio/Acilde exploit the vulnerabilities of the different actants within the assemblages maneuvering incidents deftly across time and space. Laudably motivated by a mission instigated by Esther’s prophecy, the assemblage never grasps the extent of the sacrifice demanded of them. In fact, Acilde loses control of Giorgio as the 2001 manifestation asserts his self-serving interest and hierarchical supremacy that ultimately disrupts the salvage task to protect the ocean.

Shortly after expelling Argenis from the compound, the Menicucci’s throw a lavish celebration to showcase the artists’ finished pieces. Elizabeth’s musical composition transmits a sensation of intertwining threads that move through the guests’ bodies. In this musical multi-sensorial wave, Giorgio’s euphoria culminates as he looks across the dance floor at Linda: “She was his queen. Suddenly, the idea struck him as real: he was a king, the king of this world, the big head, the one who knew what was at the bottom of the sea” (Indiana, 2018, p. 129). Where the assemblages produce

a strong ethical bond among the participants and the envioning world, Giorgio proclaims his individualized uniqueness delinking from the transcorporeal connection. In this moment, he assumes his work is complete and he has successfully diverged the timeline from the apocalyptic future “of acid rains and epidemics in which prison was preferable to the outside” (Indiana, 2018, p.128). Giorgio’s success and assertion of hierarchical superiority occurs moments before he recognizes a twenty-two-year-old Said Bona before him: “Here was the reason for his initiation. All that for this. Quickly and overwhelmingly, he had before him the real goal of his mission: to give Said Bona a message- as president, to avoid accepting biological weapons from Venezuela” (Indiana, 2018, p. 129). Giorgio must decide between the collective well-being and his individual exceptionalism, as king of his social world. Unsure whether he would disappear and unwilling to lose his unique privilege, he chooses not to reveal the future to Said Bona. He asserts dominance over the assemblage untethering himself from the connection with Acilde and Roque. Acilde dies by suicide and Roque, is killed in battle with the invading Spanish conquistadors. Giorgio’s shortsightedness also foregoes the greater mission his wife embraces. He acknowledges the pain she would experience when the seas die; nonetheless, he chooses present gratification that satisfies his desires over the long-term goal that initially drew him to Linda. As predicted, the hero’s journey risked a collapse into self-serving motivations. This, I argue, is the essence of Anthropos whose self-centered tendencies spread pathogenically impelling individual choice toward human exceptionalism and away from convergence with the voiceless human and more-than-human refugees of the world.

6. Conclusion: Inevitable Apocalypse or Trans-corporeal Hope?

As Olokun, the prophetic savior to rescue the sea, the assemblage Acilde/Giorgio/Roque predominantly fails in the mission. However, I posit that the novel does not intend to elevate an individual, albeit one that is dispersed through time and space, to rescue humanity, but rather to foreground the moments of trans-corporeal connections. Several incidents rupture the individuated nature of self-serving characters producing a profound sensorial awareness of a vibrant material environment. The novel emphasizes the Anthropos vein that runs through humanity, but is countered by the assemblages that disrupt notions of human exceptionalism. The hero necessarily had to fail so that the interconnected beings could emphasize an

alternative to bringing the vibrant material world into focus. Indiana's novel adheres to an environmental ethics by destabilizing the binary structure that isolates humans from the more-than-human participants. This undoing forces an alternative to Anthropos's dominance that encourages a polyphonic assemblage of actants that defy a hierarchical spatial and temporal ontology. The singular hero fails, but the diverse assemblages open a path for an environmental ethics that preclude human exceptionalism in favor of trans-corporeal connections.

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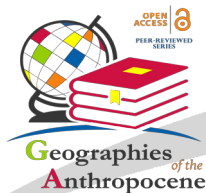
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"The Anthropocene has still the rank of a scientific hypothesis. Yet, it has already sedimented in our imagination with its stories of climate change and mass extinctions, global pandemics and energy crisis, technofossils and oceanic plastic, social justice and new minerals that are changing the face (and the bowels) of the planet. Investigating this imagination from multiple angles, *Narratives in the Anthropocene Era*, brilliantly edited by Charles Travis and Vittorio Valentino, is an indispensable tool for situating these stories into the conceptual horizon of the environmental humanities".
(Serenella Iovino, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

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