Extinctathon: Margaret Atwood's Urge for an Immanent Episteme

in Oryx and Crake *and* The Year of the Flood

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Introduction: Immanent Episteme

The first two novels from Margaret Atwood's projected *MaddAddam* eco-trilogy, *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009) demand an investigation into the causes of the dire image they present of the near future. Greed-driven disregard for the environment emerges as the palpable surface cause. Atwood's two novels depict a corporate capitalism, or corporatism, constantly pushing its limits by privileging unregulated techno-scientific endeavours with high financial yield. This lack of regulation—legal, ethical, moral—constitutes the main critique of the two companion dystopias. The absence of legal regulation facilitated through a neoliberalism taken to its logical conclusion makes the State absent in these novels. As Fredric Jameson points out, "the enormous corporations […] have replaced all the traditional forms of government" (n.pag.). After all, police and surveillance services are now privatized in the seemingly ubiquitous CorpsSeCorp, the nefarious corporation whose omnipresent surveillance keeps all the characters in check. However, beyond the dystopic hopelessness, the two novels build a case for the maintenance of ethical and moral regulation, respectively. If the anthropocene is to survive after the next century, *Oryx* and *Year* seem to argue, the solutions rely on integrating ethics and morals into the techno-scientific development processes. In other words, Atwood critiques the privileging of the techno-scientific epistemology to the detriment of the humanistic one, and highlights the need for an integrated episteme in an immanent system. These novels push readers

to question their own roles, views, and agency in both the corporatist early twenty-first century, as well as in potential futures[1].

As companion novels whose narratives unfold contemporaneously, *Oryx* and *Year* display both the problems that Atwood critiques and the alternatives she suggests. This article reads these novels in turn, while highlighting the points of connection between the two, which are explicated with help of Michel Foucault's notion of the episteme, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the rhizome, and Guattari's impetus for the unification of the three ecologies. From *Oryx*, the description of the online game "Extinctathon" best encapsulates the critique of our contemporary episteme with its forced dichotomy between techno-science and humanities. The corresponding *Year* excerpts come both from Adam One and Toby, and openly argue for an immanent episteme. In fact, the seeming religion embraced by God's Gardeners constitutes a recognition of the necessity to integrate the two epistemologies as well as an attempt to bring this integration to life. However, instead of offering it as panacea, Atwood uses the format of religion to advocate for a community of practice which enacts the moral stance necessary for humanity to avert its own destruction. It is Atwood's otherwise critical stance on religion that prompts us to question the viability of an alternative to corporatism relying on a religious paradigm.

According to Atwood, the root of the problems in these two novels lies in the forced separation and ensuing competition between different systems of organizing knowledge, with two different logics: techno-science and humanities. The former—the positivist, dichotomous, structural, chronological, and hierarchical—has risen to dominate humanity and, in Atwood's imagination, also to condemn it to death, when it goes unchecked by the humanities perspective.

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[1] Both J. Brooks Bouson and Sean Murray point to Atwood's provocation. Bouson speaks of "many Atwoodian novelistic closures" which compel "reader participation in the text" ("We're Using Up the Earth" 12), while Murray views her novels as "literature that stimulates debates and encourages activism" (121).

Whether or not the last novel of this projected trilogy, *MaddAddam*, offers more elaborate definitive alternatives to the systemic problems it presents remains to be determined[2], but this essay argues that Atwood places the responsibility of changing corporate capitalism on the metaphorical shoulders of a system of knowledge which both recognizes how the system operates and can change it, in order to counteract the possibility of humanity's extinction in the very near future. In short, she calls for the integration of different types of knowledge into an immanent episteme.

The concept of "episteme" appears in Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, where he details its characteristics as a set of rules that unconsciously govern human thought and unwittingly order human sciences at a certain point in history:

> What I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the episteme, in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather of its conditions of possibility. (xxiii-xxiv)

The episteme, therefore, is the space, which organizes knowledge in a certain way at a given moment in time, and in which knowledge becomes science through validation ("grounds its positivity") and enabling ("its conditions of possibility"). The appositive clause "envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value" highlights the absence of judgment in the process of transforming knowledge into science. This epistemic validation does not revolve around "rational value" or "perfection," but rather around the historical factors which facilitate this transformation of knowledge into science.

Foucault describes changes in the Western episteme at two different points in history: mid-seventeenth century ("the Classical Age") and the beginning of the nineteenth century (the

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[2] *MaddAddam* is slated for release in Fall 2013.

beginning of the Modern Age), which he pinpoints at the moment when Western knowledge focused on "man" as the scientific unit. It seems with a chuckle that Foucault confesses "It is comforting, however, and a source of profound relief to think that man is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and that he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form" (xv). Modernity's preoccupation with man, overtaken by neoliberalism's focus on individuality, which Atwood both critiques and counteracts in this trilogy, is a transient preoccupation, a blip when one considers the *longue durée*[3]. Finally, Foucault's archaeological endeavour into the organization of knowledge aims to uncover "how a culture experiences the propinquity of things, how it establishes the *tabula* of their relationships and the order by which they must be considered" (xxvi). How does science decide which things belong where in the taxonomic table? What is the criterion differentiating Darwin's classification from Linnaeus's? The Foucauldian episteme uncovers the answers to such questions and points to the historical factors privileging a certain kind of organization of knowledge.

So, what would an immanent episteme entail? In short, it refers to a space in which knowledge organization conforms to an immanent, rather than transcendent principle, i.e., in which no hierarchy exists between epistemologies, and no criterion or methodology reigns as dominant, or is privileged above others. An immanent episteme refers to an imbrication of disciplinary knowledges leading to an enrichment of each in particular, and whose total, taken together, can account for the complexity of life on earth in a way that would explicate it better. An immanent episteme would recognize the nature of corporatism, and respond to its

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[3] Fernand Braudel proposed this perspective in his article "History and the Social Sciences: The Longue Durée," which calls for the integration of the different social sciences for a more accurate analysis of social, economic, and political phenomena. More specifically, the "longue durée" refers to the fact that "the time of the long-term structures of social reality was privileged over the time of events" (Lee 2). Braudel is largely viewed as a founder of the world-systems perspective.

oversimplifying impulse by generating complexity. An immanent episteme would thus identify alternatives borne out of this recognition, rather than allowing disciplinary knowledges to work as a stratum in the corporatist assemblage. An immanent episteme does not yet exist, because it is in corporatism's interest to keep specialized knowledges separate and hierarchical. Atwood's trilogy critiques this zero-sum game, while gesturing to the instantiation of the immanent episteme as the only solution able to forestall the end of the anthropocene.

"Extinctathon": From Epistemological Hierarchy to Integration in *Oryx and Crake*

In a novel that has been hailed as a possible sequel to her most famous *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)[4], Atwood brings forth a critique of corporatism in the form of a dystopia[5]. More specifically Atwood denounces the contemporary episteme, by condemning the forced distinctions and separation of knowledge into two broad categories: techno-science and humanities[6]. The neat, if artificial, division between these two epistemological classes leads to the disastrous situation presented in the novel.

On the face of it, the main tension in *Oryx and Crake* appears as the binary between techno-science and humanities, embodied by Crake and Snowman respectively. However, this is a false dichotomy. In fact, Atwood directs her critique exactly towards this simplistic division of knowledge into neat and exclusive categories, embodied by disciplines, which can neither

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[4] See Coral Ann Howells, "Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Visions: *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (161), and Helen E. Mundler, "Heritage, Pseudo-Heritage and Survival in a Spurious Wor(l)d: *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood," in *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies* 27.1 (2004): 89-98.

[5] Atwood herself notes that *Oryx and Crake* "is not a classic dystopia. Though it has obvious dystopian elements, we don't really get an overview of the structure of the society in it" ("*The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* in Context" 517).

[6] For more historical context regarding the organization of knowledges into disciplines and their transformation within the university, please see Bill Readings' *The University in Ruins*.

appropriately explain the world, nor ensure a viable future for humanity. While the overarching problem of humanity is its social organization—corporatism or corporate capitalism bent on appropriating biopower[7]. *Oryx* goes deeper by showing the mechanism through which humans can dissociate themselves from the very real and immediate dangers they face. Alluding to the techno-sciences vs. humanities rivalry that appears in the novel, J. Brooks Bouson maintains that "unlike those who insist that science is nothing more than a social construction, Atwood emphasizes the growing, and potentially lethal, power of techno-science to manipulate and alter human biology—and reality" ("Game Over" 151). At the same time, I would add, she offers solutions by suggesting that it is the systematic denigration of the humanities in a hierarchical knowledge system that has led us to a situation in which techno-scientific speculation goes unchecked, and can be easily taken to extremes, such as we see in the novel. Rather, Atwood advocates for a different mode of knowledge, an inclusive, interconnected, and rhizomatic one: an immanent episteme, in which the humanities would have as much importance as techno-science, and would be able to provide an ethical balance to the latter.

For example, the simplistic words vs. numbers schism appears as a symbol of this hierarchy when it comes time for Jimmy and Crake to attend college. While numbers people such as Crake are recruited by highly reputable institutions such as the Watson-Crick Institute, which "was like going to Harvard had been, back before it drowned" (*Oryx* 200), words people such as Jimmy get "knocked down at last to the Martha Graham Academy" (218), "named after some gory old dance goddess of the twentieth century" (226), where he gets a "risible degree" in Problematics (229). Genius numbers people such as Crake, with his hard techno-scientific

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[7] In *The History of Sexuality*, *Vol. 1*, Foucault defines biopower as a "political power" which "had assigned itself the task of administering life" (139). Biopower deploys technologies of controlling and regulation life. While Foucault discusses biopower as a feature of the State starting in the seventeenth century, my argument is that a definitive trait of corporatism is the appropriation of biopower by corporations, who deploy "regulatory controls" (Foucault 140) of bodies and populations (human and animal alike).

thinking skills, get the VIP education and treatment in their highly secured and lavish compound to prepare them for their future executive positions atop a corporation. Words people, like Jimmy, on the other hand, would "have a choice between well-paid window dressing for a big Corp or flimsy cut-rate stuff for a borderline one" (229). Chung-Hao Ku asks a rhetorical question on this point: "is it not truthful that the technocratic system's privileging of 'numbers people' like Crake renders 'word people' like Snowman human beings manqué?" (111). I would answer it with another rhetorical question: what does it mean when, in the end, it is the homme manqué who survives? Maybe that the social organization of humanity itself was even more flawed? The undeniable privilege enjoyed by techno-science over humanities translates in the reality of this novel in the lavishness of the separate educational facilities of the former and the respective misery of the latter. This difference perpetuates itself in the opposing prospects faced by the alumni of these educational institutions. However, apart from the material differences, the oppressive mechanism of epistemic segregation operates at a subtle level. As much as it is constructed rather than innate—in the sense that people with techno-scientific abilities are not more endowed than humanities disciples—this hierarchy insinuates itself in activities as seemingly innocuous as game playing.

A close reading of Extinctathon, which Jimmy and Glenn play, helps substantiate this argument, as it displays some of the main characteristics of the corporatist episteme. This paragraph brings to the fore some of the most important questions that the novel asks us to ponder. There are a number of immediate connections that this excerpt facilitates. First, "Exctinctathon" clearly suggests a race towards extinction, implying perpetual competition, an idea that is also emphasized by its internet-game format, and reinforced by Glenn's desire to become "Grandmaster." The competition that the game makes us think of resonates with

capitalist conditions, which tout competition as the only type of regulation that a free market needs. The novel presents the unregulated corporations as one of the causes leading to its contemporaneous situation:

> Extinctathon, Monitored by MaddAddam. Adam named the living animals, MaddAddam names the dead ones. Do you want to play? That was what came up when you logged on. You then had to click Yes, enter your codename, and pick one of the two chatrooms—Kingdom Animal, Kingdom Vegetable. Then some challenger would come online using his own codename—Komodo, Rhino, Manatee, Hippocampus Ramulosus—and propose a contest. Begins with, number of legs, what is it? The it would be some bioform that had kakked out within the past fifty years—no T-Rex, no roc, no dodo, and points off for getting the time frame wrong. Then you'd narrow it down, Phylum Class Order Family Genus Species, then the habitat and when last seen, and what had snuffed it (Pollution, habitat destruction, credulous morons who thought that eating it would give them a boner). (97-98)

Interestingly, the way one can win the game is through naming. Taxonomy figures ironically here, in the line that calls for the organization according to "Class Order Family Genus Species," calling our attention to one of the many tensions in the novel. Here the tension is between the hard scientific character of the method of producing taxonomies versus the mythical dimensions invoked through Adam and his original attempt to name creatures. The irony comes out of Atwood's disavowal of the contemporary episteme, one that privileges a reductionist Weltanschauung under the pretence of science. The juxtaposition of scientific taxonomy with Adam's naming stands to emphasize the false dichotomy between techno-science and humanities. Adam, although fictional, a narrative device belonging to a humanistic genealogy, had living animals around to name. MaddAddam, on the other hand, present at the pinnacle of a techno-scientific society, can only stand and watch while whole species have become extinct in the space of fifty years, not only in spite of, but more likely due to unchecked techno-scientific 'advances.' However, rather than privileging humanities over techno-science, the novel and this

excerpt show how the problem lies in the clear separation and establishment of a hierarchy between the two modes of knowledge[8].

In its critique of a hierarchical system and its call for an integrated epistemology, the novel comes close to what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have described in the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus* as the tree-root/book system versus the rhizome. At stake here are not only two different systems of organizing knowledge, but two different logics, of which the hierarchical one will ultimately doom humanity according to Atwood. While the novel strongly critiques this episteme, it only offers subtle suggestions towards an alternative. The rhizome offers an alternative to the tree, which corresponds to the traditional system of domination: "Arborescent systems are hierarchical systems with centres of significance and subjectification, central automata like organized memories" (Deleuze and Guattari 16). The arborescent system is thus based on transcendence: one is above others in a clear hierarchy. The rhizomatic, on the other hand, stays within its plane of immanence. The rhizome emerges as an alternative: "To be rhizomorphous is to produce stems and filaments that seem to be roots, or better yet connect with them by penetrating the trunk, but put them to strange new uses" (15). While the tree-root/book system is based on transcendence, i.e. on the existence of one above others, the rhizomatic constructs a network of interconnected elements, in which none is the utmost dominant or determining in relation to the others.

Hannes Bergthaller views Atwood's call for integration in a more restricted sense, when he argues that for Atwood, "the imagination is needed to see something that is, in an important sense, not there—without thereby blinding oneself to that which is, that is, without distorting or

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[8] See also Coral Ann Howells, who discounts the opposition between arts and sciences: "But is there really an opposition between science and art? Is it not the case that the creative imagination is a distinctively human quality shared by both scientists and artists? Snowman is the artist figure, wordsmith and storyteller, and Crake is the scientist, a Mephistophelean figure perhaps, but also a failed idealist like Frankenstein or Dr. Moreau" ("Bad News" 93).

denying the scientific and historical record" (741). Bergthaller thus perceives the need to complement a scientific epistemology with a literary imagination. The injunction "to build bridges between evolutionary biology and literary studies" (742) foregrounds the methodology of ecocriticism, eminently predisposed to frame Atwood's two novels, but I wonder if this restriction to "literary studies" does not, in fact, limit Atwood's scope. While it is true that narrative emerges as most often used representative of the humanities in these novels, other humanist disciplines, such as history and gender studies (Watkins *passim*), prove indispensable in both understanding the problems posed by the corporate capitalism Atwood critiques, and in shaping potentialities for different futures.

Through Extinctathon, we also see that the need to categorize and hierarchize present there foregrounds the dominant epistemology squarely in the tree-root system. The game itself is a reward for the tree-root kind of thinking. It is the epitome of this sort of epistemology. The same Weltanshauung that destroyed these species because of its desire for dominance and hierarchy finds its reward here through the adherence to this conceptual apparatus. Atwood illustrates the failure of the tree-root thinking by showing it results in extinction of many animal species, placed lower in what the tree-root systems calls "the food chain." Moreover, the derision of the hierarchical logic goes, if humanity still cannot learn anything from all this destruction, then the only possible outcome rests with complete extinction of the dominant species, which is itself implied in the suffix "–athon," pointing to the perpetuity of the race. The Oxford English Dictionary advises that this suffix indicates "something carried on for an abnormal length of time." Envisaging the entire anthopocene as one protracted race, Atwood suggests, means two things: a definite end and many losers. *Oryx* warns the end is close and many species, including humans, end up off the podium.

The parallels go even further in this paragraph: Kingdom Animal and Kingdom Vegetable appear as reminders of our unquestioned anthropocentrism: why would we name the totality of animals and/or plants with a designation of human social organization? By reversing the usual phrase Animal Kingdom to read Kingdom Animal, Atwood is creating a cognitive dissonance that leads us to question anthropocentrism, to keep in check our own smug complacency, to wake us up from day-dreaming and to push us to realize the immediacy of the problem of extinction[9]. The problem of extinction is not only for techno-science to grapple with: the problem resides as much in representation, as it does in people playing God, by naming or rearranging genetic information and coming up with new species while others go extinct. Ascribing a human mode of social organization (e.g., kingdom) onto the other animals on this earth constitutes an anthropomorphic representation, which falls within the purview of the humanities. Toying with DNA, on the other hand, is the domain of techno-science. Thus, there is no innocent mode of knowledge for Atwood: both techno-science and humanities are bent on organizing, stabilizing, and systematizing. If there should be an escape from this dystopia, it resides in an epistemological overhaul, one that can provide quick connections between the actions of humans and the repercussions on other inhabitants of their environment, e.g. animals.

Also symbolic of the humanities in this excerpt, history appears almost imperceptibly. The need to historicize and construct chronologies appears in the blunt "points off for getting the time frame wrong." This is the instrumentalized kind of history, which Foucault[10] opposes to

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[9] As Atwood notes "I'd been clipping small items from the back pages of newspapers for *Year*s, and noting with alarm that trends derided ten *Year*s ago as paranoid fantasies had become possibilities, then actualities. The rules of biology are as inexorable as those of physics: run out of food and water and you die. No animal can exhaust its resource base and hope to survive. Human civilizations are subject to the same law" ("Writing *Oryx and Crake*," n. pag.).

[10] "The historian's history finds its support outside of time and pretends to base its judgements on an apocalyptic objectivity" ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 87). The genealogist, on the other hand, aims to "identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or, conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us" (81). Thus, while the

genealogy, and which can only serve to piece together the ecosystem of old, before extinction. History as the need to understand human life in different times has no place in Crake's little world, and he tries to excise that capacity from the post-human Crakers, who ultimately develop their own creation narrative. For now, though, narrative still appears at the end of the scientific enumeration of extinction causes: "credulous morons that thought that eating its horn would give them a boner." Bitter cynicism aside, humanities re-assert their explanatory value and potential for rhizomatic connections when it comes to phenomena that techno-science cannot completely account for. When techno-scientific explanations about the extinction of a species due to evolutionary or 'natural' causes do not suffice, humanities research can provide the missing links between cultural practices and ecological outcomes.

My final point here has to do with language and style. Atwood's painting of the future would be chilling and paralyzing if it were not so brilliantly satiric. The style brings out the tensions between humans and their environment; between different types of human endeavours: scholarly, e.g., techno-science and humanities, or leisurely, e.g., playing computer games. These tensions are described in a language that casually mixes academic jargon with slang. All of these interconnected aspects pinpoint the utter imbrication of all aspects of human activity as cause for the present situation: if only people acknowledged that making money by selling animal 'spare parts' for health benefits with the excuse that science has proven the inferiority of animal life, maybe humanity would not be doomed. Ultimately, Atwood's deft use of language enacts her argument: there is more to humans than their DNA, no matter how convenient and easy to categorize it were, so that human organs could be harvested from genetically modified pigs. Like it or not, both humans and animals are more than the sum of their organs, as the complexity of

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historian aims to construct a tree-root type of epistemology, the genealogies pieces together information to construct a rhizomatic understanding of disparate events which impact human life.

their cultural artefacts prove, be it the Crakers' quickly developed mythology[11] or this very novel.

Finally, Exctinctathon also occasions the perfect segue to the second novel of the MaddAddam trilogy, both through this description I quoted, in which we find out about the Grandmasters with "brains like search engines," who could remember "obscure bugs, weeds, and frogs nobody had ever heard of." These Grandmasters are yet another rhizomatic network: renegade God's Gardeners who use this computer game as a cover to communicate and co-ordinate their counter-corporatist actions. Let us now turn to investigate what kind of alternative God's Gardeners represent.

"Like any other conclave": Gods' Gardeners' Community of Practice as Humanity's Saving Grace

In spite of Crake's best efforts, the need for moral regulation through narrative re-emerges in the post-human Crakers. If that gesture merely suggests an attachment to the capacity of organized religion to shape or to police human behaviour out of its consumerist, selfish, libertarian tendencies in *Oryx*, the message of *Year* emerges seemingly in confirmation. God's Gardeners' religion and practice combine both the techno-scientific and the humanist sides of the episteme in their commitment to living sustainably on the periphery of corporatism, while also instantiating possibilities to alter the entire system. However, Atwood does not idealize the capacity of any organized religion to offer the prefect alternate to life-as-we-know-it. Rather than endorsing religion non-critically as the panacea for the devastation and inequalities perpetuated

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[11] For a discussion of mythology in this novel, see Carol Osborne, "Mythmaking in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*," in *Once upon a Time: Myth, Fairy Tales and Legends in Margaret Atwood's Writings*. 25-46.

by corporatism, Atwood is using religion as the conceptual launch pad for the suggestion to build a community organized around the practice of integrating techno-science and humanities. Gerry Canavan argues "the ultimate intellectual project of God's Gardeners is to unite the 'two cultures' of *Oryx and Crake*: to reconcile science to humanism and find some way to move forward with both" (154). In other words, the novel presents a group symbolically organized around what seems to be a religion (Grace 41; Hoogheem 60), while Atwood repeatedly displays her distrust of religion through the voices and actions of Toby, Zeb, and even Adam One himself.

The Gardeners constitute an exploration of the question of whether we can envisage the same fervour driving religious congregations around the practice of ethical living on a large scale. As Sean Murray asserts, Atwood "builds in just enough scepticism to leave us wondering how best to live in harmony with nature and with each other" (120). The point of the Gardeners is not to literally proselytize for a new religion, but to conceptually investigate the possibility of different layers of epistemic integration. Atwood suggests this integration both through the Gardeners, as well as "in her practice of rewriting, through palimpsestic accretion," in order to show "the need in a post-secular apocalyptic world for syncretic, plural faith narratives that avoid Judgment" (Watkins 130). Atwood is urging us not to re-invent the wheel, but to look around us and meld a sustainable ethic and practice out of existing narratives be they spiritual, scientific, or artistic, which can be viewed as the palimpsestic layers Watkins mentions. This practice presupposes a clear understanding of how immanent corporatism operates and offers an alternative way of life with the potential to change the system altogether. By necessity, to be attainable, this practice would have to be pragmatic and imperfect. Rather than symbolizing religion as the alternative to corporatism, the Gardeners plant an idea about the potentials of a

community of practice, whose immanent connections between modes of knowledge can guide humanity out of the devastation—both literal and figurative—of corporatism and into its future.

On the contrary, the same pragmatism which explained extinction through lust in the "Extinctathon" description also serves to open readers' eyes to the pitfalls of organized religion, when, as a newly inducted Eve, Toby realizes

> She must have supposed they [the Gardeners] exchanged information chemically, like trees. But no, nothing so vegetable: they sat around a table like any other conclave and hammered out their positions—theological as well as practical—as ruthlessly as medieval monks. And, as with the monks, there was increasingly much at stake. That was worrying to Toby, for the Corporations tolerated no opposition, and the Gardener stance against commercial activities in the larger stance might well come to be construed as that. So Toby was not wrapped in some otherworldly sheephold-like cocoon, as she'd once supposed. Instead she was walking the edge of a real and potentially explosive power. (189)

This paragraph illustrates multiple issues at the same time. First, Atwood does not embrace religion idealistically as the panacea for corporatism. As with any religion, the need for order within the ranks of God's Gardeners gives rise to a hierarchy which both embraces secrecy in a paternalist manner, and has the potential to perpetuate the systemic inequalities from which it is attempting to escape. The "hammering out" of their positions shows how power struggles do not escape the Gardeners, in spite of their seemingly egalitarian, integrated theology. Second, it is this negotiated theology which dictates the group's opposition to corporatism, as a way of constructing an alternative, ecological, and ethical lifestyle. This integrated alternative appears in the qualification of the Gardeners' positions as "theological as well as practical," which points to their aims for immediate applicability. Finally, in spite of their opposition, the Gardeners cannot escape corporatism. Even though Toby thought herself outside the system, its immanence allows for no outside. The Gardeners may endeavour to build an alternate life to the dominant one, but their dealings at the Tree of Life exchange show that such a position does not exist. Moreover,

what they trade also originates in corporatist activities, e.g., vinegar fermented from leftover wine the Gardener children "glean" from the garbage of corporate-owned establishments. Ultimately, the Gardeners are integrated within the immanent economy of corporatism, but manage to construct an alternative way of life that ensures their surviving the "waterless flood."

Even if this survival proves tenuous by the end of the novel, it is the Gardeners' recognition of the mechanisms of operation of corporatism, as well as their constructing their niche within it, a veritable line of flight[12] in Deleuze-Guattarian terminology, that allows them to survive. The reason for the precariousness of Gardeners' survival arguably also resides in their dogmatic application of their theology. This fallibility underscores Atwood's scepticism towards the wholesale adoption of any religion as panacea. Atwood's "ambivalent, sardonic, and ultimately fond portrayal of religion" (Hoogheem 57) suggests alternatives to be found in the building of communities of practice, but she stops short of prescribing religion as the ideal rallying point[13].

Arguably, the Gardeners' partial failure stems from their inability to effectively integrate the three ecologies postulated by Félix Guattari. Guattari, who was bemoaning the extinction of "words, phrases, and gestures of human solidarity" (29), alongside biological species, proclaims the solution to the devastation perpetrated by "Integrated World Capitalism" (32) to be an ecosophy. The ecosophy constitutes "an ethico-political articulation […] between the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity)" (19-20). Thus, the ecosophy would combine these three registers, which Guattari sees as the *sine qua non*

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[12] "Lines of flight, for their part, never consist in running away from the world, but rather in causing runoffs, as when you drill a whole in a pipe; there is no social system that does not leak from all directions, even if it makes its segments increasingly rigid in order to seal the lines of flight. There is nothing imaginary, nothing symbolic about a line of flight" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 204).

[13] Susan Watkins argues Atwood's palimpsestic "writing process is a direct challenge to the rise of Evangelical fundamentalism," as the writer "treats [diverse post-Christian sects] ironically" (129). Similarly, Andrew Hoogheem asserts that even though "the sacred has facilitated [the Gardeners'] secular survival," it does not mean "religion amounts to inoculation against catastrophe" (64).

condition for the prolongation of the anthropocene. Instead of an ecosophy, the Gardeners settle for a religion, which only weaves two of the three ecologies: the environment and social relations. The Gardeners' treatment of depression, which they call "fallow state," and which afflicts many of their members, who are left to cope alone, shows their religion falling short of integrating human subjectivity[14]. This problematic oversight grants the Gardeners only a tenuous survival at the end of the novel, and it precludes the facile conclusion that Atwood prescribes religion as the alternative to corporatism.

However, the possibility of the Gardeners' success, such as it is, resides exactly in their interweaving of the two epistemologies that corporatism keeps in opposition: techno-science and the humanities. The integrated episteme does not parallel the integrated ecologies. Rather, they exist in a relationship of mutual enabling: combining sciences and humanities in an immanent episteme allows for the integration of the three ecologies through the nuanced understanding of the multifaceted relationships between the environment, social relations, and human subjectivity. The corollary also stands: grasping the complexities of the connections between the three ecologies demands the trans-disciplinary approach. Towards the end of the novel, when Toby meets Ren again, she is hesitant to take charge of the young woman's recovery because of the danger Ren's vulnerability poses to Toby's own survival. However, she undertakes the task, exactly because she has adopted the Gardeners' philosophy of recuperating human solidarity from the dregs of rampant neoliberalism, which illustrates the combination of the ecologies of social relations and environment. Toby's actions at this point display the mutually-enforcing

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[14] "My own mother said Bernice's mother was 'depressed'. But my mother wasn't a real Gardener, as Bernice was always telling me, because a real Gardener would never say *depressed*. The Gardeners believed that people who acted like Veena were in a Fallow state—resting, retreating into themselves to gain Spiritual insight, gathering their energy for the moment when they would burst out again like buds in spring. They only appeared to be doing nothing. Some Gardeners could remain in a Fallow state for a very long time" (Atwood, *Year* 80).

relation between the three ecologies on the one hand, and the immanent episteme on the other. While she nurses Ren back to life, the older woman reminisces about Adam One's words:

> Some will tell you Love is merely chemical, my Friends, said Adam One. Of course it is chemical: where would any of us be without chemistry? But science is merely one way of describing the world. Another way of describing it would be to say: where would any of us be without Love? (359)

Adam One's musings summarize the theology the Gardeners develop through the integration of the sciences and the humanities. Adam One, initially a corporate scientist, transforms his disenchantment with "all those scientists and business people […] destroying old Species and making new ones and ruining the world" (146) into the Gardeners' religion, which is summarized in this address to his congregation. While reminiscent of Christianity in its invocation of "love," this religion's focus resides in the understanding of the world in its complexity by way of epistemic integration. If "science is merely one way of describing the world," the injunction then points us to finding the other ways, as well as to deploying them adequately. Thus, the capitalized "Love" here points to the ultimate aim: if epistemic immanence is the method, then ecologic integration is the aim. "Love," with its charged religious genealogy, also suggests that solutions to the present conundrums need not be invented from scratch. The concept of love also provides a connection with *Oryx*, in which Crake's "utopian solution to the problem of love" (Canavan 145) leads to the creation of the Crakers' strictly regulated sexuality. Adam One's words thus point to his understanding of the conditions of possibility for the development of an applicable alternative to corporatism. Rather than a reactionary demand for a fundamentalist embrace of any religion, the novel points us to tweaking the ethical tools humanity has been professing in order to address the problematic of the present moment. If epistemic immanence emerges the only appropriate methodology for an immanent social organization, so, too, the solutions to the problems created by the latter have to display an

imbrication of theory and practice. The Gardeners do not merely propound their religion. On the contrary, above all, they practice it: their religion resides in the practice of their lives, rather than remaining the transcendent set of laws that governs their behaviour from a moral standpoint. This embodied theology is what differentiates the Gardeners from the historical understanding of religion. In a private conversation with Toby, Adam One concedes, "We should not expect too much from faith," as "human understanding is fallible" (*Year* 168), and so conceptually, interpretations of faith can both dilute and distil the core into something else. Therefore, rather than keeping it at the intellectual level, Adam One's religion transforms the very understanding of the notion from transcendence—God is above believers dictating the laws of life to be interpreted by the few and dispersed to the many—to immanence: the Gardeners' religion is their daily life, and this practice ensures their survival of the waterless flood.

Ultimately, their survival proves tenuous, and Adam One's last speeches point to increased casualties from the ranks of Gardeners. Religion, even if immanent and embodied, might not be the ultimate answer, but these novels eschew the self-help genre. Rather, they make the case for the untenability of a rampantly consumerist and viciously unethical corporate capitalism, by taking the developments of the present to their logical conclusion in the near future. Along the way, these first two novels in the *MaddAddam* trilogy also offer opportunities for reflection on different courses of action to avert the end of the anthopocene, and ask us to ponder what life would be like if we attempted to construct an ethics based on an immanent epistemology.

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Conclusion

In a historical moment seemingly invested in a war on women[15], Atwood demonstrates corporatism's dependency on patriarchy as the primary mechanism of subjectification of minoritarian positions. Atwood's engagement with humanity's systemic problems, e.g., social inequality, environmental destruction, thus exemplifies the solid maturity that contemporary women's writing in Canada has attained by troubling the category itself: Canadian women's writing does not circumscribe women's concerns, but rather proves them to be perceptive of humanity's troubles. Atwood reclaims her position within the Canadian and international literary canon by demanding an alliance both within and beyond the boundaries of Canadian women's literature. This alliance springs from an activism which serves to highlight the inequities of late capitalism, and offer itself as the solution: an integrated, immanent epistemology, both in theory and in practice[16].

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[15] In the history of feminism, and hopefully, in the history of the world, the early 2010s will probably be remembered for the many attempts to restrict women's (reproductive) rights through the introduction of bills in the United States' federal and state legislative bodies, which restrict women's access to health services. According to The Guttmacher Institute, in the first half of 2012, "95 new provisions related to reproductive health and rights" (n.pag.).

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