

Introduction

Emerging postanthropocentric conceptions of subjectivity, agency, and knowledge formation practices contain substantial implications for currently dominant modes of environmental advocacy and social movement organizing. The nonhuman turn in environmental humanities scholarship has arrived at a critical juncture, and it is now incumbent upon eco-theory scholars to more seriously grapple with the political implications of the decentered and disanthropocentric human subject. The now prevalent concept of hybrid, or distributed, agency is central to this problematic, as it highlights the interconnected, overlapping, and dispersed nature of agency to suggest that agentic forces are always already an inextricable mixture of the human and nonhuman.¹ It is this more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between human and nonhuman agency that is most fundamentally altering our understanding of political agency and, in turn, historical change more broadly. Undoubtedly, contemporary environmental movements will be impacted, and might well benefit from, this ongoing decentering of the human subject; however, posthuman and postnatural conceptions of matter, subjectivity, and agency also present serious challenges to our contemporary sense of political efficacy.

While critiques of anthropocentrism and liberal humanist subjectivity enable an integral step toward a more ecologically sustainable society, *Material Insurgency* aims to provide an in-depth and critical consideration of what—particularly in terms of political subjectivity and agency—comes after the decentering of the human subject. Therefore, the chapters to come investigate the ways in which a distributed, fragmented concept of agency (one that does not allow for the reassertion of a liberal humanist subject-actor at convenient moments) also raises a series of problematics

for thinking human political subjectivity and best practices for social movement organizing. While hopeful about the transformative potential of posthumanist and new materialist theories generally, I also deem it necessary to explore the flip side of the coin: that is, what we might come to see as the crisis of the postanthropocentric and distributed human subject, as it relates to the efficacy of environmentalism as a social movement.

In the introduction to their influential edited collection *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics*, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost turn productively to the concept of distributed agency to explore the potential for posthuman conceptions of knowledge formation practices and agency. They suggest the concept of distributed agency is based upon “a materiality that materializes, evincing immanent modes of self-transformation that compel us to think of causation in far more complex terms,” and that moving beyond the traditional construction of the rational and intentional human subject-actor in this manner requires us to recognize “that phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlinking systems and forces and to consider anew the location and nature of capacities for agency” (9). Attending to the complexity of distributed notions of subjectivity and agency also then, and this is an integral point, necessarily impacts our understanding of intention and causality. The editors explain:

Conceiving matter as possessing its own modes of self-transformation, self-organization, and directedness . . . disturbs the conventional sense that agents are exclusively humans who possess the cognitive abilities, intentionality, and freedom to make autonomous decisions and the corollary presumption that humans have the right or ability to master nature. (10)

Taking distributed agency seriously, it follows, has major implications for our understanding of the relation between human and nonhuman communities and the best practices for evaluating human society’s impacts on the environment. The terrain of possibility is, quite truthfully, stunning in its uncertainty, complexity, and breadth, and the scholarship currently emerging from this new materialist and posthuman disruption of liberal humanist conceptions of the rational, autonomous self has been strikingly incisive and vital. The task ahead, though, is still more challenging. Given that these emergent theories of materiality “cast doubt on some of modernity’s most cherished beliefs about the fundamental nature of existence and social justice but also because presumptions about agency and

causation implicit in prevailing paradigms have structured our modern sense of the . . . dimensions of the ethical and the political” (6), Coole and Frost can only be correct in suggesting these “developments thus call upon us to reorient ourselves profoundly in relation to the world, to one another, and to ourselves” (6).² This emerging line of inquiry is fundamentally upending the long-held and comfortable humanist notions of intentionality, rationality, and autonomy; and environmental theorists and activists must now be careful not to underestimate the depths of this disruption.

The chapters to follow explore the theoretical challenges of distributed agency through a rereading of literary materials spanning two centuries of U.S. fiction and nonfiction. I suggest that turning our attention to environmentally themed literature facilitates a productive exploration of alternative and radically nonhierarchical visions of the relation between the human and nonhuman (each disruptively operating, to varying degrees of success, outside the binary constraints of Cartesian dualism). In particular, I focus upon literary fiction and nonfiction, including the works of authors such as Henry David Thoreau, Leslie Silko, Karen Yamashita, Chang-rae Lee, and Kim Stanley Robinson, which grapple with the implications of posthuman conceptions of nature for environmental justice and social movement organizing. The selected literary archive explores alternatives to humanist conceptions of the relation between human and nonhuman communities and, in varying ways, offers an opportunity to explore the possibilities for—and limitations to—a posthuman and distributed environmental politics. Each text, therefore, operates as a resource for imagining a kind of environmental actor whom we cannot necessarily study empirically, because she is still only a prospect, or potential, of our imagination.

The ultimate value in turning to literature, in this case, is that it provides a window into the possible constitution of an environmental politics (and a subject of that politics) that does not yet exist and that we do not quite know how to imagine. This study, as a result, reads environmental writing with an eye toward developing an argument that posthumanist scholar Rosi Braidotti might consider commensurate with her concept “dreaming forward,” in which critical appraisals of past and present moments allow for radical and affirmative imaginings of a just socioenvironmental future beyond humanism.³ Within this process, the “irreplaceable potentiality of fiction is that it makes possible the imagining of possibilities” (Ghosh 2016, 172). One of these possibilities fiction might

help us explore, according to Amitov Ghosh, is how “to find a way out of the individualizing imaginary in which we are trapped” (181). In fact, the posthuman is best conceived as a “non-unitary subject . . . [with] an enlarged sense of interconnection between self and others, including the non-human,” no longer held back by the “obstacle of self-centered individualism” (Braidotti, 49–50). And she is most likely to emanate from a “posthuman theory [that] is a generative tool to help us re-think the basic unit of reference for the human . . . [and] rethink the basic tenets of our interaction with both human and non-human agents on a planetary scale” (5–6). The relation of possibility between posthuman theory and the selected fictional texts galvanizes this project’s search for a posthuman political subjectivity capable of effectively operating with, and within, the modes of distributed agency.

The new materialist theoretical work of Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad, and Jane Bennett, to name just a few of the many influential scholars in this field, is also central to this project, as it has produced its own definitive critique of humanist models of subjectivity and agency (and their dependency upon anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism). My own thinking about what exactly postanthropocentric models of subjectivity and agency might mean for social movement organizing is deeply indebted to, and endeavors to expand upon, their foundational scholarship. The question of intentionality, first and foremost, is central. Distributed agency, as a particular expression of the broader theories of a postanthropocentric world, disrupts the humanist model for the rational, autonomous, intentional human actor. Intentionality, as a discrete property of the human individual, is no longer a safe assumption. While interpreting the radical significance of Danish physicist Niels Bohr’s complementarity principle, which plays a foundational role in her influential theory of *agential realism*, Karen Barad finds that “intentions are not pre-existing determinate mental states of individual human beings” (2007, 22–23). In fact, she goes on to suggest that once “agency is cut loose from its traditional humanist orbit,” it is, in fact, no longer solely or entirely “aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity” (177). This ongoing destabilization of the assumed connection between human subject and intentional act, fundamental to her concept of “intra-action,” compels us to consider its subsequent impact upon sociopolitical organizing strategies. Especially, as Barad argues, because “intentionality might better be understood as attributable to a complex network of human and non-human agents, including historically specific sets of material conditions

that exceed the traditional notion of the individual” (23). Rather than a supposed intentional agent of change, Barad asks us to train our attention upon the complex materiality of agentic forces. This reorientation should then lead us to recognize “it is less that there is an assemblage of agents than there is an entangled state of agencies” (23). This is where Barad’s work is especially integral. Her influential concept of intra-action eschews a more superficial understanding of distributed agency in which human and nonhuman agencies impact each other and eventually become intertwined, instead insisting that all phenomena manifest from the outset as fundamentally “entangled” agencies.

What then would it entail to organize political resistance to social and environmental exploitation within a world, in Barad’s formulation, comprised of an “entangled state of agencies”? Recognizing agency as a coproduction of forces emanating from the human and nonhuman worlds requires, at the very minimum, an acknowledgment that political agency is always already partial and bound to produce effects not calculable in advance.⁴ And once the assumed anthropocentric link between human act and result is severed, as it is by the concept of distributed agency, it is not so easily recoupled. That is, if we are to understand each human action as imbricated and complexly intertwined with nonhuman agency, then this necessarily impacts our understanding of the relation between the human political act and its result. I hope to explore these issues, in part, through some of the following questions: To what degree do a given social movement’s actions in the present moment relate to its declared future goals? Or, even more provocatively, what would it mean to organize without intention? Is it possible, for instance, to organize an efficacious movement without a defined goal, or endpoint, in mind? Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggests that distributed agency, what he calls “agentism,” is a “form of activism” in and of itself because “only in admitting that the inhuman is not ours to control, possesses desires and even will, can we apprehend the environment disanthropocentrically, in a teetering mode that renders human centrality as a problem rather than a starting point” (2013, xxiv). From within this “teetering mode,” what do social movements look like? With these provocations in mind, *Material Insurgency* focuses particular attention upon the ways in which embracing the concept of distributed agency will necessarily change our understanding of causation, linearity, and futurity within environmental politics and beyond. In so doing, I hope to provide some insight into the challenges and possibilities disanthropocentric modes of subjectivity and agency present for environmental

theorists and activists, as they search for viable sociopolitical pathways toward a more just and egalitarian world.

It is far from surprising that posthuman and new materialist conceptions of the decentered subject have captured the imagination of environmental scholars, as they articulate an in-depth theoretical structure for the long-standing and varied environmentalist critiques of anthropocentrism (and the nature/culture binary, more broadly). Additionally, distributed agency seems to align with environmental activism's longstanding contention that humans would be better served by understanding themselves as one member of the ecological community rather than as outside, above, and/or fully in control of the nonhuman environment. Understanding human agency as distributed across the human and nonhuman, as opposed to being the sole possession of an intentional, rational, and discrete human subject has therefore become tremendously influential in new materialist theory, and rightfully so. Despite its potential to revitalize existing critiques of anthropocentrism, I will suggest here that we should not be too quick to extol the decentered, posthuman subject as automatically a more ecologically aware citizen. There is a subtle but detectable habit of mind, among environmental advocates and theorists alike, that assumes the human subject, once made sufficiently aware of their more interconnected relation to surrounding nonhuman communities, will recognize their ethical duty to treat the earth more carefully and respectfully. Eco-theory scholars and green activists, in other words, might be guilty of, at times and to varying degrees, too confidently celebrating this newly decentered human subject as automatically better positioned to think and act in ecologically sound ways. According to this line of thinking, one might suppose the human subject will reconfigure their ethics and practice based upon this newly decentered worldview, while simultaneously retaining what seems to be their fully intentional and rational agency. This newly transformed, decentered, and ecological citizen will then *act* in a more responsible and ethical manner from their now decentralized (i.e., correct, or proper) relation to the world. It sometimes seems this conceptualization of the new materialisms' political impact attempts to claim that everything and, simultaneously, nothing has changed. That is, endowed with an entirely reconfigured subjective position and a newly minted disanthropocentric ecological consciousness, the distributed political actor can now act, in similar ways as (but to different ends than) the humanist political actor that preceded her, to improve society's treatment of a still surprisingly passive and malleable nonhuman world. This

assumption, if unchecked, will limit our ability to successfully disrupt the traditional reification of the natural world in humanist thought. It may be much more difficult, but I think necessary, to admit that the materialist disruption of the rational humanist subject position also unsettles many of our assumptions about the political subject and her ability to organize and propel social movements.

For these reasons and more, the question of distributed agency's impact on social movement organizing remains an essential and animating concern throughout this book. Jane Bennett, speaking to the political consequences of the new materialisms, in her influential book *Vibrant Matter*, argues that if "an image of inert matter helps animate our current practice of aggressively wasteful . . . consumption," then further attention to "a materiality experienced as a lively force with agentic capacity could animate a more ecologically sustainable public" (2012, 51). The understandable, though possibly optimistic, desire to see theories of materiality and distributed agency as providing a pathway to a more ecological society is clear in this passage. Bennett's confidence that admitting more "actants" into our conception of agency will allow humans to devise "wiser interventions" is typical of new materialist arguments generally (2012, 4). If we allow that agency, however, is not the exclusive property of a presumed rational and intentional human subject, then how exactly shall we reevaluate the process in which "wiser" actions are first devised and then, ultimately, mobilized within the framework of distributed agency? I do not think we can assume that even a broad acceptance of distributed agency as a concept will *automatically* lead to more ecologically aware individual citizens living in a society that successfully interacts more wisely with the nonhuman environment.

I am not suggesting, to be clear, that Bennett's work is somehow uncritically anthropocentric. Quite to the contrary, it is the acute effectiveness of new materialist critiques of humanist conceptions of anthropocentrism, such as those brought forth by Bennett, that reveal these new questions regarding the relation between disanthropocentric subjectivity and political agency.⁵ Within the context of distributed agency, even if we assume a given subject's newfound sense of interdependence with the more-than-human world will lead to more eco-friendly thinking and intentions, there is no guarantee these new intentions will lead directly to intentional acts with preordained and knowable results. In fact, distributed agency muddies exactly this construction of causality. Consequently, in regard to political subjectivity and activism, distributed

notions of knowledge and agency raise a set of unique, and hopefully productive, challenges to traditional theories and practices of social movement organizing (which remain, to this point, predominantly based upon an intentional human activist-subject). As Bennett suggests, “If human intentionality can be agentic only if accompanied by a vast entourage of nonhumans,” then the necessary task ahead is to “devise new procedures, technologies, and regimes of perception that enable us to consult nonhumans more closely, or to listen and respond more carefully” (2012, 108). It will be imperative, therefore, to reconfigure knowledge formation practices, and their relation to political subjectivity and agency, in ways that better recognize “human culture is inextricably enmeshed with non-human agencies” (2012, 108).

Environmental scholarship is only just beginning to interrogate the assumption that an ethics based in distributed, or postanthropocentric, subjectivity will, as a matter of consequence, lead to more ecological subjects and environmentally sustainable societies. Stacy Alaimo’s hugely influential concept of transcorporeality, via its emphasis on humans’ intimate and material interconnection to each other and the nonhuman world, is one immensely helpful step toward a new ecological ethics and environmental stance.⁶ I share Alaimo’s sense that the Western liberal subject, as we know it, is no longer a tenable figure, and that there is an embryonic and profound political potential embedded within distributed subjectivity and agency (2016, 4–5). While the scholarship of the nonhuman turn is, of course, generally committed to a progressive and justice-based environmental movement, much of its focus has maintained an ontological framework that allows for only relatively vague gestures toward its implications for environmental politics itself. In this context, *Material Insurgency* critically engages with the possibility that sociopolitical movements may soon discover they are operating within a redefined framework: one in which (because of an increasing recognition of distributed agency) the relationship between political actions and human-intentioned futurity is significantly less definitive. From this standpoint, I suggest we are now tasked with fundamentally reimagining political activism and social movements in a fashion that no longer assumes the autonomy, rationality, and intentionality of the traditional humanist subject. The political subject and the political act in a *distributed* world simply will not look at all like the politics of liberal humanism.

Taking distributed agency seriously, in summary, will mean grappling with the limitations it places upon human mastery over the envi-

ronment, even in arenas where we might prefer to still claim it. In other words, we must resist at all costs the temptation to assume that we can at once disrupt the deepest assumptions of humanist concepts of subjectivity and agency while, at the same time, maintaining a familiar political subject-activist who, through generally recognizable modes of social movement organizing, successfully influences and shapes a given human society to promote more responsible interaction with the more-than-human world. Once we have unsettled the human intentional subject, as posthumanism and new materialist theory have undoubtedly accomplished in recent years, it becomes simply impossible to depend upon familiar models of liberal democratic political activism. It is not written in stone that the decentered human subject will automatically live as a more ecological citizen, and it is certainly not clear that this distributed subject will wield an effective and justice-oriented politics. Scholars will need to recognize that even those of us deeply committed to a critique of humanism, one that we hope might build a more just and equal post-human model for our social, economic, and political institutions, might not find each and every impact of this radical postanthropocentrism to our immediate liking.

New materialists' expectations for the political impact that might follow from these reworked ontologies, furthermore, generally tend toward an at times problematic conception of contemporary structures of power: that is, the complex relation between the state, transnational capital, and the citizen-subject. We cannot afford to assume that a change of consciousness in, for instance, a majority of the U.S. population will equate to political change at the necessary scale and pace; that is, not without a sustained and deeply critical engagement with the dynamics of power in the era of late capitalism. To be sure, a small but significant set of voices has been theorizing the relation between posthumanism (and the new materialisms) and political theory. Of this set, Bennett's work on the politics of "agentic assemblages," Donna Haraway's engagement with feminist and posthuman successor sciences, and Timothy Mitchell's writing on distributed agency and historical change are of particular relevance to this project. Building upon Bennett's work, political theorist Stefanie Fishel explores the ways a growing body of knowledge on "microbial communities give[s] a bodily and material example in which multiple perspectives and objects—beyond human-created institutions and subjects—can be seen as vital and necessary to politics and human survival" (2017, 5). Beginning from the microbial, Fishel's work makes clear the

extent to which new materialist theories might potentially disrupt both our sense of the individuated political subject and the political systems and institutions in which she operates.

In her fascinating book of new materialist political theory *The Microbial State*, Fishel contends, “If humans take a decentralized view of the world and the “stuff” or material of politics seriously, this puts the very categories of politics into question” (2017, 42). Working from a perspective steeped in theories of the state and international relations, Fishel argues that if we recognize “the human is a hybrid forum of nested sets of complex permeable bodies, this leads to a new conception of ‘bodies politic’ . . . [as] a set of evolving and interlocking organic systems within systems” (43). This is potentially transformational, she contends, exactly because it “challenges a basic assumption about modernity, especially those surrounding the role of human agency, subject creation based on this agency, and what this subject’s relation with nature and culture entail” (43). It is imperative, therefore, that eco-theorists recognize the limitations inherent to an overemphasis upon change at the level of individual consciousness, and instead dedicate more attention to the myriad ways in which the broader contours of liberal democracy are also fundamentally challenged by postanthropocentric thinking. As Fishel points out: “Our ideas of the state—and the body politic—are limited because of the way we understand bodies as autonomous sovereign actors in rationalist theories, ergo our politics are limited” (43). Theorizing the state as a distributed entity, rather than a fully self-contained and independent institution, opens up promising avenues for theories of political power and activism, but also raises many questions that remain as yet less explored. Fishel’s work, importantly for our purposes here, helps to move us beyond the assumption that a distributed subjectivity leads automatically to an ecological transformation of society, and instead compels us to look at the complexities inherent in rethinking entire cultural and political formations.

Another essential strand of the current conversation in theories of the state focuses upon the category of the *citizen* itself, elucidating the myriad challenges social movements will face in the quest of transforming theories of posthuman subjectivity into an effectual environmental politics. Expanding and contemporizing Foucault’s concept of biopolitics in her recent book *Neocitizenship*, Eva Cherniavsky explains the particular importance of distinguishing between *governmentality*, as a process of regulating a given population, and *discipline*, as the hegemonic “norming” of

individuals in order to “bind” them to a particular social order (2017, 16). Cherniavsky argues the State, within and under neoliberalism, is more and more focused on the former while becoming increasingly less concerned with manufacturing consent through discipline. Suggesting that this process is redefining the very idea of the citizen as we know it, she coins the term *neocitizenship* as she explores the transitional “forms and contexts” of “political participation” available to the “neoliberal subject” (32); a subject whom we should now understand as “dominated but undisciplined” (36). In other words, the state is increasingly less interested in creating a hegemonic view (a shared assumption of what is “real” or the “correct” way to view contemporary structures of society); instead, it manages its citizen-subjects through their data-based visibility (153). Adroitly tracing these changes, Cherniavsky examines the move from “normative culture,” in which the State “interpolates” the citizen-subject’s interiority, to a “serial culture,” where citizens are released into “a minutely regulated environment” (37). The citizen becomes more and more visible to the State (often reified as an “identity” or group “affiliation”), but the state is increasingly “opaque and elusive to her” (37). Therefore, if the “state no longer ‘frees’ the individual but operationalizes her,” Cherniavsky suggests, freedom is thus transformed into mere “functionality” (58–59).

It follows from the above that if the state does not need the consent of the governed, or is no longer invested in creating a commonly shared view of its own legitimacy, then traditional academic “ideology critique” approaches become rather less impactful (2017, 60–61). In this context, new materialist and posthuman scholars can defamiliarize and reimagine cultural assumptions concerning the relation between human and nonhuman communities as thoroughly as we like, without necessarily impacting the state’s ability to control the population. That is, if Cherniavsky is correct that the state no longer “norms” its population through hegemonic processes (or is at least less and less dependent upon doing so), then a socioethical shift in the population is less disruptive to State power. This is because “[t]he interests of ruling elements are served by decomposing the social body and permitting us to dwell in whatever (un)realities of our own devising” (154). The immensity of this challenge for scholars of new materialisms dedicated to their work’s implications for a more effectual environmental politics, and a more socially and environmentally justice-oriented society, cannot be understated. In darker moments, we might imagine the posthuman subject, and her distributed environmental politics, becomes simply another “label” and “affiliation,”

respectively, or an identity the state can manage as just another “unreal” cultural perspective (154). In a more hopeful light, new materialist and posthuman theory—such as Fishel’s work on the microbial sciences pointing toward a new vision of the state and body politic as complex assemblages—might be seen as the first steps in a vast reorientation of theory, practice, and politics in a posthuman and postnatural world. It would, by necessity, need to be a step toward thinking political power beyond individual consciousness change and community-wide socioethical transformations.⁷

All of this should be taken as a further explanation as to why I find it useful to turn to literary nonfiction and fictional narratives with these challenges in mind: working upon these shifting and decomposing foundations means that we must first admit how much we currently do not know empirically, recognizing the limits of our own experience. The imaginative worlds of these environmental writings, along with the creative edges of environmental organizing strategies, I suggest, can provide a productive space within which to start rethinking our politics from the bottom up, where we find an unsteady foundation now understood as a complex set of shifting, agentic, nature-culture assemblages. This is also why the book’s title, *Material Insurgency*, operates on two unique but related registers.⁸ First, the new materialisms and posthuman critical theory have become simultaneously productive and disruptive forces, and it is this theoretical insurgency that animates this project’s approach to environmental literature and politics. And, second, these postanthropocentric theories compel us to think in new ways about an environmental politics capable of effective social movement organizing, while operating within the context of material and distributed, rather than exclusively human-centered, agency. This twofold concept of material insurgency is then understood as a problematic to be explored throughout the book, rather than a prescriptive theory, in part because it implies that the posthuman subject is not automatically a more ecological one; and, even more so, because distributed agency itself resists certainty and closure. While many approaches to this problem will be necessary, this project turns predominantly, though not exclusively, to the speculative narratives of various genres of environmental literature with clear but hopeful eyes.

The opening chapter, intending to track the ways dominant and emerging trends in the climate change movement currently script political subjectivity and agency, focuses upon contemporary environmental political theory and a recent prominent environmental campaign, the move-

ment to halt the construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline. Examining the relation between the U.S. State and the fossil fuel industry through the lens of political theorist Timothy Mitchell's concept "Carbon Democracy," this chapter explores the existing power dynamics between the State and climate activists. Rather than offer an exhaustive review, I use this first chapter to introduce and press questions (that are then explored further in the literary texts in later chapters) regarding how comprehending agency as distributed across the human and nonhuman might (productively) complicate environmental activists' sense of their campaign's strategy and goals. Intriguingly, it becomes clear many environmental organizations are reluctant to admit to the limitations of human-directed action to mitigate climate change, and I argue this reticence is based upon a fear of creating a public resigned to environmental catastrophe (rather than motivated to "act" to stop it). This concern over fatalism, I contend, brings into sharp relief the challenge posed by thinking environmental politics as "distributed" in a postnatural and posthuman age. Therefore, we are left with a question that is taken up, in different ways and to different ends, in each of the following chapters: that is, What might it mean to *know*, to *care*, and to *act* in environmentally responsible ways within a world where humans are no longer understood to be the sole or privileged agents of historical change?

Chapter 2 focuses upon Henry David Thoreau, the icon of U.S. environmental literature and thought, to suggest Thoreau's work may offer insights into contemporary debates within environmental theory, specifically regarding knowledge formation practices and agency. Turning predominantly to a few key scenes in *Walden*, I examine the complexities of his approach to relational knowledge formation processes, hybrid-objects, and liminal spaces. Building upon the groundbreaking Thoreau scholarship of Laura Dassow Walls, I suggest that her explication of Thoreau's knowledge formation process, one more attentive to embodiment and positionality than traditional empiricism, might serve as an integral building block in the development of a distributed environmental politics. Thoreau's approach to "relational knowing," as Walls categorizes it, begins a through line in this book in which his theories of knowledge formation practices and agency intersect with contemporary posthumanist concerns of materiality and distributed agency. One goal of this book is to explore the resonance between Thoreau's sense of agency and knowledge formation and more contemporary posthuman (and new materialist) theories of subjectivity and ways of knowing, and therefore the readings

in this second chapter echo through the following chapters in what I hope are increasingly evocative ways.

Chapters 3 and 4 both draw our attention to texts of environmental justice fiction in order to more fully explore the relationship between postanthropocentric agency, social movement organizing, and nonlinear conceptions of temporality. The chapters together explore whether Karen Tei Yamashita's and Leslie Marmon Silko's representations of distributed agency and radical social movement organizing—in which the traditional human political act is reconfigured as contingent, limited, co-produced, or is even altogether absent—might offer eco-critical scholars an evaluative measure for rethinking political efficacy. My readings of *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* and *Almanac of the Dead* bring into relief a similar preoccupation in each novel; that is, how to represent an effective political resistance to transnational global capitalism within the context of a world unfolding through distributed agency. In chapter 3 specifically, I explore how *Through the Arc's* narrative is driven by distributed agency to fascinating affect, however, my reading suggests that the novel's problematic grasping for narrative closure foregrounds the difficulty of imagining political change without a traditional human activist-subject. By drawing attention to the novel's ambivalence regarding the decentralization of the human subject, my analysis raises important questions that scholars and activists will have to address to better formulate distributed agency's potential for a positive impact upon contemporary sociopolitical organizing. Next, chapter 4 explores *Almanac's* integrated depiction of distributed agency and nonlinear temporality in order to narrate a revolutionary politics of decolonization and environmental justice, via an overlapping set of *material temporalities*. The novel effectively evades the strictures of narrative closure altogether and, as a result, expands our awareness of distributed agency's deep impacts upon progressive politics. Exactly because the question of revolutionary transformation in Silko's novel is left at once incomplete and open-ended, it lingers as an inchoate yet ever-present possibility in the reader's mind. A spatial and nonlinear approach to temporality in this novel depicts the revolutionary moment as, though possibly not quite here, also somehow ever-present, ultimately advocating for a patience that is not passive and a progressive politics that is not Progress.

Chapter 5 advances critical readings of two recent and popular novels which fall within the new genre of climate change fiction: Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow* and Chang-Rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea*.

Both novels present intriguing and complex representations of what I choose to term *disintentional politics*, from the perspective of two very different subjectivities. My reading of *Odds Against Tomorrow* interrogates its depiction of the newly decentered human subject and how they might react to the sudden realization that while human agency is partly (and consequentially) responsible for climate change, it is also limited in its ability to control or manage the resulting weather-related events and their socioeconomic impact. That is, after Mitchell Zukor, a privileged yet troubled math “quant” on Wall Street, has his assumptions of human exceptionalism disrupted by the flooding of New York City, he does not easily transition into an ideal environmentally conscious member of a broader ecological system. Instead, Mitchell is deeply disturbed and unsettled through his discovery of the myriad inadequacies contained within humanist promises of the rational and autonomous self, and this leads to a crisis of subjectivity with, at best, ambiguous results. The chapter then turns to a selective reading of Lee’s *On Such a Full Sea* with an eye toward the narrative’s construction of a (partial) political imaginary and its limitations. This is a politics of materiality that, I suggest, begins with the premise that each individual exists in physical relation to a larger ecology; an ecology that should be understood to include the social, institutional, and nonhuman environment. Neither text, in the midst of their extended representations of disanthropocentric political subjectivities, is quite able to produce a coherent version of futurity. And thus, my readings examine how the social, economic, and political disruptions of climate change call upon a type of political agency and efficacy that is difficult to imagine from our contemporary humanist viewpoint. Carving out a liminal space between the binary construction of intentional and unintentional acts, this chapter explores what it might mean to organize without a rational and intentional goal, to work within a type of disintentional politics.

The sixth, and final, chapter engages Kim Stanley Robinson’s near-future science fictional depiction of climate change in his *Science in the Capital* trilogy. The examinations of contemporary political campaigns, environmental nonfiction and environmental justice, and climate fiction in earlier chapters set up this chapter’s closing engagement with distributed agency and its political potential. As the character Frank Vanderwal, who works in the National Science Foundation (NSF) in Washington, D.C., develops what he terms a “passionate science,” he draws from Thoreau in an attempt to transform the National Science Foundation’s approach to climate change by promoting a situated, subjective, and materialist approach

to the technological interventions necessary to address an abrupt climate change event. Thoreau's appearance in this work of speculative climate fiction might surprise many scholars steeped in postmodern skepticism of Thoreau as the poster child for American Romanticism; however, his deceptively complex approach to inhabiting and knowing the nonhuman world—as explored in chapter 1—provocatively informs this main plotline in Robinson's trilogy. This narrative ultimately conjures a near future that outstrips traditional humanist binaries in intriguing ways. As a result, this final chapter allows for a more complete examination of the interconnections between knowledge formation practices, distributed agency, and nonlinear temporality that previous chapters have only partially, but hopefully provocatively, explored. My reading of Robinson's speculative fiction posits that, as sociopolitical strategy takes the decentered human subject and embodied forms of knowledge formation more fundamentally into account, scholars and activists committed to justice-oriented social movement organizing will be tasked with learning to critically inhabit a present moment—to some degree always an *unknowable now*—that anticipates an uncertain, rather than promissory, future.