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"We Were Paralysed": Ecological Grief, the Everyday Anthropocene, and Climate Crisis Ordinariness in *The High House*

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ABSTRACT

Despite arguments to the contrary, this article contends that climate realism both is and is yet to become a useful and valuable genre for aestheticising an environmentally threatened and threatening present. It conceptualises Jessie Greengrass's *The High House* as a contemporary novel that mobilises climate realism through the "everyday Anthropocene" paradigm to convey the affective experience of living through and with climate crisis for a Western Global North populace. This affective climate is most typified by a paralysing ecological grief that implicates the novel's characters in wider political inertia. As such, I argue that *The High House* deploys climate realism to scrutinise the structures of feeling that directly or indirectly contribute to this inertia, intimating that a living with and through climate crisis – what can, after Lauren Berlant, be called climate crisis ordinariness – might in effect equate to political quiescence if not indirect complicity in ecocide.

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In the past decade, much has been said about the promise and pitfalls of climate realism. Without doubt the most-cited criticism of literary realism in a climate changed and changing present belongs to Amitav Ghosh, who has somewhat notoriously dismissed both the generic capacity of literary realism and the formal capacity of the realist novel to reflect and represent climate crisis.[1] Though well-rehearsed, Ghosh's argument is pertinent to this article's exploration of climate realism, and is therefore worth briefly summarising. The nineteenth-century realist novel, he contends, contributed to the regularisation and normative organisation of social, economic, political, and cultural life, thereby participating in the wider ideological project of post-Enlightenment modernity. This was achieved through a gradualist narrative temporality that backgrounded improbable and unlikely events, instead privileging (and foregrounding) the unexceptional, everyday, and even mundane phenomena that came to be synonymous with European literary realism. In this narrative

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[1]Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*. "Climate crisis" is used throughout this article as metonymic of wider phenomena of environmental breakdown. Climate crisis is, of course, not the only example of this collapse, but it is the most widely recognised and discussed, and is therefore perhaps the most appropriate (though nonetheless flawed) moniker.

schema, disruptive, catastrophic, and disastrous events – like, say, floods, fires, or droughts – were banished to the pages of fantastical, fabulist genres such as the gothic, romance, melodrama, horror, and science fiction.[2] It is for this reason, then, that Ghosh contends both literary realism and the realist novel are ill-equipped to aestheticise the weird, strange, uncanny, and eerie phenomena of climate crisis.[3] In insisting on literary realism's representational and ideological limitations, Ghosh's analysis resonates with other scholarship on realism's shortfalls, which has tended to outline the degree to which the genre has always been materially, socially, and culturally embedded and situated, both enabled by and enforcer of humanist norms that have legitimated and sustained social, political, and environmental violence.[4]

Ghosh's thesis does have some critical acuity; it is certainly possible to argue that realism has been critical in reifying particular (privileged) populations' "real", a social and political legibility that is typically stratified along axes including race, class, gender, ethnicity, ability, and sexuality. From an ecocritical perspective, then, it is certainly possible to argue that realism has legitimated and naturalised ecocidal regimes. In acknowledging these contentions as appropriate criticisms of the genre, it would be easy to adopt and advance Ghosh's thesis, insisting that literary realism (and by extension the realist novel) are unfit for purpose in an era of intensifying climate crisis. This article does not do so. In fact, it contends that realism and the realist novel are both valuable and useful at this time of increasingly threatened and threatening environmental collapse. To be clear, my position is not one that advocates an instrumentalised realism for use as a didactic or polemic tool, a tendency that both Dana Phillips and Nancy Easterlin have identified as typical of Anglo-American ecocriticism and environmental writing.[5] Rather, this article will contend that Jessie Greengrass's novel *The High House* (2021) mobilises climate realism through the "everyday Anthropocene" paradigm to convey the affective experience of living with and through climate crisis for a privileged Western, Global North populace.[6] The characters in *The High House* live with and through this crisis in various states and scales of felt implication that materialises as an ecological grief which curdles, at times, into depression. Ultimately, this article argues that *The High House* deploys climate realism to explore how these characters directly and indirectly enable (or, are implicated in) continuing climate crisis.[7] For, though cognisant of planetary environmental transformation and ensuing loss, these characters remain trapped in an affective impasse that extends to political inertia. I subsequently assert that Greengrass's novel scrutinises the structures of feeling that contribute to this political inertia, intimating that a living with and through climate crisis – what might, after Lauren Berlant, be called climate crisis ordinariness – may in effect equate to political quiescence if not indirect complicity in ecocide.[8]

[2]Ghosh, 16–20.
[3]Ibid., 23–24.
[4]Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*; White, *Ecospectrality*; Ganguly, "Catastrophic Form and Planetary Realism".
[5]Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*; Easterlin, *A Biocultural Approach to Literary Theory and Interpretation*. There is no scope here to detail the history of literary realism; readers looking for this analysis can turn to John Thieme, *Anthropocene realism*.
[6]Greengrass, *The High House*; LeMenager, "Climate Change and the Struggle for Genre".
[7]Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject*.
[8]Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*. I am wary of reproducing the Global North and Anglo-American bias in environmental humanities scholarship in this article. However, there is an increasingly urgent need to interrogate how Global North and Anglo-American publics participate (intentionally or otherwise) in the political inertia that is enabling rapidly

Climate Realism and the Everyday Anthropocene

Underlying Ghosh's scepticism about the capacity of either realism or the realist novel is a critical (epistemological and ontological, social and ideological) tussle over what constitutes a contemporary "real", given the almost daily reconfiguration of that "real" by disparate environmental phenomena. Put plainly, he doubts whether there can even *be* a contemporary climate realism and/or climate realist novel. There are, however, key problems with his thesis, which I am by no means the first to outline. John Thieme, for one, has contested Ghosh's claim that nineteenth-century literary realism concealed the unlikely and improbable.[9] To Ghosh's assertion that the inclusion of environmental phenomena in a novel resulted in its banishment to the "generic outhouses" of fabulist and fantastical modes of representation, Lynn Badia, Marija Cetinić and Jeff Diamanti retort that "climate realism always already abandons the mansion of realism and takes flight on the lifeboats of 'those generic outhouses' of literary history", because the genre is "always already gothic, romance, melodrama, fantasy, horror, weird, or science fiction".[10] Or, put more pithily, "the mansion is already under water".[11] In other words, what might be conceptualised as climate (or Anthropocene) realism is necessarily adapting, evolving, and innovating into a cultural mode that contains and collides generic templates.[12] For, as Badia and her co-authors would have it, "[t]he world changes, our science changes, and so do our cultural and aesthetic modes of detailing that world in the manner of any realism".[13]

The highly contingent and emergent coordinates of that realism makes defining and describing the genre something of a Sisyphean task, demanding both a critical agility and humility that acknowledges its iterative nature. At the least, however, it seems reasonable to assume that climate realism "will be more than a little strange because it moves beyond the presuppositions that have shaped its foundation".[14] These estrangements are many. Besides the incorporation of what were once mere "generic outhouses" into the mansion of so-called serious fiction, they include a reformulation of humanist realism's ontological foundations to reflect the enmeshment of the human and nonhuman; the narrative inversion of background into foreground; the expansion of temporality beyond the linear or teleological; a dethronement of the once omniscient and transcendent (human) subject; and recognition of the genre as "a consciously acknowledged political and aesthetic *position* from which to build a framework for knowledge and action", rather than "a framework grounded in reference to claims of objectivity or representational accuracy".[15] In other words, adding "climate" to "realism" necessitates expanding the genre's epistemological and ontological foundations, and troubling its anthropocentric

accelerating climate crisis. Doing so requires looking at the specific cultural ecologies in which those publics are immersed in order to scrutinise the relationship between these ecologies and that inertia.

[9]Thieme, *Anthropocene realism*, 7.

[10]Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*, 40–41; Badia, Cetinić, and Diamanti, "Climate Realism," 8. Ironically, Ghosh here participates in the very same discursive trivialisation and exile of non-realist genres that he seeks to critique, a contradictory – though likely unwitting – rhetorical move.

[11]Badia, Cetinić, and Diamanti, "Climate Realism," 8.

[12]Thieme, *Anthropocene realism*; Johns-Putra, "Climate and History in the Anthropocene: Realist Narrative and the Framing of Time". Although "Anthropocene realism" is my preferred moniker for this emerging genre, "climate realism" is used here to reflect its wider critical circulation.

[13]Badia, Cetinić, and Diamanti, "Introduction," 6.

[14]Ibid., 5.

[15]Badia, Cetinić, and Diamanti, "Climate Realism," 4.

and aesthetic boundaries and organising structures. Strangely, however, although time, scale, and the novel itself have all been vectors by which a critical analysis of climate realism has begun to be articulated, there has been little thus far said about the structures of feeling (or, affects) that currently typify or coalesce around the genre.[16] This is odd because, as Berlant has outlined, the present – which is to say, realism's principle temporal domain – is "perceived, first, affectively".[17]

For Berlant, the "main genre for tracking the sense of the present is the "impasse"", and more specifically, an "impasse induced by crisis".[18] That crisis, they continue, is "a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what's overwhelming", a contention that led Berlant to the much repeated conceptual paradigm of "crisis ordinariness".[19] As such, the best way to "take the measure of the impasse of the present" – thereby (hopefully) "produc[ing] some better ways of mediating the sense of a historical moment that is affectively felt but undefined in the social world" – is, they posit, through a renewed attention to the ordinary and everyday.[20] Since Berlant first hypothesised this, there has been a noticeable shift in critical focus towards the everyday as a vector by which to trace the affective contours of an ever-emerging climate crisis present.[21] Adrienne Ghaly, for one, has described the articulation of a "felt everyday" – what she elsewhere calls the ""what it is like"" – as an emergent literary strategy that responds to the everyday's dissolution and re-composition by climate crisis through an emphasis on the co-constitution of "the ordinary and mundane" with "the extraordinary, the horrific".[22] Indeed, so noticeable is this turn towards "a felt "everyday"" that Ghaly identifies it as indicative of "the broader phenomenological turn in literary studies".[23] It is curious, then, that although this "felt [environmental] everyday" has been increasingly taken up by ecocritics, few (if any) have examined its relationship to climate realism. This article does so, specifically arguing that LeMenager's everyday Anthropocene is a particularly key paradigm for the expression of climate realism.[24]

For LeMenager, the everyday "implies getting by, living alongside the world, living through it"; as a critical framework, then, the everyday Anthropocene "names [a] correction to contemporary epochal discourse that capitalises on the charisma of crisis".[25] When "[f]aced with an everyday in which the habit of living alongside the world crumbles under pressure from material impingements", LeMenager writes that the everyday Anthropocene attends to "the present tense, lived time of the Anthropocene", by which she means the granular and perhaps mundane reality of "what it means to live,

[16]Thieme, *Anthropocene realism*; Woods, "Scales: Climate versus Embodiment"; Johns-Putra, "Climate and History in the Anthropocene: Realist Narrative and the Framing of Time"; Ganguly, "Catastrophic Form and Planetary Realism."
[17]Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 4.
[18]Berlant, 10, 4.
[19]Ibid., 10.
[20]Ibid., 263. Berlant repeats this assertion in later co-authored work with Kathleen Stewart (2019), a project that itself began in 2007 via the more informal blog *Supervalent Thought*.
[21]This is not without controversy – Min Hyoung Song, for one, has discussed how one audience member of a talk given on his recent book *Climate Lyricism* challenged him about the potential myopia of this strategy and its political implications. Song, "On Being Stuck at Customs." Yet, to paraphrase Berlant, discussions about the present are necessarily always political. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*; Song, *Climate Lyricism*.
[22]Ghaly, "What Does Biodiversity Loss Feel Like?" 33, 42.
[23]Ibid., 33.
[24]LeMenager, "Climate Change and the Struggle for Genre."
[25]Ibid., 221, 224.

day by day, through [...] enduring crises that never quite come to a head".[26] Equally important to LeMenager's concept is her insistence that the everyday Anthropocene is best expressed in the "novelistic mode", an observation that accords with the work of Adeline Johns-Putra, Debjani Ganguly, and Derek Woods, all of whom emphasise the long-established relationship between the novel and realism.[27] As such, "[t]he project of the Anthropocene novel [...] is at best a project of paying close attention to what it means to live through climate shift, moment by moment, in individual, fragile bodies", and is therefore a literary practice that counters the amnesiac displacement and abstract futurism of epochal discourse, which is inherently "not attentive to the wearing away of bodies, their slow depletion" in the present.[28] In thus "reinventing the everyday as a means of paying attention", LeMenager contends that the labour of the everyday Anthropocene novel is that of imagining and participating in "a project of staying home and, in a sense distant from settler-colonialist mentalities, *making* home of a broken world".[29] In other words, the everyday Anthropocene is a paradigmatic example of the embryonic ecocritical endeavour to trace the affective dynamics of *climate* crisis ordinariness.[30]

So far, then, this article has charted the (ongoing) development and emergence of climate realism. It has argued that the proliferating pressures of climate crisis are forcing the genre to reformulate in order to reflect an increasingly precarious extratextual "reality", a re-composition that has also required the genre to self-reflexively confront its representational limitations and ideological myopia. Following Berlant, it has suggested that affect may be the most appropriate critical tool by which to (begin to) comprehend the always-unfolding, "stretched-out present" – a present that, for populations in the Western Global North, is currently stuck in the impasse of climate crisis ordinariness.[31] In speculating that moving through and beyond this impasse is best achieved through a renewed attention on the everyday, I have suggested that a climate realist literary practice which (re)focusses on the felt everyday might be the most effective strategy by which to trace the affective contours of an emergent climate crisis present. Far from either a pastiche or product of neoliberalism's individualist ideology, this emphasis on the everyday is, as Berlant writes, critical to move beyond the inertia or malaise of crisis-induced impasse: "[w]e understand nothing about impasses of the political without having an account of the production of the present".[32] LeMenager's everyday Anthropocene has been introduced as paradigmatic of climate realism, as well as a foundational example of the literary turn towards the "felt everyday" that is, as LeMenager herself specifies, an affect and narrative practice best mobilised and conveyed through the novel.[33] This article's remaining task, then, is to demonstrate how the everyday Anthropocene novel

[26]Ibid., 221, 224.
[27]Ibid., 223; Johns-Putra, "Climate and History in the Anthropocene: Realist Narrative and the Framing of Time"; Ganguly, "Catastrophic Form and Planetary Realism"; Woods, "Scales: Climate versus Embodiment."
[28]Ibid., 224.
[29]Ibid., 225–226.
[30]Thus far, Dana Luciano is the only other academic who has adapted Berlant"s oft-repeated phrase to include "climate" (her analysis pertains to Jenny Offill"s novel *Weather*).
[31]Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 5.
[32]Ibid., 4.
[33]LeMenager, "Climate Change and the Struggle for Genre"; Ghaly, "What Does Biodiversity Loss Feel Like?"

– a category to which this article contends that *The High House* belongs – conveys the affective experience of living through and with climate crisis ordinariness.[34]

"Loss was familiar to us": Climate Crisis Ordinariness in *The High House*

Composed of six sections of irregular length, *The High House* has a multi-narratorial perspective that oscillates between the three central figures of Caro, Sally, and Pauly. Caro and Pauly are stepsiblings who share the same father; their parents own the eponymous high house. Sally is raised by her grandfather Grandy – a character who is as vital to the novel as the younger three, but never given first-person perspective – in the same village as that house. Safe in this domestic haven, *The High House* foregrounds the co-existence and survival of this multi-generational, non-biological family unit against the background of a British coastline that rapidly becomes more vulnerable to sea level rise as the novel develops, and explores the many losses – geographic, personal, cultural – that inevitably ensue. Whilst the novel remains unspecific about the house's exact location, geographical cues suggest that it may be in East Anglia, an English county that Sam Solnick has noted for its frequent appearance in Anthropocene fiction as the synecdochic embodiment of the "United Kingdom's shoreline vulnerabilities".[35] The significance of the British coastline – its oft-overlooked but undeniably agential role in the formation and function of an island nation – was of vital importance to *The High House*'s composition: in an interview with UCL's Anthropocene Studies Network at the Institute of Advanced Studies, Greengrass emphasised that she wrote the novel with the explicit intention of reflecting on the United Kingdom's intensifying coastal precarity and increasingly forgotten relationship with the sea.[36] *The High House* thus acknowledges and reflects on nonhuman vitality, most particularly in the characters' chronicling of the ever-worsening floods experienced in the village where the house is located, as well as across the United Kingdom and the planet more widely. The novel is therefore identifiable as what Astrid Bracke calls a "flood fiction", a narrative framework that she describes as "stretch[ing] backwards in time to ancient flood myths lodged in many cultures' collective memory, and forwards by prefiguring the face of climate change in the near future".[37] In other words, the expansive temporality of the flood as both a literary motif and ecological symptom of climate crisis activates a temporal grammar that foregrounds the compression and striation of the present by both past and future simultaneously – a strategy that is further intensified through use of the "future anterior".

For Rick Crownshaw, the future anterior enables "the dramatization of that which will have been", thereby giving "narrative presence to that which is subject to cognitive dissonance if not disavowal in the present".[38] The use of the future anterior in speculative fiction, dystopian, and post-catastrophe narratives is by now well established, but the

[34]The use of all these prepositions is deliberate, as each have different implications. With that said, I borrow from both Blanche Verlie"s assertion that "climate is living-with," *Learning to Live with Climate Change,* 1, as well as Berlant"s discussion of "the relation of living on to ongoing crisis and loss," *Cruel Optimism*, 5.
[35]Solnick, "Critical Climate Irrealism," 304.
[36]Greengrass, "Between Two Futures": Jessie Greengrass on Literature in the Anthropocene" (paper presented at the UCL Anthropocene and IAS Writers of the Anthropocene Series, London, UK, June 7 2022).
[37]Bracke, "The Novel," 91.
[38]Rick Crownshaw, "Climate Change Fiction and the Future of Memory," 128, 129.

device is increasingly used in novels like *The High House* that heed, instead, the contemporaneous slow violence of living day-to-day with climate collapse, even as they may simultaneously "project future climate-changed worlds from which retrospection on and cultural remembrance of the changing climate and its causes is staged".[39] Indeed, Bracke goes so far as to identify the future anterior as a ""stock feature" of many climate fictions", because "[t]hinking about the effects of climate change requires us to imagine a time in which our future has become the past".[40] In deploying the future anterior as the predominant temporal framework for at least the first two sections of the novel, Greengrass can narrate the characters' pre-history, thereby staging a cultural remembrance – to borrow Craps and Crownshaw's phrase – that swerves the tendency of an Anthropocene discourse and rhetoric that has typically deferred and displaced the worst of the climate crisis onto non-UK geographies and populations.[41] In other words, as an everyday Anthropocene novel written about and (arguably) for the United Kingdom and its populace, *The High House* brings the Anthropocene home (so to speak). Indeed, the eerie prescience of the novel's "anticipatory history" – to use Caitlin DeSilvey's useful phrase – resides specifically in that history's uncanny resemblance to the contemporary reader's present.[42]

Though none of the characters in *The High House* ever specify the exact date of novelistic events, temporal cues in the novel's first and second sections – a collection of the now-no-longer-teenage Caro and Sally's memories that recall and describe the novel's pre-history – is understood by the contemporary reader to be her present. Consider, for example, the following passage, narrated from Sally's perspective:

> Late at night, scrolling through news sites, I read about those things which were beginning to happen elsewhere. That winter, in the southern hemisphere, a forest fire encroached on a city and whole suburbs were burned to the ground. I watched people running from their houses. [...] I watched them line up on a beach, everything behind them burning, and wait to be rescued. They got into the sea and stood, waist-deep in water, waiting, because there was nowhere left for them to run.
>
> [...]
>
> After that, I watched an earthquake, and then it was an outbreak of cholera, a flood, a drought. Each time the questions were the same[, ...] and the last thing was forgotten by all except those who, presumably, still lived inside of it. To watch became a hobby or a habit, and I thought I was better for it, because at least I knew what was going on – but what difference did my knowledge make? Outside, in the garden, things went on. The owls hooted. A fox barked. In the morning, I ate my porridge and got dressed for school.[43]

The crisis "in the southern hemisphere" that Sally here narrates is unmistakably the January 2020 Australian bushfires, which forced residents from their homes and into the sea, and is just one of the many cues in the novel's earliest sections that pinpoint the characters' pasts as the contemporary reader's near-present. The tension of this passage – its complex oscillation of felt responsibility and helplessness set against the

[39]Craps and Crownshaw, "Introduction," 5.
[40]Bracke, "The Novel," 92.
[41]LeMenager, "Climate Change and the Struggle for Genre."
[42]DeSilvey, "Making Sense of Transience."
[43]Greengrass, *The High House*, 80–81.

incongruence of knowledge and action – is the discomfiting affective atmosphere that permeates *The High House*, metonymically conjuring and conveying the precise dilemma faced by Global North publics who are not (quite yet) experiencing the worst impacts of climate collapse.

Despite the matter-of-fact tone of her recollection and its frank recognition that consuming reportage of these compounding crises "became a hobby or a habit", Sally refuses to abdicate her own complicity in the process of disavowal and distancing. The above-quoted memory is immediately followed by her admission that, "[w]e were no better than anyone else, Grandy and I. We noticed the changes, but we dismissed them, or said that they were only a part of the inevitable[. ...] Loss was familiar to us".[44] The "we" to which Sally here refers is ostensibly herself and her grandfather, but it is a sly use of a collective pronoun that implicates both the reader and wider (geographic, ethnic, and class-bound) publics who recognise themselves in the characters' casual dismissal of such chronic but commonplace ecological loss. Caro is similarly cognisant of her own evasion and avoidance, which she parallels with the fury of Francesca. Both stepmother to Caro and biological mother to Pauly, climate scientist and activist Francesca refuses to relinquish her feelings of anger about and responsibility for climate collapse. During one of the many hot summers of Caro's teenage years, Francesca asks:

> – How can they stand to enjoy it, this weather?
>
> She didn't have the habit that the rest of us were learning of having our minds in two places at once, of seeing two futures – that ordinary one of summer holidays and new school terms, of Christmases and birthdays and bank accounts in an endless, uneventful round, and the other one, the long and empty one we spoke about in hypotheticals, or didn't speak about at all.
>
> – They act as though it's a myth to frighten them,
>
> Francesca said,
>
> – instead of the imminently coming end of our fucking planet,
>
> and I knew that when she said "they", she meant father, too, and me.[45]

In characterising the dissociation of both Caro and Sally (in the quotation above) as a "habit", Greengrass here intimates the individual and cultural forgetfulness circulated and naturalised by amnesiac habitual behavioural practices, once again using collective pronouns – the "they" at whom Francesca rages – to meta-linguistically reflect on the agential and affective positions of both reader and character(s).[46]

Recalling and recording the affective climate of "a contemporary moment from within that moment" is not without its challenges.[47] As Caro comments: "[i]t is so hard to remember now, what it felt like to live in that space between two futures, fitting our whole lives into the gap between fear and certainty".[48] Beyond the inherent difficulties

[44]Ibid., 81.
[45]Ibid., 11.
[46]LeMenager, "Climate Change and the Struggle for Genre."
[47]Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 4.
[48]Greengrass, *The High House*, 19.

of articulating the sensorial, remembering and recording "what it felt like" is made the more difficult for Caro's sense of the present as simultaneously coming-into-being and arrested: "[w]e were paralysed, unable to plan either for a future in which all was well, or one in which it wasn't".[49] Writing on just such moments of arrest, Kathleen Stewart – herself a long-time collaborator with Berlant – notes:

> A space opens up in the ordinary [...] animated by the sense that something is coming into existence. The subject is called to a state of attention that is also an impassivity – a watching and waiting, a living through.[50]

Although she is not discussing eco-fiction here, Stewart's description of the present as fissured by a "watching and waiting" that is also, inevitably, "a living through" is eerily prescient to Caro's memories. As the character recalls: "[t]hat was how it felt [...]: that there was something always waiting, just beyond the edge of vision, to terrify or to reproach".[51] Trapped in this looping state of apprehension and frustration, Caro – here emblematising the Western Anthropocene subject – finds herself both within and without crisis, "troubled by the world's potential for event".[52]

In chronicling the minute-by-minute experience of the everyday Anthropocene – or, the climate crisis ordinary – *The High House* alludes to the insidious and oft-invisible ecocidal dynamics that have always upheld that very same everyday. Put otherwise, by gesturing to the latent violence of a class – and race-bound status quo and establishing the temporal dislocation of the climate crisis present, it intimates the narcissistic anxiety that underwrites the West's obsession with its own survival – an anxiety made most manifest through the genre of apocalypse and post-apocalypse.[53] As the likes of Jennifer Wenzel has observed, (post)apocalyptic genres – or, "end of the world" narratives – instrumentalise a static teleology that constructs the future ("the end") as foreknown and foreclosed.[54] Yet, as climate crisis quite literally materialises, these narrative structures and generic frameworks cannot accommodate ongoing catastrophes, which are distributed in space and time, disrupt causality, and enact accretive, cumulative, often slow violence.[55] Or, put differently, they can neither represent nor reflect climate crisis ordinariness – with dangerous consequences. The affective experience of a foregone future is, as Timothy Clark makes clear, intensely disturbing, potentially even producing "a fatalistic sense of a zombification of human life".[56] In other words, these predominantly white fabulations of strangled futures can circulate and legitimate the politics and affective phenomena of climate doom – and defeatism, which in turn erases the lived reality of diverse Indigenous and marginalised populations who have repeatedly experienced the world-ending violence of settler colonialism and extractive capitalism.[57]

[49]Ibid., 39.
[50]Stewart, "Pockets," 365.
[51]Greengrass, *The High House*, 35.
[52]Stewart, "Pockets," 367.
[53]LeMenager, "The humanities after the Anthropocene."
[54]Wenzel, *The Disposition of Nature*.
[55]Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*.
[56]Clark, "Ecological Grief and Anthropocene Horror," 68.
[57]Whyte, "Indigenous Climate Change Studies"; Mitchell and Chaudhury, "Worlding beyond "the" "End" of "the World; Verlie, *Learning to Live with Climate Change*.

The High House reflects on the inadequacies of such "end of the world" narrative templates.[58] As Sally despairs, "[p]eople have nothing already. People are dying already. How can a threat to you be an apocalypse when the rest of the world is drowning and it's only a fucking preamble?".[59] Meanwhile, as the principal figure and carrier of intergenerational memory, the character Grandy particularly concentrates *The High House*'s exploration of world endings: "I am an old man, and I have seen worlds end myself. I have seen the end of this village, for a start".[60] Opposing Sally's gloomy assertion that "this time there will be no afterwards", he states that:

> there'll be something left. A ruined living, maybe, and a hard world, but hasn't it always been that way for most? All I can think is that what's different now is that no one can claim this is progress.[61]

Although Grandy might not describe the failing master narrative of progress as indicative of the increasingly unfit ideologies of colonial capitalism, this reflection nonetheless implicitly indicts the structures (social and ideological, formal and generic) inherent to and naturalised by the same. Caro, too, reflects on an unrealisable "end": in recalling a fleeting moment of release in her stepmother's fury, she describes Francesca as briefly "look[ing] neither fierce nor righteous but only rather sad – as though she could see already how far she had failed, and wished only that the end would come, and let us all out".[62] By here characterising "the end" as agential – it must "let" the characters "out" of their story – Greengrass uses this moment of generic self-reflexivity to make Francesca's impossible but yearned-for relief all the more palpable, imbuing her fleeting moment of exhaustion with real pathos. Similarly, Sally, Caro, and Pauly's stories remain unresolved at the novel's close: as Caro states in one of her last observations, "[a] world has ended, but we have not".[63] *The High House* thus engages with the challenge of representing such crises, ultimately reflecting that:

> there is never an apocalypse, only the impending possibility of one. In reality, we are living in the liminal spaces between events that often feel like potential ends of the world.[64]

Living through and with climate crisis is both extraordinary and ordinary at once: "the end of the world keeps on keeping on".[65] For an increasingly diminishing Western populace, it means both inhabiting and witnessing the potential ends of worlds, and attending to the minutiae of domesticity. In other words, it involves a collision of scale.

Scales of Implication: Anthropocene Horror and Ecological Grief

The tussle between irreconcilable scales of crisis is fundamental to *The High House*, with the disastrous and catastrophic always co-terminus with the banal and mundane.[66]

[58] In her UCL talk, Greengrass noted that she is an ardent consumer of post-apocalyptic novels, but also spoke about the inability of such texts to capture the incremental crises of climate collapse. The novel"s critique of "end of the world" narratives is also concentrated in the figure of the child, which represents and actualises the beginning of new worlds.
[59] Greengrass, *The High House*, 107.
[60] Ibid., 118.
[61] Ibid., 119.
[62] Ibid., 31.
[63] Ibid., 250.
[64] Wright, "Cli-Fi: Environmental Literature for the Anthropocene," 114.
[65] Luciano, "Of Course, the World Continues to End."
[66] This chapter"s previous discussion of the future anterior is, of course, also a discussion of *temporal* scale (the co-habitation of the past and future in the present); this section considers scale along a spatial axis.

Despite the worsening climate in the novel's earliest sections, Caro and Sally continue going to school; Francesca persists with her activism and academic work, but also participates in family life. In the novel, the oscillation of these irreducible and irresolvable scales is characteristic of and endemic to the experience of living in a climate changing world.[67] For Clark, the affective experience of such scalar dislocation is best conceptualised as "Anthropocene horror", which he states "is being lived [in the Global North] as a pervasive affect in daily life, not as an easily compartmentalized emotion".[68] The diffuse nature of Anthropocene horror is, he writes, the affect's most harmful quality, frequently leading to apathy, paralysis, or denial in the affected subject, who has likely "lived for so long with variously frightening possible futures" that images of environmental collapse produce "an insidious sense of *déjà vu* and the inevitable" which in turn produces "a form of denial".[69] Ominous though this observation may be, it nonetheless seems to accurately reflect Caro and Sally's individual and cultural experience of the climate crisis ordinary present, which is dominated by an affective climate where emotions like shame, guilt, fear, anger, despair, and grief all coalesce. What Anthropocene horror perhaps most usefully captures and conveys, however, is the simultaneously felt and unfelt horror that comes with recognising the "scale effects" of one's actions – a horror that subsequently "inhabit[s], contaminate [s] and destabilize[s] the meaning of an individual action or object".[70] Anthropocene horror, in other words, names the affective experience (panic, fear, horror, paralysis) that comes from realising the vertiginous, inescapable "lack of proportionality" of one's actions.[71]

Clark is particularly critical of the affective denial or disavowal that Anthropocene horror may produce in the affected subject. Berlant, however, would likely take a more compassionate approach. In their essay on the genre flail, they write that where "crisis is ordinary, [...] we genre flail so that we don't fall through the cracks of heightened affective noise into despair, suicide, or psychosis".[72] Or, as they write in *Cruel Optimism*, "[i]n the impasse induced by crisis, being treads water; mainly, it does not drown".[73] In critical conversation with both José Estaban Muñoz and Lisa Duggan, Luciano also writes that both depressive or cynical affective positions can "also attune us to the grim realities that surround us", and are therefore "still ways of engaging the world, of living with its damage".[74] In other words, although Anthropocene horror is a flat affect – "both a feeling and the intimated sense that more ought to be felt" – it is nonetheless a *kind* of engagement by which to tread water and avoid descent into the very worst affective experiences (Berlant's despair, suicide, or psychosis).[75] In *The High House*'s earlier sections, Caro characterises this flat affective engagement as a kind of protective benevolence:

> There is a kind of organic mercy, grown deep inside us, which makes it so much easier to care about small, close things, else how could we live? As I grew up, crisis slid from distant threat to imminent probability and we tuned it out like static, we adjusted to each emergent

[67]In demonstrating how "these myriad scales are not contradictory but rather complementary and co-constitutional," the novel mobilises a transscalar literary practice. Ivry, *Transscalar Critique*, 25; Wenzel, *The Disposition of Nature*.
[68]Clark, "Ecological Grief and Anthropocene Horror," 62.
[69]Ibid., 73.
[70]Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, 142.
[71]Ibid., 147.
[72]Berlant, "Genre Flailing," 157.
[73]Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 10.
[74]Luciano, "Of Course, the World Continues to End"; Duggan and Muñoz, "Hope and Hopelessness."
[75]Clark, "Ecological Grief and Anthropocene Horror," 74.

> normality and we did what we had always done – the commutes and the holidays[. ...] We did these things not out of ignorance, nor through thoughtlessness, but only because there seemed nothing else to do – and we did them as well because they were a kind of fine-grained incantation, made in flesh and time. The unexalted, tedious familiarity of our daily lives would keep us safe, we thought, and even Francesca, who saw it all so clearly – even she who would not let herself be gulled by hope – stood by the open fridge at five o'clock in the afternoon and swore because there was nothing to give the baby for his tea.[76]

The tone of Caro's observation – and, indeed, the tone of *The High House* itself – is one of "great mercy" towards this tendency to "care [more] about small, close things". In her estimation, it is neither "ignorance" nor "thoughtlessness" that instructs such behaviour, but habit – here characterised in ritualistic language – and a belief in the safety of the "unexalted" and "tedious familiarity" of everyday life. The most telling clause in this passage, however, is also one of its shortest: "we thought". Speaking from the future, Caro may remember this period before wider environmental breakdown with great compassion, but she's still aware of how this habitual avoidance and misplaced belief in modernity's infrastructures have since failed on both a local and planetary scale. In other words, she is acknowledging – note the passage's repeated use of the collective "we" – her own complicity with and responsibility for future loss, violence, and death. For, as the passage continues:

> And all the while, outside, the thing that only [Francesca] could look at straight: the early springs and too-long summers, the sudden, unpredictable winters that came from nowhere and brought floods or ice or wind, or didn't come, so that there was only day after day of sticky dampness and the leaves rotting on the trees and the birds still singing in December, nesting, until the snow came at last and, having overlooked migration, they froze on the branches, and they died.[77]

As the phenological (seasonal) change of this passage conjures, there are very real ecological losses that come from affective dissociation and avoidance.

Ecological loss and grief – as a subject, theme, and experience – is central to *The High House*. For each character, that loss is distinct; where Grandy, Sally, and Caro bear witness to the slow, cumulative loss of the everyday, Pauly's character represents the anticipated losses of a potential future. Away at university, Sally receives letters from Grandy, which she notes as detailing his:

> [...] fear that all around him change was coming fast and unfettered, the seasons falling into one another, the delicate systems he had spent his life observing starting to unravel. *I walked along the dunes today,* he wrote, *and I see that in many places the grass is thin* [...] *The tides are getting higher. Since the new year I have waited for floods.* [...] *I saw a badger in the lane, a fine chap, but awake too early, I think.*[78]

It is changes to nonhuman bodies, spaces, and places that most instils Grandy's unease; phenological disruptions render environmental change and loss more tenable, as cycles are disrupted and feedback loops compound ecological consequences. Beyond the ecological losses, however, there is the no less significant loss of ordinary milieu: Sally in particular finds herself yearning "at times, for another kind of freedom – the kind which is

[76]Greengrass, *The High House*, 19–20.
[77]Greengrass, 20.
[78]Greengrass, *The High House*, 86–87.

convenience, the ability to live one's life, in part, unplanned".[79] Generational difference also results in a differentiated experience of loss for Grandy, Caro, Sally, and Pauly, for each has distinct reference points by which change and concurrent loss is noticed and chronicled. For Grandy, these begin with historical disruption to rural and coastal industry, changes which in turn shift the village's socio-economic make-up: farming and fishing families cannot compete with the demands and mechanisation of agriculture, and the local community is evacuated as properties are bought up for use as second homes. Concurrent to this social change is coastal erosion, which in turn subjects the village to increasingly severe flooding that further compounds the loss of industry. Pauly, meanwhile, experiences and characterises a further dynamic of *The High House*'s exploration of loss: he speaks to the reader from a future that has lost the references of that reader's present. When he tries to remember his mother, who has long since died in a hurricane alongside his father, Pauly states:

> It is possible that, if things were otherwise, then the fact that I have no memory of my mother would seem a greater loss – but, as it is, her absence is only a smaller part of the whole. I have forgotten an entire world.[80]

The simplicity of the last sentence is made more poignant for the mature tone that, despite his youth, he has both here and throughout his first-person passages. This tone suggests that, in forgetting and therefore losing "an entire world", the character has also lost something of the innocence and naivety of childhood. However, Pauly has neither the nostalgia nor yearning that Sally does: "I wish I could remember more. [... But t]hose things are gone, or they are ruined, and we can't rebuild them".[81] Undoubtedly, Pauly's frankness is only possible because, unlike Caro and Sally, he either cannot remember or did not experience the slow, creeping dissolution of that reality in the same way: his losses – and there are many – are absolute and concrete, disappeared from his memory and therefore beyond recall. By contrast, the girls can remember the small and slow but nonetheless significant losses and loss of their everyday reality. By now ensconced in the refuge of the house, Sally muses:

> Loss is such a private thing, and besides, our is so vast, so absolute, that it is hard to know what we could say, or, if we found a way to start, how we would ever stop – but to myself I make lists. I count the things that I miss, as I stand in the dull winter light, picking slugs off the cabbages: being warm in the winter; the clean feeling which comes from using soap. Butter. Coffee. Hot running water from the tap. The routine absence of hunger and worry. Not having to think about the constant eking out of resources. Lemons. Frozen pizza. Ice cubes. Grandy.[82]

The characters are surrounded – almost haunted – by "the silence of absence, the inaudible clanging of all we have lost".[83]

Although these losses are different, they all create a kind of ecological grief in the characters, who therefore experience both Anthropocene horror *and* ecological grief. It is therefore worth scrutinising Clark's distinction of these two affects. For Clark,

[79]Ibid., 126.
[80]Ibid., 135.
[81]Ibid., 192.
[82]Ibid., 193–194.
[83]Ibid., 64.

Anthropocene horror is also notable as the affective corollary of ecological grief, which he writes is felt "for the loss or threatened destruction of a *specific* landscape, place or species", and "suggest[s] a lack of implication in the loss".[84] Anthropocene horror, by contrast, is more diffuse and complex, "an ineradicable but not specifically locatable concern with the horizon of our being-in the-world itself".[85] In other words, for Clark, ecological grief is the emotional response to the loss of an object with which an individual has a personal relationship and attachment; further, it is the affective result of a loss in which an individual is unimplicated. Anthropocene horror, by contrast, is the affective collateral of feeling personally implicated in latently violent systems that are nonetheless beyond individual control. It is Clark's use of the word "implication" that is of particular interest here. Implication, as Michael Rothberg makes clear, is proximate to – but not quite synonymous with – complementary terms like "responsibility" and "complicity": it "draws attention to how we are "folded into" (im-pli-cated in) events that at first seem beyond our agency as individual subjects".[86] Implicated subjects are therefore not "direct agents of harm", but nonetheless "occupy positions aligned with power and privilege" and thereby "contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes".[87] As such, they legitimate and "help propagate the legacies of historical violence and prop up the structures of inequality that mar the present".[88] Rothberg's theory thus offers fruitful ways of thinking through multi-scale environmental responsibility, complicity, and agency, ultimately revealing that *all* Western subjects are implicated in the extractive and ecocidal violence of neoliberal capitalism (albeit to varying degrees). Yet, to follow Clark's logic, this would mean that such subjects therefore do not and perhaps even cannot experience ecological grief (which, to recall, he contends is the affective experience of losing an object or ideal with whom one has a specific, personal relationship).

The High House suggests otherwise. Midway through the novel, Sally and Grandy are discussing recent media reports on the rising tides threatening Europe:

> [...] Half the country is under water, as far as I can tell. The Thames has burst its banks above the barrier and god [*sic*] knows how many people drowned. They say it's worse in the Netherlands – Belgium and Germany, too. [...] People have nowhere to go.
>
> but I didn't know how to say what I was thinking. [... A] sense of desolation had come over me in waves.
>
> – We should have done something,
>
> I said,
>
> – we should have tried –
>
> – Tried what?
>
> asked Grandy, and I knew that he was right, but still it didn't rinse us clean from blame.[89]

[84]Clark, "Ecological Grief and Anthropocene Horror," 61, 62.
[85]Ibid., 70.
[86]Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject*, 1.
[87]Ibid., 1.
[88]Ibid., 1.
[89]Greengrass, *The High House*, 83.

Greengrass here turns the image of floodwater on its head through the religiosity of Sally's adage-like "rinse us clean", a phrase that also indicates her complex feelings of implication, fury, and "desolation". Semantically, "desolation" greater aligns with grief than horror, troubling Clark's suggestion that someone like Sally can't be feeling ecological grief for the losses in which she is implicated. This conversation indicates the increasing aptness of Rothberg's framework for an environmental context: neither Sally, Grandy, nor Caro inhabit an unequivocally antagonistic role in the European drownings and displacements, and there are systems and structures that are arguably more responsible for these crises, but neither are they entirely "clean from blame".

Although Sally outlines her desolation here, it is Caro who is the novel's most ecologically grief-stricken character. She is also the character that most troubles Ashlee Cunsolo's theory of ecological grief.[90] For Cunsolo, ecological grief builds on and departs from Freudian theories of mourning and melancholia.[91] Where the Freudian mourning paradigm is a process of egoistic incorporation and de-cathection from the lost object or ideal, Cunsolo specifies that the ecological mourner refuses to relinquish their attachment to that object or ideal, thereby remaining in a deliberately melancholic state that both mnemonically preserves what has been lost and recalibrates that mourner's ethics and politics to consequently elicit pro-environmental political action. Put plainly, where Freud conceptualised melancholia as unsuccessful mourning, Cunsolo asserts that ecological mourning is necessarily melancholic. In *The High House*, Grandy reflects a Freudian (and frankly British) approach to grief, loss, and mourning: having lost his home to the encroaching seawater and exacerbating floods, he states, "I won't go back to the cottage. It doesn't do to dwell".[92] But Caro *does* dwell. In Cunsolo's parlance, she experiences an ongoing melancholy, refusing to transform or resolve her ecological grief. However, this ecological melancholy (grief) produces concurrent feelings of guilt, fury, shame, and despair in the character, an affective cocktail that ultimately results in what can only be described as depression. Pauly's character particularly chronicles his sister's decline:

> Something was wrong with Caro, but I didn't know what it was. Sometimes, [...] she opened her arms for me to run into them [...] – and at other times I stood beside her in the kitchen calling her name, but she didn't even turn her head to look at me.[93]

Caro progressively loses enthusiasm for the activities and people she once loved, becoming fatigued and listless, unresponsive and indifferent even to Pauly. Dwelling with her ecological grief and inhabiting the melancholic posture and performance espoused by Cunsolo makes Caro spend days locked away in her room – makes her, in other words, depressed.[94] Enduringly practical, Sally becomes increasingly frustrated and impatient with Caro, having to take up her slack in matters of domestic labour (tending the vegetable patch, drawing water from the well) alongside Pauly's care. The

[90]Cunsolo Willox, "Climate Change as the Work of Mourning"; Cunsolo and Landman, *Mourning Nature*.
[91]Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia."
[92]Greengrass, *The High House*, 125.
[93]Ibid., 168.
[94]To be clear, ecological grief and depression are not quite the same emotional or psychological phenomena Luciano, "Of Course, the World Continues to End." Yet, as Rebecca Tamás writes, ecological grief can become so paralysing that it may "tip into periods of despair, to a depression that is not an outlet or a process, but a cycle of repetitive suffering and self-hatred." Tamás, *Strangers*, 80.

dynamic between the two is complicated, however, by Sally's admission that Caro is more realistic about ever-worsening environmental collapse:

> still – still – despite all I saw and knew, I told myself that perhaps it was only another bad year. Something would happen, or something would be done, to keep everyone safe. It was, I think, a form of self-protection, the way my mind slipped off the truth. It was a way of keeping us safe. Caro couldn't do it. [...] She couldn't tune out the suffering of other people, or think that someone else must be responsible for them.[95]

Unlike Sally, Caro is haunted by others' suffering and paralysed by the guilt of her own comparative comfort. One night, whilst Sally sits on her bed watching the endless media coverage of compounding climatological disasters, Caro joins her. "[A]fterwards", as Sally says, "she was inconsolable. We should, she said, fill up the bedrooms. We should open our gates. We should let them come".[96] Sally, ever the pragmatist, responds with "the truth", stating "that we couldn't save ourselves and them as well – and anyway, out of all those people, all those desperate hundreds, who should we choose, and how?".[97] The extremities of Caro's despair render her incapable of responding to such an impossible situation with anything other than intense emotional distress, such that, as ever, the burden of choice is placed by default onto Sally:

> In the end, it was my decision, because no one else would make it. I saw those thousands and thousands of faces, [...] and I decided that Pauly was more important, and Caro, too, because she was also in my care.[98]

Here, again, is the collision of scales of crisis and care that drives *The High House*'s emotional and narrative arc. As Sally states in defiant tone, "I had to draw a line, and so I drew it, and Pauly is still alive, and so is Caro, and so am I".[99] Yet, underneath her unrepentant bravado, there nonetheless lurks the moral tussle that underwrites the novel in its entirety. Our choices may be unimpeachably sensible, that does not mean that they are not also selfish.

The character of Caro thus answers Luciano's question of "what happens [...] when the affective fullness and narrative promise of climate grief give way to the plodding tenacity of climate depression".[100] She also troubles Cunsolo's paradigmatic framework of ecological grief as catalysing the grief-stricken subject into pro-environmental action.[101] Although this enquiry is unique in its challenge to Cunsolo, it is not alone in expressing scepticism towards theories that either ignore distress or despair as affective responses, or that characterise the same as productive. Although he neither explicitly cites or engages with Cunsolo's work, Timothy C. Baker articulates an equivalent wariness of Donna Haraway's well-cited theory of "staying with the trouble".[102] What happens, he ponders, "if "[s]taying with the trouble" comes at great personal cost and, unlike in Haraway's formulation, cannot necessarily be seen as a model of

[95]Greengrass, *The High House*, 227.
[96]Ibid., 227.
[97]Ibid., 228.
[98]Ibid., 228.
[99]Ibid., 229.
[100]Luciano, "Of Course, the World Continues to End."
[101]Cunsolo Willox, "Climate Change as the Work of Mourning."
[102]Baker, *New Forms of Environmental Writing*; Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.

engagement".[103] His scholarship develops from this question, exploring how the process of imagining oneself as part of a wider planetary web might not "trac[e] a journey from distress to healing", but reveal, instead, that "distress can, itself, be a form of encounter".[104] This recognition complicates the discourse that characterises the nature encounter as healing, consolatory, or recuperative – a trope that persists in both fictional and non-fictional environmental writing, and is arguably descended from the ethically normative Romantic framework of loss that conceives of grief as morally good and righteously useful.[105]

Baker's focus is broader than ecological grief, but his analysis nonetheless helpfully gestures towards the question of what place the ecological mourner who does *not* respond to their grief with pro-environmental action has in this kind of schema of loss. Is their ecological grief any less real, valid, or valuable for not being action-oriented? This is certainly the position taken by Glenn Albrecht, who takes pains to distinguish his concept of solastalgia from ecological grief by espousing the former's active politics.[106] However, taking such a position is to ignore the wisdom that Sally displays when she states, "that any loss, however it might be of benefit, is still a loss".[107] Why, then, should ecological grief – or any grief, for that matter – be validated according to an ethical schema in the first place? Why should loss be a lesson? Underlying these uneasy questions are further complexities and challenges. For one thing, conceptualising environmental loss as beneficial to the human because of the knowledge gleaned therein is anthropocentric: it establishes a hierarchy wherein the desecration of the natural world is legitimated because of the lesson(s) that desecration imparts on the human subject. Conceptualising ecological loss and grief in such a way implicitly buttresses the codification of nature as a resource for human emotional consumption and didactic use. In other words, within such a schema, nature is theoretically conceptualised as a resource for human extraction and advancement – a framing that contributes to its continued material use and abuse (extractivism).

Perhaps one of the more pressing matters, however, is that, as Rebecca Tamás writes in an essay on climate grief (her preferred term), "depression is profoundly unlikely to lead to any action which might avert the very worst of ecological collapse".[108] Caro's depression, in other words, may be in some ways a survival strategy, but it is nonetheless indirectly and slowly (but still violently) killing her, because it entails a disengagement from the ecologically-threatened world around her.[109] "Being numb", as Tamás continues, "will not help us"; still further, "despairing will (for those of us in the West) excuse our responsibilities to the global South [and the nonhuman], and the suffering

[103]Baker, *New Forms of Environmental Writing*, 62. There is a wider conversation to be had here about the problems of relationality: namely, that an ontology of being-in-relation, to quote Franklin Ginn, "does not map on to a given set of ethico-political outcomes." Chatterjee et al., "The Arts, Environmental Justice, and the Ecological Crisis." Lack of scope forestalls adequate discussion that this premise deserves; Eva Haifa Giraud offers a more comprehensive analysis. Giraud, *What Comes after Entanglement?*

[104]Baker, *New Forms of Environmental Writing*, 62.

[105]Clark, "Ecological Grief and Anthropocene Horror." Richard Mabey's *Nature Cure* exemplifies this trend, and Samantha Walton's *Everybody Needs Beauty: In Search of the Nature Cure* explores it. Mabey, *Nature Cure*; Walton, *Everybody Needs Beauty*.

[106]Albrecht, "Negating Solastalgia."

[107]Greengrass, *The High House*, 131.

[108]Tamás, *Strangers*, 84.

[109]Sarah Jaquette Ray makes exactly this point about climate anxiety, which "may be a rational response to the world that climate models predict, but [...] is unsustainable." Ray, "Climate Anxiety Is an Overwhelmingly White Phenomenon."

they are experiencing because of the actions of our nations".[110] There is, in other words, a significant privilege in being able to withdraw into a depression that turns individuals away from the climate crisis, and is a behaviour that further implicates oneself in the complex and uneven power differentials of this crisis. To be clear, this claim is not the same as saying that more precarious or marginalised populations *cannot* experience (climate) depression. It is, rather, to acknowledge both that depression is recognised and diagnosed more often in white people than BIPOC, and that climate depression and doomism "is an overwhelmingly white phenomenon" and luxury that is unevenly accessible to and experienced by Global South activists.[111] In their discussion of the crisis-paralysed impasse, Berlant also recognised this, writing that "for many now, living in an impasse would be an aspiration", such that any analysis of the impasse necessitates heeding the impass*ivity* of "diverse class, racial, sexual, and gendered" publics.[112]

The characters in *The High House* are certainly aware of their privilege and (im)passivity. Whilst preparing the house, Francesca admits that "real self-sufficiency is an impossible goal", requiring both skill and "some kind of broader community".[113] Towards the novel's end, Caro also acknowledges:

> We are not self-sufficient. There is no such thing. We rely on the stores we have left in the barn. We rely on the chickens, but the flock is shrinking. We rely on the wheat, but one bad year and we will have none left to sow as seed. We rely on the tide pool and the generator which we cannot fix if it breaks. We rely on the high house, on its fabric, on its shelter and protection, but these things will not last forever. We rely on one another. I try not to be afraid, but I am.[114]

Her repetition of "[w]e rely" becomes like an incantation, a desperate attempt to stave off their fragile vulnerability. Meanwhile, in *The High House*'s earlier sections, Caro indicts the inaction of both her community and own self:

> We were protected by our houses and our educations and our high-street shopping centres. We had the habit of luck and power, and couldn't understand that they were not our right. We saw that the situation was bad, elsewhere, but surely things would work out, because didn't it always, for us?.[115]

That "we" – which also implicates the reader – is incapacitated, unable to imagine a world beyond the class and race-bound one to which it currently clings. It is a "we" that benefits from "the luxury of uninflected introspection" – a "we" that is slowly awakening to the collapse of "[t]he genocidal settler fantasy of whiteness as the motor of progress", but nonetheless "stalled, unable or unwilling to come up with another form [of life]".[116] In this way, then, *The High House* implicitly scrutinises (but remains entrapped within) the privileged epistemologies – of which climate realism is a key aesthetic example – that contribute to the re-entrenchment of a socio-environmentally unjust status quo by ensnaring both the individuals and wider cultures of that status quo in an affective and political inertia.

[110]Tamás, *Strangers*, 88–89.
[111]Luciano, "Of Course, the World Continues to End"; Tsui, *It"s Not Just You*, 119; Ray, "Climate Anxiety Is an Overwhelmingly White Phenomenon."
[112]Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 4–5.
[113]Greengrass, *The High House*, 109.
[114]Ibid., 223.
[115]Ibid., 38–39.
[116]Luciano, "Of Course, the World Continues to End."

Conclusion

In 2019, Axel Goodbody and Adeline Johns-Putra wrote that "[r]ealist climate fiction is a medium through which the psychological mechanisms behind climate scepticism and inertia [...] can be better understood", a conclusion that seems remarkably appropriate for Greengrass's novel.[117] This article has positioned *The High House* as an everyday Anthropocene novel that mobilises the ever-emerging genre of climate realism to scrutinise the affective climate of living with and through climate crisis.[118] In doing so, it has argued that Greengrass's novel advances an implicit critique of how affective impasse can reinforce political inertia, revealing how characters trapped within these impasses directly and indirectly enable (or, are implicated in) ecocidal regimes. *The High House* is therefore a key example of an emerging corpus of contemporary Anglophone climate fiction (or, everyday Anthropocene novels) that "take the measure of the impasse of the present" by mobilising climate realism to narrate the experience of "being in the middle of detaching from a waning fantasy of the good life".[119] Jenny Offill's *Weather* and Daisy Hildyard's *Emergency* are particularly indicative of this oeuvre – but so are novels like Julia Armfield's *Private Rites*, Richard Flanagan's *The Living Sea of Waking Dreams*, and Alexandra Kleeman's *Something New Under the Sun*, all of which deploy a self-conscious (and distinctly eerie) climate realism to conjure their barely speculative futures.[120] To LeMenager, this generic self-reflexiveness is characteristic of what she calls "genre trouble", a process that reflects how –

> artistic genres are fraying, recombining, or otherwise moving outside of our expectations of what they ought to be because life itself is moving outside of our expectations for what it out to be.[121]

More specifically, LeMenager writes that genre trouble "comes about when the affective expectations we hold for how things unfold, in art and life, do not make sense anymore" – that is, when "new representational regimes" (re)form in response to crises in existing ones.[122] In thus exposing how "affective expectations are put together" and culturally circulated, this process of generic innovation (trouble) has the potential, continues LeMenager, to "shift the structures of feeling that undergird hegemonic understandings of [...] the good life[, ... thereby] innovating new socio-ecological relations".[123] In making this contention about the potential socio-ecological affordances of genre trouble, LeMenager seems to echo Berlant's exhortation to (re)focus on the impasse of the present in order –

> to produce some better ways of mediating the sense of a historical moment that is affectively felt but undefined in the social world[, ... and] imagine a potentialized present that does not reproduce all of the conventional collateral damage.[124]

[117]Goodbody and Johns-Putra, "The Rise of the Climate Change Novel," 238.
[118]LeMenager, "Climate Change and the Struggle for Genre."
[119]Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 263.
[120]Offill, *Weather*; Hildyard, *Emergency*; Armfield, *Private Rites*; Flanagan, *The Living Sea of Waking Dreams*; Kleeman, *Something New Under the Sun*.
[121]LeMenager, "The Humanities after the Anthropocene," 477.
[122]Ibid., 476, 477.
[123]Ibid., 476.
[124]Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 263.

For itself, *The High House* itself proves unable to achieve Berlant's liberatory imaginings, but that does not mean that climate realism should be entirely abandoned as an aesthetic template by which to reflect on the evermore threatened and threatening environmental present. Indeed, given the genre's continuing emergence, a climate realism-to-come may yet prove itself up to the task of imagining the "potentialized present" for which Berlant yearns. By using the everyday Anthropocene paradigm, a novel like *The High House* can, for the moment, both articulate and scrutinise the structures of feeling by which a privileged Western populace remains affectively incapacitated by a localised paralysis that is both implicated in and reinforcer of the political inertia which currently typifies the Global North's response to the climate crisis. In doing so, such novels can illuminate the rapidly crumbling social fantasies that undergird this inertia – fantasies that persist because, to paraphrase Caro, those of us who participate in them wrongly believe that our longstanding infrastructural and geographical privileges, and our habit of luck and power, will displace climate catastrophe onto an elsewhere that is discontinuous with ourselves.

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