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The Garden of Dirt:

Post-Human Entanglement with Dirt

Master's thesis in English Literature
May 2022

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Abstract

This thesis argues for a post-human entanglement with dirt. Through the texts of Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* and Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu*, the bond between soil and the body is established as something that is inextricably linked. Different socio-cultural and -political preconceptions about what it means to be dirty, as well as literary examples of what a coexistence with dirt looks like, shows the importance of dirt on our bodies. Secondly, Samuel R. Delany's *Dhalgren* and Ursula K. Le Guin's "Paradises Lost" broaden the horizon in their depictions of a coexistence with dirt in societies of chaos and order. The former offers a chaotic coexistence with dirt that is untrammelled and free; the latter an orderly coexistence with dirt that is subjugated and rendered harmless. Both channel dirt in principally diverse ways, yet their many similarities are revealing. Finally, Paolo Bacigalupi's "The People of Sand and Slag" and William Gibson's "The Winter Market" paints a picture of the post-human cyborg of dirt and waste in its own Garden of Eden—the Garden of Dirt. Through their texts, it becomes clear how only the post-human cyborg of dirt can perceive the Garden of Dirt, which is inhospitable to all other forms of life. Humans cannot see it, and they cannot live in it. In the Garden of Dirt, the post-human cyborg of dirt becomes dominant and is finally able to flourish.

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"I really do think we have to take our dirt with us wherever we go. We are dirt. We are Earth."

—Ursula K. Le Guin, *A Fisherman of the Inland Sea*

"Mud makes us tick."

—Paolo Bacigalupi, "The People of Sand and Slag"

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Introduction

Dirt. It is the substance underneath our feet, the soil beneath all that which surrounds us. It holds life within itself and is required for life to thrive. What we call "the philosophy of dirt," begins Olli Lagerspetz, "is approximately the same age as Western science and philosophy in general" (27). Civilisations have risen and fallen on Earth's soil for eons, and they will continue to do so. The sediment reveals all of that which has transpired before us. Down to the smallest grain, the dirt and soil we stand on are the building blocks of all life. David R. Montgomery explains that "good dirt allows plants to capture sunlight and convert solar energy and carbon dioxide into the carbohydrates that power terrestrial life right on up the food chain" (15). Good soil is paramount, and it is the source from which everything feeds. Humans are born from dirt, and when their individual lives end, they return to it; that soil which is ever so sacred. All life is enmeshed in a mire of matter that makes us, and we cannot live without it. But dirt is also *dirty*. When you are covered in dirt, what do you do? You clean yourself and, in doing so, cease to be *unclean*. It is strange, then, that to be covered in that which is closest to nature, you are also unclean, as if to imply that the nature we come from is inherently unclean. So preoccupied are we as a species with separating ourselves from that granular, coarse substance which we call dirt that we are failing to see just how significant that dirt is for us to evolve further. By opening the door to the dust, sand, and soil from which we strive so hard to remove ourselves, we also open ourselves to hitherto unimaginable opportunities of post-human growth. A coexistence with dirt could just be that which leads us into the next stage of what or who we are meant to be. Several works of fiction come together to augment this topic, painting a picture of humanity's future with dirt.

Today, ecocritical attitudes toward dirt are more intense than ever, and no shortage of scholars are afraid to get their hands muddied. According to Anthony Lioi, ecocriticism is in "a moment of transfiguration" that sees attitudes and preconceptions shift in an attempt to "give dirt its due" (17). What this refers to is assigning "a symbolic place in ecocriticism for dirt and pollution" (17). This symbolic place is not so much an actual place as it is a process. Heather I. Sullivan speaks of dirty nature as being "always with us as part of ongoing interactions among all kinds of material agents, and thus is … more *process* than *place*" (515, emphasis added). Such processes of moving dirt are always happening in large part because bodies carry dirt with them. Even without our bodies, the processes of dirt continue unabated. Earlier in March this very spring in 2022, local newspapers reported a sandstorm from the Sahara that made breathing difficult in large parts of southern Europe. According to the correspondent Carlos Pérez García, this is a lithometeor phenomenon that occurs about once or twice a year. The dry dust and sand are stirred by high pressure-gradient winds in Algeria

and Tunisia and carried northward, sometimes as far as Iceland. (NTB, "Sand fra Sahara gjør det vanskelig å puste i Spania"). Sandstorms such as these give us difficulty breathing because we are not meant to inhale sand or dirt; they are toxic to us. "Thinking dirt is therefore challenging," says Sullivan, because ecocriticism must encompass dirt's complex duality of its "full range of life-sustaining and toxic agencies in the soil without flinching" (516). This is why Lioi suggests the figure of the swamp dragon in ecocriticism's current involvement with dirt because the swamp dragon's "embodying elemental mixture, ethical impurity, and serpentine wisdom" captures dirt's dual nature of being equally dangerous and wholesome (17). Additionally, this allows ecocriticism to "provide a solid place for the assessment of the shifts between scientific objectivity and reverential mysticism when dealing with dirt" (Sullivan 517). Dirt, and all bearers of it, has usually been made to conform to the civilising world's ideas of what and where it should be (Mary Douglas 3). However, current times reveal that these attitudes are changing. No longer should dirt conform to us exclusively; we too must begin to conform to it.

Chapter one begins with Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* (1992) and Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu* (2018), two speculative fiction novels that depict dirt-body representations of post-human entanglement with the earth and dirt. The novels' respective protagonists, Marguerite Angelica "Marghe" Taishan and Kora Ko are characters who become or are dirty, unclean, and infected in some way. The former is a human woman at the mercy of an alien planet's infection that forces her to undergo a process of becoming with that planet, and the latter is a bioengineered, filthy human girl whose mind transcends her body and merges with a tree. Their respective conversion journeys bring them from a human to a post-human existence with dirt. The novels' exploration of the dirt-body dynamic helps us in understanding dirt's potentiality and its complex relationship with the body. Furthermore, attitudes toward dirt from distinct parts of the world—Euro-American, South Asian, and South African—supplement this understanding, as well as readings of dirt and the woman in particular due to the female body's cultural and historical relevance in narratives of dirt.

Both *Ammonite* and *The Tiger Flu* involve themselves with soil and dirt, tackling that dirty matter head on, and, while the two texts do stand out, this is not something which is novel to the speculative fiction genre. Although Sullivan would argue that the science fiction genre has long had a troublesome relationship with dirt in that "it [sci-fi] problematically assumes that we can exist separate from our dirty planetary enmeshment" (518), many authors, such as Samuel R. Delany, Ursula K. Le Guin and Frank Herbert, to name a few of the most prolific, would have you believe the opposite. Granted, Sullivan's argument carries

weight to the casual viewer, but the fact remains that the genre's involvement with dirt reaches back a long way. Not to mention, the cyberpunk subgenre popularised in the eighties sees the human body directly interacting with waste, metal, and junk, entangling the naked body in wires of technology. What *Ammonite* and *The Tiger Flu* are doing is taking an already well-established topic and developing it further: they enmesh the post-human in dirt, waste, and/or junk. This is something which Sullivan's dirt theory can help us wrap our heads around too. Subsequently, Douglas and her work on ritual pollution and taboo as it pertains to dirt provides an anthropological foundation upon which it becomes possible to make a case for the dirt-body connection.

Chapter two delves into Delany's *Dhalgren* (1975) and Le Guin's "Paradises Lost" (2002), a speculative fiction novel and novella, respectively, that portray coexistences with dirt that are based in opposing principles of chaos and order. Despite adhering to two different principles of coexistence, the two texts share more similarities than differences in their ways of living. In *Dhalgren*, we follow the protagonist known only as the Kid, a man living in the post-apocalyptic city of Bellona, a smouldering, umbral city that perpetuates anarchist, anti-civilisation values which oppose the civilising process. The city itself resists civilisation, and its denizens find comfort in a life free from order. In "Paradises Lost," we follow the characters of Luis and Hsing on the generation ship *Discovery* as it makes its way toward the New Earth. The crew have successfully learned to separate themselves from dangerous dirt, living in a system where all manner of bodily waste, dirt, and biomaterial are recycled and rendered free of the harmful substances which they do not need.

Where order and humanism are concerned with civilising the modern world, chaos and anarcho-primitivism are not. The primitivism found in chaos and much anarchist thought hearkens back to "a pre-historic condition of relative, if not absolute, ecological and anarchic social harmony" (Mick Smith 472). Primitivism would seek to undo the civilising movement in humanist philosophy that many of its thinkers agree is leading humanity "away from the state of nature" to which it belongs (471). This duality is salient in these two texts, as one's definition of progress differs from the other's. Whether humanity can, cannot, or even should separate itself from dirt is addressed here. "To reject dirt," says Lioi, "is to imagine that it can be separated from what is sacred, and to finalize that separation by annihilating pollution from the cosmic order itself" (17). One cannot hope to separate pollution from the cosmic order any more than one can separate chaos from order. They are fundamentally inseparable from one another, and one cannot exist without the other. *Dhalgren* and "Paradises Lost" make this point salient in their similarities.

Chapter three portrays the union of the post-human with mud and waste in two more works of speculative fiction: Paolo Bacigalupi's novella "The People of Sand and Slag" (2004) and William Gibson's short story "The Winter Market" (1985). In the former, humanity has evolved beyond its modern stage through merging with weevils, eating mud and slag for nourishment. Limbs can regrow when lost, and cybernetic enhancements adorn the body both cosmetically and for the purposes of warfare. Here, the post-human Other flourishes as a post-human cyborg of dirt whose way of life bears similarities to the common dung beetle. With the help of Donna Haraway and Katherine N. Hayles to lay the groundwork for the cyborg, Bacigalupi's novella reveals a post-human Other that has found its place in the Garden of Dirt. In the latter work, said Garden is characterised in the islands of waste erected off the coast of Tokyo Bay. The islands of waste are created to manage humanity's growing waste problem, essentially creating civilisations upon dirt. In this world, Lioi's swamp dragon writhes and heaves, ushering humanity into its becoming with the Gardens of Dirt and Waste which it is not yet able to perceive, blurring the delineations between the clean, civilised human and the post-human Other. Synonymous with the Garden of Eden, the Garden of Dirt is a place that only the post-human cyborg of dirt can perceive. Only the post-human can reside there, for it is toxic to humanity.

All these texts exemplify that dirt, whether on our bodies or not, is multifaceted. Dirt can hold life within itself, but it can also be equally toxic. It comes in many forms, and it carries biomatter as it is scattered everywhere by our bodies and the elements. Dirt holds the power to destroy and to build, becoming the essence of that which allows boundaries to break apart and unify anew. Humans are beset by dirt; therefore, they too are at its mercy. Each of the characters in these texts all exemplify an entanglement with dirt in their becoming with their respective environments. Their entanglement with dirt and unclean natures portends a post-human condition that (re)enters into a naturalistic union with the worlds and societies they inhabit. This union is emblematic of a more-than-human way of life that exists as one with nature, earth, and waste in all its unclean splendour. In these dirt-covered worlds, which seem to destroy all human life, where human life is waning, the post-human being sees itself begin to flourish.

Chapter 1: Griffith and Lai: Soil and the Body

Thanks to modern plumbing and mass-produced soap since the mid-nineteenth century, the cleaning of the body became not just a physical duty but also a moral one, says Adeline Marie Masquelier (6). Moreover, she explains that "'dirt'—real or imagined—clinging to the surface of bodies has often been associated with alterity and considered morally suspect" (6). This did not start in the mid-nineteenth century, however—far from it. For as long as the concept of civilisation has existed, as something that is nature's opposite, dirt has been weaponised by societies to differentiate between class, race, and ethnicity. Yet, "dirt is not inherently 'dirty'" but becomes so under a system of order that deems it as such (10), which has become the case in most modern Western societies. To other societies, religions, and cultures, what the West often considers dirty or harmful "may appear perfectly clean and even cleansing" (10). Societies have a strong inclination to label any individual or group which does not, or cannot, conform to a particular system or pattern, willingly or unwittingly, as dirty, polluting, or impure (10). This is reflected, for instance, in vulnerable groups such as refugees, immigrants, and various exposed minorities who appear, within that system, to lie caught "betwixt and between conventional socio-political categories" (11). Conversely, Westerners will often appear equally polluting in the eyes of foreigners and Indigenous peoples (11), as different societies uphold different conventions of what it means to be dirty and clean. Dirt is associated with all manner of pollution, moral corruption, foul play, and filthy behaviour, not necessarily defined by physical uncleanness but also a lack of moral values and deviance which can translate to a kind of social uncleanness too. The history in the civilised Western world is clear on the fact that dirt has long been marked as something belonging outside the boundary of society and the human body, that it is suspect and that we should strive to distance it from us entirely or subjugate it in ways that render it *harmless*.

Dirt itself is an earthly substance from which all manner of flora sprouts and a plethora of life-forms call home, but dirt also takes the form of dust, sand, waste, and all kinds of matter. This dirt does not become *dirty* until the eye of the beholder deems it as such. For dirt to become dirty, it must be perceived by human eyes to have transgressed a preconstructed boundary, subsequently upsetting the order of that boundary. In the words of Douglas, "Dirt is … disorder" and "offends against order" (2). It becomes a symbol of life as well as pollution solely depending on its place, and its place is what determines whether it belongs there or is simply what Douglas calls *matter out of place* (50). In this regard, dirt can be said to harbour a complex duality based on where it is placed. Because dirt invites disorder, it "symbolises both danger and power" (117). Disorder implies the transgression of boundaries—boundaries which are inherent to creating and upholding a system of order.

Such a system is upheld by boundaries which are meant to resist transgression and fend off corruption. It is in this equation that dirt becomes a danger because it breaks down those boundaries and invites chaos: it transgresses and threatens just by its presence alone in an established system of order. Yet, its destructiveness is also brimming with a potentiality which many cosmologies recognise both ritually and otherwise (117). Where there is dirt, there is a system, and the successful manipulation of its power is what Douglas calls "pollution powers" (140). This power "punish[es] a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined" and the "joining of that which should be separate" (140). This duality of dirt and its potential becomes salient in dirt's transgression of the boundary between soil and the body. A body which is covered in filth or considered dirty otherwise, whom Douglas would call a "polluting person," "is always in the wrong" because they have crossed a line which should not have been crossed (140); they have transgressed a sacred boundary. So heavy are the anthropocentric implications of the dirt-body connection that the body's involvement with dirt becomes an act of inviting disorder, as if to imply that the union of soil and the body is unnatural in and of itself.

In terms of harnessing dirt's potential, the boundaries imposed by civilisation between soil and the body become problematic. "Despite dirt's association with 'mother earth' and topsoil, it is often overlooked, under-appreciated [and] condemned," states Sullivan (529), and therefore it becomes alienated and antagonised. To harness dirt's potential, Sullivan offers an imperative: "Dirt is our radically local, material environment, and it demands our ecological and cultural attention" (529). Dirt's complexity and dual nature means that it can easily turn into something destructive and toxic, even radioactive, to all living things. In such a state, dirt will only remain as something estranged and untamed rather than harnessed—if we fail to utilise it. The other side of dirt is that it is all-nurturing, providing, and "the literal ground without which there would be no terrestrial life" (516). Channelling dirt's earth power, so to speak, rather than letting it become something destructive, is what could open doors hitherto unopened for humanity with regard to the post-human state, or that version of humanity which will one day surpass who we are today. Still, just ignoring the boundaries between dirt and body could be just as problematic since that would invite disease and death (528). Dirt is a series of "biospheric processes constantly reshaping all matter," and "there can be no long-term stability for the boundaries … between clean and unclean, sanitary and unsanitary, or the pure and the dirty" as such (528). The earth power that all manner of dirt, sand, and dust hold within their potentiality is vast, unstable, and unwieldy, yet it is precisely in recognising that unwieldiness that we also find an energy that is dynamic, potent, and

pliable, brimming with possibility.

According to the late-nineteenth century mayor of Boston and supporter of public baths, Josiah Quincy, bathhouses were built to fight dirt, which he called “the greatest enemy of mankind” (Marilyn T. Williams, qtd. in Masquelier 6). Such preconceptions about dirt have become archetypical in the civilised Western, or Euro-American, world of the judgments cast upon the unwashed and the exclusionary practices that those judgments advocate (7). Predominantly, Western attitudes toward dirt have been adverse; although, one should be careful not to mark the entire West as anti-dirt, since such an oversimplification would be an injustice to those in the agricultural sector or any group who is required to work with or otherwise indifferent to the act of interacting with soil and dirt. However, it is the case that “filth of African, Native American, or immigrant bodies carried prurient associations” in the West, and this directly affected a person’s social position and moral worth (6). Anti-dirt campaigns even sought to proselytise, advocating for a connection between “cleanliness of body and purity of moral character” (6). In this way, the cleansing of dirt has manifested itself in the modern Western world as a boundary-marker, or boundary maintenance, to distinguish the poor, ethnic, or religious Other from the morally *cleansed* (6-7), i.e., the eyes of the clean. As Masquelier describes, these attitudes toward the dirty become salient in colonial societies and as a means to combat the slums (6-7). Wendy Steele, et al., supplements that “dirt is both of the earth, an indispensable material co-presence, as well as an implied danger or shortcoming of some kind invested in objects, bodies, substances, places, acts, images, thoughts and feelings” (242). In other words, it becomes a threat to systems of order not just through its material form, but also in the form of the immaterial in relation to acts, thoughts, and even feelings. The cleansing of human spaces has served as a method of conquering all anomalies that have not conformed to historically anthropocentric and modern Western values concerning apparent cleanliness and to justify socio-political exclusion—as my supervising professor would say, “Western attempts to erase dirt are just a matter of sweeping things under the rug, so to speak.” Moreover, dirt has come to bear a much graver marker of boundary for one sex than it has for any other.

Historically, dirt’s entanglement with the female body has been associated with all manner of degrading and patriarchal connotations, and it has usually been identified with characteristics that opposed what the woman should be. This notion rings especially true for patriarchal standards which have defined womanhood as something that has encompassed both notions of purity and pollution on each end since the start of the Anthropocene era—with roots reaching back as far as antiquity (Masquelier 13). Because the female body has

always been associated with bodily functions such as menstruation and giving birth, it has become historically labelled as impure and something that must strive harder than any other sex to achieve purity. A modern example of this in practice was the state of women prostitutes in the mid-nineteenth century. Prostitutes were branded as "agents of disease" to "divert male responsibility for the spread of venereal disease[s]" (14). While men could labour and toil in dirty environments and still be considered clean, women partaking in the same male activities were considered "dangerous, anomalous, or 'tainted'" (13). The dirt-body connection and its connotations to the female body varies between cultures, but the exploration of this bond between dirt and the female body relates to the novels *Ammonite* and *The Tiger Flu* directly. In these texts, female characters and female societies live in dirty environments that deviate from civilised, historical standards and preconceptions about dirt, having more in common with the dirt-body attitudes of societies often found in African and South Asian societies.

In Mangaldihi, India, Hindu traditions concerning the cleansing of dirt from the body are complex, and there is a distinct difference between men and women, with women perceived as the dirtier of the two sexes, although not in the same way as in the modern Western world. According to anthropologist Sarah Lamb's findings, "most in the village viewed women as anatomically more 'open' … than men, and thus more exposed to mixing, or the flowing of things into and out of the body" (219). This understanding of soil and the female body does not appear as intrinsically malevolent as the Western one but offers instead a more convincing line of reasoning. The woman is the sex associated with childbirth; therefore, it is they who must be the most "vigilant about 'boundary pollution'" (219). Such a boundary does still suggest that dirt and bodily waste must be confined within a certain place and removed from spaces in which it is not *meant* to be—the connotation here being that the arbiter who decides where dirt is and is not meant to be has been indisputably patriarchal. However, it is a boundary which suggests a much higher degree of mutual respect than its modern Western counterpart, so long as dirt's place is also respected. If dirt crosses this boundary, it becomes matter out of place (214). The female body, in this equation, is the body which expels more bodily waste than the male body, with menstruation fluids and childbirth tied to the biological female body alone. Boundary pollution is therefore a socio-political rule that appears to apply much more exclusively to the woman, or at least to a much greater extent (Masquelier 11-2). This anthropocentric notion of an out-of-placeness is the source from which this boundary emerges and is also what dictates uncleanness, with uncleanness being anything that finds itself begrimed by dirt and, as such, in need of cleaning. The South

Asian relationship between the female body and dirt is interpreted, then, as one of discipline not necessarily out of a moral obligation but a sense of duty. It implies a much greater conscientiousness about dirt and its relationship with the body, a notion which can also be said to carry a degree of mutual cognisance.

If we look further south to Botswana in South Africa, the relationship between soil and the body appears even more distinctive. In Botswana, both women and men are oftentimes visibly dirty, says Deborah Durham. "To Appear [dirty] while working was appropriate, even approved, and young women felt no shame or injury to their vanity in being seen so. Indeed, older men often remarked how beautiful they were as they toiled in their yards or walked around the neighbourhood in distinctly dirty condition" (Durham 192). In contrast to previous historical or modern Western examples, where dirt was either a morally suspect element or would translate to a lack of diligence concerning bodily cleanliness, there is instead an example here of dirt being tied to something which positively enriches the human body, and the female body especially. Being dirty, rather than harming one's social standard, will reflect instead on your work ethic and overall physical attractiveness—a fact which is true as well in agricultural societies around the world where toiling away in the soil is a normal part of everyday life. In Botswana in particular, the condition of being dirty ties directly to "the idea of beauty, and ideal marriageability" (192); in other words, being dirty translates to desirability. Similarities exist in pre-colonial Zimbabwe as well, where the smearing of soil to the skin was considered decorative (Masquelier 14-5). These culturally different attitudes toward dirt prompts us to think about the numerous ways in which we can coexist with dirt. By embracing the dirt-body relationship in a similar fashion to how these African and South Asian societies do, in both integrating and utilising dirt together with the body as well as respecting dirt's place on a culturally profound level, we could find ourselves on the path which will lead humanity to a new, post-human future that recognises dirt's complex potentiality.

Sullivan's dirt theory is based on material environmental immersion (518). It suggests that soil and the body are entwined and inseparable and not just something which can be overcome simply with the right technology. "With dirt theory," says Sullivan, "we see that most of these boundaries are actually porous membranes participating in often disturbing exchanges of energy and matter. Human bodies and minds are fully ensconced in material environments, which shape us just as vividly as we shape them" (528). It is mobile, formless, travelling together with our bodies and always on the move. It implies that it is primarily in the acceptance of and immersion into our dirt-laden environments that the future of human

evolution lies, not in technological advancements alone that do not incorporate dirt. Sullivan calls this "a productive slippage whose energy we might harness and guide rather than seek to overcome" (519). *Ammonite* and *The Tiger Flu* do this to differing degrees not by harnessing the earth in typical fashion as some sort of conventional energy source but by integrating its female protagonists into its dirty environments and embracing dirt, soil, earth, and dust as something to aid the human in becoming post-human. However, Sullivan emphasises that "the move from soil science to dirt mother is a short step," and what she means by this is that both scientific knowledge and environmental activism's love of nature must combine in this productive slippage to succeed—dirt theory must be scientific as well as cultural (518). The evolutionary progress that the novels of Griffith and Lai suggest involves casting aside the technology we know which would only serve to further the divide between soil and the body and forces us instead to think differently about what a post-human state means when considering the entirety of the dirt-body relationship. To clarify, dirt theory does not advocate for an anti-technology way of life but asks us to rethink how soil can be brought with us alongside humanity's development and evolution into our idea of the more-than-human being. This is why both novels exhibit examples of societies that are effectively shedding technology from themselves and seeking connection with their material, earthly surroundings.

There is an inherent formlessness to dirt's vast potentiality. As previously explained, dirt is a dynamic element which can be both destructive and productive depending on how successful we are at harnessing its potential. Its duality transcends material and immaterial boundaries in ways that are still unravelling before our eyes. This massive slippage is in a constant state of flux, either formless or given form. Returning our attention to Douglas' words on the danger of dirt, its danger becomes evident when dirt is given form. When given form, dirt gains an identity, a face, and therefore becomes a threat to order (Douglas 197-8). It is in the process of becoming formless that dirt ceases to be dangerous, because "where there is no differentiation there is no defilement" (198). Douglas claims that, while formless, dirt has no power; it is where it should be, with no identity and rousing no suspicion. In its formlessness, dirt is as much a "symbol of beginning and of growth as it is of decay" (198). It is when given form that dirt gains power. However, it is in the transition between form and formless that dirt becomes truly dangerous. Like an initiated but unfinished ritual, the state of being transitory is a state of undefinable tumult (120); it is an anomalous mode of being that is both without form and taking shape simultaneously. As such, dirtiness becomes synonymous with the definition of alterity. This in-betweenness is the "marginal period which separates ritual dying and ritual rebirth," and to have been in contact with it "is to have

been in contact with danger, to have been at a source of power" (120). This understanding can be applied to how conservative systems of order in general treat marginalised groups, because the alterity associated with them is incongruous to that system of order. Moreover, this is a testimony to the potent changeability of dirt. What dirt theory seeks is to harness that changeability, that slippage of pollution, to embrace its many forms and to immerse humanity in its protean fluidity.

What is here referred to as dirt theory is a relatively new phenomenon, but it is built on a much deeper history. The connection between soil and the body is one that reaches back to antiquity and is acknowledged in old religions, myths, and foundational texts. Montgomery reminds us that "The Hebrew name of the first man, Adam, is derived from the word *adama*, which means earth, or soil," and "The Latin word for human, *homo*, is derived from *humus*, Latin for living soil" (27, emphasis original). While not referred to as a theory until recently, the study of the connection between soil and the body is a timeworn one, as Montgomery makes apparent in bringing awareness to foundational religious texts. This gives a clear indicator of just how ingrained in our history the connection between soil and the body is. Furthermore, and with regard to the dirt-body relationship, the example of the demon Lilith from the Hebrew Scriptures becomes relevant. Lilith's story is a rejection narrative that marks dirt as something dangerous already at humanity's genesis. Mary Aswell Doll tells how "Lilith … was created from the same dirt as her husband [Adam], making her equal, although apologists claimed her dirt was unclean. Refusing to take the subordinate position in sex, Lilith flew away, cavorting with demons and making demon babies" (125). Lilith was unclean, and because of that she was expelled from the Garden of Eden and treated as an Other. Readings such as these are ecofeminist interpretations which remind us that the "despoiling of the Earth and the subjugation of women are intimately connected" (126). Lilith's relevance also remains important in comparisons with *The Tiger Flu*'s co-protagonist, Kora. But as we can see, the despoiling of dirt as well as dirt's connection to the female body began already in the foundational writings of humanity's beginnings.

The Tiger Flu's co-protagonist, Kora, is an example of human entanglement with dirt. Kora lives in Saltwater City, formerly Vancouver, Canada, which was, and still is, ravaged by the tiger flu. Like most denizens of the city, Kora adorns herself with both makeup and cybernetic implants called scales, which are cyberpunk-esque metal threads or tendrils inserted into a halo around the scalp to provide instant access to digitised information. She represents a post-human development with dirt but also metal and junk in the cyberpunk sense. Kora is filthy, and her implants are dirty too. An early account of Kora by Kirilow

Groundsel, *The Tiger Flu*'s other co-protagonist, describes her as such: "A tangled mass of scales falls thickly around her. They aren't very clean. Large black insects scuttle through them. I don't want to imagine the condition of her brain with all these dirty twigs plugged into it" (Lai 182-3). It is Kirilow, the ruralist, who points this out. While one would think that it is the city-dwellers who should be cleaner and those who live outside the city who should be dirtier, this situation sees a reversal. Looking back on Douglas' notion of the sacred and the profane, situations like these can be explained by what constitutes as sacred in a given community. Initially, there is nothing that points out what should or should not be sacred, but it is in the "relations between *human beings*" that such mutually agreed upon conceptions emerge of what constitutes as sacred (Lagerspetz 83, emphasis original). With this understanding in mind, it is possible to see why Kirilow is so disgusted by Kora and the residents of Saltwater City, because their individual conception of what constitutes sacred—and, by proxy, *clean*—differs from each other. Without a communal acceptance of what is and is not clean, situations like these are bound to occur eventually.

While it is worth emphasising that Kirilow describes all the girls of Saltwater City as dirty (160), it is Kora herself who is characterised as the filthiest among them. She does not bathe, nor does she seem to care about her filthiness until much later in the novel, and we see through Kirilow's observations how wild and undisciplined Kora really is. Kora herself is somewhat of an anomaly to Kirilow and those around her, but hers is a life that sets the stage for a journey toward a post-human entanglement with dirt that harnesses dirt's slippage successfully.

While earthly filth and dirt are not that far from cybernetic implants of metal and junk, they are not all that often combined in the way that Lai shows in Kora's character. The metal connected to her scalp—her body—is begrimed with dirt and infested with bugs. She is literally entangled in dirt and metallic junk, which makes her a complex entity. Moreover, the dirt and filth that beset Kora show just how inevitable humanity's material embodiment with dirt is. Even as partial cyborgs, soil and grime invite themselves because being human means propagating dirt. Dirt follows us and is a part of us, inescapably so.

Kora's entanglement with dirt is one that not only sees her caught between the boundary of clean and unclean but also follows her across that boundary completely. At the end of her journey, Kora's consciousness transfers to the earth itself, specifically to a tree, and she becomes one with the earth and nature around her. This idea of women, and men also, turning into trees is an old notion tied to mythological characters such as Daphne from Greek mythology, among many others (Doll 126). *The Tiger Flu* toys with the separation of

mind from body, with the antagonists' motive being to upload people's minds to two manufactured orbital moons with the purpose of curing the mind of the body. What comes as a surprise, then, is not that Kora's mind uploads to one of these orbital databases but to a natural, material assemblage of the earth. While dirt is not an uncommon theme in sci-fi, uploading human consciousness to naturalistic objects like trees in a cyberpunk fashion like Lai does is still somewhat uncommon. In this union, Kora discovers her connection to her environment, nature, and Earth (Doll 126). By merging her mind with a tree, Kora transgresses the dirt-body boundary literally and begins to embody one of the earth's many rhizomatic assemblages. However, these assemblages are not cables and high-tech machinery or cybernetic limbs, they are roots, branches, and soil.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari speak of rhizomes in a manner we can use to understand Kora's earthly transformation. Although their concept of rhizomes does not directly relate to dirt per se, their descriptions are original and fit rather well when applied to the discussion of networks. "A rhizome," they explain, "ceaselessly establishes connections" (Deleuze & Guattari 7). Like becoming part of a complex network, Kora is ingrained in the reverberating rhizomes of the earth's many assemblages.

> The rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature … It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overspills. (21, emphasis original)

Connected by the nerve centres that Deleuze and Guattari call plateaus, the rhizome can expand and hold itself together, linked in multidimensional ways, and "As such, the plateau and the rhizome … are ways of being which are always open to multiplicity and the becoming of the world" (Robert Shaw 158). As these dimensions twist and turn, change and evolve, they undergo constant metamorphosis (Deleuze & Guattari 21). These rhizomes function like networks, which, in our case, are networks of dirt that submerge the body in a milieu of earth and soil. The complex rhizomes of Deleuze and Guattari, then, reifies a conceptual framework from which we can understand Kora's—and the post-human's—becoming with dirt in a living, breathing system of constantly moving, earthly assemblages.

The attitudes and mannerisms of some of the characters and groups in these novels are reminiscent of the undisciplined—they are wild, chaotic, and uncivilised in their disposition. This is the case for, e.g., Kora and the other girls from Saltwater City in *The Tiger Flu* as well as the many Indigenous tribes on Jeep in *Ammonite* such as the Echraidhe. When compared to the disciplined, which include characters like Kirilow and Marghe, an interesting contrast is

revealed: the state of the undisciplined body is directly tied to the body of the dirty and vice versa. What this shows is that there is a direct correlation between the undisciplined body and the potential of the dirt-body relationship. The body of the disciplined is a concept introduced by Michel Foucault in his work *Discipline & Punish*, and it discusses the body in relation to punishment, discipline, and the prison. According to Foucault, the body is “directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, [and] to emit signs” (25). However, the body can only become “a useful force … if it is both a productive body and a subjected body” (26). What this means is that for the body to become a force of labour which can be utilised within that system of order, it needs to be tempered. Conversely, this implies that the undisciplined body, which Foucault associates with the body of the prisoner, is not valuable in the sense that it is not productive to society. It is the disciplined body which promotes what Foucault calls “‘docile’ bodies” (138). A docile body is comparable to the body of the soldier, a body which can be formed and plied like an automaton (136). In a system of such body politics, then, it is the docile, productive body of the disciplined soldier that can be moulded and employed for one’s own purpose, whereas the undisciplined body of the punished cannot be bridled in the same manner because it has yet to be made docile. To this effect, the undisciplined body is one without value and therefore reprehensible, morally suspect, and dirty.

Kora classifies as an undisciplined body. She is wild, lacking self-control, and perpetually covered in filth, meaning that her body is not docile like Foucault’s rendition of the soldier. Throughout *The Tiger Flu*, Kora is portrayed as a dirty, irreverent child, and Lai goes to great lengths to paint her as such. Harsh remarks directed at her person are common and really cements her as the unruly child character. However, her being a child strengthen her position since children are undisciplined creatures by nature. The novel’s primary commentary on Kora comes from Kirilow, who acts as the older sister in their relationship dynamic. Kirilow is continuously shocked by Kora’s lack of discipline and manners, expressing her displeasure in instances such as the dumplings scene, where Kora is seen gorging herself on dumplings and falling asleep while everyone else is having an important conversation. As she subsequently dozes off and proceeds to snore, Kirilow is mortified at her complete lack of propriety (Lai 268). It is while imprisoned together in the dungeon of Marcus Traskin, one of *The Tiger Flu*’s two antagonists, that Kora’s dirtiness manifests in full and Kirilow’s assailment of commentary follows. All the way from page 235 through 240, Kirilow’s inner and outer dialogue expresses disgust over Kora’s state of apathetic

squalor, taking her pungent filthiness as an affront that violates Kirilow's own being. Moreover, Kora is a product of infidelity too (244), which is directly associated with moral uncleanness. Shame is a concept wholly unfamiliar to Kora, but when her body is deliberately used as an example of an infected person, she expresses genuine self-reflection and feels shame for the first time (263). Kora gives dirt form, letting it travel on her and thus giving it an identity. Her dirtiness is a threat to order, representing an undisciplined body that is unproductive and in a state of in-betweenness—between negligence and discipline, uncleanliness and cleanliness, and cyborg and dirt mother.

At the other end of the equation there is Marghe. Marghe begins her journey as a disciplined body. Her character fits with Foucault's model of the soldier, which means she is a docile body that exemplifies productivity. Like an automaton, she is employed by the Durallium Company and utilised by a system of order to face anomalies which threaten that order. However, what makes Marghe unique is that her journey sees her transition from disciplined to undisciplined. Marghe visits the planet Jeep as an anthropologist, predisposed to learn the ways of the planet's native inhabitants. She does, in effect, leave the system of order she knows and travels to a system with which she is unfamiliar. She knows nothing of the natives' norms and rules and appears before them as an anomaly. Initially, Marghe is inoculated from Jeep's virus with an experimental vaccine known as FN-17 (Griffith 2). So long as she keeps ingesting the edible vaccine regularly, her body is protected, guarded, against the unknown and the dangerous. This is a boundary which Griffith dramatises from the start. Before Marghe can be inoculated with the FN-17, she must travel from the clean to the contaminated, dirty sections on the orbital space station *Estrade*, one airlock at a time: "that last step over the sill … marked the boundary between what was understood and controlled and what was dangerous" (4). As if foreshadowing Marghe's journey, this line aptly encapsulates her transition into the Douglasian profane. Rather than studying the Jeepians like "strange shells you might find on the beach" (190), Marghe metaphorically becomes one of those shells, an ammonite, and takes her place in the dirt alongside the other natives of Jeep. Her dream about the ammonite fossil sinking into the palm of her hand symbolises this transition into the earth, as well as her taking the name Amun—meaning the complete one—after the Egyptian ram-headed god of Thebes (192-3, 240). Marghe's body mixes with the world of Jeep and becomes dirty; therefore, she remains no longer a docile body but becomes anomalous and undisciplined. By the end of *Ammonite*, it is not Marghe Taishan but Marghe Amun who is representing the natives and turning her back on Company, her transition from space woman to dirt mother complete.

On *Ammonite*'s remote planet of Jeep, many different tribes live together as one with the earth. The wildest and fiercest of these tribes are the Echraidhe who endure a much harsher lifestyle than any other tribe due to the cold, snowy climate that surrounds them. Still, dirt has become an integral part of their lives, both in their surroundings and on their bodies. The snow in their camp is described as muddy, the huts they inhabit have an acrid smell from the burning of animal dung, and the tribeswomen do not mind dirtied bodies either. The Echraidhe value dirt on the body in much the same way as the Botswanans in South Africa do. This is most evident from when Marghe scrambles on all fours "across the dung-spattered snow" to avoid being trampled by two taars—native four-legged fauna on Jeep (Griffith 129). In her prone, dirt-covered state, Marghe looks up to meet the gaze of Uaithne, one of the leading Echraidhe tribeswomen, to find out that she is staring at her intently: "She looked up to find Uaithne watching her with an almost sexual intensity. She flushed. Uaithne laughed and turned away" (129). To the Echraidhe, being covered in dirt does not make Marghe unclean, morally suspect, or diminished in any way; on the contrary, it makes her attractive. Like the Botswanans, the Echraidhe regard dirt-covered bodies as beautiful, as Uaithne's reaction gives away. Even the children play with runny noses. The acrid smell emanating from their huts makes Marghe's nose run too, and she finds nothing to wipe her nose on, suggesting that the Echraidhe do not care nor feel the need to do so (96). But, since the Echraidhe are wild natives of Jeep, they are still associated with the dangerous. Furthermore, their kidnapping Marghe threatens her clean, disciplined disposition by entrenching her in the dirty and the foreign. Marghe compares the Echraidhe to the Sidhe, who are mythical creatures from Celtic mythology also called people of the mounds. These elves and fairies who are said to have lived underground "stole human children, twisted their souls from their bodies, and filled them instead with dark glamour" (140). Reminiscent of cautionary tales for children about dangerous, earthly forest creatures to keep children in order, this analogy antagonises the Echraidhe, a people whose lives are wild and undisciplined and therefore dangerous. The other tribes of Jeep exemplify a connection with dirt in a similar fashion to the Echraidhe, with agricultural work, sweat, and grime all being an accepted and natural state of affairs for everyone.

Sweat, stink, and grime recur in the novels too, with Lai particularly being known for her consistent use of saltwater, urine, and fish as descriptors for smell. All of these are associated with the vagina and the ocean, which, again, ties to mythological and biblical imagery of the mother and giving birth. Each mention of sweat and saltwater manifests in these novels as a celebration of the vulva, of "sensuality, playfulness, and salty sexuality"

(Doll 129). This eco-sexual way of life revels in the dirt-body connection, in the acrid smells and dirt associated with the female body and its providing, sexual splendour. It is an existence that understands smell as something which "offers invisible yet highly concrete evidence of our material embodiment" (Sullivan 256), and, instead of rejecting it as something unseemly, it is embraced as something which celebrates the body of the woman and all she represents. A compelling extract from Patrick Süskind's *Perfume* (1985) speaks of how humanity strives to distance itself from smell, or rather what Sullivan calls dangerous earth (527): "All living creatures … endeavour to distance themselves from the earth by growing—that is, they grow away from it and not, for instance, into it; which is why their most valuable parts are lifted heavenwards: the ears of grain, the blossoms of flowers, the head of man …" (Süskind 145). Because of these *corrupting gases*, "proximity to the 'earth' is dangerous," and all things must labour to rise above those earthly gases until time inevitably sees us falling back into and succumbing to those deathly vapours (Sullivan 527-8; Süskind 145). When it comes to dirt, this theme of moving heavenward, away from the earth, is salient in both *Ammonite* and *The Tiger Flu*. Marghe's *fall* from the sky lands her on Jeep where the planet's corruption will inevitably take her, and in *The Tiger Flu*, HöST Light Industries launched the orbital moons Chang and Eng for the purpose of uploading peoples' minds to them to cure the people from their corrupted, earthbound bodies. However, it is in that dangerous earth that Marghe embraces the next stage of her evolution, living as one with that earth as opposed to Company who looms threateningly in orbit around Jeep and is as removed from earthly substances as it can be. Kora's arc comes to a similar conclusion in her becoming with the earth rather than in the databanks of the moons Chang and Eng. It is worth considering, then, that it is in smell and sweat we can seek to learn more about that which binds us to the bare soil upon which we stand.

As a result of civilisation, humanity has constructed a clear boundary between itself and nature, with nature usually being depicted as the dirty counterpart to society. Oftentimes, however, it is also depicted as something serene and clean as opposed to the dirty human, at least in pastoral imagery. We seek nature for spiritual cleansing; yet, we have deemed dirt as something that comes from nature, and we clean dirt off ourselves after having been in contact with it. The dichotomy that this constructed boundary presents is intricate and complex if not also highly anthropocentric. Like an unpopular but esteemed family member, dirt is distanced from us yet acknowledged when it is necessary or convenient. An example of this can be seen in burial rituals: "Soil is the placenta that nurtures all of life—the membrane that unites the non-living components of the system [with the living]. The soil is the stage

upon which the entire human drama is enacted" (Chris Maser, qtd. in Sullivan 517). Upon the soil, humans live, fight, and die. Humanity rises from the earth in the beginning, and humanity returns to the earth upon the end of its lifespan. The earth binds the living with the non-living. Above it, the living dance; below it, the dead rest.

After the battle with the opposing Echraidhe and the Briogannon tribes at the end of *Ammonite*, the question surfaces of what to do about those who died. Danner, Company's representative on Jeep, refers to the fallen as simply *bodies*. Thenike, Marghe's partner and a native of Jeep, takes great offense to this and retorts viscerally, treating the dead as if they are still a part of the world and very much *alive* (Griffith 357). Much to Danner's dismay, the dead are agreed to be buried where they fell: "bury them where they died. We'll put them under the charred grass and the seared soil, and their grave will green when the rest of the plain does" (358). What follows is a solemn yet terrene ceremony with songs of harvest instead of sorrowful elegies. The burial site of the fallen, to the Jeepians, would be a place of renewal, "of ground that would be plowed over and seeds that would be sown that the fields would bloom again" (358). On Jeep, rather than being buried at some cemetery out of sight, the fallen are buried where they died to let their bodies become fertile ground—life—for future generations. In a ceremonial manner that sanctifies life, these bodies return to the dirt to become new soil that enriches the fields with new life. It is because of the Jeepians' cognisance about their ties to the earth that they can honour the dirt-body connection in this fashion. Kora's burial of her father hits much differently. Because she has spent most of her young life not caring about dirt or its meaning in any way, she lacks the proper knowledge to perform a satisfactory burial ceremony. To commemorate her father's death, she buries his boots in a potato jar which she then fills with depleted earth: "She ought to pray, or chant, but she doesn't know any prayers or chants. She doesn't worship Our Mother" (Lai 167). Initially, Kora does not believe in the figure of the Earth Mother nor care about the dirt-body connection like the Grist do; therefore, the act of returning her father to the earth lingers with an aftertaste of incompleteness, as if something fundamental is lacking. This lack of closure intensifies for Kora when it is revealed that her parents' minds were uploaded to Eng by Isabelle Chow, the other of the *The Tiger Flu*'s two antagonists (217). For Kora, this knowledge festers like a wound. With no way to rightly honour her parents' passing through a proper burial, the rest of the novel sees Kora visibly conflicted, and she carries that burden with her through to the novel's denouement. The returning of the body to the soil after death is thus a ritual of the highest significance which, if not performed or performed improperly, will break with an integral part of who we are.

Kirilow comes from a community of women known as the Grist sisters who were bioengineered by the clone company Jemini to function as a disposable labour force in Saltwater City's scale factories. By the grace of their mother, many of the Grist managed to escape captivity and flee into the wilds. There, beyond the reaches of the Saltwater Flats, after the fourth and final quarantine ring circling the city, the Grist settled, taking up residence in caves and forests and living off their own harvested crops. They formed the Grist sisterhood, and thanks to the many gifts bequeathed by their mother, the most important being the *partho pop*, they were able to reproduce parthenogenetically and survive (20). Created from the genetic makeup of one woman, the Grist from outside the city all look like one another, with "crow-black hair, autumn-leaf skin, and short legs" (36)—though more Grist do exist inside the city, they derive their likeness from a different mother. Furthermore, and much like the Mangaldihians of South Asia, the Grist sisters are quite preoccupied with cleaning themselves. This can be seen in Kirilow, a Grist who cleans her knives and tools often. Kirilow, like the rest of her sisterhood, is not necessarily opposed to the mixing of sweat and dirt, but in any activity that involves the cutting of flesh—which the duties of the grooms consistently do—she exemplifies a hyper-vigilance when it comes to hygiene and self-care, which is shared by the Grist (38). They have a clear cultural boundary between dirt and body, which explains Kirilow's reluctance to journey to Saltwater City as well as her revulsion upon meeting Kora and the other girls there since their diligence when it comes to washing and self-care appear, to Kirilow, to be sorely lacking—and it is. To the Grist, dirt is respected, sacred. They recognise that impurity is inevitable, making them a dirt-affirming people (Lioi 17). Dirt is integral to their lives, which is apparent in their communal chants that praise "our Mother of dirt" on several occasions (Lai 20). Moreover, their rhetoric sees frequent use of phrases associated with dirt in everything from blessings to curses. The Grist sisterhood does not shun dirt's disorderly nature but embraces its ritualistic value. In their wilderness home, their initial connection to nature can also be spotted in their choice of names—the Grist sisters outside the city are all named after distinct types of flowers, weeds, and herbs. Kirilow herself is named after the *kirilowii* plants, both a medicinal Chinese herb known as the *Chinese cucumber* and another being a wisteria plant known for its resistance to alkaline soils, both of which fit Kirilow well symbolically as a doctor travelling into the toxic environment of Saltwater City.

Kirilow stands in contrast to Kora throughout *The Tiger Flu* as someone who comes from the outside: she is the ruralist. If Kora represents the civilised Western eyes, Kirilow represents the South Asian point of view. Her tribal community has more in common with the

attitudes toward dirt shared by the people of Mangaldihi as opposed to the anti-dirt attitudes of Saltwater City's inhabitants. She perceives the girls' preoccupation with covering their faces with makeup to be far removed from natural beauty and remarks gravely on this:

> The girls who live here are a dirty, thuggish lot. They have open sores on their faces that they try to cover with a flesh-coloured liquid. It gives their skin a sticky, tacky look. They rim their eyes with charcoal pencils, which only accentuates the pus leaking from their tear ducts. Juicy, translucent lice play happy hopscotch in their matted hair. And infected metal threads drip off them like lace fungus from diseased trees. (160)

While makeup is far from being solely a modern world invention, its usage by the girls of Saltwater City perpetuates modern attitudes toward dirt as well as "efforts to conceal 'dirt'" and make dirty nature appear as "something far away and disconnected from themselves and their bodies" (Sullivan 526). By applying makeup to their faces—which Kirilow regards as something unnatural in itself—and covering up their own dirtiness, they are drawing a demarcation between themselves and dirt, effectively distancing themselves from it. As someone from the outside, Kirilow's character is meant to make the reader question the boundary between the body and dirt in this manner, especially when she is juxtaposed with Kora in the setting Saltwater City provides, a place altogether poisonous for her. Either of these two on their own would not produce the full picture. Instead, the urban city-dweller, representing a civilised point of view on dirt and the body, is placed together with the rural forest-dweller, representing a naturalistic point of view. With each of them projecting their own socio-cultural preconceptions of what classifies as filthy, their presence to each other sees them both regarding the other as dirty.

Both the Grist in *The Tiger Flu* and the Jeepians in *Ammonite* have a deep connection with the earth's womb, a connection which they externalise through their ability to dream. Through trance-induced dreaming aided by hallucinogens such as the *forget-me-do*, the Grist can cultivate their history collectively and share dreams through touch (Lai 43). Similarly, the Jeepians dream collectively through a process called *deepsearch*, a ritual which is integral to their existence for many reasons. In deepsearch, stories are shared, one's history and roots are discovered, and it is also through deepsearch that Jeepians conceive children parthenogenetically. While the Grist's dreaming might just take them to a metaphorical womb, the Jeepians' dreaming can directly manipulate and fertilise the womb in their own bodies (Griffith 248-9). So, not only can both female communes connect to the earth's womb in a figurative way, but the Jeepians can enter the womb in their own bodies, like stepping

into a hallowed cathedral, and in that way consummate new life. These associations to metaphorical imagery of the earth's womb are significantly pronounced in both novels.

Griffith's world of Jeep differs slightly from Lai's as a world where its inhabitants are living as one with the earth successfully in a spiritual fashion. Jeep's inhabitants further the myth of the earth mother living as one with nature, with its many different tribes all devoted to the earth in a similar fashion to how the Sumer people worshipped the Mesopotamian earth goddess Inanna. Inanna appears in myth as a female hero who travels to the netherworld. This symbolic female journey to the netherworld and its connotations to the mythical Inanna are reflected in *The Tiger Flu* when both Kora and Kirilow venture into the depths of the copper quarry below the New Origins Archive, a structure resembling a "vertebrae for some prehistoric gargantua" with a "spine diving deep into the ground" (Lai 265). Beneath this archive lies the Dark Baths, a series of small underground pools and lake beds pulsating with green phosphorescent light from the hallucinogenic drug that is the Grist sisters' forget-me-do. For the observant reader, Lai has been diligent in planting this connotation early in the character of Delphine, Kora's pet goat. In Greek mythology, Delphi was a place known as the earth's womb, and its evocation foreshadows Kora's destiny as intimately conjoined with the soil. Poems about Inanna depict her as a motherly figure who pours plants and grains from her womb like threads, and this thread metaphor is meant to represent "an ancient reverence for female power 'threaded' with earth power" (Doll 129). Traces of her worshippers speak of "men and women living together peacefully and devoted to earth wisdom, weaving, and agriculture" (129). Doll elaborates that these findings "testify to what our early ancestors from Sumer and Old Europe understood to be a nature-loving, female-centred people: womb power and nature power were one. However, this peace-loving culture was wiped out brutally with the coming of the Aryans and the Babylonians" (129). Parallels can be drawn here to *Ammonite*'s Company, the group of corporates from Earth representing humanity's final throes of capitalism who would rather exploit Jeep for its resources irrespective of the negative effects it would have on the natives. To them, the Jeepians are simply an Other. *The Tiger Flu*'s co-antagonist Isabelle views the Grist in the same manner, not as women but as alien and non-human.

While Company looms in orbit around Jeep in *Ammonite*, Isabelle's flying war machines comb through the forests of the Grist—both equally pernicious—seeking to exploit those whom they perceive as a dirty Other for their own gain. In addition, Marcus makes use of the Grist's forget-me-do, mass-producing and distributing it in the form of a powerful hallucinogenic drug he names *N-lite*, which is far more potent than the Grist intended.

However, in Saltwater City, N-lite is used to "see the truth" in a world ravaged by disease and destitution (Lai 206), utilising the drug's hallucinogenic effects to augment reality and make it seem more appealing than it really is. Moreover, N-lite is used as the first step of the upload to Chang and Eng (206). What these malicious agents seek to accomplish goes against the dirt-body connection represented in the Jeepians and the Grist. For the Jeepians, Company's experimental vaccine could potentially prevent Jeep's virus from affecting its host, thereby stopping Jeepians from conceiving children through parthenogenesis and jeopardising their connection to the planet—without the virus, life on Jeep stops. Should Company perfect their vaccine, "they'll be holding our [the Jeepians'] destruction" (Griffith 371). The vaccine is representative of control in this fashion. For the Grist, it is the separation of the mind from the body that is the biggest threat. To the Grist, body and mind are inseparable. Kirilow embodies this stance emphatically, stating that "if the body is dead, then so is the woman" (Lai 232). To the Grist, the separation of the mind from the body threatens their earthly connection, which is their way of life. Whether it be body and virus or body and mind, their potential separation endangers the same thing: their bodies' ties to the soil. What these female communes have makes them alien in the face of the human, and therefore they are wronged, harassed, and tyrannised. They have a connection to nature and the earth which far eclipses their human counterparts' understanding, and, rather than try to understand it, these human antagonists would see dirt as an obstacle to overcome.

An orchestra of ochre and all other earthly pigments surround humanity on all sides in the form of dirt, soil, earth, and dust. We find it everywhere, "on our shoes, bodies, and computer screens," and it is "mobile like our bodies" (Sullivan 515). Wherever humans have walked, what remains is dirt. Human habitats such as homes, workplaces, commutes, pubs, and cafés all need to be cleaned regularly because these places become dirty from human occupation. Nature, on the other hand, does not need to be cleaned. This is, for one, because the civilised world has deemed dirt's natural place in the world to be something that should be *outside* as opposed to *inside*. If it gets inside, it becomes matter out of place and needs to be moved or cleaned up. There is a clear setting of boundaries to separate dirt from our bodies, yet the places we reside become dirty because of us. Sullivan explains that "this dust emerges from our bodies" and "is always with us as part of ongoing interactions among all kinds of material agents, and thus is … more process than place" (515). This distinction between process and place is important because the anti-dirt campaigns of civilisation would have us believe that dirt in the human domain is something to be combated when we must instead learn to negotiate with dirt's *mobile grit* (526). Where humans go, dirt follows. This

has never changed, and it is never likely to change.

Sullivan's dirt theory as well as the characters Marghe and Kora in *Ammonite* and *The Tiger Flu*, respectively, builds on the Douglasian notion of the dirt-body connection, suggesting a rethinking of the boundary we have created between soil and the body. Dirt, in all its forms, reaches across time and space, always moving and moved by everything around it. It has an inherent hybridity that lets it be both stationary and mobile. Dirt theory presents a way of reading *Ammonite* and *The Tiger Flu*, as their references to dirt and a becoming with the earth and the planet are prevalent throughout their narratives. Dirt carries biotic matter; everywhere we go, dirt follows. It is impossible to separate ourselves from dirt, as its assemblages can reach every corner, every nook and cranny, and it plays a role in all manner of ecological processes. It is a mystical being of sorts whose matter sanctifies life and the union of the human body and earthly bacteria. Rather than reject this union, we must begin to affirm it. To quote Lioi, "To affirm dirt is to recognize that impurity is inevitable, and to offer it a carefully defined place that recognizes and contains its power" (17). To accept rather than reject dirt as a part of ourselves, and to acknowledge our place in its unclean ecologies, is what dirt theory would have us do. Although it has no designated place of dwelling, we must create a symbolic place for dirt and accept it as a part of our bodies.

Chapter 2: Narratives of Order and Chaos

What constitutes as pure in one society becomes pollution in the other. Douglas defines this distinction as a "ritual limit between the acceptable and the prohibited" (Lagerspetz 82). For instance, whether it is acceptable for shoes to be placed on the table or kept on the floor is one such distinction Douglas makes (82). What is unclean in a given culture finds itself imposed with prohibitions which in turn decide what is and is not acceptable within that culture. For instance, mannerisms or deeds performed in the wrong place or at the wrong time upsets order. These prohibition markers proceed to "structur[e] life for members of the community," so long as they are maintained (83). Such prohibition markers hold the power to dictate how societies coexist with dirt, functioning as a communally upheld arbiter that passes judgment on pollution and disorder as it catches them in the act of transgressing. Furthermore, to pass as pollution, the item in general does not even need to classify as dirt. It is only required to "*deviate from its own place* in an order" (Lagerspetz 85, emphasis original). Douglas' depiction of shoes on the table is an example of this (85), and it is one which directly applies to the two next texts in question. Anything can be both pure and dirty depending on the culture because the borders dictating these labels are unfixed and fluid. In societies that coexist with dirt in an orderly or chaotic fashion, boundary markers of the sacred shift to include all manner of dirt in places where another culture would shun it. Lagerspetz summarises that "society is, more than anything else, kept together because its members think in the same way. Deviants are excluded and branded as lunatics or evildoers. Dominant norms of thought must be presented as inviolable, and the role of religion and *the holy* will be central in the process" (110, emphasis original). The societies presented here are examples of this collectiveness in their coexistence with dirt, and their connotations to deviancy manifest in ways that set them not so far apart.

A recurring topic in the discourse on dirt and its shifting definition is the concept known as the *civilising process*. As our societies have modernised throughout the years, tolerance toward dirt and grime on our bodies have changed, and so too have the definitions of items which we would ascribe to the categories of junk and dirt. In particular, "general tolerance towards soiling and bad hygiene in Western societies was previously higher than today on *average*" (125, emphasis original). Lagerspetz attributes this change to "*the birth of the modern individual*" (126, emphasis original), a process which turns the focus of dirt inward and "marks the adult from the child" (127). With this modernisation arose "the principle means for socially controlling individuals" in ways that are internal, or what we know today to be self-discipline (126). While self-discipline dictates certain standards in our civilisation toward which we all should strive, it works to actively encumber the civilising

human with controlling measures within a social order (129). This notion of control is directly related to Foucault's ideas on discipline and the body. Moreover, says Lagerspetz, in instances where a disciplined party observes acts of transgression, the "implicit rule … is for passers-by to behave as if they had not seen anything" (138). In this case, Lagerspetz asks us to consider who really is the undisciplined party: the transgressor or the gaze of the discreet (138). As the wheel of progression turns, the civilising process sees humanity shut the doors on private matter, allocating dirt to less and less intrusive spaces. Yet the wheel of progress can turn two ways and, with it, undo the progress of the civilising process as well as its definition of self-discipline, turning humanity toward degeneracy, away from the human being to a state of bestiality—allegedly (152). In doing so, different, complex narratives of modern coexistence with dirt reveal themselves.

Dirt is equally potent as it is precarious, and how we choose to approach a coexistence with that ubiquitous matter will affect how we can best make use of that gritty element at all. The novels explored in chapter one, *Ammonite* and *The Tiger Flu*, serve well as narratives about what it means to coexist with dirt, and they will continue to be referenced. However, in this chapter, I present alternative narratives of two societies that coexist with dirt in principally opposing ways which are not particularly different from each other, returning to an anthropological state in their own way either through methods of order or chaos. Each of these societies are emblematic of the Douglasian sacred and profane in their own unique way, and this affects how they treat dirt accordingly.

When it comes to living with dirt, two principal approaches are juxtaposed, casting light on each of their respective modes of living and their inherent limitations. These principles are order and chaos, where the former has ties to humanism, the civilising process, and anthropocentrism, and the latter has ties to re-wilding, deep ecology, and primitivism—not to say the two cannot mingle, for they most certainly can and do. Representing chaos is Delany's *Dhalgren*, a cult classic novel spanning over eight hundred pages long. The novel is known for its mobius structure, which encourages the reader to delve into the novel from any point since the ending loops back to the beginning. Although the novel lacks any traditional plot, it functions well as a case-study of how the protagonist, a 27-year-old man known as the Kid, lives day to day as he deals with themes such as identity, sexuality, and race while being an undisciplined body of value who is always dirty in some way. *Dhalgren* aids in understanding the potential of a coexistence with dirt as it remains uncontrolled and wild. In the novel, dirt and filth cling to everyone in a post-apocalyptic landscape, but it is not channelled in any productive way. The Kid, along with the other denizens in the city of

Bellona, embodies this as he lives wild and free in the city's perpetual state of orderly dissolution.

"Paradises Lost," written by the late Le Guin, is the novella representing the side of order. The text is a speculative fiction novella published as part of the collection *The Birthday of the World and Other Stories*. The novella follows the characters of Hsing and Luis on the generation ship *Discovery*, a spaceship tasked with journeying from Earth, Dichew, to the New Earth, Sindychew, in the span of roughly 200 years.[1] The novella grapples with ecological issues and questions relating to our relationship with earth and dirt and our ties to it from the perspectives of characters who are becoming increasingly distant from Earth. Le Guin's novella will add a necessary layer of complexity that betters our understanding of how a life with dirt looks like on the side of order, which stands in opposition to chaos—to show their differences but also the many ways in which they compare. On the spaceship *Discovery*, Le Guin has created a society of humans who have built themselves a generation ship that is journeying through space, and the first humans who set out, known as the zero generation, bring with them only the parts of Earth that they can domesticate. Dirt, nature, and crops still exist on the ship, but everything is utterly neutered so it does not pose a threat in terms of pollution and infection. Through an emerging religious group who call themselves the Angels, anti-nature attitudes are fostered to cement humanity's place as a species belonging in the heights of space, away from dirt and relying solely on technological progression and human ingenuity. However, the novella's two outcasts, Luis and Hsing, are unable to sever their connection to Earth and become increasingly critical of the Angels' agenda. Their path introduces the birth of chaos out of the order which the Angels are advocating in the novella, paving the way for an innocent coexistence with dirt that sees a return to nature from civilisation. In these stories, both Delany and Le Guin highlight narratives of order and chaos that shift between civilising and primitivistic attitudes toward dirt. Together, they accentuate the complex relationship between order and chaos as it pertains to dirt and what it means to coexist with dirt at the fringes of their respective societies.

"Paradises Lost" complements *Dhalgren* through its own critique of order and the civilising process, highlighting the problems inherent to a way of life that attempts to increasingly distance itself from dirt. By juxtaposing Le Guin's novella with Delany's novel, one is made aware of how "each turn of the [civilising] wheel actually decreases the individual's potential to experience life in its fullness as we become ever more dependent, domesticated, and alienated from our own vital potential and the living world" (Smith 481-2). When it comes to a re-wilding of the human and its connection to dirt, the civilising process

of order is directly counter-intuitive to such a re-wilding, and Le Guin's novella functions as a cautionary tale of exactly this. On the other hand, Le Guin's novella offers a way to live with dirt through a civilised ecocentrism that differs from how *Dhalgren* tackles the same issue. Within order and chaos, the tenets of humanism and anarchism operate reciprocally. Humanism and anarchism offer a productive discourse on the boundaries of dirt and what a post-human life with dirt looks like, under the banners of both order and chaos. Moreover, such a discourse should preferably circuit the peripheries of extremities which "Paradises Lost" allows because of its exploration of emerging ecocentric thinking in an environment that grows increasingly anti-nature. *Dhalgren*'s chaotic utopia cannot supply this understanding on its own, as a reading of its life with dirt could ensnare readers in a one-sided and romanticised interpretation without the lens of Le Guin to help broaden the horizon. This chapter digs to the bottom of the fringes that are the boundaries associated with living with dirt and offers an understanding of humanity's connection to dirt, with what we can and cannot leave behind. With both Delany and Le Guin together, the ecological aspects of order and chaos and their relationship with a post-human entanglement with dirt suddenly become tangible.

Delany and Le Guin: Modes of Post-Human Coexistence with Dirt

Delany's *Dhalgren* advocates a world of anti-civilisation and anarcho-primitivism that works against the civilising process. The city of Bellona, where the events of the novel take place, is a ruinous, post-apocalyptic utopia where individual freedom and debauchery are the status quo. The city was borne into existence by a mysterious disaster in the American Midwest, and most people who used to live there have fled. Bellona is characterised by its perpetually smouldering buildings, heavy mists, smog, and broiling thunder clouds. It is a city that, to mention some of its more important quirks, is seemingly always burning, yet buildings still stand; where time moves differently for some than others; and, where not just one moon but two fill the darkened sky. The city of Bellona is an erratic being, and the people who seek out the city are equally attracted to its devastation and ruin. Many of these denizens live in unsanitary environments, covered in filth, metal chains, and junk, all of which they relish. After all, living in an endless gloom caused by a clouded sky of smoke and haze makes it that much easier to just remain dirty. There is no government in Bellona either, so the city is adherent to a chaotic status-quo, which serves the novel's themes well. However, the world of *Dhalgren*, while seemingly anti-civilisation, is not all about disorder. Amid all the chaos, cultures and societies grow, human lives flourish, and a life with dirt asserts itself in a way that directly affects the human condition and the modern world's definition of the natural.

The city of Bellona is an unbridled landscape where humans live in any way they like. Its inhabitants are reminiscent of an American city full of people from the fringes alone: counterculture advocates, punks, gays, and non-whites—primarily blacks and Latin-Americans in *Dhalgren*'s case. Considering when and where Delany wrote and published the novel, it is not difficult to imagine how much of a haven Bellona represented to people in the margins of 60s-70s America. Here is a city wherein anyone could just go and be themselves, free from oppression or persecution, emancipated, and able to live freely. The city resists the laws that most of modern humanity is familiar with; it resists civilisation and even conventional progress as our modern civilised society knows it. According to the novel, the existence of the city bypasses perception itself, suggesting that it is in a state of liminality (Delany 14), undetectable by civilisation. As such, the city is an anomaly that exists independent of the rest of the world, which is also what allows it to remain undisturbed in its naturally discordant state of affairs. To the cosmic eye of order, Bellona looks like what one might call a regressive city, ushering in a primitivist society—a city that is moving backward as opposed to forward, undoing *progress* in the name of a re-wilding or a return to a natural

condition. In this sense, the city of Bellona is a chaotic element that stands in opposition to the order toward which the civilising process and the original tenets of humanism work. The orderly aspect of civilisation and humanism is "usually portrayed as a progressive, culturally mediated movement away from an inchoate natural condition, a coming to individual maturity that mimics, even recapitulates, society's own 'civilising' historical telos—its evolving transcendence of a primitive 'state of nature'" (Smith 471). We can understand from this that, as far as notions of order are concerned, primitivism is to be avoided as it would be considered heading in the opposite direction from the kind of progress which order would want to create.

Smith elaborates that "primitivists deem 'civilisation' in all its various guises to be inherently destructive to biological and cultural diversity and to individual freedoms. The very idea of progress is, from this perspective, an ideological smokescreen used to justify the increasing domestication and enslavement of human populations and ecological landscapes (472). Keywords such as domestication and enslavement are vital to understanding the primitivist's opposition to modern civilisation and the civilising process. These words are associated with control and subjugation which are values that the primitivist philosophy naturally disavows. *Dhalgren* champions the primitivist notions proudly, and it throws all manner of conventional beliefs of order out the window. This is represented no better than in the Kid, who walks partly barefoot throughout Bellona, covered in metal chains that are wrapped all around his body, directly touching his skin and occasionally abrading it (Delany 7-8). The Kid, like most of the people in Bellona, is his own person, autonomous and free. This serves as a reminder that primitivism is not "anti-humanist in the philosophical sense of seeking to dissolve that autonomous self-defining human subject so central to humanist (and much anarchist) thought" (Smith 472). On the contrary, both anarchism and humanism share a powerful sense of individual autonomy in their definitions of human individualism. In this regard, it is their means to the same end that sets the two philosophies apart. It is a complex relationship, but the similarities between Delany's chaotic denizens of Bellona and Le Guin's orderly civilisation on the *Discovery* are many, and this becomes especially salient in the way each of them lives with dirt.

The kind of primitivism found in *Dhalgren*'s world is not present on the *Discovery*—although there remains a morbid fascination of it. The crew of the spaceship is an orderly but eco-friendly society preoccupied with building and maintaining their civilisation. In terms of religious beliefs and a higher purpose, human ingenuity reigns. In Le Guin's novella, it is only the Angels that set themselves apart from the rest in this regard. To the Bellonans, their

chaotic, anarchic society invites what Murray Bookchin calls "an anti-Enlightenment culture with psychologistic, mystical, antirational, and quasi-religious overtones" (qtd. in Smith 472). This irrationality and nature mysticism is what is viewed by advocates of order to be regressive forces, meaning that they are not auspicious for the advancement of society. Yet the truth remains that both order and chaos's definitions of progress are simply two sides of the same coin. Mohammed A. Bamyeh states that "chaos is both the precondition and source of order" (6). The two are always in conflict, mixing with each other and undoing the other's progress. Whereas one would be deemed a "'progressive' rationalism," the other would be called "an emotive and 'regressive' irrationalism" (Smith 472). Progress is, in all fairness, a misleading term here, since one side's progress is the other side's regress, one cannot just label the other as being regressive if the aim is to understand diverse ways of coexistence with dirt. The case is that the two conceptual principles of order and chaos have their own idea of what constitutes progress, and these ideas happen to be synonymous with regression by the other. More textual examples of this will be addressed.

In *Dhalgren*, key differences between orderly and chaotic ways of living with dirt begin to manifest. Roughly one third of the novel is dedicated to a family known as the Richards, a conventional, modern family that is living in Bellona as if nothing has changed. The Kid helps them move from one flat to another, slightly higher up in their housing complex. It is in the interactions between the Kid and the Richards that one notices the apprehension expressed by the Richards in their dealings with the Kid, treating him as a malodorous stray whom they can employ. If the Richards represent the remnants of a humanist civilisation of order that would seek to domesticate dirt, the Kid represents anarcho-primitivist as well as deep ecology aspects of a coexistence with dirt. Suffice it to say, the two do not mesh well in the same space. The world of Bellona, in all its chaotically inclined anarcho-primitivist splendour, is one that threatens the Richards family, but it does not appear threatening to the Kid. Being the undisciplined body that he is, the chaotic city of Bellona is home to him. Toward the end of their heated exchange when their philosophies clash, the Kid states, "I live outside in it; I walk around in it" and "you've got to walk around in it because there isn't anything else" (Delany 225). Acclimating to that dangerous outside is all there is to the people of Bellona, and embracing it is their kind of progress—a progress toward chaos. It is this mindset, that the advocates of order would deem regressive, which poses the biggest threat to civilisation politically, because it is anti-establishment and destructive rather than progressive in the civilising sense. In *Dhalgren*, this is reality. There is no world apart from dirt, and you must open your body to it.

In *Dhalgren*, dirt is everywhere. There is no wrong place for dirt and rubbish anymore, and therefore it is allowed to intrude so close to peoples' bodies. The Kid walks in urine and filth, is covered in sweat, and he even wears chains and metal on his body. Yet, it remains invisible to most people in Bellona because it is no longer categorised as transient rubbish out of place but something which is durable and a part of their lives. There is a sort of consummation of this dirty existence in the opening sequence of the novel between the Kid and Tak Loufer, another denizen of Bellona, where they proceed to have oral sex despite the rank state of uncleanliness in which they both are (49-50). On the *Discovery*, dirt is allowed to intrude only as far as it is because the culturally perceived dangerous components of it are removed. Had that not been the case, their dirt would be in the wrong place. While dirt and bodily waste remain, they become invisible because they too are neutralised. The visibility of dirt depends on where and in which socio-cultural environment it is. Put differently, "there are those things or areas which we cannot see … and there are those things or areas which we conspire not to see" (Michael Thompson 88). In his book *Rubbish Theory*, Thompson says that "When these latter intrude, and we cannot help but see them, we banish them from view (or alternatively neutralize their visibility)" (88). While *conspire* might be too harsh a word, the society on the *Discovery* shares in an out-of-sight, out-of-mind mentality regarding dirt. They know that "the body is 'a reliably constant source of pollution'" (Elisabeth Shove, qtd. in Remo Gramigna 259), only that they have found a way to neutralise it, turning their transient dirt and rubbish invisible. Since even the dead are recycled aboard the *Discovery* (Le Guin 262), the process of life's end becomes effectively invisible too when they do not need to concern themselves with the decaying body after death, since that decay and pollution is in the *right* place. It is when dirt becomes visible, when it is in the wrong place, that it becomes threatening (Thompson 92). When this happens, order is transgressed and becomes chaos. Additionally, when considering the notion of place, saying that dirt and rubbish are invisible in Bellona might not be entirely correct. They are noticed, regarded, and the target of much commentary; this is true, and therefore it cannot be invisible. Yet even though it is visible matter, it is not out of place. Dirt, in *Dhalgren*'s city of Bellona, is in a complex state of alterity that is both in the right place and the wrong place simultaneously. The body is enmeshed in that liminality, that in-betweenness, where transient dirt and rubbish becomes both visible and invisible.

Returning to the Richards family, their reactions to the Kid speak of a natural, civilised revulsion to the liminal state in which the Kid is. Valerie A. Curtis makes an argument for the biological reaction of disgust as it relates to the prevention of disease and

infection. “Disgust of dirt,” she says, “is part of human nature” because it helps us ward off infection and remain healthy (Curtis 660). This reaction predates history as we know it (660), and it is an integral part of us by this point. It is in our nature, then, to harbour an innate aversion to dirt and similar matter which we would find polluting. Following this logic, it is not hard to understand why modern civilisation has progressed in the direction that it is heading, toward an orderly utopia as opposed to a chaotic one. Moreover, this could also be grounds to assert that the civilising process is human nature as well; after all, being disgusted by dirt has been in our nature for a long time, so why would we not attempt to shut it out or domesticate it to make it less threatening? This poses a problem for Bellona, the anarchic society that champions ideals of primitivism as humanity’s natural condition—that being dirty is no sin at all and that we should not be disgusted by it being on our bodies. When applying Curtis’ assertion of a natural disgust toward dirt, does this make the Bellonans unnatural? Does it make Kora, the perpetually filthy girl in *The Tiger Flu* unnatural? It is difficult to say for sure, to say what is and is not unnatural out of these two, but it is possible to argue that, in these cases, one is dealing with a state of liminality as proposed in chapter one. Delany’s *Dhalgren* is not meant to be read as a regressive society about degenerates and a return to the cave dweller but as a progressive utopia of the post-human. The fact that the Bellonans are no longer afraid of dirt or any of its socio-cultural or religious connotations presupposes a transcendence similar to what was encountered in *The Tiger Flu* and *Ammonite*, one where the denizens of Bellona, its outcasts, and the Kid all have attained a post-human state of being where dirt on the human body is perceived as natural. Although the Bellonans appear to be in a state of liminality, theirs is a state of post-liminal post-humanism, where dirt, infection, and pollution have become part of the body; therefore, these are no longer biological threats of which they need to be afraid. This is not quite the case in “Paradises Lost.”

The *Discovery* is a society governed by civilised, ecocentric ideas of order, which is a conscious decision on Le Guin’s part. Their society represents human ingenuity, a new frontier, and the future. In the novella, the humans on the *Discovery* have managed to domesticate dirt. The way this looks is quite deceiving initially. They live with dirt, grow their crops in botanical bays, walk barefoot, and even refrain from showering too often. Really, on the surface it is as if Le Guin and Delany have their respective groups of humans living the same life. However, what becomes apparent is that the zero generation, in domesticating dirt, left out everything they did not strictly need. Dangerous bacteria, bugs, and animals were abandoned (Le Guin 250-1). “The quality, literally, of life” is trammelled

and carefully maintained by scientists (263), and this goes for everything related to the human body as well, such as reproduction, death, and one's upbringing. What dirt the children of the *Discovery* learn to live with is not dangerous dirt but the subjugated kind. Dichew, and all references to it, fade into obscurity with each passing generation, only available in texts and virtual simulations.

In the world of Bellona, the tapestry of civilisation is unravelling; therefore, ideas of hygiene are fading too (Curtis 662). One might call this development a natural one, given the chaotic nature of the city and how it is veiled in a blanket of perpetual night and clouds. On the *Discovery*, hygiene seems quite relaxed as well. The crew of the ship walk barefoot on metal, shower only ever so often because of water-rationing, and promote a culture of sex that is healthy and positive. In this, its similarities to Bellona begin to shine through the canopy in a way that is rather striking. While seemingly the same, the two societies of Bellona and the *Discovery* accept dirt on different premises: the former regards dirt as natural, while the latter has domesticated it entirely. The crew of the *Discovery* are living in an orderly, civilised future ahead of our modern civilised society, which means that religious and cultural "intuition[s] that polluting matter should be removed or avoided can be found" there (662). That is why they have subjugated dangerous dirt to its most harmless state. While this does mean that they have taken dirt with them, it is only the kind of dirt that the hand of civilisation controls. Wild, polluting dirt as it exists in *Dhalgren*, *Ammonite*, and *The Tiger Flu* is nowhere to be seen. "Nothing but the necessary bacteria, the house-cleaners, the digesters, the makers of dirt—clean dirt," are present (Le Guin 250). While the Bellonans have managed to attain a coexistence with dirt that is post-human through its primitivist approach, the crew of the *Discovery* have attained a different, albeit arguably also post-human, coexistence with dirt in an eco-anthropocentric sense—a coexistence with dirt that is tamed to suit humanity. These are two distinctly separate ways of living with dirt. Each of them proposes their own kind of coexistence, where one is attained by emerging oneself into the pollution of the dangerous outside and the other by subjugating that very same dangerous outside, or at least the basic components that matter, so it is no longer harmful. Two similar coexistences with dirt, yet they derive from two completely opposite, but also closely adjacent, principles or order and chaos.

Various kinds of rubbish are ascribed different kinds of values, these being either transient or durable (Thompson 10). Thompson explains that "objects in the transient category decrease in value over time and have finite life-spans. Objects in the durable category increase in value over time and have (ideally) infinite life-spans" (7). Body products

such as "excrement, urine, finger and toe-nail clippings, pus, menstrual blood, scabs and so on" are considered transient rubbish items; body products such as milk, sperm, and babies are considered durable (10). The two categories matter differently for the two texts in this chapter, but what is more important to address first is the notion of how items in one category can move unhindered into the other. The categories themselves are fixed, but the items in them are fluid, able to shift from one to the other depending on socio-cultural and/or political circumstances: "the boundary between rubbish and non-rubbish moves in response to social pressures" (11). Thompson makes a point out of sweat and how it was once considered noble back in the wartimes of WW2, rallying the "spirit with offers of 'blood, toil, tears and sweat,'" but how, in our modern time, sweat is placed solely in the transient category of rubbish where it has become a target for anti-perspiration advertisement campaigns (11). What is and is not considered natural in these categories is at the mercy of the temporal. On the *Discovery*, the crew are quite preoccupied with nature and the natural state of the body—which looks, perhaps, ironic in juxtaposition with *Dhalgren*—but their idea of the natural is one that differs from nature as we know it on Earth precisely because theirs is a tamed, or subdued, version of that naturality (Le Guin 276). What is left are two different societies rooted in their respective systems of order and chaos who each have their own definition of the natural.

Bodily products such as sweat are a good starting point to address the similarities between life on the *Discovery* and in Bellona. Simply, to conserve water aboard the generation ship, the crew must shower less. This makes it easier to accept a little body odour when everyone is in the same boat literally. In terms of the dangerous and the polluting, sweat is relatively harmless and easy to overlook. Even in a civilisation of order, it would be considered quite innocuous in most cases. When looking at more vulgar items on the transient list of rubbish, the crew on the *Discovery* have methods of recycling those, which is something the Bellonans do not. In "Paradises Lost," the ones responsible for the recycling and the management of human bodies and their waste products are the scientists and the anthrogeneticists. They dabble in the management of the body, down to its most basic, cellular pieces, carefully managing every detail: "Every cell shed by human skin, every speck of dust worn from a fabric or a bearing, every molecule of vapor from leaf or lung, [is] drawn into the filters and the reconverters, saved, recombined, re-used, reconfigured, reborn" (288-9). On the *Discovery*, absolutely all manner of bodily waste down to the last drop of sweat is recycled. Nothing is wasted. All is channelled in an efficient system of equilibrium.

Bodily waste is not recycled in this way by the Bellonans, and this contrast between

the two is stark. For the denizens of the post-apocalyptic city, living in rubbish and walking around in one's own bodily waste has become normalised, though not for everyone. The Kid especially is the most obscene example of this alongside the Scorpions, a gang of outcasts of whom he becomes the leader. Lanya, the Kid's romantic partner, comments on the state of the Scorpions' nest when she sees it, how filthy it is, and how utterly overcrowded the house is: "There is a pile of shit—human, I assume—by the side of the back steps, which is understandable considering you only have one bathroom. Which I was in, by the way, and *that's* pretty unbelievable" (Delany 574, emphasis original). For the Kid and his company, all manner of rubbish and bodily products in the transient category does not bother them in the slightest. Brigitte Laser argues that the post-apocalyptic phase is a contributor to this change in attitude, and that in this phase "there is a destabilization of the value of things" promoted by the post-human Other which then sees itself "become the dominant species" to which the human being must give way (251). For the Kid, the boundary between the two categories does not exist. Transient, durable; it does not matter. This, again, brings up the argument of transience: the Kid and those who live like him in Bellona have transcended the boundaries between culture and dangerous dirt, and because of this they are all living a post-human existence.

It is also important to emphasise that the toilet is what Gramigna calls "a boundary place" that is "in between nature and culture" (274). The toilet is a place inside the culturally constructed house, a place of concentrated order that distinguishes itself from the outside. Here, restrooms relegate filth and dirt into the peripheries (274). "By building a house," Yamao Yamagushi explains, "man cuts out a culturally controlled 'inside' … in contrast to the outside" (qtd. in Gramigna 274). Toilets become containers of the unclean that conceal our dirt, making it a private business as opposed to a public one (274). When our own private, bodily waste is allowed to transcend the boundary of the restroom in the way that it does in the Scorpions' den, it sets a precedent of transgression that breaks down the borders of the house, mixing outer space with inner space, nature with culture.

Both *Dhalgren* and "Paradises Lost" show ways of living with dirt in a post-human setting. The most notable difference being the topic of boundaries: the Bellonans, and the Kid, have muddled the waters and submerged themselves into the dangerous dirt, that metaphorical swampland, that is associated with sin. All manner of boundaries is entangled, whisked away, or entirely absent, all of which the post-human entity is known to do. It is a being committed to perversity and one which assimilates all into itself, transgressing all boundaries (Haraway 118-9). The crew of the *Discovery* are not like this. Their existence

with dirt is one that is based on systemic assimilation rather than immersion, "impos[ing] order upon nature by whittling it down to manageable proportions" (Thompson 91), removing that which is undesirable and threatening to make it safe. What unavoidable waste they must live with, such as bodily waste, they recycle. In terms of a coexistence with dirt, they exhibit an eco-anthropocentric, idealised form of post-human life with dirt that enriches their own lives, but, as it is based on manipulation and subjugation, it becomes a wholly different entity from *Dhalgren*'s anarcho-primitivist post-human creature. Through the principles of order, the civilisation of the *Discovery* has attained a post-human coexistence with dirt. Even though they have weeded out all that which they could not control and kept what is left in a cannibalised form, it has made them experts on dirt in the civilised sense of order and control all the same. "As soil completes the cycle of life by decomposing and recycling organic matter and regenerating the capacity to support plants, it serves as a filter that cleanses and converts dead stuff into nutrients that feed new life," says Montgomery (16). The *Discovery* crew surely understands this, since they do also recycle their dead, and the soil can help with this. Theirs is arguably a more efficient coexistence than what is seen in *Dhalgren*—when talking strictly in terms of productivity—which makes one wonder whether one is objectively *better* than the other.

In both texts, there are systems of dirt operating together with the body, and "where there is dirt there is a system," says Douglas (44). "Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements" (44). The *Discovery* crew do this. They have furthered a culture that categorises dirt as dirt, and, in so doing, they have classified it as matter that can transgress the boundaries laid down by their current system of order (Curtis 663). In a modern system of order like this, filth is usually regarded as

> wholly unregenerate, contaminating, even toxic, and demands to be rejected and denied. But when polluting or filthy objects are thought of as trash, waste, junk, or refuse, they become conceivably productive, the discarded sources in which riches may lie, and therefore fecund and fertile in their potential. (William A. Cohen, qtd. in Gramigna 266)

The society on the generation ship in "Paradises Lost" do not reject dirt but, on the contrary, incorporate it. In the eco-anthropocentric fashion, they accept it. It has become a productive matter of fertile potential that is a vital constituent in propelling them across space. Although they reject the inappropriate elements as they are, they have become a society wherein transient dirt and rubbish are effectively durable. As such, their lives become enriched by a

system of dirt. To the Bellonans in *Dhalgren*, dirt and rubbish are equally durable, as the city's denizens and the Kid himself are wont to adorn themselves in scraps of metal and chains. The rubbish around them is attributed with value, and dirt on the body is treated as something that is natural. Based on the two societies' positive predisposition toward a coexistence with dirt, dirt, filth, and rubbish are considered just as potent in Bellona as they are on the *Discovery*. Although, while this may be true, the two societies utilise that potentiality in widely different ways. The Bellonans revel in dirt more so than the *Discovery* crew do, but they do not channel it. Dirt and rubbish are a valuable and natural part of the Bellonans' lives, but their definition of productivity sets them apart from Le Guin's people. In the primitivist sense, the system of dirt in Bellona is not a typical system at all, but a state of nature that resists ordering, and, as such, it is a system of chaos which undoes systems of order. The fecund potentiality of dirt in these two texts is one of nature and culture, and it shows even more strongly the characteristic differences between modes of living with dirt that are rooted in order and chaos.

A system in the civilised world needs order and structure to work, which is something Bellona resists. If the society on the *Discovery* is one of culture, then Bellona is one of nature, and "nature is essentially chaotic and continuous; culture is orderly and discrete. Thus, nature continually threatens to break down the water-tight compartments which culture seeks to impose on it," says Thompson (91). *Dhalgren* is filled with examples of this kind of undermining disorder, and the Scorpions' den is, indeed, one very salient example of their primitivist coexistence with dirt. The Richards family's dinner with the Kid is an even better example of how Bellona's society of dirt is one that threatens systems of order. During the dinner, the Kid continues to dirty the table with his filthy fingers, after which the situation only gets progressively messier from there as he spills cream and syrup on his hands as well as uses the silverware from the communal bowls for himself exclusively (Delany 140-53). To an orderly family such as the Richards, the display is rather grisly. Before the dinner, the Kid does have a bath (138-40), but his undisciplined and dirty nature actively labours to re-merge him into the chaotic state of coexistence with dirt that his body knows. The Kid's entire presence in the Richards' household paints a tableau of the forces of nature and culture at work and of how futile the struggle appears to be. Nature invades boundaries without shame, and culture attempts to stop its ceaseless charge to no avail, like a war where neither side can hope to emerge victorious. The two are an Other in each other's eyes.

I speak of these two different post-human ways of coexistence with dirt, that differ so widely from one another, and how the two, if they were put in the same room together, would

appear foreign and alien to each other. What the Kid and the Bellonans have would be dangerous to the *Discovery* crew, even resisted, and what the *Discovery* crew have would be considered unnatural by the Bellonans. Steele, et al., explains that

> in cities, dirt and filth represent 'the other' of the civilising process. Repressing savage, animal impulses involves material-semiotic processes of urban divorce, cleaning and ordering. The implication is that civilised human beings, if they do not take care to avoid dirt, will (re)turn into animals. (242)

It is for this reason that the threat of dirt—or untrammelled dirt in Le Guin's case—is so salient to civilised societies and people such as the Richards or the crew of the *Discovery*. The urban divorce on the generation ship is observed in their use of virtual simulation to experience the *savage* and *animalistic* people of Dichew that lived with raw dirt. While subtle, there is an underlying tone of exaggerated self-opinion expressed by the crew on the *Discovery* that implies that they are not animals like the people of Earth but in fact civilised human beings that have evolved further in their coexistence with that same matter. A similar predisposition against the dirt with which the Kid pollutes their home can be gleaned from the Richards as well. Both Delany and Le Guin present two different definitions of a post-human coexistence with dirt, both of which require some context about what the post-human is to be understood fully.

Hayles says that "the prospect of becoming posthuman both evokes terror and excites pleasure" (283), and that is true in a literal sense for the communities in the texts that are presented so far. In *Dhalgren*, since its denizens embrace a coexistence with wild and dangerous dirt and rubbish, the notion of the post-human excites more pleasure than terror. In "Paradises Lost," the situation is the opposite. The post-human, as the name eponymously implies, speaks of that which comes after humanity and supersedes it (283). This idea is understandably more terrifying to a civilised society that is based on systems of order than it is to a primitivist one—since a chaotically inclined society is much more accepting of alterity—and it is their attitudes toward the post-human that defines their versions of what that post-human existence should look like. In their attempt to control dangerous dirt and make it harmless, the *Discovery* crew are inadvertently ushering themselves into a fully post-human, ecocentric existence that ends up being not so unlike the Bellonans' in the end when most of the *Discovery* crew decide to colonise Sindychew and leave the generation ship behind. Although the two texts do uphold two quite different yet similar kinds of post-human modes of living, they become almost the same toward the denouement of "Paradises Lost." At that point, what dangerous dirt the current generation on the *Discovery* have been taught to

fear is transposed with a feeling of rediscovery and intrigue. Luis and Hsing, together with those who choose to settle, enter a state of post-human coexistence with dirt not so unlike that of the Crakers in Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003) who are motivated by an innocent reacquaintance with dirt that evokes Edenic representations. However, whether it is a Garden of Eden, Dirt, or even Waste means little for the post-human. What remains constant in its definition, as it is defined in these two texts, is a return to the natural.

Both of Delany and Le Guin's narratives make certain to include dirt in their own ways, whether through the lens of order or chaos, and when we know that the body is a natural source of pollution and dirt, there does not seem to be any rational alternative of excluding dirt short of becoming machines. In the words of the late Le Guin herself: "I really do think we have to take our dirt with us wherever we go. We are dirt. We are Earth" (11). It is only a matter of how one goes about bringing dirt with them that makes a difference in the end. There is no denying that the two texts in question incorporate dirt, and they both end up in quite similar places, but, even then, there are still differences. To the *Discovery* crew, the notion of raw animality is what they perceive to be unnatural in their futuristic society. Readings, films, and virtual simulations about the old world and our comparably primitive ways are available to the crew, and there is a morbid fascination shared by the crew regarding these, but the fact remains that their society has separated themselves from the parts of Earth and the human body that were considered dangerous. "Elimination of bodily waste reminds human beings of their inescapable and irreversible embodied condition as well as their 'Animality,'" says Gramigna (259), and this is a salient notion that each generation on the *Discovery* must acknowledge every day. They can segregate themselves from all manner of dirt, filth, and wildness as much as they want, but *removing* it is nigh impossible; therefore, they can only subdue it or otherwise neutralise those elements to at least make them as invisible as possible. This makes sense for an eco-anthropocentric society that places the civilised Anthropos first and nature second. Conversely, in Bellona, animality is embraced in the spirit of the post-apocalyptic, anarchic society in which they live. Rather than being seen as "something threatening and repelling which possesses a high potential of contamination and pollution," bodily waste, dirt, rubbish, and junk are embraced on the premise of that wild, animalistic mode of living with dirt. The civilised coexistence with dirt espouses eco-anthropocentric temperance, animalistic subjugation of the body, and, naturally, control. This is what puts the *Discovery* crew's eco-anthropocentric coexistence with dirt on the path to its eventual, ecocentric post-human state when they do finally return to their earthly roots. Theirs is an innocent post-human state that comes to regard Earth as a lover.

The post-human being in *Dhalgren* does not share this Le Guinian sentiment. Instead, their primitivist coexistence with dirt espouses untrammelled wildness (Smith 479), human animality—a progression toward an earlier, idealised state of being—and chaos, or at least the absence of order. This animality and wildness are seen through the Scorpions and their use of the optic chains on their bodies. These chains are holographic projectors that veil the body in light, obscuring them entirely, taking the shape of all kinds of animals, insects, and mythical creatures (Delany 594). While their half-naked bodies remain filthy and adorned with metal, these beastly projections shroud them, concealing their own dirt while simultaneously channelling it in a futuristic, animalistic display of post-human verve. This raw nature is something the *Discovery* crew could only gaze at from afar from the safe confines of their unsullied, eco-anthropocentric utopia of subdued animality. Interestingly, the Kid's holographic projection is never explicitly revealed but implied to be amorphous. Making the anomalous and constantly filth-covered Kid out to be a creature without form creates parallels to the Douglasian formlessness of dirt, which is something the Kid does not just exemplify but embodies in his lifestyle, performing it with his body.

The *Discovery* crew, living as a post-human species in a perfected system of dirt while sailing through the blackness of space, can regard themselves as angels in a way. The religious sect that emerges on the ship names themselves precisely that: the Angels. It is hard not to miss the Douglasian overtones of Le Guin's novella when considering the crew's eco-anthropocentric system of dirt. The crew are only mingling with dirt to the degree that "is required for their own survival," while everything else is "contained in a self-sustaining system of their own devising" (Tonia L. Payne 244). In this sense, the *Discovery* crew become like angels—angels, who "are not supposed to mix with mortal Nature" (David Ehrenfeld 21), that profane matter, or the kind of dangerous dirt which is natural on Dichew and in Bellona. The angelic symbolism often stands in opposition to a demonic counterpart in biblical texts: "'The good angels,' explains Susan Griffin, 'hold cheap all the knowledge of material and temporal matters which inflates the demon with pride.' And the demon resides in the earth, it is decided, in Hell, under our feet" (7). If the earth is a place allocated to the demonic, then the angelic must distance itself from it. This aversion to untrammelled dirt has been a key component in civilised systems of order most often observed in such humanist or eco-anthropocentric societies, and Ehrenfeld would argue that "there is … a strong anti-Nature (at least raw Nature) element" in such societies (6). This is evident in how the zero generation dismantles dirt to the ground, bringing with them on the *Discovery* only the parts of it which are susceptible to manipulation. Although civilisations have always appreciated

nature, as centuries of pastoral imagery, poetics, and texts intimate, they have often appreciated it more so for its resourceful usefulness to humanity or for the historically anthropocentric narratives that saw nature as something to be challenged or conquered. Civilised systems of order are regarded as anti-nature in that they oppose raw nature and, along with it, the wild and the dangerous. Furthermore, for raw nature to exist, a civilisation to name nature as such is required. In this context, the differences between the two texts of Delany and Le Guin manifest. If *Dhalgren*'s Bellona is the Douglasian citadel of the profane, where wild and dangerous dirt follows everyone around uncontrollably, the *Discovery* is the metropolis of the sacred, where all dirt is cleaned and rendered harmless. In the former, the demonic finds its home; in the latter, the angelic.

Chapter 3: The Mud and Refuse in Our Future

Infection was believed to be associated with the miasmatic swamp terrain, says David C. Miller (13), a place that has been designated a locus of disorder as far back as there have been civilisations to acknowledge it. Contact with the swamp's miasma caused disease, and so there arose an imperative need to combat this potential blight upon the body: "By the end of the nineteenth century … the civilising agenda was understood mostly in terms of medicine and hygiene. Illness rather than sin was the thing to be afraid of in industrial society" (Lagerspetz 151). It was said that infection would give rise to harmful effects that would put the individual in a diseased condition through contact with microorganisms such as germs (151). As a result, judging eyes shifted toward the dirty. For the rural folk, however, more disciplined attitudes toward dirt took longer to manifest. According to Annie Furuhjelm, a common saying among the ruralists was that "cleanliness, that's what kills you off" (qtd. in Lagerspetz 153), implying that dirt is what makes you human. As institutions and the civil world became modernised, these attitudes would be quelled somewhat, but, as is most often the case, the farther away from urban areas you venture, attitudes toward dirt become progressively relaxed. The modernisation of civilisation can only reach so far, and what it does not reach, it alienates. This is the case for the swamp:

> As an ambiguous realm (neither land nor water), the swamp defies the pervasive logical distinctions at the basis of culture: the demarcation between life and death and polarities such as good and evil, light and dark, male and female. That is largely why it has always seemed so threatening, and the antithesis of civilization. (Miller 78).

Traditionally, "it [the swamp] was the domain of sin, death, and decay; the stage for witchcraft; the habitat of weird and ferocious creatures" that came to be associated with a "a matrix of transformation" in the mid-nineteenth century (Miller 3, 21). Yet, it is a wild matrix that civilisation cannot contain, holding within itself the fluctuating, dynamic alterity of the Douglasian profane. For this reason, the swamp is "literally and figuratively a terrain of struggle for government agencies" (Ingrid Bartsch, qtd. in Lioi 21).

Through the perspective of the civilised modern world, the swamp is an outlier, a writhing navel of deviancy. The swamp is a place of disorder that evokes a recrudescence of primitivistic sensibilities (Miller 10), offending order by its very presence. While being labelled a new Eden of sorts that became associated with much intrigue and mystique as well (60), its dangers remained salient. Immersion into the swamp was said to give "way to the prospect of a loss of control signified by unlimited growth" (13)—a growth toward the post-human perhaps? The dirt-laden environment of the swamp evoked both terror and pleasure, and its infection heralded a "loss of control" that would rouse our "unconscious response[s]"

(190), or so people feared. This perception of the swamp was one belonging to the civilised world. And as both Douglas and Lagerspetz argue, “dirt is not so much an element of reality as the result of a symbolic order that we *impose* on reality” (Lagerspetz 102, emphasis original). The dangerous swamp, perceived as dangerous by humanity, would not necessarily be dangerous to an Other that finds its miasmatic terrain an inviting embrace. Whether it is an actual swamp, a metaphorical swamp, or a swamp of dirt and waste created by human hands, our entanglement in it could transform us, changing our perception of that dangerous place, and dirt as well. No longer will it be an outlier, then, but a living, breathing heart of formless becoming.

There are many ways to imagine what our near future with dirt will look like. Dirt, in the form of all kinds of matter, but also bodily waste and rubbish, is something humanity could embrace in a plethora of ways. Chapters one and two show several examples of what a post-human entanglement with dirt can be, with different but still similar ways of living with dirt on opposite sides of order and chaos. These are all good examples, but what could our future with dirt be like in a more tangible sense? Bacigalupi’s novella “The People of Sand and Slag” offers a gritty and explicit take on our future involvement with dirt that merges the body with dirt in a cyborg fashion where humans are eating and consuming mud. In another vein, Gibson creates a civilisation on top of mountains of waste and rubbish in his short story “The Winter Market,” a future that does not seem altogether unlikely. Bacigalupi provides a take on the cyborg of dirt; Gibson the environment in which it lives. In the wasteland of dirt and waste that inevitably builds up around us, the dangerous and metaphorical swamp of dirt threatens to devour and overtake humanity. In the novella and short story of Bacigalupi and Gibson, respectively, the post-human rises from that waste to become dominant, ushering in the next stage of our evolution, a stage that entangles itself in mud and refuse.

Bacigalupi’s novella “The People of Sand and Slag” is about a futuristic Earth where the post-human cyborg has superseded the modern human being. In this future, the dominant post-human species is one that decorates the body with metal prosthetics, regrows lost limbs, and, most importantly, eats mud and slag for nourishment. This becomes possible thanks to humanity merging their bodies with larvae, or, more specifically, weevil larvae. Bacigalupi’s treatment of the post-human union between human and dirt is materially visceral. In the short span of the novella, readers become acquainted with three soldiers who fight to preserve mountainous mining operations and pools of mud and slag, which are vital resources for their survival as human creatures with with lead and mercury running through their veins (Bacigalupi 55). The story takes an unexpected turn when the band of soldiers encounter a

wild dog, remarking on its strangeness and lack of prosthetics. In their world, the existence of a *normal* dog is incongruent with their environment. Dogs are thought to be extinct and to only exist in zoos, hence the crew's fascination with it. They decide to take it in, and what follows is a story of what distinguishes the human from what they have become: people of sand and slag.

In Gibson's short story "The Winter Market," people live among junk and refuse under a sky "illuminated by neon and mercury-vapour arcs" (Gibson 126). Outside Tokyo Bay, the Japanese created islands of *gomi* (junk) to deal with their increasing waste problem. Despite this, gomi kept accumulating, and islands continued to "rise out of the Pacific" (129). Rubin, the local savant of gomi, continuously brings home rubbish he finds useful, collecting it and repurposing what he can. Everyone lives in gomi, and everything comes in with the gomi. Lise, a congenitally disabled human woman whose real body is maintained by a polycarbon body in the events of the story, is found in a waste disposal area; she comes in with the gomi. An intricate exoskeleton of metal and black polycarbon helps her move. She is a cyborg woman made of metal and junk who also becomes romantically involved with Casey, the story's protagonist. Casey works as Lise's editor in her psychic waveform career—a type of mental film industry—and he appears conflicted over his inability to aid Lise in her situation, which is growing progressively worse. Lise dreams of transitioning her consciousness into the network, a transition that Casey himself fears. Amid the landscapes of gomi that continuously submerges the human further into dangerous waste, the character of Lise is an anomalous character who seems to live in a twisted form of harmony with that waste. She is described as a doll, propped up with her polycarbon and glitter, descending further and further into decadence. In both texts, the boundary between body and dirt/waste is no more. In Bacigalupi's text, humanity has become post-human, embracing dirt fully in a material and organic manner; in Gibson's text, people swim and wallow in junk as it steadily encroaches on their lives, blurring the line between danger and purity. Yet, the one who is best suited to navigate that junk is none other than Lise herself.

The post-human is a complex entity, and unpacking it is a challenging task—in part due to its intricate entanglement with multiple domains, like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome (21). In its literary form, the post-human occurs in many areas. It is especially frequent in speculative fiction, a genre well suited for the issues surrounding the post-human being, and it is most often associated with the cyborg. "The cyborg," says Haraway, "is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity" (118). The cyborg proposes a state of being where the qualities that made the human *human* are no more. It is beyond gender and conventional sex as a method of reproduction. Instead, the cyborg is wholly committed to perversity and without innocence (119); moreover, it is concerned with the regrowth and restoration of its structure rather than reproducing organically (147). By calling the cyborg perverse and without innocence, Haraway paints a picture of the cyborg as an entity which is part of something that it should not be: it is an aberration, an amalgam of heterogeneous assemblages that are always expanding (Hayles 3). Furthermore, because the cyborg lacks innocence, it is also unclean, or dirty. Its becoming "evokes terror and excites pleasure" (4), as if reaching out and touching the deepest part of our soul.

According to Haraway on the topic of cyborgs, "contemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs—creatures simultaneously animal and machine" (117). These are creatures who are entwined with the machine, cybernetically augmented, bioengineered, and whose being heralds a post-gender, post-human era. "The cyborg," she asserts, "would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust" (119). It is in and of itself something entirely different from the human. The cyborg is the "illegitimate offspring" of patriarchal capitalism, yet, as she points out, "illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins" (119). While cyborgs are most often made out to be part machine, cyborgs need not be machines at all. Hayles states that the cyborg's distinction lies in the "construction of subjectivity, not the presence of nonbiological components" (4). Sci-fi popular culture works such as Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), and Masamune Shirow's *Ghost in the Shell* (1989) have certainly helped popularise the image of the cyborg in later years, but the cyborg is more than just carbon-based bodies entangled in wires. The cyborg is a metaphorical being composed of innumerable assemblages, free from prejudices and preconceptions, and not necessarily

metallic in origin. Therefore, interpretations of the post-human cyborg can apply to all the texts that have been presented so far, not as a being made from machine parts but as a being that entangles itself in matter such as dirt and waste. Whether the cyborg embraces the machine or immerses itself in dirt or any other matter, the difference is negligible if not entirely inconsequential.

It is still an important duality Haraway presents, that humans, made of mud and dirt just as the biblical Adam was moulded from clay, are distanced from the nature that bore it, and that the non-human Other—creatures like the Kid, Marghe, and Kora—is closer to that muddy, dirty nature than humanity can perhaps ever hope to be because it would be toxic to us. The post-human Other can live in conditions that humans cannot. They survive in ecologies wrought with disease and waste, much akin to a swamp. Extrapolating from Haraway, post-human Others are far closer to the dream of the Garden of Eden, in a way, than humanity could ever be.

The post-human's enmeshment in the Garden of Eden is one that is considered by the modern civilised world to be a form of pollution, and it ties back to Douglasian notions of the sacred and profane. These matter-out-of-place "transgenic border crossings pose a serious challenge to the 'sanctity of life,'" explains Fiona Coyle (511), evoking terms such as bio-invasion, ontological pollution, and unnaturalness. Pollution is a term that implies the introduction of matter in a space where it is not supposed to be. We imagine the infection of our bodies to be a pollution of the cells; the image of Lilith in the Garden of Eden to be a pollution of the nature of being; the mixing of human and animal to be an unnatural union of the sacred and the profane (505, 507). However, in this transgressional state of in-betweenness that the cyborg engenders, particularly in Bacigalupi's "The People of Sand and Slag" and Gibson's "The Winter Market," a new and natural state of being occurs where the human becomes embedded in an amalgamation of complex processes from which it has been thought to be separate. Just the matter that humans excrete alone delineates it as something inseparable from nature: "The 'environment' … runs right through us in endless waves, and if we were to watch ourselves via some ideal microscopic time-lapse video, we would see water, air, food, microbes, toxins entering our bodies as we shed, excrete, and exhale our processed materials back out" (Harold Fromm, qtd. in Stacy Alaimo 11). By accepting dirt, matter, and microbes within oneself, one would nurture a stronger connection with one's environment, which is what the respective main characters do in the texts I have included. Alaimo elaborates on the connection between body and environment, arguing for the material interconnectedness between human and the non-human Other. The human is inseparable from

nature in its trans-corporeal state, and it is this trans-corporeality that imagines the substance of the human as enmeshed with nature (2). This material interconnectedness opens hitherto unmappable landscapes of the body-nature state, and it is from this that the post-human Other enters. In a space where it is not supposed to be, the post-human is welcomed, accepting pollution, infection, and unnaturalness within itself.

The more one describes the post-human, the more it begins to resemble the workings of a swamp, or at least a creature from the swamp. In understanding ecocriticism, Lioi evokes "the figure of the swamp dragon—embodying elemental mixture, ethical impurity, and serpentine wisdom—as an alternative to the posture of prophet and judge, the arbiters of purity and righteousness" (17). Like the swamp dragon, the various post-human characters presented so far submerge themselves—figuratively or literally—in the mud and dirt of their environment, embodying a becoming with the cyborg of dirt and its many assemblages. It is in doing so that they supersede the boundaries that hold back the human, becoming post-human. The environment in the city of Bellona in *Dhalgren* and the polluting grandeur of Saltwater City in *The Tiger Flu* as well as the other biomes in these texts are all places of pollution wherein the post-human thrives and the human does not, almost akin to a Superfund site. Lioi "suggest[s] that a swamp dragon moves through these regions" (19), bringing these places of pollution and concentrated dirt and waste to life. While evoked as a serpent of wisdom, there is no shortage of mythological tales of "the serpent [being] demonized in narratives of patriarchal defeat of chaos" (21-2). This causes some issue in evoking the symbol of the swamp dragon, Lioi admits, but that it is also a blessing: "to accord a proper place to pollution, ecocritics must retain a sense of pollution's danger, and our own connection to it, rather than reduce its power through domestication" (22). Sure enough, places of dangerous dirt are subject to domestication by the civilising process, much like what is learned through life on the *Discovery* in "Paradises Lost" and from the perception of the Richards family in *Dhalgren*. In the stories of Bacigalupi and Gibson, however, these wetlands of pollution and toxicity are now just a part of the natural world. Notions of purity have changed throughout time, and the parameters of what constitute dirty and clean differ too as times change.

Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann both expand on the post-human being's connection with nature and the swamp. Iovino is concerned with the post-human's dwelling, whereas Oppermann elaborates on the notion of the post-human's space as a nucleus where ends meet. "The posthuman," begins Iovino, "is … the ontological *narrative* of the human in its infinite paths of entangled becoming with its others" (12, emphasis original); furthermore,

she says that “the posthuman discloses a dimension in which ‘we’ and ‘they’ are caught together in an ontological dance whose choreography follows patterns of irredeemable hybridization and stubborn entanglement” (11). Extrapolating on Sullivan’s explanation of dirt, and Lioi’s depiction of the swamp dragon, as something which connects everything, Iovino’s portrayal of the post-human becomes clearer: it is a being which blurs boundaries and resists limitations, weaving them together; it is accessible to guests, the elements and the Other (12); it is a nomadic entity that dwells in fluid transformation. Oppermann describes the post-human as “a perturbed middle space where many crisscrossing discourses mingle to consolidate a non-anthropocentric humanism” (274), which is consistent with the non-anthropocentric attitudes shared by the respective characters in these texts.

The post-human is a criss-crossing space of becoming. It expands, resisting limitations and erasing demarcations laid down by modern civilisation: “In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals” (Hayles 3). It binds human, cyborg, and nature together, all intermingling and overlapping, cross-hatched and a part of each other. Distinctive markers between sex, race, and ethnicity are erased (4-5). Kora and Kirilow in *The Tiger Flu*, Marghe in *Ammonite*, the Kid in *Dhalgren* as well as the soldiers and Lise in “The People of Sand and Slag” and “The Winter Market,” respectively, all embody this shared state of being, embracing it and allowing it to bleed into the ecologies of which they begin to realise they are a part. Even for the respective characters in “Paradises Lost,” their environment is ushering them into a similar post-human existence that is in the process of erasing or has already erased these boundaries. Stubborn and unrelenting, the post-human cyborg of dirt asserts itself like a complex rhizome, forming networks upon networks with all domains around it, like an *interbeing* (Deleuze and Guattari 25). Through rhizomatic assemblages stretching and curling like rousing roots, animating and burgeoning out of control in the thickets of swamp- and wastelands, the post-human cyborg of dirt is composed.

In “The People of Sand and Slag,” what has allowed humanity to advance as much as it has is the technology known as *weeviltech*, genetically enhanced larvae of beetles known as weevils that reside in and augment the human body. Since humanity is a people that consumes slag for nourishment in this world, the naming of this technology makes perfect sense. The weevil is a beetle, and although the weevils themselves are common pests with limited usefulness outside of being weaponised by farmers against invasive plants and used as folk medicine in certain parts of Asia, most beetles are attuned to dirt and soil in a less

invasive fashion—the weevil's stigma as a pest is generally attributed to its defilement of crops such as rice and grain, an interesting notion on the topic of post-human entanglement that is toxic to the human. One beetle, known as the dung beetle, has been revered since Ancient pre-Egyptian times as a deity of resurrection, the sun, and as a primal source of creation (Marcus Byrne & Helen Lunn 5, 12). Moreover, the dung beetle is portrayed in various creation myths, described as the creature whose "dung ball symbolised the ball of matter the scarab brought from the sky in order to form the world" (2-3). Its connotations to rich soil, fertility and life are strong as well. The dung beetle also carried with it the connotations of rebirth: "It rolled the ball backwards—a peculiar way for any animal to move—creating a living image of reversible life" (11). Byrne and Lunn speak of how the dung beetle can travel between invisible realms and back again to the material plane, that the "Dung beetles entered these alternative worlds simply by rolling and burying balls of dung" (4). In a sense, these dung beetles were entering the realm of the post-human cyborg of dirt long before us, effortlessly shuffling, consuming, and mediating dirt as they bustled in the soil underneath our feet. The soldiers in Bacigalupi's novella have evolved to mimic this lifestyle, even going so far as to wear exoskeletons on their bodies for protection before a military operation (Bacigalupi 49). So not only do the soldiers eat dirt and wear what we can imagine to be armour with beetle-esque aesthetics, but it is also the case that if they lose a limb, an arm, or a leg, it has the potential to regrow just like some types of beetles are known to possess the ability to do. The humans in Bacigalupi's future live lives that bear such a strong resemblance to beetles, and, because of that, dirt and processed slag are granted a higher priority than ever as the most valuable resources there are. To the modern human, the world in "The People of Sand and Slag" might simply appear to be an inhospitable and muddy mess, but within that world itself, and to the people there, the battlefield of wet dirt and slag constitute the necessities of life.

One of the more commonly known beetle deities is the Egyptian god Khepri, a man with a scarab for a head. Khepri symbolised resurrection and the idea "that life did not end with death," which the Egyptians believed was associated with the dung beetle's dung ball (Byrne & Lunn 3-4). The idea of life springing from the dung ball shares similarities to Bacigalupi's novella in the dirt and mud that embalms and/or is consumed by the body in order to regenerate it. While it is not explicitly implied, the mud-eating soldiers' ability to continuously regenerate limbs from eating slag suggests that they might even have developed the ability to undergo some form of rebirth through mud, although this is only speculation. The notion of rebirth through dirt is something I visited in chapter one with *Ammonite* and

The Tiger Flu in the form of parthenogenesis—the ability to reproduce without the help of another sex. Male dung beetles were believed to be "capable of parthenogenesis," says Byrne and Lunn, an ability that "was an additional quality that made the dung beetle supernatural" (12). Although we know today that this was a scientific inaccuracy, the notion of being able to reproduce on its own made the dung beetle a particularly potent symbol of creation and rebirth. While Bacigalupi's novella gives no notion of rebirth per se, the regrowing of lost limbs happens frequently so long as one consumes mud. This notion of regeneration coincides with what the Egyptians believed about the dung beetle and their capacity to engender humanity's ability "to transform and regenerate themselves" (Byrne & Lunn 18), which is something the soldiers in Bacigalupi's utopia interpret literally in their direct consumption to regeneration ability.

When looking at "The Winter Market," the idea of parthenogenesis or any kind of rebirth through dirt takes on an entirely different meaning. In a society where humanity and gomi interact on a level that transgresses the human body as deliberately as it does, the transfer of one's body and *mind* to a polycarbon Other might just as well constitute the ability to reproduce parthenogenetically through that same gomi, only it is a cycle of rebirth through our own manufactured waste. If nothing else, Lise's transformations represent an early form of parthenogenesis through waste. Her continuous transitions are steps akin to a rebirth of the body where she is progressively becoming more as one with the environment of waste and junk that envelops her, one large bite at a time.

The soldiers in Bacigalupi's novella encounter a live dog in a tailings pit on one of their outings, a creature so rare in their day and age that they can only be seen in zoos. Much time is spent marvelling at the creature and how it is so unlike themselves, with no prosthetics, hands, or any weeviltech. The dog should not be alive in a world so inhospitable to it, and the crew contemplates eating it to put it out of its misery (53). The dog itself is symbolic of various things: it is symbolic of how our kind of modern life would not be able to survive in Bacigalupi's world of mud and machine, but it is also a testament to life's resilience in a world that is decidedly toxic to it. While normal in our own world, the dog is an anomaly in this muddy future, an outdated relic at the end of its evolutionary chain. A biologist who comes to check on the dog tells the soldiers that keeping it as a pet is a bad idea: "A live one is hardly worth keeping around. Very expensive to maintain, you know. Manufacturing a basic organism's food is quite complex. Clean rooms, air filters, special lights. Re-creating the web of life isn't easy" (59). To the biologist, the dog is simply not worth it. Life is constantly evolving, and humans along with it. Inside us, microorganisms

live and breathe, fighting a constant battle with the outside in terms of flu and viruses. In other words, our body is not our own, and in “The People of Sand and Slag” the new human race has recognised this by ascending to a new level of being that actively entangles the body in bio-organisms which, in turn, transform it.

Slag is the most common nutrition in Bacigalupi’s novella, and eating it is as normal as eating an apple. To most of us, this kind of geophagy would sound rather unappealing, but Gerald N. Callahan sees fit to remind us that, even today, most of what we eat is, to a smaller or larger extent, just dirt:

> Other than water, what little stuff we humans have inside us is largely dirt. Admittedly, this dirt is sometimes highly processed before we receive it, but most solids that make up humans and other creatures either are now or recently were dirt … transformed by sunlight into plants or animals. Most of us prefer the dirt we eat in the form of cows and sheep and carrots and squash and bison and sorghum. Other dirt we'd just as soon scrape from our feet and leave at the door. (Callahan 1016)

Geophagy is generally considered an abnormal practice, but so is the consumption of any non-food item in any given culture. Moreover, what items count as food items varies by region and culture (1017). No matter what we do, however, we inevitably consume some dirt, whether through interacting with the soil in some fashion—through dirty hands from agricultural labour for instance (1017)—or just from inhaling the granular, particulate matter that is carried by the wind. Generally, eating dirt poses health risks, since humanity today primarily eats dirt that is highly processed and has become dependent on consuming it in that fashion. Interestingly, “indigenous peoples have routinely used clays (decomposed rock, silica and aluminum or magnesium salts, absorbed organic materials) in food preparation” as a means of removing toxins (1017). This is strengthened by Montgomery’s findings about how clay minerals most likely “played a key role in the evolution of life” (15). Even aluminium salts from clay are used in “human and animal vaccines” (Callahan 1017). Furthermore, the consumption of dirt happens frequently among pregnant women, especially in certain sub-Saharan African societies, due to the soil’s richness in, e.g., calcium and for its ability to strengthen the immune system, among many other benefits (1017-8). So, despite its risks, the soil clearly possesses a myriad of beneficial properties. To us today, food items that are grown in soil function like an extra step, deriving nutrients from the rich soil which is then digested and absorbed by us in a process that makes it safe for us to do so. It is as if our processed foods are places of boundaries that serve to shield us from the harmful properties of dirt. The soldiers in “The People of Sand and Slag” no longer need to worry about harmful

toxins in dirt because the weevil larvae modify their bodies, and therefore they eat slag as is and can harness the beneficial properties of dirt without considering the possible detrimental effects of eating raw soil. Should this extra step no longer be necessary, growing processed food would no longer be required, and we would be able to consume slag straight from the ground like the soldiers do in Bacigalupi's world. In doing so, we would consummate our becoming with the post-human cyborg of dirt in a similar fashion on an organic level, making the previously inhospitable and polluting elements of dirt a part of ourselves, since all the microorganisms and organic material in the soil would become a part of our bodies directly.

The post-human being in Bacigalupi's novella, and the other characters in the respective texts I have discussed throughout these chapters, is unlike the human being we know today. It has superseded all other life and unified with microorganisms and science in ways that make it wholly unrecognisable. In a sombre moment between two of the soldiers, Chen and Lisa, Chen asks her, "If someone came from the past, to meet us here and now, what do you think they'd say about us? Would they even call us human?" to which Lisa replies, "No, they'd call us *gods*" (Bacigalupi 66, emphasis added). Their existence is one that cannot reconcile with the Garden of Eden—for they are too dirty and do not belong there. The dog that the crew finds repeatedly injures itself in the inhospitable environment, cutting itself on clusters of wires (66), showing just how clearly it does not belong there. Everything threatens it. To survive in the Garden of Dirt, one must evolve beyond the limits of the human body, becoming something new which can not only survive in the given environment but also thrive in it. Bacigalupi's mud-eating humans would appear to us as gods, but so might any creature whom humanity perceives to live in ways that are so different from it. The post-human cyborg of dirt is just another way to live, and it is a form of life that engenders and is engendered by the Garden of Dirt.

The Garden of Dirt

The imaginary Garden of *Dirt* is a wordplay on the Garden of *Eden* and alludes to our return to it in some meaning. It is a place where dirt's slippage flows freely, where we live in symbiosis with it. The word *we* is ambiguous here, but it is clarified by Haraway that humans and the post-human cyborg perceive the Garden of Eden differently and that the cyborg would not perceive it at all since "it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust" (119). I would argue that the mud-eating post-humans in Bacigalupi's novella, even though they are made of dirt, would not recognise the Garden of Eden either and that this is a case of perspective. The connotations to a Garden of Eden are different to humanity and the post-human Other, respectively—they do not mean the same; hence, why I call for a Garden of Dirt. The post-human would not be able to perceive the Garden of Eden as we know it, but it would be able to see the Garden of Dirt, that gritty, polluting swamp- or wasteland and junkyard with which it lives in harmony. The two gardens are really one and the same, but they are perceived from two completely different eyes: the human and the post-human cyborg of dirt.

In Bacigalupi's text, dirt flows freely in the form of tailings pits and slag pools mined in large areas—mud is everywhere, directly integrated into peoples' lives. In Gibson's "The Winter Market," dirt flows freely in the form of gomi. In both texts, dirt is a productive slippage of waste. I spoke in the previous chapter about the movement of rubbish, about its transient and durable capabilities. In Gibson's short story, most waste is no longer transient. Islands, liveable spaces, are borne by waste. As something that began as a project to make waste useful, rubbish suddenly becomes a source of power. Rather than pollute, waste becomes a resource upon which civilisations can stand. Thompson explains that "the production to rubbish transfer, at first sight, appears rather unlikely. After all, who would go to all that expense and trouble to produce rubbish" (114)? Producing rubbish for the sake of rubbish is pollution (114), yet in Gibson's short story, that pollution is now a source of durability that becomes productive. The consumption of rubbish has usually been something covert, that we put away, out of sight. Since rubbish is usually covert, says Thompson, "there is a tendency to ignore, and even deliberately to deny, the existence of this consumption of rubbish" (117). However, in "The Winter Market," dirt, waste, and rubbish have become overt. What this means is that places like "the compost heap becomes a powerful status symbol" (117). So too do the mountains of gomi in Gibson's post-apocalyptic world of rubbish become a symbol of power, not only for the gomi's inherent usefulness and

recyclability but also for its dualistic, pollutive benefits that turn previously inhospitable areas of dangerous dirt into foundations, building blocks, for the civilising process. In a somewhat perverse manner of mixing with the Douglasian profane, humanity is building its houses out of waste, so to speak, previously designated to the matter-out-of-place category, effectively making waste not only durable but also valuable.

Waste and rubbish are much like swamplands when they accumulate to large, toxic dumps, but, in "The Winter Market," the wastelands of rubbish that make up the islands outside Tokyo Bay become more alive than actual islands, brimming with a "virtuosity of microbial teamwork and the conviviality of the anaerobic world" (Lioi 29). Scavenging through rubbish and setting out on *gomi runs* is a common occurrence, because, as it turns out, beings such as Lise are found just lying around (Gibson 136). Waste is moving in these texts; it is alive and growing thanks to the direct human involvement through which it is reified. In a sense, these wastelands of dirt and rubbish are post-human versions of swamps. "The swamp is the exemplary figure in the American semiotics of place for chaos, desecration, and diminishment," says Lioi (20). Moreover, it is the centre of innumerable processes, a matrix of transformation that spells trouble for the civilising process (Miller 21). The swamp is also an obstacle for government agencies (Bartsch, qtd. in Lioi 21), something that is visible to varying degrees in Bacigalupi's and Gibson's texts as well as in Griffith's and Lai's novels. While Miller would call the swamp a *desert place*, referring to "any wild, uninhabited region, including forest land" that is deserted and/or forsaken in some way (1), these post-human swamplands of dirt and waste are anything but forsaken: they are flourishing. The landscapes of dirt and gomi are polluting, anti-civilisation spaces that seek to assimilate you into themselves—the post-human entity naturally entangles itself with every domain around it. Recalling the image of Lioi's swamp dragon, one can picture how this Garden of Dirt broils with a toxicity that should be poisonous to the human body. Yet, life blooms in its pollutedness. Just as "the moisture of the soil preserves a continual verdure and makes every plant [in the swamp] an evergreen" (William Byrd, qtd. in Miller 207-8), the swamp of dirt and gomi in these texts empowers the post-human, evoking its existence from within the human:

> In the swamp the exchanges between skin and enveloping matter, the synaptic response of nerves to the myriad signals in the surrounding space, and the overburdening of mind with the onrush of uncatalogued perceptions all initiate the dissolution of the self. As self-consciousness relaxes, instinctual energies surge. (Miller 208)

It is here the Deleuzian-Guattarian notion of the rhizome and its expanding networks echoes the strongest. As it is, the swamp is inhospitable to humans; prolonged contact with it dissolves the self. However, in that dissolution, something instinctual stirs from its slumber. This is the swamp dragon, the post-human cyborg of dirt who thrives in the in-betweenness and alterity behind which the landscapes of dirt and gomi leave. "The Winter Market" portrays this dissolution of the self acutely in the cyborg character of Lise, a woman whose disabled body is maintained by her polycarbon body. She seeks to leave her body fully and immerse herself in a supercomputer—marking a mind-body separation in a similar fashion to *The Tiger Flu* where the tainted body is left behind and the mind merges, quite literally, with metal. "The People of Sand and Slag" emblematises a direct embodiment of the post-human cyborg of dirt that now lives. In both of these gritty existences, the swamp dragon is realised, and the swampland of dirt that was previously inhospitable to humans sees humanity undergoing a metamorphosis that allows it to finally perceive the Garden of Dirt.

Lise's body in "The Winter Market" is a locus of gomi. Similarly to what happens in *The Tiger Flu*, Lise's mind and real body are in a process of dissolution. Her body is fitted in an exoskeleton of black polycarbon without which she cannot live. It is after the batteries run out and she is found incapacitated in a pile of gomi that Rubin takes her in. As the story progresses, Lise's body becomes wrought with drug abuse, making what is left of her body not just broken but also utterly polluted and tainted by chemicals.

As anomalous as Lise is, she is a being altogether unfit for the real world. Being congenitally disabled, Lise has been unable to walk on her own two feet her entire life, having grown dependent on her polycarbon body to move. She bears a striking resemblance to the post-human mud-eaters in Bacigalupi's novella. Just like their bodies are swarming with microorganisms and swimming in dirt and mud, Lise's body is too. The main distinction is that to Lise, the chemicals, dirt, and junk are polluting her body and not strengthening it. Although she seems unfit for the real world, she does, however, appear to be a perfect fit for the land of gomi. At first glance, the two parties are similar post-human Others that are living in harmony with their environments, but while Bacigalupi's mud-eaters are purified by their dirt-ridden swamplands, Gibson's polycarbon cyborg is polluted by hers. The similarities between the two can be understood through Lioi's swamp dragon and its duality as both a force of purification and pollution: "The danger of the dragon of waters is more than symbolic: it has manifested in the history of the Great Swamp as a Superfund site. The dumping of industrial pollutants into a wetland suggests the dragon of unrestrained corporate capitalism guarding its filthy horde amidst the suffering of others" (Lioi 22). Recognising the

danger of the swamp dragon is vital, says Lioi, since it grows increasingly dangerous over time and with negligence. In Gibson's junk heaps, the swamp dragon has grown out of proportion. It has become unrestrained and a tool for capitalist greed. The gomi now carries civilisation: "The city beyond the Market a clean sculpture of light, a lie, where the broken and the lost burrow into the *gomi* that grows like humus at the bases of towers of glass" (Gibson 145, emphasis original). In both Lioi and Gibson, the suffering of the broken and the lost is recognised as those who suffer due to the swamp dragon's unrestrained pollution. While some do indeed prosper, the status quo of the islands of gomi in Gibson's short story is synonymous with the dangers of neglecting the swamp dragon, as its pollution has the potential to drown humanity in it. Civilisations require rich soil to thrive, and the islands of gomi outside Tokyo Bay have effectively removed themselves from the soil. Soil and agriculture are both explicitly necessary for human civilisation to gain any sort of foothold, argues Montgomery (234), and if we let soil erode, human civilisation will soon go down with it. The neglected and eroded garden of the swamp dragon is one that cannot sustain human life—unless everyone becomes like Lise.

Lise is a cyborg who is made from the heaps of junk that bore her, and she wants to transfer her mind to the digital mainframe. In the end of the short story, Casey remarks "That she threw away that poor body with a cry of release, free of the bonds of polycarbon and hated flesh" (Gibson 149). Her body of both real biomatter and polycarbon becomes interchangeable with the gomi Rubin collects on his gomi runs. Moreover, her existence in the story embodies the text's question of "where does the gomi stop and the world begin?" (128), because the boundary between the two become blurred where she is concerned. Navigating the sea of junk that is the islands of gomi, the anomalous Lise has an easier time in general. While Lise has the body of a congenitally disabled person, her black exoskeleton allows her to move around effortlessly. The night before Casey and Lise become intimately involved, she is described as "weaving through the bodies and junk with that terrible grace" (130), moving in a way one can imagine to be unnatural for a human yet seamless in its performance. In the Garden of Waste that Gibson has created, congenitally disabled people like Lise, ambulating in their polycarbon exoskeletons, find themselves suddenly in their natural habitat. With a grace described as evoking both terror and grace, images of Haraway's post-human cyborg resurface once more. Lise is not a creature of beauty, for she is described with sores on her skin from exoskeletal abrasions (Gibson 129); she is presented, full of glitter, in what sounds like a bombastic display of showmanship for her psychic waveform career. She is an Other marked by abuse and decadence by the agents who work to keep her

running (140), yet she is still more attuned to that junkyard of gomi than anyone else. Through the eyes of Casey, a narrative about Lise unfolds: she is a dolled-up puppet in a toxic world, a self-destructing performer and piece of property whom he is helpless to rescue. That toxic world is consuming her—slowly—yet it is what she wants. It is a form of toxicity that is entangling her as she too is entangling it. The toxic Garden of Waste with which she is merging is also the place where she, and only she, can thrive. It is a place where she is no longer just an Other, but a post-human being of waste.

It is important to recognise the swamp dragon's dual nature when understanding the Garden of Dirt. To "accord a proper place to pollution, ecocritics must retain a sense of pollution's danger, *and our own connection to it*, rather than reduce its power through domestication" (Lioi 22, emphasis added). Lioi makes this duality explicit in the various interpretations of dragons throughout history—some are deified as guardians and protectors, while others are vilified as monsters to be conquered (21-2). The two texts of Bacigalupi and Gibson are appropriate examples of this duality, something which reflects in their respective worldbuilding and how one complements the other in terms of one being a land of purification and the other pollution. Our own connection to dirt and pollution is certainly unquestionable: we expel dirt from our bodies constantly and simply from being alive. Being human means embracing the fact that you yourself are a force of constant pollution. So, then, to recognise our connection to that polluting environment and the metaphorical swamp dragon that resides there, we must learn "how to love the land that has been poisoned, and may be poisoning you," says Lioi (22). From there, a suitable foundation can be built from which the post-human cyborg of dirt can flourish.

The Garden of Dirt and Waste that these two stories espouse is not necessarily as Edenic in their interpretations as one would initially believe. It is a place altogether unfamiliar to the modern human yet familiar for the post-human. It is a place characterised by Haraway's cyborg: a being committed to perversity that is without innocence (119). Their Garden of Eden is one that is gritty, polluted, and dangerous, completely in accordance with the Douglasian profane. Bacigalupi's future of genetically enhanced humans that regenerate leg and limb by eating dirt is a romanticised notion of life in the Garden of Dirt, but one that comes with the lack of innocence of which Haraway foretells. When a biologist examines the dog that the soldiers found in their tailings pit, he states, "Did you know that in the past, people believed that we should have compassion for all living things on Earth? Not just for ourselves, but for all living things?" (Bacigalupi 58). Theirs is a Garden of Dirt without innocence, where the post-human Other has outgrown all other beings. To us, it will not be

pretty, but to the post-human cyborg of dirt that lives there, it will be natural; it will be home. Similarly, Gibson's Garden of Waste sees children warming themselves by steel canisters filled with burning rubbish, "huddl[ing] over the flames like arthritic crows" (138). While some find strength in the heaps of gomi that uphold civilisation and at the same time threaten to engulf it, many others suffer, with Lise being among them. Lise, however, flourishes in her suffering too. Like an uncanny automaton, she is gradually losing her own body and sense of self but simultaneously becoming more attuned to the world of junk in which she is. She is in a state of dissolution and becoming, caught in the in-betweenness and formlessness that so characterises the post-human. The Garden of Dirt appears an inhospitable and unpleasant place for humanity, and that is because it is. It is a place unfit for our kind but fit for the post-human Other. It is both a polluting, miasmatic swampland and an enriching, life-giving Garden at the same time.

Miller's rendition of the swamp shares many commonalities with Haraway's cyborg. He expresses that "As an ambiguous realm (neither land nor water), the swamp defies the pervasive logical distinctions at the basis of culture: the demarcation between life and death and polarities such as good and evil, light and dark, male and female. That is largely why it has always seemed so threatening, and the antithesis of civilization" (Miller 78). To a being that is beyond gender and committed to perversity in the manner that the cyborg is, the swamp sounds like its natural habitat. The swamp, and what it represents, becomes synonymous with the Garden of Dirt. It is a place where boundaries cross-hatch over one another in much the same way as the post-human does when it encounters the various domains with which it resides. The post-human cyborg of dirt naturally entangles itself into other domains, and the swamp does the same. The swamp has been deemed miasmatic, a place of infection and disease (Curtis 662), but it is also a place of post-human becoming. To the post-human cyborg of dirt, the dangerous dirt and swamp appears to transform to hold within it the qualities which we would ascribe to the Douglasian sacred. The duality of the dung beetle, an original cyborg of dirt in its own right, enforces this notion. As a being which is both filthy and nurturing, it represents "primal chaos, disorder, sickness and pain" but also the heavenly qualities of "healing and release" (Byrne & Lunn 5). The dung beetle revels in the garden of the swamp dragon, tilling its soil and nourishing its waste heaps. It travels between the realms of life and death, transgressing, invading, and carelessly rolling its dung ball in the ambiguous realm that is neither land nor water. So too will the post-human cyborg of dirt entangle itself in the swampland of mud and refuse that is the Garden of Dirt.

Although it seems a dangerous place, the Garden of Dirt only appears that way because it is in its nature to entangle everything into itself. If we are not ready, these advances of the vast entity that is the realm of the post-human will appear unrelenting and threatening. We will not understand it. In our becoming post-human, however, the Garden of Dirt, which humanity has resisted for so long, will appear before us a welcoming dirt mother, accepting her children into herself. Demarcations of matter out of place are whisked away, and tailings pits and slag pools become natural places of nourishment. Instead of domesticating dirt and soil to make it safer for us and our bodies, we will make our bodies a place in which the slippage of dirt can flow untrammelled, no longer toxic to us or poised to harm us. Our bodies will evolve, entering a union between the sacred and profane. No longer just our own, our bodies of dirt, microorganisms, and polycarbon will expand the definition of what it means to be human—where the body stops and the mind continues. The post-human will outrun us, like a rapidly growing child. Down that road, into the Garden of Dirt, we might not recognise what we used to be after we enter that place. To the Other that resides there, they will not think of themselves as post-human. To the post-human cyborg of dirt, the Garden of Dirt will just appear to be the next, natural step of our lives on this Earth, the dirt ball that makes us what we are.

Conclusion

Dirt, on the body, in our homes, or in our environment, has always been suspect and associated with alterity (Masquelier 6). When it is confined to the spaces where we designate that it should be, then all is well; however, when it transgresses the boundaries of its designated domains, it becomes a dangerous pollution and matter out of place. Depending on where you are in the world too, the meaning of *dirty* and *clean* changes based on socio-political, -cultural, and even temporal factors. Dirt has come to signify bodily waste, moral corruption, foul play, filthy behaviour, and is not limited to the material realm—it can also imply inner uncleanness, undisciplined bodies, and be associated with deviancy and stigma. Dirt is the realm of the Douglasian profane as opposed to the sacred, where the civilised Anthropos resides. It is matter which offends against order and creates disorder (Douglas 2), resisting the civilising process in a manner observed in *Dhalgren*'s city of Bellona. Equally powerful as it is dangerous, dirt harbours a multifaceted potentiality, a formlessness, which is in a state of constant liminality, anomalous. Separating ourselves from dirt is a hopeless endeavour since humans themselves are walking machines of pollution. Dirt is a part of us, and it is something without which we cannot live.

The slippage of dirt is constant, and our ability to harness that slippage will dictate how and if we are able to see the Garden of Dirt. There is no singular way to go about this; however, there are many. One way is a return to dirt in the form of symbiosis, which is the case in *Ammonite* and *The Tiger Flu* with Marghe and Kora, respectively, where they enter a union with that slippage, becoming one with the earth in the form of rhizomatic assemblages akin to the Deleuzian-Guattarian idea of rhizome and networks—whether literally, in Kora's case, or not. For those female-centred worlds in particular, the dirt that is categorised as bodily waste carries significant meaning. The associations between the female body and the giving earth are many, and the historical symbolisms plenty, with mythological creatures such as Lilith, Inanna, Daphne, and more, being intimately involved with dirt to the point where their bodies have become marked as dangerous. The tales of Griffith and Lai reflect this mysticism and intimacy in their novels, lifting their female protagonists into a becoming with the dirt mother. Such a becoming sees similarities with the anarchic becoming with dirt in *Dhalgren*, which leans on the mystical rather than the scientific. When juxtaposed with Le Guin's tale of space-faring humans who have subjugated dirt completely, recycling all manner of bodily waste and even their own dead, a different understanding becomes apparent of the slippage of dirt and how one can go about harnessing its potential. It is in "the combination of the two that promises our greatest and most concrete strength, as long as one side does not erase the other" (Sullivan 518). Although the post-human can grow out of any

number of paths, it is in the combination of dirt mother and soil science that the post-human cyborg of dirt will arise, harnessing the slippage of dirt to its fullest potential.

Dirt itself does not exist without a civilisation to call it that. On its own, dirt simply *is*. It is when standing in opposition to a system of order that dirt *becomes*: "Left to its own devices … the world is neither orderly nor chaotic, neither clean nor dirty. It is human design that conjures up disorder together with the vision of order, dirt together with the project of purity," explains Zygmunt Bauman (qtd. in Steele, et al. 241). Notions of order and disorder change depending on the culture, and items belonging to either category of transient or durable rubbish change with it, moving back and forth across the boundary of the Douglasian sacred and the profane. Worlds such as the waste-ridden landscapes in Gibson's "The Winter Market" and the swamplands of mud in Bacigalupi's "The People of Sand and Slag" become orderly and systematic in their chaotic integration of waste and dirt. As if merging both order and chaos, the latter two societies set the stage for the post-human cyborg of dirt and the rhizomatic environment in which it both lives and intentionally engenders with its being, a being which is now emancipated from the concepts of both clean and dirty. In all these texts, the bodies of all the respective protagonists remain or see themselves become undisciplined in their unification with dirt, but in the post-human environment, they become undisciplined bodies of value.

The Garden of Dirt has many names. But make no mistake, this is our Eden. To our human eyes, the mud and waste of this swamp of pollution appears to us an environment of toxicity that will ensnare and suffocate us. And it is true, the swamp- and wastelands of mud, junk, and dirt are hostile to humanity. As humanity is now, they cannot ever hope to fully coexist with it. The swamp dragon which guards the Garden of Dirt requires that all of humanity become who they are meant to be before they step through the Garden's gates. This transition might appear altogether inhuman, and it can take many forms. In the works of speculative fiction that I have presented in this paper, different characters have entered through this gate and entered the Garden of Dirt. *The Tiger Flu*'s Kora embraced a union with dirt in the literal sense of having her consciousness transferred to a tree, an assemblage of Earth; *Ammonite*'s Marghe accepted the planet of Jeep's ecosystem into herself, making her body a part of the planet in ways she could not have foreseen had she not embraced it. In *Dhalgren*, the Kid's body is a constant place of dangerous pollution that exudes dirt, constantly scraping against concrete, finding itself covered in bodily waste and dirt. The *Discovery* crew in "Paradises Lost," although they domesticate dirt to a large extent to make it safer, still coexist with dirt in much the same way as their counterparts do in *Dhalgren*'s

city of Bellona—the main difference being how they harness the slippage of dirt. Similarly, in Bacigalupi's and Gibson's texts, the genetically enhanced soldiers in "The People of Sand and Slag" and the humans on the islands of gomi outside Tokyo Bay in "The Winter Market" both live in their respective Gardens of Dirt. The former's version sees a swamp dragon that is purifying, and the latter a swamp dragon that is polluting. In all the texts, the Deleuzian-Guattarian idea of the rhizome and its becoming with networks of earthly assemblages reappears and rematerialises in many different forms. How we choose to immerse ourselves in our own dirty matter is up to us, but as Le Guin reminds us, "We are dirt. We are Earth" (11). And she is right. Whatever we do, and wherever we go, we must take it with us.

Note

1. In Ursula K. Le Guin's "Paradises Lost," the Earth and the New Earth are referred to by their Chinese names of Ti Chiu and Shin Ti Chiu (colloquially, Dichew and Sindychew) respectively.

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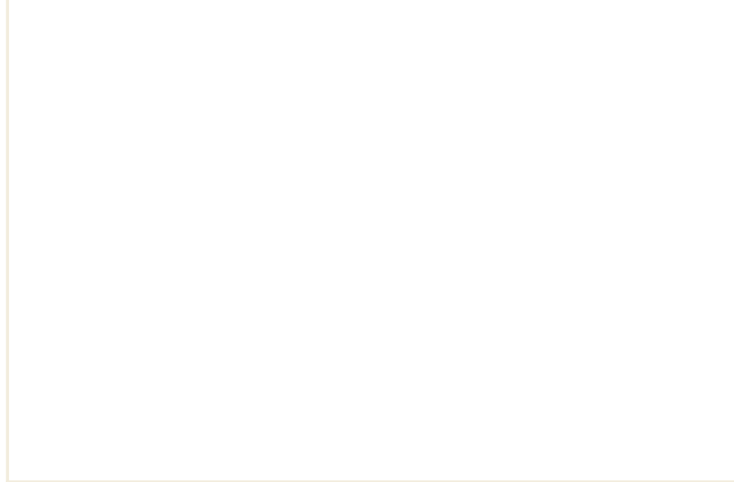

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