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"Ocean green of shadow": Coloring the Speculative Urban Landscape in Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* and Beyond*

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Abstract

Flashes of green glinting through speculative fiction's cities draw the reader's eye to the rhetorical power such apparitions of color can spark. The color's speculative appearances signaling hybridity, ambiguity, danger, the alien, and possibility stand out against the dominant globalized Western neoliberal discourse in which green has become a metonym for the environment. To demonstrate how SF intervenes in and critiques this discourse and current political approaches to climate change, I analyze the rhetorical applications of green in Nnedi Okorafor's 2014 novel *Lagoon*, in conversation with a range of Anglophone, Taiwanese, Italian, and Finnish speculative texts. An Africanfuturist novel set in Lagos, Nigeria, with clear environmentalist critiques, *Lagoon* applies green in a way that echoes other texts and suggests a critique of the green movement, pushing back against anthropocentrism and romanticization of nature, to envision possibilities for

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environmental renewal in an urban setting in the global South. Okorafor's use of green evokes the monochromatic simplicity of human comprehension of our world, and hybrid possibilities for transcending those limits, threats and human power dynamics represented by military fatigues, and alien interventions offering utopian futures. These evocations structure the essay's three main sections presenting an argument for how Okorafor's figuration of green in *Lagoon*'s complex urban landscape represents a larger speculative turning away from the dominant contemporary green. Instead, the emerging speculative green decenters Western human perception and power, revealing human vulnerability and entanglements, critiquing colonization and capitalism, and engaging a spatial and temporal play that burns away the dominant metonymic discursive shadow of green.

Keywords: speculative fiction, Africanfuturism, Nnedi Okorafor, climate change, color theory, green

Increasing urbanization of our world has inspired rich literary imaginings of the city, whose dark gray tones of metal and asphalt are often flecked with greens. What is the purpose of these flashes of green, and what do they indicate about our fears or desires for our future? In some literary works, these appear to be specks of the natural world, serving as a counterpoint to the unnaturally colorless city. In others, the city becomes all the more uncanny because the greens are not hues of nature, but artificial replacements for the natural world, representations of human power, or marks of alien incursion. I see the rhetorical daubs of green in gray speculative fiction (SF) cityscapes signaling hybridity, ambiguity, danger, the alien, and possibility. For this essay's core text, I've chosen a contemporary, urban, near-future Anglophone speculative novel that is both representative of SF's potential for reframing human understandings of their engagement with the environment and innovative enough to invite conversation with other texts. Nnedi Okorafor's celebrated 2014 speculative novel *Lagoon*, set in Lagos, Nigeria, demonstrates such applications of green in ways that I read as suggesting a critique of the green movement, pushing back against anthropocentrism and romanticization of nature to envision possibilities for environmental renewal in an urban setting in the global South.

Lagoon features shape-shifting, wish-granting aliens, hybridized non-humans with anthropomorphized capabilities, and a range of human characters illustrating the diversity of our values and desires. The polyvocal—sometimes pidgin—woven telling, whose non-human narrator is only fully revealed in the final pages, pivots around Ayodele, a diplomat for the aliens who land in the Gulf of Guinea, and three humans who are walking on Lagos's popular white sand Bar Beach when the aliens arrive: a marine biologist Adoara, a soldier Abu, and a famous rapper named Anthony. Through the characters' interactions and conversations with Ayodele, and wider Lagos's response to the aliens' arrival, Okorafor explores human relationships with each other, non-humans, and the world, which is an assemblage of urban and oceanic, each imposing on the other through tidal waves, flooding, and the hybrid geology of the lagoon for which Portuguese colonists renamed the settlement that has grown into the most populous city in Nigeria. The city itself is arguably a character:[1] alive with competing geologic and magical forces, flora, and fauna. As one minor human character remarks, "if there is one city that rhymes with 'chaos', it is Lagos" (214).

[1] Famously, if not speculatively, the city of Dublin is also a character in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), from which I drew the quotation for the title proper. Cesare Pavese credits Honoré de Balzac's 1833 *Ferragus, chef des Dévorants* with innovating the city-as-character through Paris, or as Italo Calvino puts it, to make a city a "*dramatis personae*" (qtd. in Harding 1).

Human, non-human, extraterrestrial, and magical forces shape the city's—and indeed, the novel's—landscape, confounding hubristic human belief in our dominance over and exception from what we call nature.

Like Okorafor's wider oeuvre, *Lagoon* defies easy categorization into Western cli-fi, science fiction, or fantasy genres. Okorafor describes her earlier young adult fantasy as "organic fantasy" rooted in the literary legacy of Ben Okri and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, because it "blooms directly from the soil of the real," influenced by literary culture and the author's experiences ("Organic Fantasy" 152). One memory Okorafor references in her description of how she's inspired to write in this genre is looking into the "green compound eyes" of a "green katydid" (151). This image and her curiosity about another way of experiencing the world are strikingly reminiscent of a scene from Wu Ming-Yi's *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, in which one character recalls seeing compound-green-eyed dragonflies while growing up in an underserved Taipei neighborhood, and "wonder[ing] whether the world looks green through dragonfly eyes" (94). The way Okorafor invokes non-human perspectives to spin a science-inflected fantastical world of the real-world city of Lagos suggests that *Lagoon* might also fit the "organic fantasy" generic description.

Okorafor is a Nigerian-American author who speaks Igbo and is careful in *Lagoon* to reflect the linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the novel's setting in and around the city of Lagos, Nigeria. Though speculative, *Lagoon*'s Lagos is, in Janelle Rodriques's assessment, "not far off from the present; these futurescapes are familiar" (19). Okorafor writes from reality—"I am not just 'making stuff up,'" she avers—setting most of her fiction in the country her parents left before she was born ("Organic Fantasy" 150-51). This inspiration enriches not just Okorafor's writing but the broader genre. As Brian Attebery writes: "Okorafor brings to fantasy . . . a wealth of traditions and beliefs from her Nigerian parents' culture. Her characters and her stories are not locked into a Western mindset" (155). Nedine Moonsamy further argues that such "acknowledgement of its roots in local style" is integral to Okorafor's Western-genre-defying fantasy (177-78). While I engage European and Igbo color associations that may inform Okorafor's approach to the color in recognition that distinct socio-linguistic groups have varying associations with colors, the particular green against which this essay places the literary applications of the color is a twenty-first century global neoliberal construct informed by commercial, political, and even environmental interests.

Green in global popular discourse has become a metonym for the environment in a way that emphasizes particular features of green as highly relevant to the environment (Augé 3), eliding many metaphorical associations with the

color. Or as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen phrases this critique: "Green dominates our thinking about ecology like no other, as if the color were the only organic hue, a blaze for nature. . . . Green has become our synonym for sustainability" (xix). This particular green transcends color and perception to evoke cleanliness or even purity, leftist political values, utopian literary aesthetics, efficiency and cost-effectiveness when combined with monetary associations, and of course nature in a way that perpetuates European Enlightenment dialectic binary oppositions between nature and human culture, "the great Bifurcation" in Bruno Latour's phrasing (479).

A simple reading of green in the cityscape would be to interpret it as a representation of nature in the urban space, an organic counterpoint to the built environment. But of course, nature is not green. Nature refers to vast ecosystems containing sentient and non-sentient forms that give the impression of having color through the wavelengths their surfaces absorb or reflect, and the light reflected spans a broad spectrum of hues visible and invisible to the human eye. Grass is not green. Healthy turf species like fescue or bluegrass with enough chlorophyll to absorb every color except green may reflect enough light waves of roughly 550 nm to give the viewer at the right distance the impression that it "is green," though native grasses reflect a range of colors. If you look under a microscope, you may perceive more yellow, blue, and brown than green. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was aware of this deceit, concerned about which experiments might yield which colors, and the impact of certain color combinations or controlled amounts of light.

Okorafor does not color the leaves, palms, nor the frequently mentioned plantain tree green, even though that would be consistent with Western and Igbo associations of green with plants, harvest, and (monetary) wealth. According to Ngozi Okee Okoro, Igbo "'akwụkwọndụ' represents not only the color green but also embodies the concept of prosperity and growth . . . [thus] green symbolizes the lushness of nature and the promise of a fruitful harvest" (56). Rather than replicate such associations with the color, in *Lagoon,* uncomplicated green evokes the monochromatic simplicity of three aspects: human comprehension of our world and hybrid possibilities for transcending those limits, threats and human power dynamics represented by military fatigues, and alien interventions offering utopian futures. These three evocations structure the following three sections presenting how *Lagoon*—with reference to other Anglophone, but also Taiwanese, Italian, and Finnish SF texts from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—defies stereotypical metaphors and resists the metonym of green for nature, to convey more nuanced possibilities for humans' future and our relationship with the world.

Hybridizing Monochrome Comprehension

Metonymic, propagandistic green from popular discourse tries to encompass within a singular color the techno-fix idealism and neoliberal personal responsibility that encourages consumers to buy more, produce more, and not rise up against the corporate and political interests condemning us to a hotter future threatening increased suffering of human and non-human animals, including suffering due to mental health and infectious diseases, droughts, wildfires, "deep ocean warming and ice sheet melt," and widespread extinction for coral reef and island ecosystems (IPCC 49, 51, 77, 71). The flooding will not be limited to salt and freshwater overflowing sea coasts and river banks, as in *Lagoon* and many of the other novels mentioned here (e.g., Armfield, Lai, Lee, White, Wu). The potential for flooding is crucial to Okorafor's geographic mapping of Lagos. The beach is treated as a focal point of the areas hierarchized by their level—how easy they are to flood. The city becomes nearly as constituted by water as by land, like in Julia Armfield's *Private Rites* set in a perpetually flooded London, or Wu Ming-Yi's *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, in which a trash-vortex floods Taiwan, inundating the island with pollution's simulacrum of land.

Our world also will be flooded with many other miseries, from J. R. R. Tolkien's magical water horses saving riders from a deadly flood (280–292) to quotidian "announcements and music" or "flood of dates and names of kings" as in Finnish author Leena Krohn's *Tainaron* (44, 47). These floods remind us of our misplaced attention while the narrative green presents a simple solution that seems natural and fresh. The professor protagonist in the near-future Taiwanese cli-fi *The Man with the Compound Eyes,* embarrassed that "she'd fallen into a kind of intellectual trap," mistaking the real for a simulacrum, derisively recalls how "people had started promoting 'green living' or 'slow living', and so forth, but this was just the latest fad" (Wu 118-19). Other characters discuss the lie of the "Green Revolution" promising we could keep feeding our excesses (199), despite climate change being more complicated than a few green fixes can solve.

With "monochromatic" I seek to convey the simplistic metonymic function of green, lacking complex associations an author might develop through modifications—such as adjectives like vibrant, pale, crisp, pastel, translucent, luxurious, and uncanny—or through the use of more value-laden synonyms such as emerald, jade, olive, pea, aquamarine, chartreuse, sage, or sea.[2] Humans

[2] A striking literary example that combines a simplistic associationless monochromatic sense of green with modifications that are also synonyms is the scene from Chu T'ien-wen's *Notes of a Desolate*

are drawn to the simplicity, the monochromatic green, yet the SF pushes back. Okorafor captures this dynamic in her human characters' monochromatic view of green, in contrast to nonhumans' polychromatic perception, finding a solution in hybridity. In the novel's speculative world rich with supernatural, cryptobiological, and technological innovation, the color green is conspicuously regular, without the deviations or developments one might anticipate given the narrative's upheaval of its fictional world. *Lagoon*'s cover, the first image most readers will encounter, sets the tone in a monotone dark pastel cyan (a bluish green) ocean scene of a human figure rising up through what the designer, South African illustrator Joey Hi-Fi, describes as a "writhing morass of sea creatures" towards a black skyline, with the sky, title, and author's name set off in white negative space. While the illustrator says he chose the cover's "limited colour palette to ensure the fine detail wouldn't detract from the novel's title" (Okorafor, "Full Jacket"), the image also foreshadows the monochromatic human view throughout the novel, for it is the non-human influence that brings complexity. Okorafor's invocations of green from human perspectives throughout the novel place the color on its own, or if combined, then with white or black as in the cover illustration. In contrast, non-human perception of green is described in conjunction with many other hues. For instance, the colorblind bat tastes "red, pink, green, yellow, blue, periwinkle" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 224). Such juxtapositions and the possibilities of non-human perspectives as in the following example serve to demonstrate how her speculative medium allows Okorafor to challenge normative anthropocentric conceptions of green. This speculative potential is accentuated through the revelation of a nonhuman narrator in the final chapter.

The key exception to monochromatic description is when Adoara transforms into a mermaid: gills replace her lungs, while the form and fin of "a giant metallic blue fish" replace her legs (250-53). Moonsamy reads Adoara's "amphibian" body—able to survive on land as in water—like Ayodele's similarly amphibious shape-shifting body as "suggestive of the tentative navigation of spaces that they do not necessarily inhabit. . . . [It] performs a metatextual mapping of the precarious space that black women more generally occupy in science fiction," never fully belonging, but rather inhabiting an "alien home" (175). Rodriques posits that Lagos is already such a home, "a place where

Man, in which the protagonist, feeling like a zombie, is only able to read "A Japanese book on color," which charts greens including "Jialing River green, tender lily green, grasshopper green […] mantis green, pea green, chalcedony green," and many more, until the words lose "even their semiotic functions" (64-65).

existence is precarious and identity is in constant negotiation" (28). The vibrant, chaotic city enforces a more nuanced or hybridized perspective, parallel to the rich underwater ecosystem from the novel's cover illustration and Adoara's hybridization.

Right before Adoara recognizes her hybridizing transformation by noticing that her skin has become grooved, she looks down. "[B]elow her was a brown crusty coral-like surface covered with green swaying seaweed. She could see a group of red crabs the size of small children plucking the seaweed and delicately munching," and the sun humans tend to describe as yellow is "[a] glowing pink dot" (250). This combination of green and red is provocative. Color theorist and painter Wassily Kandinsky finds "in the open air the harmony in red and green is very beautiful" (40), yet the combination is also posed as dramatic, misleading, and even sinister. Goethe writes that they "seem powerfully to evoke each other. . . . Objects seen through an opening in a red or green curtain appear to wear the opposite hue" (26). A series of examples along the lines of: "in walking through meadows, where we see scarcely anything but green, the stems of trees and the roads often gleam with a reddish hue" (27) show how Goethe envisions the two colors interacting and contrasting.

Krohn uses these contrasting colors to emphasize the conspicuousness of a person she describes as "the dangler . . . hanging head-first from his balcony" who "always looks the same: a bright, even gaudy, green . . . like a living leaf against a red brick wall" (42-43; first ellipsis in the original). In Fritz Leiber's *Swords and Deviltry*, green and red are the modes of cryptic conversation between a presumed "smuggler" at sea and a "kerchiefed thief holding a dark lantern . . . whence shot a faint green beam north to where a red point of light winked dimly in reply" (117; ellipsis in the original). Like the dangler's colors and brick wall, these lights are artificial imitations of natural color, and like the smuggler's lantern, they illuminate farther than we could otherwise see. In her 2018 novella *Binti*: *The Night Masquerade,* Okorafor employs lights of natural color to an eerie effect: "swirls of green lights" (8) herald unreal scenes, at points all the stranger because we might consider their source natural, like the "blinking electric green light" that comes from "spawning bioluminescent baby snails, the tiny creatures each flashing their own signals" (15). Organic creatures similarly light the way in Annalee Newitz's *Autonomous*: "A dull green glow emerged in streaks on the walls as bacterial colonies awoke to illuminate her way" (2), an image echoed in *Private Rites* with the "nightlight, greenish in an upstairs corridor" (Armfield 2). These artificial and organic greens, contrasting with controversial red or hybridized through light can point our way to a less monochromatic view of humans' place in the world.

After all, Adoara's polychromatic underwater experience is not a human one, but rather a human experiencing non-human form, along the lines of the human-fish shape-shifting Nu Wa (女媧) in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl.* A classic example that shaped my own childhood conception of humans' place in the world is young Arthur's transformation into a fish (and other animals) in T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* to better understand how non-human animals experience the world in their particular embodied form. Melody Jue reads Adoara's transformation into a mermaid in *Lagoon* as expressing the "subjective knowledge framed by the scientific study of the limits of the human body underwater" suggested by "Jacques Cousteau's early experiments with scuba diving and the haptic desire to 'feel what the fish scales know'" (Cousteau qtd. in Jue 182). This knowledge culminates in the collectivist recognition that Adoara must ally with other sea creatures.

Significantly, the first character we meet, in *Lagoon*'s prologue, is a swordfish, who sees the aliens—which she and the non-human narrator call "New People"—when they arrive off the coast of Lagos. That Okorafor places the aliens in the category of "People" could be read as an anthropocentric reification of human hegemony or intellectual superiority presuming that the highly intelligent aliens would share their category. However, given Okorafor's highly speculative style, Afrofuturist commitments, and non-human narrator, I read the choice conversely as decentering the human as uniquely deserving personhood. As alluded to above, this decentering of the human through speculative fiction and a non-human narrator holds theoretical implications for Okorafor's application of green. The narrator's and other non-human perspectives, including those of the above-mentioned bat and swordfish, resist human perspectives on and constructions of monochromatic and metonymic green.

The swordfish watches the aliens in a "unique gathering." Then, "[r]ight before her eyes, it shifts. From blue to green to clear to purple-pink to glowing gold." The kaleidoscopic colors remind her of a diverse underwater "paradise" she once encountered though never again located, "a giant world of food, beauty and activity. The coral reef was blue, pink, yellow and green, inhabited by sea creatures of every shape and size" (5). Jue calls the alien-transformed seascape in this scene a "rainbow oasis," comparing the waters that promise to heal human ill to a "pharmakon" (179), a reading that anticipates the poisonous destruction of human society that precedes the aliens' healing influence.

The New People are wish-granters, so when they ascend in the ocean to meet the swordfish, they change her into "exactly what she wants," which imbues her former "smooth, grey-blue skin" with a "new color golden like the light the New People give off" (6). Mixing "grey-blue" with golden color would

produce a greenish hue, so right from the prologue, Okorafor presents green as more utopian: the color of what creatures desire. Yet in contrast to the prevalent cultural discourse presenting green as the color of nature and Earth, in this interaction, green is possible thanks to the aliens; it arises from giving natural color a hybridized alien light.

Pointing out the danger that utopian (literally, "no place") visions might ignore place, Dustin Crowley celebrates how Okorafor's futures are rooted in real places, her futures comprising "radically altered (and alternate) geographies as well, with expanded and porous boundaries of relation that trouble strict identity categories and open new spaces for belonging" (270). Rodriques situates this gift of Okorafor's challenge to traditional Western genre boundaries as part of a legacy of "African creative and cultural expression" blending "the 'fantastic' and the 'real,'" and indeed featuring aliens (associated with science fiction in Euro-North American SF) in fantastical or even realist fiction (16). Significantly, *Lagoon*'s rootedness in the real that circumvents utopian weakness via displacement is possible thanks to the novel's "striking concern for the city itself as a particular place" (Crowley 275), not only due to the material reality and history of Lagos, but also thanks to the city's structural strength as a complex, communal entity. Lagos becomes a significant character in the novel, placing it in Blanche H. Gelfant's "synoptic" category of city novels from US literature in the modernist era (qtd. in Harding 6-7). Cities possess a critical density: "cities are often the only places capable of sustaining any infrastructure," observes the City, one of the four main characters in Armfield's *Private Rites* (234). As in *Lagoon*, the City in *Private Rites* is a character who undergoes a hybrid coupling with the ocean: "A washing in, or a blurring together. One can picture the sea and the city's floundering remains as less distinct, a bleeding in of lines once drawn in washable ink" (234). This hybridity strengthens the City, lending anthropomorphic consciousness through knowing the sea.

Greens indicate hybrid characters or moments of hybridity and ambiguity in the short stories of N. K. Jemisin's *How Long 'Til Black Future Month?* collection. Jemisin uses phrasings such as the "uncertain coloring of browny-green" to describe the racial hybridity of one character (84). Then to signal ambiguity, she writes that "the indicators are all green" despite fear of biohazards (188). Jemisin dismisses the dominant Western association of green as a cool color when one character feels "a warning tang of crisp green and red heat" cautioning them against entering a fight (275). The hybrid or ambiguous not-quite-green is unsettling and forewarning. For Goethe, pairing "yellow and green has always something ordinary, but in a cheerful sense; blue and green, on the other hand, is ordinary in a repulsive sense. Our good forefathers called these last fool's

colours" (324-25). Kandinsky warns that "[a]n attempt to make yellow colder produces a green tint and checks both horizontal and excentric movement. The colour becomes sickly and unreal" (37). Italo Calvino echoes Kandinsky's sentiment on such an unpleasant juxtaposition of colors in *Invisible Cities,* depicting the city of Trude's suburbs with identical "little greenish and yellowish houses" (128). The frame story of *Invisible Cities* is that Marco Polo is describing for Kublai Khan all the exquisite cities from his travels, so there is a dynamic in the speculative cities of selective perspective and political maneuvering rhetoric.

Calvino uses green to signal the uncanny (including an uncanny lagoon!), such as the "*island gardens glowing green in the lagoon's grayness*" (85; italics in the original). Yet there is a disquieting undercurrent implying that the apparent beauty may turn dark: where Marco Polo expects to glimpse bathing beauties, instead non-human animals appear: "crabs were biting the eyes of the suicides, stones tied around their necks, their hair green with seaweed" (47). An ominous eeriness accompanies the greens throughout *Swords and Deviltry*. Often, there is an implication of magic, for example describing the face of a murdered wizard as "inhuman—more a green mask of torment than anything alive . . . there was much suffering in it, but also much power—power to control the thick twisting shadows that seemed to crowd around the green flame" (Leiber 71; ellipsis in the original). The eerie magic of green bears the threat of the supernatural—like "the green glow, vague and faint at first as the ghosts of an aurora" (71)—and poison. The Duke accuses his daughter of poisoning his wine, then "watching to see green spots come out on me" (68). Another character steals "a large green flask" containing a "dubious perfume," in which "rotten-sweet gardenia-reek contended with the nose-sting of spirits of wine" (106). In contrast, Krohn's eerie greens are more dream-like: "all of Tainaron would begin to dissolve into the mists and I, too, should begin a dream, endless and leaf-green" (43), although with the theme of death, like the selected funerary box that is "round and grass-green, with sky-blue crescent moons" (17). The pairing of green and blue is morbidly threatening. Beyond the uncomfortable pairing of red and green, blue is almost too close to green, producing a reaction more unsettling and uncanny. I read these SF texts as suggesting that we *should* be unsettled, *should* look hard into the uncanny; to not accept simple green with all that it implies and promises, and not ignore the threatening chromatic foreshadowing, for green can be as uncanny as an ocean sunset's green flash or inferior mirage.

Dangerous Power

The serene conventionality of simple green conceals a threat. Kandinsky writes that "green keeps its characteristic equanimity and restfulness, the former increasing with the inclination to lightness, the latter with the inclination to depth. In music the absolute green is represented by the placid, middle notes of a violin" (39). Yet green threatens, represents, and in some texts constitutes dangerous power. Derek Jarman captures the gorgeously morbid potentiality of green, with a "killing reputation" from "poison, arsenic, which produces emerald paint" which even, through its interaction with ocean spray, killed one of Europe's most legendary military men: "Napoleon died from arsenic poison as the green wallpaper in his prison on St Helena rotted in the damp" (69, 71). Green is bitter with poison, yet also bitter with freshness. Green is bitter with the seemingly innocuous quotidian or natural.

Eyes and lawns may be the objects most commonly described with greens in literature, and SF is no exception. Okorafor manages not to invoke either of these images in *Lagoon*, though the quotidian green reappears a number of times in clothing: clothing that conceals, reveals, and certainly threatens. The most morbid is the feminine dress that a closeted (straight) transvestite owns. Okorafor describes it as "bright green and silky with a drooping neckline. He didn't much like this dress because of its ugly color. . . . But he loved how it fell over his body, like a cascade of cool water" (185). The green is ambivalence-inducingly ugly, while the texture that makes it more organic than most clothing introduces a hybridity between the concrete commodity of clothing in the readers' world on land and liquid organic inclusions of the speculative world changing under influence of aliens arrived from space into the sea, which implies a descent that foreshadows danger. When his homophobic friends see the dress, they react murderously. The green is not natural enough for their conception of masculinity. This doubled relationship between green and nature reinforces the critique of Western construction of metonymic meaning and masculinity, with green making both uncanny.

Green clothing that reveals a man's true identity serves a similarly horrifying, foreboding function in *Private Rites*, when one character recognizes "a man in green scrubs" who repeatedly comes into her workplace. The scene concludes: "Any horror story could be said to work in two pieces: the fear of being wholly alone and of realising that one has company" (Armfield 269). Similarly, green clothing conceals the images the human-sea creature hybrid character in *The Man with the Compound Eyes* has drawn on his unclothed body; removing "the green polo shirt that Alice had bought him, and his chest, arms, belly,

and even the parts of the back he could twist his arms to reach, were covered in the stories of their life together" (Wu 292). Green clothing likewise signals questioned identity and magical deception in Chi Ta-Wei's *The Membranes* (the title of which also evokes a certain sickly organic green), in two scenes of a character stripping for the protagonist, unwinding "a sari of infinite layers" down to "reveal a fourth layer in green" (92, 110). With structuralist implications, Chi places this polychromatic stripping in a legacy of Italian SF through Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* and Indian myth along with the Mahābhārata (Chi 92). The looming specter of war in both referenced texts (Calvino's fictional interwar Cimmeria, and the Sanskrit epic's central narrative of the Kurukshetra War) foreshadows the military specter revealed near the end of Chi's novella: the protagonist is a brain-in-a-vat working for a weapons manufacturer on Earth's destroyed surface.

Perhaps it is ironic that a color associated with fecund life-giving nature is also symbolic of the military as a life-taking human construction through the imagery of fatigues. In *Lagoon,* most appearances of green clothing are military, such as the "green beret" on a "bloody military man" (10) or a "stern-looking Hausa man in sharp military dress, his green beret perched on his head like a fixture" (27). Of course, military greens do not only suggest human construction and violence, but more sophisticated forms of belligerent power, over humans, non-humans, and nature.[3]

Green jade is the source of narrative-, political-, and super-human-power in Fonda Lee's world of *Jade City,* in which people on the urban island of Kekon (based on a mixture of cities, including Hong Kong and Taipei)[4] have learned to channel hidden power in jade to heighten their intellectual and physical abilities. These "Green Bone warriors" apply jade power towards fighting for justice, yet others' desire for jade power threatens their island. The novel is saturated with green, from constant jade references to green as symbolic of natural and political power in the city. A senior Green Bone warrior is described as frequently "gazing out past the city skyline to the distant green mountains covered in jungle and shrouded by clouds of mist" (32). Green mountains provided sanctuary to past generations of Green Bones, and frame the urban

[3] *Pace* Kandinsky's peaceful green: theorizing dynamics of green though not writing specifically about any literary texts, he characterizes green as initially peaceful, until it begins to create stress. Kandinsky writes that green's "effect on the soul through the eye is therefore motionless. This is a fact recognized not only by opticians but by the world. Green is the most restful colour that exists. On exhausted men this restfulness has a beneficial effect, but after a time it becomes wearisome" (38).

[4] Historian Lillian Tsay observes that Kekon's indigenous population, ethnically similar colonizing powers, and Western ally nation suggest a closer resemblance to Taiwan.

space, for instance, with descriptions of traversing the city often referencing mountains' locations. Green Bone supporters are called "Lantern Men" for they "hung green lanterns in their windows" in a show of solidarity (33). In the city, the green lantern signals a refuge, as though a piece of mountain in the urban space. To harness the jade power is "to be green" (107), adjectivally, whereas Lee uses green as a verb for attaining that power. To lose it, to no longer be green is "almost unbearable," likened to "the feeling of being in a deprivation chamber . . . [perceiving] less color, less sound, less feeling—a washed-out dreamscape" (50). Losing green deprives humans of other color and by extension other sensory engagement with the world. However, too much green—more jade than a person can handle, jade in untrained or inappropriate hands, jade used with an artificial drug, or jade along with greed—is dangerous. The novel's core tensions revolve around the balance of the right amount of green for justice and peace, against threats of the wrong green, conveying a clear message to readers to similarly moderate their use of green.

Whereas *Jade City* is inundated with green representing nature as well as power, military, orientation, illumination, solidarity, and danger, other SF texts apply green as a counterpoint to such a holistic green world, a contradistinction to nature. Samuel R. Delany's imaginary US city of Bellona in *Dhalgren* may exemplify green serving as the counterpoint to bucolic natural green. Delany smatters Bellona's urban space with the color green, yet they are incursions of humans rather than nature. There are lots of green eyes and some books: "a green, hard-covered book of logs and trigonometric functions" in a random collection of books and a plagiarized "big green and white paperback" (43, 357). Delany includes copious quotidian cloth, including green dresses (and one polychrome dress evoking metaphorical sea green: "Kid watched her dress catch what light there was and glitter dim crimson, with waves of navy, or a green of the evening ocean"), men's shirts, a bathrobe, drapes, canvas, corduroy, cloth, and a military-reminiscent blanket of "army drab and a weave of paler green rippled through with an electric-blanket cord" (271, 475, 615, 449, 501, 599, 170, 171, 675, 763, 777, 389). Several green walls, including one "covered with rough green paper" are reminiscent of Napoleon's demise (367, 539, 763), which must not bother the occupants, while the character with "[r]emnants of green polish [that] flecked her nails" (32) must have been similarly inattentive. Even the "tenpenny nailhead of muzzy green" (15), presumably green through some natural processes of oxidation or molding, is a human-made object, not a natural growth.

Another canonical 1970s SF text that positions green as a counterpoint to metonymic green nature is *Invisible Cities.* Calvino invokes green in explic-

itly artificial situations, and uses green to delineate the urban space as set off from nature. In the city of Isaura, for example, a "green border repeats the dark outline of the buried lake; an invisible landscape conditions the visible one" (20), representing the natural foundation underpinning all urban landscapes we might imagine. At the same time, the urban is ever-present in Polo's mind in the midst of (green) nature as well: he claims that even on "*a river green with crocodiles*" (103, italics in the original) he can always concentrate and imagine himself in Khan's grassy urban garden.

Artificial green stands out in the buried lake passage above, or Dorothea, where "four aluminum towers rise from its walls flanking seven gates with spring-operated drawbridges that span the moat whose water feeds four green canals which cross the city, dividing it into nine quarters, each with three hundred houses and seven hundred chimneys" (9). Green walls are a trope of their own in these texts: not only here and in Jarman's arsenic emerald warning, but also as previously mentioned in Delany, Krohn, and Newitz. Green walls named almost archaeologically after the copper phthalocyanine pigments of the paint indicate an artist's ownership in Johanna Hedva's *Your Love Is Not Good*, whose protagonist "had her own room, the walls painted rich phthalo green" (228-29). Further, almost damp-feeling green walls stand out in Alexandra Kleeman's *Something New Under the Sun*, set in a drought-torn Los Angeles, when a protagonist points out "the sloppily painted wall, patches of glossy and matte, with a sharp, dark crease where green wall met green floor. . . . The uneven lighting that cast the leftward reach in algae-green shadow, dark and sickly" (135). The book is about loss of reality in LA, and about money, another association with green that adds capitalist critique to the narrative of postmodern climate inhumanity.

The highly quantified description of the city emphasizes human interventions on the landscape, the constructedness of the walls in Hedva and Kleeman, and Calvino's canals and moats transporting green water to the unnaturally segmented humans. Krohn similarly emphasizes the built environment around a green so weak that it is almost unidentifiable: "I lived in a northern suburb, in a building which must once have been plastered in pale green" (10). James Hilton allows green into the idyllic scenery through built objects in *Lost Horizon*, like a bath "of a delicate green porcelain, a product, according to inscription, of Akron, Ohio" (69). The multiple displacements—that porcelain is an Asian art form but this bath is made in North America, then shipped back to Asia, functioning to represent Western luxuries in an Eastern bathing setting—make the green all the more removed from any sense of a natural environment. The bureaucratic, feeble, bland impression of green in these three fake natures echoes

Kandinsky's sense of green's "wearisome" and "passive" moods: "Pictures painted in shades of green are passive and tend to be wearisome; this contrasts with the active warmth of yellow or the active coolness of blue. In the hierarchy of colours green is the 'bourgeoisie'—self-satisfied, immovable, narrow" (38). Such a green should provoke discomfort, perhaps implying unknown meaning or a foreboding eeriness portending danger.

Where green serves as a metaphor for nature, it is often a pitiable nature that cannot be realized. *Jade City*'s hills are part of the urban island's city rather than a fully wild nature, while Kublai Khan's garden in *Invisible Cities* is more an artificial human construction and jail than a free environment. In *The Membranes*, set in post-climate-apocalypse future underwater "T City," green appears as nature when observed through the technological mediation of a digital encyclopedia or when about to be destroyed by soldiers. The protagonist reads a verse "Among the green hills / a troop of soldiers in black leave a gray factory / petals of cadmium yellow scatter among the green grass / each one a murdered canary / sarin gas the birds' lament." With the canaries "scattered" over nature's green hills and grass, the protagonist reflects that the canaries (an important figure throughout the novel) "were caged not because humanity cherished them, but to torture them" (Chi 50). I read this revelation as a critique of humans' greedy and cruel approaches to nature.

In some works, nature seems to fight back, for green consumes the city, as in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring.* Tolkien's cities tend to be dark colorless spaces, and greens mark the natural or ambiguously urban areas, such as Southern Mirkwood (458), which is either a city of trees or green towers to Frodo's eyes—yet green also represents the uncanny, as in the "green flame" in Gollum's greedy eyes (16). Most famously, L. Frank Baum envisions an entire "Emerald City" for his *Oz* books. Like Lee's Jade City, Baum's Emerald City summons the cachet and even power of the gem. Yet overlaying the urban built environment with a veneer of verdant natural color does not constitute a triumph of nature. These cities all conceal beneath the green veil a trick or sinister danger. While the inhabitants of Oz wear emerald-tinted glasses, representing the illusion of security allowing people to live happily, even if under a delusion, city dwellers in Tolkien, Lee, Baum, and Okorafor all live under threat of sinister power. In *Lagoon*, the city is consuming itself, emitting a dynamic arhythmic hum of transformation. It is transformation that earns Lagos the association with chaos, which Crowley reads as "a site of 'messiness,' multiplicity, and mixing that stems from its palimpsest of historical, geographical, and ecological relations bringing diverse peoples and concerns into interaction" (274). Rather than the alien arrival inciting transformation, the aliens instead mid-

wife the more utopian developments already in motion, giving the reader hope that—even without alien intervention—we might already be on the way to a better future.

Alien Futures

Lagoon's wish-granting aliens arrive on a—dare I write heterotopian?—ship just off the coast of Lagos, bringing new possibilities for the city's future, and the reader's imagination. Okorafor's uncannily somehow familiar yet alien depiction of the novel's speculative landscape and narrative invites the reader to envision new possibilities arising from the critique of our current world, and not just Nigeria's but most nations' climate negligence. In what John Rieder calls the "imaginative alliance between the sf invasion narrative and environmentalist concerns" in *Lagoon*, the alien "empowers its sea creatures to resist the degradation of their waters by oilmen and fishermen alike, and proceeds to catalyse a wholesale satirical exposure of corruption and an upheaval of social and political norms in the city itself" (260).[5] When the alien invasion reveals the future to Anthony, his response to Ayodele is: "There's more to this city than you imagined" (*Lagoon* 168). By extension, the reader can ideally identify in their own landscapes more future-looking potential than they previously imagined. So while Nnedi Okorafor resists the metonymic green of neoliberal Western discourse, perhaps she is not so much writing against the Igbo akwụkwọndụ as metaphoricalizing it. One of Okoro's explications of the Igbo concept is: "(Akwụkwọndụ): Green symbolizes life, fertility, and the bountiful earth. It represents the harmony between the people and their agricultural practices. Green is often used in ceremonies related to agriculture and the cultivation of crops" (54). If we focus on the ceremonial application to stretch the meaning beyond the literal, then "the cultivation of crops" can represent new futures, and the "harmony" sought can be a de-anthropocentric rebalancing of the human and nonhuman, following an alien fertility of alien futures.

Jue argues that "Okorafor's oceanic Afrofuturism leads to a Utopian politics of the possible, an intricate imagination of what a postpetroleum Nigeria might look like" (175). Okorafor has subsequently (after both *Lagoon* and Jue's article) "publicly resisted" the label of Afrofuturism in favor of

[5] Rieder does make a disputable point, because the aliens land in the Gulf of Guinea off of Bar Beach, not in the Lagos Lagoon. Although it's possible that in this world the alien invasion "purges Lagos lagoon of pollution" (260), that is not addressed in the novel.

Africanfuturism,[6] which by her own definition decenters the West and the past in favor of Africa and the future. According to Okorafor's definition, Africanfuturism "is rooted first and foremost in Africa. It's less concerned with 'what could have been' and more concerned with 'what is and can/will be'" ("Africanfuturism Defined"). This generic framing is fitting for *Lagoon*'s future-looking optimism rooted in Nigerian culture and geography, and the genre is even more suggestive of an alien futures reading. Further, in this defining essay, Okorafor forecloses categorizing Africanfuturism as fantasy "unless that fantasy is set in the future or involves technology or space travel, etc." Yet, she resists any unproblematic genre categorization, given the "grey areas, blends, and contradictions, as there are with any definition" ("Africanfuturism Defined"). This resistance to Western genres is consistent with the centering of African literary discourse, and echoes previously mentioned debates over generic triangulation of *Lagoon*. This stickiness pushes literary scholars to rethink Western-centric genre assumptions and associations, and be receptive to fable or magic in science fiction without necessarily assigning the label of fantasy. Charting the "black fantastic" as a genre, Ekow Eshun uses Okorafor's Africanfuturist writing—though not *Lagoon* explicitly—as illustrative of how African diaspora authors demonstrate "a shared tendency to elide myth and collective memory, the speculative and the supernatural, and also to imagine the flow of time as unfixed and open-ended" (54), resisting European linear straight time.

Already in our realist world, green carries associations of temporality, from the traffic signal green inviting us to go, and the phenomenon of green lightning (see e.g. Heffernan) playing with our normative expectations of synchronized audio and visual perception, to (as Jarman reminds us) "the sloth, which is green with algae" (66). In *Lagoon,* many scenes feature a mixed temporality of uncanny present experience juxtaposed against memory and future-oriented desires. The previously discussed opening scene in which the swordfish encounters the aliens epitomizes this dynamic: while questioning what she

[6] Since Okorafor published her Africanfuturism essay, scholars (including Moonsamy and Rodriques) have continued to categorize Okorafor's work as Afrofuturist, perhaps from a post-structuralist position of reading the text independently from the author's intention, or perhaps following her proviso that it might be possible for a text to be both Africanfuturist and Afrofuturist. One alternative is Dustin Crowley's suggestion that Okorafor's *Binti* series and *Lagoon* can be described as "Afropolitanism," a subgenera response to Afropessimism that condemns Africa as a continent of "'crisis . . . plagues and catastrophes'" (James Ferguson qtd. in Crowley 268), isolated and exploited. Instead, Afropolitanism presents Africa as "a cosmopolitan hub vital to global interaction, with the particularity of the continent adding to, rather than suffering from, such participation." He sees Okorafor's Lagos as a fitting "cosmopolis," with the novel's temporal play, truly post-colonial mindset, and transformation of "Afro-centered identities . . . within complex geographies of planetary and cosmological connection" such as aliens qualifying it as Afropolitan (268).

is seeing, the swordfish is reminded of a previously glimpsed paradise, and expresses desires to the aliens who manifest them. Such scenes blending memory and uncertain experience of the present with hope for the future express the temporally complex utopian imaginings of Okorafor's Africanfuturism.

Green represents the alien as in "little green men" in two characters' first impressions of alienness. The first question a military officer asks when told that some humans have an alien is: "'Is it green?'" (80). Another human watches the alien transform from human to lizard form, and what he sees is unclear but for its green color: "A green . . . He squinted. A green lizard" (103, ellipsis in the original). In turn, alien reception of Earthly green nature takes on new meaning through the figure of the gastronomically utopian "raw garden egg," a Nigerian fruit with a crunchy, fresh, bitter taste. Ayodele tries the fruit at Adoara's house: "She bit, chewed and swallowed the crunchy green and white tomato-like fruit for several moments" (42-43), and later declares, "Garden eggs. Nothing better" (269). Once humans have been infused with Ayodele's essence when she allows herself to explode-vaporize to bring more peace to humans, they assume some of her values, which is expressed through the green and white fruit: "Everyone in Lagos was craving garden eggs" (269). The fruit returns twice more (273, 285), reminding readers that humans are now hybridized with alien cognition and desire, expressed through fruit of their own land. As in the scene of Adoara's transformation into a mermaid, Jue interprets the core lesson that humans gain through their inhalation of Ayodele's consciousness as collectivism and tolerance through "intimate objectivity," the "feminist epistemic approach that meets the fantastic and science fictional with an openness that allows for mutuality, rather than fear and skepticism" that Jue identifies throughout *Lagoon* (183). Although the transformations occur on land, Jue weaves in the oceanic by likening Ayodele's diffusion to "coral spawning" that "leaves everyone a little bit alien, a little bit more receptive to the fantastical arrival of difference as a regenerative force" (183). Moonsamy identifies a similarly potent "familial intimacy" in the relationships between the human and alien protagonists, particularly between Adoara and Ayodele (178).

The intimately dense communal world the aliens' arrival spawns in the sea and city echoes the "communal and collaborative formations" that, as Cohen paraphrases, ecocritic Lawrence Buell hopes movements like ecofeminism can inspire, to surpass "the lonely limits of some green ardors" (Cohen xxi). Okorafor's Lagos is densely, complexly resilient. As Rodriques remarks, "the city absorbs all that is thrown in and at it; Lagos' cacophony makes it a crucible for reinvention" (20). In the realism and adaptability of the "future imaginings of Lagos" of *Lagoon* and another novel, Rodriques finds rational hope: the texts "do

not escape from [future imaginings] into an implausible utopia, [n]or despair of them in an indulgent dystopia. 'Future', here, does not have to be implausible" (21). Not only the city primes its citizens and readers for futurist imaginings; Rodriques identifies another character resembling a familiar archetype who encourages this project. Ayodele's resemblance to the folkloric mermaid-goddess Mami Wata helps midwife the transition: "Mami Wata, like Ayodele's species, is an agent of change, trade and exchange—Africa has been ready to absorb the future" (22), with figures transcending era and species.

The use of green in literary visions of speculative cities—or, as Rodriques calls Okorafor's Lagos, an "*aspirational*" city (28; original italics)—represents a particular, highly controlled inclusion of nature in a human space. These texts invoke green, yet rarely more specific or more natural depictions of the color; the reader is unlikely to come across sage, lime, olive, pea, moss, pine, turquoise, malachite, verdant, or chartreuse. Green is not a representation of nature, but rather an intentionally poor simulacrum, referring to a cultural construction of significance rather than nature as it is. Green is what humans permit of nature in the worlds they construct, whether literary speculative cities, or existent human spaces. Green is to verdant nature as the green canals of Calvino's Dorothea are to natural waterways. The artificiality of the urban spaces and objects where writers invoke green particularly stand out in Calvino, Delany, Hilton, Kleeman, Krohn, Newitz, and Okorafor, while Chi, Leiber, Lee, and Wu use green to evoke the uncanny. Armfield and Okorafor signal human mistakes—like a destroyed archetypical red fruit of "GM tomatoes split and oozing green" (Armsfield 154). There is a foreboding of danger attached to green across the texts this essay discusses, not merely in reference to wild nature beyond the city, but also eeriness of green in the urban space producing a tinge of horror. From Hilton's quintessential utopia of Shangri-La to Leiber's foul Lankhmar, the greens of the speculative cities are a scripted simulacrum, warning not of nature, but rather warning nature of how humans will design the future of green.

In the temporally complex speculative cityscape, green can represent utopian possibilities of what architect Maya Lin calls a "green print." Riffing on "blue prints" from the field of design, Lin proposes "actively engaging the present and the future" to envision "plausible future scenarios, what we call green print, which is really rethinking what the planet could look like" (qtd. in Dimock 55). Catriona Sandilands proposes moving in the other direction, from green to blue, reaching for a blue queer ecological perspective that refutes green fecundity. Sandilands builds on critiques such as Vin Nardizzi's, which she paraphrases, "green fecundity is also often articulated with a specifically heterosexual

futurity," which is dangerous because "verdancy and profligate reprofuturity ultimately fuel a path of death and destruction" (Sandilands 187). Rather, Sandilands proposes a "specifically queer ecopoetic sensibility" of blue offering "awareness of precariousness and enmeshedment, to a dwelling in the present, and to a critical perspective on heteronormative time's . . . metastasizing narrative of endless growth, verdancy, and neoliberal progress that is tied to heteronormative temporalities and futurities" (191, 202). I suggest that Okorafor's figuration of green accomplishes a similar turning away from the twenty-first century global neoliberal green introduced at the beginning of this essay. By splattering open anthropocentric monochromatic comprehension to encompass hybrid potentiality, engaging the poisonous green danger of human power relations, and welcoming alien approaches to possible futures situated in the complex urban landscape, *Lagoon* decenters human perception and power, revealing human vulnerability and entanglements, critiquing colonization and capitalism, and engaging a spatial and temporal play that burns away the dominant metonymic discursive shadow of green.

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「海綠色的陰影」：彩繪思辨都市地景—尼迪・奧克拉佛的《潟湖》及其他

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摘要

幾抹綠色在小說中的城市閃過，吸引讀者思辨這些色彩幻影中蘊藏的修辭力量。引人思索的綠色暗示著混合性、模糊性、危險、外星，從主流全球化的西方新自由主義論述中脫穎而出：「綠色」不再只是「環境」的轉喻詞。本研究透過分析尼迪・奧克拉佛（Nnedi Okorafor）在小說《潟湖》（*Lagoon*）中綠色的修辭應用，並與二十、二十一世紀英語語系國家、臺灣、義大利、芬蘭等國的思辨小說進行對話，展現思辨小說如何干預、批判當前的主流論述和現今針對氣候變遷的政治行動。《潟湖》是一部以奈及利亞拉各斯爲背景的非洲未來主義（Africanfuturism）小說，這部環境批判意味濃厚的作品對綠色的詮釋呼應著其他文本，並暗示對「綠色」運動的批評，反對人類中心主義以及對自然的浪漫化，設想全球南方城市中環境再生的可能性。奧克拉佛在作品中對綠色的應用喚起人類對於世界單色簡易的認知，以及超越這些限制的混合可能性、軍事迷彩服所代表的威脅與人類權力動態、外星入侵時烏托邦未來的出現。綠色在文本中喚起的這些連結構築了本文的三大部分，並提出一論點：奧克拉佛在《潟湖》複雜的城市景觀中對綠色的描繪呈現一種思辨式轉向，遠離當代對「綠色」的詮釋，將西方主流的人類感知及權力去中心化，揭示人類的脆弱性和糾纏，批判殖民及資本主義，再透過時間、空間的戲耍燒盡主流的「綠色」轉喻論述。

關鍵字：思辨小說、非洲未來主義、尼迪・奧克拉佛、氣候變遷、色彩理論、綠色