5. Queering Ecological Desire: Post-Mobility and Apocalyptic Environmental Ethics in the Poetry of Etel Adnan

As I have suggested in the previous chapter, Agha Shahid Ali's collection *A Nostalgist's Map of America* (1991) uses intertextual references to place-based works of literature and art to express a deep longing for a diasporic intimacy with the world that challenges econativist ideas about belonging and emplacement and, in doing so, points toward more mobile and more inclusive forms of ecological citizenship that acknowledge the experiences and perspectives of the displaced. A similar nature-oriented longing can be found in Etel Adnan's poetry, which expresses a queer ecological desire for an intimate connection with the more-than-human world from a different perspective toward mobility. Where Ali's migrant speaker Shahid is looking back at past migrations but also at those still constantly on the move, the perspective evoked in Adnan's poetry is one informed by two different kinds of post-mobility: a re-orientation toward nature in the aftermath of the disorientation caused by migration and in light of an acute awareness of the increasing immobility that comes with old age.[1]

In a short poetic essay, entitled "The Cost for Love We Are Not Willing to Pay," published on the occasion of the exhibition of her paintings at the thirteenth docu-

1 The term "post-mobility" occasionally appears in publications in the social sciences, usually in the context of work-related mobility or migration, such as in the introduction to the edited collection *Spatial Mobility, Migration, and Living Arrangements* (2014), edited by Can M. Aybek, Johannes Huinink, and Raya Muttarak. As the editors argue, the "Post-mobility Phase" (9) is one of three stages in the life course of mobile individuals, or in *Spatial Mobility of Migrant Workers in Beijing, China* (2015) by Ran Liu. Most of these economic, sociological, and political science publications use the term in a fairly commonsensical manner, denoting a time period of indeterminate and flexible length after an especially significant act of mobility, in which the aftereffects of that previous act of mobility remain felt. This is one way in which I use the term. Additionally, I use the term to denote a time after mobility in a related yet slightly different sense that is connected to the use of the term mobility in the context of disability studies, namely as a time in which the subject is no longer mobile, i.e., able to move in the same ways as it was before.

menta 2012 in Kassel, Germany, the Lebanese-American artist and poet Etel Adnan contemplates the different kinds of love she has been exploring in her art throughout her long and prolific career. Before discussing her anti-war activism and her lesbianism, she uses this essay to reflect on a world in crisis and on the reasons why it may already be too late to avoid environmental catastrophe:

> Planet Earth is […] the house we are discarding. We definitely don't love her […] b]ecause the price for the love that will save her would reach an almost impossible level. It would require that we change radically our ways of life, that we give up many of our comforts, our toys, our gadgets, and above all our political and religious mythologies. We would have to create a new world […]. We're not ready to do all that. So we are, very simply, doomed. (Adnan, "The Cost" 6)

Adnan's assessment of the current state of "Planet Earth" palliates nothing. It is because, she argues, those of us living in relatively more affluent countries do not appreciate nature enough and instead cling to our luxuries and outdated ways of thinking, even if they are destructive of the world, that "we are, very simply, doomed." In light of the apocalyptic scenario Adnan conjures here, one might expect her to give herself over to quiet despair. Yet, Adnan continues to speak. Despite the apparent hopelessness of the situation, her poetry expresses a radical love for nature that hopes to seduce readers into loving it enough to consider paying the price necessary to save the world. Indeed, Adnan understands her poetry not only as a means to capture what we are about to lose but also as a means "to create [the] new world" we so urgently need.

Adnan's poetry about the more-than-human world addresses matters of politics, ethics, and poetics by reflecting on human-nature relations from a perspective of migration. While there are no ecocritical publications on Adnan's poetry yet, at least to my knowledge, a few scholars have addressed issues of import to my own analysis. Mahwash Shoaib, for instance, examines the complexity of spatial configurations in Adnan's collection *There*. Shoaib's ideas about questions of location in this extended poem sequence are relevant to my discussion of place-making in Adnan's work. Teresa Villa-Ignacio's argument about the ways in which *There* "envisions and discursively practices ethical encounter as the making-present of a virtual, postapocalyptic, planetarily-conscious community of the future" (305), in turn, resonates with my analysis of the temporal dimensions of Adnan's environmental imaginary. So does Eric Keenaghan's assessment of Adnan's poem "Sea" as a text that "point[s] to the future" by engaging with past and present traumas as well as "global crises" (601) and as a text that draws readers "into continuous movement, buoyed by sensuous thought and feeling" (601). Taking inspiration from these and selected other publications, I focus on the mobile environmental imaginary put forward by Adnan's collections *There* (1997), *Seasons* (2008), *Sea and Fog* (2012), and *Night* (2016), collections that evoke a migrant's desire for meaningful encounters with the more-

than-human world as well as an apocalyptic environmental ethics informed by experiences of mobility that grapples with the certainty of death, but does not abandon hope for a better future.

In order to show how mobility troubles and makes strange human-nature relations in Adnan's poetry, I draw from concepts and theories of queer ecocriticism and queer phenomenology. Specifically, my analysis is indebted to a number of "'queer ecocritical' trajectories" (Sandilands, "Queer Life" 305) that Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands has outlined in her writings over the past two decades: first, her suggestions that a queer phenomenology might help us to challenge the kind of ethics of proximity that is often promoted by ecocriticism ("Whose There is There" 66); second, her observations concerning a radical rethinking of human-nature relations of the kind Adnan demands in her documenta essay that require a queering of our desire for nature ("Desiring Nature, Queering Ethics"); and finally, her argument that a "genuinely queer ecology" entails an interrogation not only of the narratives that structure humans' relations to place but also to time, that is, not only of humans' relations to nature but also of humans' relations to "future nature" ("Queer Life?" 309). Drawing on these and related queer ecocritical trajectories, I show by building on Sara Ahmed's work that Adnan's ecopoetry of migration engages in a *queering of dwelling* by transforming her speaker's *migrant orientation* into a perpetual process of reorientation toward nature. Approaching the natural world from a perspective of post-mobility, I argue in drawing on Catriona Sandilands, that Adnan's poetry is invested in a queering of *ecological desire* that points to the value as well as to the limits of an *erotogenic ethics* based on touch in the context of migration. Examining human-nature relations in light of post-mobility in yet another sense, namely the kind that recognizes the limits imposed on physical mobility by old age, I conclude the chapter by demonstrating how Adnan's poetry employs poetic strategies of disorientation to reach toward what can be described with Nicole Seymour as *queer ecological empathy* and an imagination of a *queer ecological futurity* in the face of apocalypse.

Etel Adnan: A Lebanese-American Poet of the World

Born in Lebanon in 1925, Etel Adnan attended the École Supérieure des Lettres in Beirut, before moving to Paris in 1950 to study philosophy at the Sorbonne. Having completed her studies in Paris in 1955, Adnan moved to the United States to pursue postgraduate work in philosophy at U.C. Berkeley. After a short stay at Harvard during the academic year of 1957/58, she moved back to California and took up a lecturer position at the Dominican University of California in San Rafael, where she taught philosophy of art for fourteen years. During her time in the Bay Area, Adnan met many poets associated with emerging countercultural movements such as the San

Francisco Renaissance, whose poetic practices changed her perspective on poetry in profound ways, as did the French-Algerian War (1954–1962), eventually leading her publish her first poems in English in protest of the Vietnam War (1954–1975). In 1972, Adnan moved back to Beirut to work as a journalist, which is where she met her life partner, the Syrian painter and sculptor Simone Fattal, and experienced the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War. In 1977, Adnan and Fattal returned to Paris, where Adnan wrote her acclaimed anti-war novel *Sitt Marie Rose* (Orig. Fr. 1978; Transl. Arab. 1977), a fictional account of life in Beirut before and during the civil war. In 1979, the couple once again moved to California, where Adnan continued to work as a writer and painter, while Fattal founded Post-Apollo Press, a small pressed focused on poetry and experimental writing. After having lived in Sausalito, a small town to the north of San Francisco, for several decades, the pair again moved to Paris, where Adnan died in 2021 at the age of 96. During the final decades of her life, Etel Adnan wrote politically engaged and emotionally engaging nature poetry full of details of the physical world, while also examining life in a time of many wars. Adnan was thus not only a "poet of the world" in a cosmopolitan sense insomuch as she continued to cultivate affiliations and connections to multiple places and cultural traditions in her poems. As I propose in this chapter, she was also a "poet of the world" in an environmental sense, particularly because she wrote poetry that addresses human beings' relationship to and responsibility toward the natural world in the context of mobility.

Etel Adnan is the author of several works of non-fiction and more than a dozen books of poetry, the last of which was published in 2020, a year before her death in November 2021. Despite her incredible productivity during the last two decades of her life, Etel Adnan's literary oeuvre at large remains woefully understudied (see Majaj and Amireh 1–2). To this day, her best known and most widely discussed publication beside her novel is *L'Apocalypse Arabe* (Fr. 1980, Engl. 1989), a graphically innovative collection of poetry that deals with the 1976 Tel al-Zaatar massacre, during which Christian Syrian militia forces killed several thousand Palestinian civilians in a refugee camp northeast of Beirut (see Mejcher-Atassi, Seymour-Jorn, Donovan). In contrast to *The Arab Apocalypse,* Etel Adnan's poetry collections *There: In the Light and the Darkness of the Self and of the Other* (1997), *Seasons* (2008), *Sea and Fog* (2012), *Night* (2016), *Surge* (2018), *Time* (2019), and *Shifting the Silence* (2020) have so-far only received very little critical attention, which seems to be, at least in part, due to the fact that the more-than-human world features prominently in many of these volumes. Indeed, when scholars analyze Adnan's literary works, they often do so by reading them as Arab American literature and/or war literature.[2] Her treatment of nature

2 Yasir Suleiman and Michelle Hartman, for example, identify Adnan as one of those Arab American poets who use jazz to negotiate their own ethnic/racial identity in an U.S. American context. Philip Metres mentions Adnan in an essay on the poetry of Abu Ghraib, classi-

seems to pose a challenge to such classifications. And yet, as Gregory Orfalea and Šarīf al-Mūsā note in their introduction to the anthology *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab American Poetry* (2000), the natural world in Adnan's oeuvre "is to be […] negotiated with" (xxvii), even if one wants to maintain that her "apocalyptic poetry […] in beat fractures" (xix) offers "very little of what is an American (Emersonian) genre: nature, or pastoral, poetry" (xxvii). In this chapter, I attempt precisely such a negotiation, demonstrating how the human-nature relations Adnan evokes in some of her more recent and indeed increasingly apocalyptic collections are shaped by experiences of (im)mobility.

In recent years, including the years following her death, Etel Adnan has received more attention as a painter than a poet. Adnan turned to painting while living in the U.S. during the late 1950s, a time when the ongoing anti-colonial struggles in the Middle East and North Africa caused her to look beyond the French she had grown up with and for "a language without a language problem" (Adnan qtd. in Khal 102). A detailed investigation of the many ways in which her visual art is in conversation with her poetry is outside the scope of this chapter. Suffice it to say that there are interesting parallels in how Adnan approaches depictions of landscapes in her paintings and how she approaches evocations of natural phenomena in her poetry. Indeed, what Cole Swensen notes in relation to Adnan's paintings is also to a large extent true for her poetry: "[Adnan] has made the act of painting into the bridge between self and world that lets consciousness disperse, lets the I overflow the body and spread out across that world as a field of bright attention traversing an earth that will not stop" (145). As this description of Adnan's artistic process as an act of translation of perception and experience suggests, thinking about the environmental imaginary of mobility that emerges in her poetry does not only entail thinking about place and time, it also entails thinking about the traveling body as well as the traveling mind.

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fying her as one of many Arab American poets who, after 9/11 "dramatized the complexities not only of the Arab world but also of Arab American life, of living in the hyphen" ("Remaking/Unmaking" 1599). Susan S. Friedman reflects on the "Poetics of Home and Diaspora" in the works of several ethnic American women writers, noting that "[l]ong before 9/11, Etel Adnan wrote about living, speaking, and writing in the body of an Arab woman traveling away from 'home' where no one feels 'at home'" (207). Scholars focusing on Adnan's war writing too have often emphasized her position as an Arab woman writer, who "has used women's traditional role as witnesses and keepers of memories to write a different story about motherhood and suffering" (Afshar 186) in times of conflict, or who, as a result of that conflict has "interrogated the hierarchic power structures of Arabic society—the lingering national, political, communal, sexual, and aesthetic issues that only emerged more clearly during the war—in a more radical way than had previously been attempted" (Alcalay 88). More recently, Christiane Schlote has discussed Adnan's choice of the genre of literary non-fiction in texts such as *In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country* as a choice that foregrounds the special pressures surrounding "civil rights, the ethics of engagement, committed writing, and their experience of living abroad" (284) for Arab American women writers in the context of the Iraq War.

Etel Adnan's nature poetry is often arranged in long sequences of solid blocks that one might mistake for poetic prose, if it weren't for the very deliberate placement of line breaks. Despite her poetry's emphasis on natural phenomena typical of Northern California and San Francisco Bay, the Middle Eastern landscapes of her youth continue to shape Adnan's migratory poetic imagination, as the following two stanzas from the beginning of *Seasons* demonstrate:

> O the Syrian desert mounted by its young emperors in the steel days of Rome! Its salt has melted in the Euphrates. Further north the spring has planted miles of orchards. Frantic flowers whisper to the wind. Birds use corridors of air within the air for their flight. Their shadows come from the soul. It is necessary not to stay still; the voyage is family.
>
> I want to walk in mountainous countries. Some nations are sitting and crying in front of screens larger than their borders. Their brains are starting to fall apart. I listen. Of course, all this is perceived as silence, in the midst of storms, under heaven's explosion.

(Adnan, *Seasons* 3–4)

Concerned with history, politics, the ethics of speaking/writing in a time of crisis, as well as with questions of nature and mobility, Adnan's poetic language is sparse yet colorful, producing effects of concreteness without relinquishing the possibility of a complex, at times idiosyncratic symbolism. In the quote above, for example, references to the Syrian desert and fallen empires as well as to "storms" and "heaven's explosion" allude to military conflict. At the same time, the arrival of "spring" points to the reawakening of the natural world, urging both birds and human beings to move in a defiant affirmation of life. Like this excerpt, Adnan's poems frequently bring together seemingly contingent aphoristic statements into highly evocative scenes with multiple layers of meaning. Pervaded by a stubborn hope for renewal and change, her political nature poetry alternates between seemingly disengaged, descriptive passages, in which the speaker recedes to the background, and more traditionally lyrical, contemplative passages, in which an emotionally involved speaker voices her perspectives on the natural world. These perspectives are often perspectives of mobility.

Even those collections in which nature features most prominently make it clear that the non-human world can never be separate from the human world. The following stanza from *Seasons*, for instance, suggests that experiences of migration shape not only people's perceptions about the world but also their preferences for certain types of cultural and artistic production, in this case for the fast-paced, more immediately accessible art of film as opposed to literature. At the same time, it conjures

up the threat humanity's insatiable hunger for space and careless acts of pollution pose to the environment:

> In a season of migration movies are preferred to books. Luminosity is a different language, the result of a confluence of methods used by Nature. A reel played backwards, that's the future. Wherever one looks one finds that space is filled with the past along with steep cliffs, big fires. Although the moon escaped the disaster, the future will not. Poisons connect with their destination in beautiful plants. A lawyer loses his argument. The voyage is delayed.
>
> (Adnan, *Seasons* 2)

In this quote, like at various other moments in her collections, Adnan's poetry weaves together evocations of nature, history, and culture into a series of thought-provoking tableaus that often allow for multiple, sometimes contradictory readings. By drawing attention to processes of perception and representation, Adnan's poems hint at the special role that allusive poetic language might play for a project of ecopoetic place-making that views writing about the non-human environment in a world in crisis as a necessary labor of love. Importantly, then, Adnan is not only a poet of the world for whom the (aftermath of) mobility is key for understanding her own place in a world moving toward different kinds of endings, she is also a poet of the word who assigns poetic language and expression an important role in producing alternative environmental imaginaries in the face of impending apocalypse.

Queering Dwelling: Migrant Orientations and the Politics of Reorientation

In her documenta essay, Adnan discusses migration as a profoundly unsettling and disorienting experience that lastingly affected her relationship to the natural world. Reflecting on her indebtedness to ideas of a "fundamental unity of love" (Adnan, "The Cost" 5) expressed in both Western and Sufi mysticism, Adnan recalls "two passions that did not concern human beings, but that at turns took center stage" (5) in her life. As she reveals, the first of these passions was directed at the Mediterranean Sea of her childhood. The second one, she explains, only manifested once she arrived at the West Coast of the United States:

> A few decades later, I settled in California. During the first years there, I carried within me the feeling of a deep uprootedness. Living north of San Francisco, near the other side of the Golden Gate Bridge, I developed a familiarity with Mount Tamalpaïs, a mountain that dominates the scene. Gradually, the mountain be-

> came a reference point. I began to orient myself by its presence, or a view of it in the distance. It became a companion. ("The Cost" 5)

Adnan here emphasizes the "feeling of a deep uprootedness" that plagued her after relocating to Sausalito, a feeling that only began to abate, when she started to develop a "familiarity" with the place she had moved to. Specifically, her sense of displacement lessened once she started "to orient" herself by the "presence" of Mount Tamalpais, a mountain that not only quite literally "dominates the scene" in Marin County, but that would also dominate her artistic imagination, at least as far as her paintings are concerned. According to Adnan, Mount Tamalpais became more than just an important "reference point" in her new place of residence; it became a cherished "companion," implying an intimate, emotional connection to this landmark. In Adnan's poetry, the mountain as a primary means of orientation is frequently replaced by other natural phenomena such as the seasons, the sea, or fog, as her collections' titles indicate. This shift in focus, I suggest, is indicative of the *mobile* as well as the complex *temporal* environmental imaginary in Adnan's poetic works. To expand on this, in the following, I begin to explore how this environmental imaginary is shaped by experiences of mobility by asking what it means for Adnan's migrant speaker to be oriented by and toward the natural world. Specifically, I suggest that Adnan's poetry depicts place-making in the aftermath of migration as a never-ending process of reorientation toward nature that produces a queering of traditional notions of dwelling.

In her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006), Sara Ahmed re-conceptualizes the politics of being in the world as a matter of being orientated in space and toward certain objects rather than other ones. All orientations, she argues, either fall in line with dominant social, cultural, and moral codes, or run counter to them. Orientations thus "shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitance as well as 'who' or 'what' we direct our energy and attention toward" (Ahmed 3). "Queer orientations," she suggests, are "those that don't line up, which by seeing the world 'slantwise' allow other objects to come into view" (Ahmed 107). Hinting at the difference between the conventional objects of phenomenology and these queer "other objects," Ahmed notes that phenomenology traditionally offers a way of thinking about "the importance of lived experience" as well as about "the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand" (2). By contrast, "queer phenomenology," she suggests, "might start by redirecting our attention toward different objects, those that are 'less proximate' or even those that deviate or are deviant" (Ahmed 3). Similarly, Adnan's nature poetry foregrounds questions of inhabitance and processes of apprehension from a deviating perspective of migration. In the course of her poetic career, Adnan has increasingly turned toward the more-than-human world as the primary subject of her poetry, even though the human tragedies of a world in turmoil, which are so central to her earlier works, have

never disappeared entirely from her poems. Furthermore, although Adnan's poetry values lived experience and that which is "ready-to-hand," nature remains a deviant object of orientation in her poems not only because of the persistence with which she engages with it in a world that does not have enough love for it, but also because she continues to approach it from the perspective of post-mobility, which makes it a "less proximate" object of attention.

While Ahmed does not actually discuss the natural world as a queer object of orientation in *Queer Phenomenology*, she addresses how experiences of migration effect a queering of people's orientations toward the world. Suggesting that orientations do not only matter for what objects we turn our attention to but also for "how we 'find our way'" and "how we come to 'feel at home'" (Ahmed 7), she writes:

> Migration could be described as a process of disorientation and reorientation: as bodies 'move away' as well as 'arrive,' as they reinhabit spaces. […] The disorientation of the sense of home, as the 'out of place' or 'out of line' effect of unsettling arrivals, involves what we could call a *migrant orientation*. This orientation might be described as the lived experience of facing at least two directions: toward a home that has been lost, and to a place that is not yet home. (9–10; emphasis added)

Adnan's poetry dramatizes the disorienting effects of migration and displacement as well as processes of reorientation in and through nature, and in doing so engages in what Ahmed calls the "work of inhabiting space" (7), or as I would call it, an (eco)poetic project of place-making. If Adnan's poems thus act as "homing devices" (Ahmed 9), they do not do so under the premise that a migrant's sense of place can simply be restored to its pre-mobile state, or that such a restoration would necessarily be desirable.

Instead of figuring a "migrant orientation" as a transitional state that can be overcome by successful reorientation and emplacement, Adnan's poetry draws attention to the fact that human-place relations may permanently acquire a different quality as a consequence of migration and forced displacement, even if migrants or displaced individuals eventually return to a life of relative immobility. As Adnan writes in her collection *Seasons*: "We live in many places, experience different telluric spirits. At / the end, we'll live in all these various places simultaneously" (43), and later in *Sea and Fog*: "What does it mean to belong to land? For those of us who live / away from our private history, the question never heals" (73). If, as Ahmed suggests, "the starting point for orientation is the point from which the world unfolds: the 'here' of the body and the 'where' of its dwelling" (8), and if orientations thus are about "the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places" (Ahmed 8), then the queer orientations toward nature evoked in Adnan's poetry are exactly the ones that deviate from those conventions in that they neither present mobility as a necessary obstacle to nor bodily proximity as a necessary condition for such intimacy. In doing so, they challenge the eco-nativist logic that the idea of dwelling is sometimes

associated with, particularly in its Heideggerian, "geophilosophical" tradition (Garrard, "Heidegger, Heaney" 167).[3] Paying attention to orientations in Adnan, I read her collections *There, Seasons,* and *Sea and Fog* as works of ecopoetry that explore the lasting aftereffects of migration on human-nature relations by enacting a queer reorientation toward nature. I argue that Adnan's poetry moves from evocations of the disorientations caused by (forced) displacement in *There* to evocations of continuous reorientation toward the natural world in *Seasons* and *Sea and Fog*. Through extended poetic and philosophical musings on the profound materiality and locatedness of Being, Adnan's poetry questions ideas of permanent emplacement as a prerequisite for authentic dwelling and instead points to an ecopoetics of post-mobility.

Many of Adnan's poems allude to migration, displacement, and mobility more generally as events with a potentially disorienting effect. As the poet puts it in "The Manifestation of the Voyage" from *The Spring Flowers Own & The Manifestation of the Voyage* (1990): "Between one airplane and / another / space is disoriented" (44). The book of poems in which this disorienting effect of mobility is explored most prominently is *There: In the Light and the Darkness of the Self and of the Other* (1997), a collection in which, as Mahwash Shoaib points out, "the material political world […] is coordinated with the inner landscape of thought and memory" (21). *There* consists of thirty-nine sections that combine descriptions of concrete sensory impressions and reflections on human life in a world of conflict, pointing at once to the limits of individual lived experience and the expansiveness of a compassionate imagination. Thirty-eight of the sections that constitute the collection are entitled "There," while the section at the collection's center is entitled "Here," a structure that speaks—to use

3 It would go beyond the scope of this study to include a discussion of Heidegger's notion of dwelling, in particular how it relates to poetry; indeed, much has been written on the topic, including about how Heidegger developed his idea of dwelling by thinking about the poetry of the German Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin (see Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology* 2006; or Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* 2000). Suffice it to say that for Heidegger *dwelling* (*wohnen*/ *Wohnen*) meant a "being-in-the-world" as opposed to *Dasein* (as a "being-here" or "being-there") or the Cartesian "being-in-thought." For Heidegger, dwelling thus not only gestures beyond Being (*Dasein*) because it points to the ways in which human existence is profoundly emplaced and temporal and can only be experienced as such, it also gestures beyond notions of "physical inhabitation" or literal, architectural "home-making" insofar as Heidegger, especially in his later writings, frequently insisted that poetry may be the best way for human beings to approach dwelling, that is, to approximate what "being-in-the-world" means or to engage in "home-making" (or indeed place-making). As Heidegger wrote in an essay that used a phrase from one of Hölderlin's poems as its title: "Poetic creation, which lets us dwell, is a kind of building. Thus, we confront a double demand: for one thing, we are to think of what is called man's existence by way of the nature of dwelling; for another, we are to think of the nature of poetry as a letting-dwell, as a—perhaps even the—distinctive kind of building. If we search out the nature of poetry according to this viewpoint, then we arrive at the nature of dwelling" ("…Poetically Man Dwells…" 213).

Ahmed's phenomenological terminology—to the vertiginous multiplicity of the "less proximate" in comparison to that small part of the world that is "ready-to-hand." At the beginning of the book-length poem, philosophical questions, asyndetic sentence structures, and metaphorical references to human existence as uncontrollable movement through time and space evoke a profound sense of confusion. The speaker asks:

> Where are we? where? There is a *where*, because we are, stubbornly, and have been, and who are we, if not you and me?
>
> Where are we? Out of History, of his or her story, and back into it, out in Space and back to Earth, out of the womb, and then into dust, who are we?
>
> Where is where, where the terror, the love, the pain? Where the hatred? Where your life, and mine?
>
> (Adnan, *There* 1)

Conjuring a world in which the "terror," "pain," and "hatred" that define both "History" with a capital "H" and "his or her story" appear to outweigh the "love" between "you and / me," the speaker seems to have lost all sense of place or location and, in consequence, also a sense of self, which can only ever exist in relation to others and to the world. The speaker emphasizes that being always means "stubbornly" existing in a specific time and place; yet at the moment evoked in the poem she can find no stable point of reference by which to orient herself, neither in relation to others nor in relation to a world that has descended into chaos. In her reading of *There*, Mahwash Shoaib argues that for Adnan "subjectivity is simply not tied to a single place or time" (25) because an appreciation of "the irony of dwelling as permanent ownership, and the complications of constant mobility [...] leads the poet to a space beyond the dogma of nationalism and other codified aspects of subjectivity as gender and race" (25). While I would agree that *There* frequently troubles the boundaries between the self and the other rhetorically and calls into question notions of permanent or authentic dwelling from a perspective of mobility, I find that the speaker's position in the world, her socio-cultural as well as geographical location in the moment of speaking/writing, continues to reasserts itself in the text. In the end, *There* does not suggest that a life in exile and a life on the move transcend place or identity and defy all borders, whether of nation, gender, ethnicity, or race. Rather, the text explores how subjects react to the disorientation produced by experiences of displacement through reorienting themselves with the help of, and toward, the natural world.

While the beginning of *There* evokes an existential sense of dislocation, the collection later suggests that the speaker's disorientation is, at least in part, the result of physical displacement:

> Am I always going by boat, and where from? Am I crying, and why? Are the roads blocked by angels or by soldiers?
>
> I'm asking you to run ahead of yourself and tell me why my bones are cold, or am I wanting you to leave my trees alone and search for water where the rivers overflow?
>
> Going, into a train and stopping nowhere, because *it is* nowhere, with people pouring in, like ripped bags of wheat, birds helplessly flying overhead.
>
> (Adnan, *There* 3; emphasis original)

Moving about in a world in turmoil, always "[g]oing," the speaker ends up "nowhere," a place which, as the poem puns, seems to represent both a "NowHere" and a "NoWhere" (see Friedman), as indicated when the speaker projects her feelings of disorientation and vulnerability onto the migratory birds described as "helplessly flying overhead" (Adnan, *There* 3).[4] Being thus disoriented in place, the speaker identifies with many different groups of people. Indeed, in the excerpt, the speaker considers many possible geographical locations and socio-cultural positions for herself: of someone travelling on a "boat" lost on the ocean, maybe a migrant or refugee; of people trying to move through a war zone where roads may be "blocked by angels or by soldiers" at any time; and finally, of people trying to protect their "trees" against encroaching enemy forces. Whether the speaker on the "train" is herself a displaced person or whether she is merely a traveler or commuter contemplating these tragedies from a safe distance, this passage speaks to the profound disorientation produced by physical dislocation. Juxtaposing different kinds of travel, migration, and forced displacement, the poem emphasizes that mobilities must be considered in larger political contexts in order to allow for an examination of how they affect people's relations to place in general and people's perception

4 I borrow the orthography of NowHere and NoWhere from Susan S. Friedman's essay "Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora," which mentions Adnan's book of travel meditations *Of Cities and Women* (1993) together with several other texts in connection to what Friedman calls "an exploration of the poetics of dislocation" (189). Friedman develops this orthography by drawing from the sociologists Roger Friedland and Deirdre Boden (*NowHere: Space, Time, and Modernity*, 1994) to argue for the home as a "utopia – a no place, a nowhere, an imaginary space longed for, always already lost in the very formation of the idea of home" (192). My reading of Adnan's poetry puts a different stress by emphasizing the importance that place in general and the natural world of different places retains for the poet.

of the natural world in particular. Or to expand on the examples Adnan gives in the text: migrating birds acquire a very different meaning for migrants like the speaker—who interprets their erratic flight as a sign of disorientation—than they do for the common traveler, who might be more likely to enjoy the spectacle of the birds' aerobatics. The same is true for trees, which for Palestinians or the people of Lebanon have become powerful symbols of national identity, contested territorial claims, and displacement of populations, while they may have more economic, romantic, or indeed environmental significance for people in comparable situations elsewhere.[5]

While the locations referred to as "There" and "Here" in the collection initially remain relatively elusive, *There* gradually begins to reveal more information about the particular place in time Adnan's poems speak from and the distant places that occupy the speaker's mind due to personal connections and due to the tragic histories that have been unfolding there. One of the sections of *There*, for example, emphasizes that the speaker belongs to a long line of people who were born elsewhere and then moved "to the Americas" where "Columbus landed […] bringing stench, / disease and mortal wounds, logs to crucify Indians on" (Adnan 5). Pointing to American colonial history and U.S. involvements in different oversea conflicts as well as her own position in relation to these histories and current events, the speaker reveals that she now lives "somewhere on the West Coast, away from / the front line" (7).[6] Yet, as the speaker emphasizes when contemplating a "conversation" (Adnan 7) she hopes to have with an unidentified addressee, her "twin enemy-brother" (5), possibly an American or Israeli friend or solider, "war is around us, visible at different / degrees of sharpness" (7). For Adnan, who moved to the United States from the same region in which the U.S. was engaged in military action throughout most of the 1990s and 2000s, as for her speaker, what is "There" cannot neatly be kept separate from what is "Here."

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5 In the poetry of Palestinian-American poets like Naomi Shihab Nye, the olive tree frequently features as a symbol of land loss and for the willful destruction of Palestinian property, family structures, and community by Israeli forces (see, for example, her collection *Transfer*, 2011). For Lebanon, too, trees symbolize the sovereignty of the nation and its territorial integrity. Indeed, not only does the so-called Lebanon cedar crown the country's flag, in the conflict between Lebanon's Hezbollah groups and Israeli forces trees have sometimes been represented as victims of war in their own right, as in a piece written about the environmental consequences of the 2006 Lebanon War by Hassan M. Fattah for the *New York Times* entitled "Casualties of War: Lebanon's Trees, Air and Sea."

6 The reference to a single "front line" in this stanza is deceptive insofar as Adnan refers to many different military conflicts in the poem. As Shoaib notes, *There* not only invokes conflicts in Lebanon and Palestine, but also the Vietnam War (see Adnan, *There* 69) and war in Bosnia. Indeed, as the acknowledgement section of *There* indicates, parts of the poem previously appeared in a special issue of the American literary magazine *Lusitania* on the war in Sarajevo edited by the Jewish Serbian American poet Ammiel Alcalay.

Gradually in *There*, the initial disorientation gives way to what Ahmed calls a "migrant orientation," that is, the "lived experience of facing at least two directions: toward a home that has been lost, and to a place that is not yet home" (10). It is precisely at such a moment, in which both the world "there" and the world "here" come into view simultaneously, that the speaker directs her attention to the natural world:

> Floods, as persistent as the sun could be. It is in the early mornings of the Bay that a peace I would share with you invades my awareness. The light steams out from the ground and carries the soul into a sensation of beginnings. Things seem possible, which have something to do with the thrust of living.
>
> You may claim the privilege to such an experience. How to assess your mind's clarity, its innocence? It's clear there, over there, as I see it from my window, my brain getting sharper than a radio satellite. I don't need to travel if I wanted to visit the disappeared streets of my hometown, and you are doing the same, I'm sure, even if your birthplace stands gloriously under its flag, but you lost forever the particular light which accompanied you to school between ages four to six.
>
> (Adnan, *There* 8)

The "disappeared streets of [the speaker's] hometown" stand in sharp contrast to her addressee's "birthplace [which] stands gloriously / under its flag," marking the speaker as someone who has been exiled from a region of conflict. The speaker's loss of home, which is representative of the devastating losses of millions of peoples displaced by war and affected by foreign occupation, by far outweighs the more common losses her addressee has suffered as a result of the passage of time. Yet, for the speaker who compassionately compares different losses, these disparate experiences can still be the grounds for empathy and a genuine human connection. In light of the conflicts and wars waged in the Middle East, the constancy of the natural world in the Bay Area, the incoming "[f]lood as persistent as the sun could be," offers the speaker a momentary sense of constancy and orientation. It offers her "a peace" she "would share" with those she addresses, particularly, one can assume, her American readers whose lives were—at the point of the collection's publication in 1997—only rarely, if at all impacted by the wars fought overseas with U.S. involvement. Watching the movements of the Pacific Ocean from the "distance of her window" and falling back on memories and her imagination in order to also look "over there," to the sea of her youth, the natural world becomes a navigational and indeed orientational tool, albeit not an entirely stable one, as the choice of the sea rather than a mountain as a reference point in this scene suggests.

When Adnan evokes mountains in her writing, they usually represent fixity and stability, often in explicit or implicit comparison to the sea. As the speaker notes in Adnan's most recent collection, *Premonition* (2014): "Beyond, there's solidity, a mountain. My fluidity is measured by what seems not to move" (2). In contrast to mountains, the sea and the ocean in Adnan's poetry are characterized by mutability and (the potential to produce) mobility: "Universe and sea made an agreement: the one provides substance / and the other, movement" (*Sea and Fog* 17). More ambiguous than it may initially seem due to the unusual use of punctuation, this quotation implies that the sea provides "substance" as well as "movement." This idea is suggestive of Adnan's treatment of the sea as a queer object of orientation that is permanent yet inconstant, forever close but never ready to hand. Precisely because of this quality, the sea functions as a useful metaphor as well as an important constitutive element for how the speaker experiences her being-in-the-world, or dwelling, in the aftermath of migration. As the only section from *There* entitled "Here" puts it:

> If we were not tied to a place what of us? I will introduce the
> sea into the frame and that would be tentative. Not an answer.
> Not a question. (47)

If the natural world provides orientation for Adnan's migrant speaker, and if the ocean and the sea come to represent the primary objects of orientation and means of reorientation in her late poetry, this orientation is never complete. Rather, due to its mutability and constant movement, the sea only ever offers momentary orientation and thus forces the speaker to keep engaging with it, be it physically or mentally. It is through this ongoing engagement with nature that Adnan rethinks ideas of *Being* and *dwelling* as open-ended processes at once driven by and sustaining the speaker's orientation toward nature in the context of post-mobility.

As Mahwash Shoaib perceptively notes in her reading of *There*, the initial impression that "Adnan's poetry has no local base in its investigation of existential subjectivity" (21) is deceptive. However, rather than identifying what the essay's title describes as "Etel Adnan's Location in *There*" primarily by way of the poet's "socio-political references" (Shoaib 21), I want to stress that the "statements and questions [...] she poses of the specific reality of existence in regions of war and conflict" (Shoaib 21–22) are frequently and importantly ones about human-nature relations in the aftermath of dislocation. In my reading, *There* represents the tentative beginnings of a queer reorientation toward the natural world in Adnan's poetry, introducing an increasingly contemplative, philosophical poetic voice that would become more pronounced in collections such as *Seasons* and *Sea and Fog*. When Adnan's speaker notes in the excerpt from *There*, discussed earlier, that "[t]he light steams out from the ground / and carries the soul into a sensation of beginnings" in "the early / mornings of the Bay" (8), Adnan invokes a question that dominates all her poetry collections published after *There* and one she explicitly asks in the only stanza of *Seasons* that consists of a

single line: "What's meant by 'Being'?" (62). For Adnan, the answer to this question not only involves the relationship of mind and matter, self and world, it also suggests that the question must take into account an interrogation of human-nature relations. As Adnan reflects on the important role that both thinking about nature and physical encounters with nature play for the question of Being, she recasts it as a question of "being-in-the-world," that is, of dwelling.

Throughout *Seasons*, the speaker's orientation toward the natural world manifests in an almost obsessive preoccupation with the ways in which Being—the question of what it is like to be in the world in terms of a felt sense of one's existence—depends on an exchange between the mind and the world. "Being is mind and outside / the mind" (*Seasons* 34), Adnan notes, adding a few pages later: "At the confluence of spirit and matter, or mind and environ- / ment, there's a continuous spark" (37). For Adnan, a person's felt sense of existence is experienced especially acutely when the individual is in close contact with the natural world. In this encounter, the natural world represents a co-constituting force, as the following excerpt from *Seasons* suggests, which recalls the writings of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty who, especially in the unfinished and posthumously published manuscript of *Le visible et l'invisible* (1964), used the image of light to explore the role of vision and touch in the process of the making-conscious of Being:[7]

> Master of velocity, light bores into the tree trunks of these woods. Blue moon over green waters. The beach's impenetrable beauty lends its transparency to the soul in order to institute Being, in a joint creation.
>
> (Adnan, *Seasons* 11)

Because human-nature encounters "institute Being, in a / joint creation," Being cannot be reduced to mere thinking; it is not immaterial or transcendent, because it depends on both thinking and on perceiving the world with all senses, including vision, touch, and taste:

> In Yosemite Valley the body felt weightless. All the way to the Merced River's beginning. No past or future there. Only to eat drink and touch granite. There, awareness detaches itself from thinking. The mind becomes a sense added to the other senses. No concepts; just a total, uncluttered way of being.
>
> (*Seasons* 37)

7 For an account of Merleau-Ponty's challenge to purely consciousness-based conceptualizations of the interactions between bodies and the world and of his argument about the materiality and corporeality of vision, perception, and consciousness, see Cathryn Vasseleu's *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Pont* (1998), especially pp. 21–72.

By evoking immediate sensory impressions, Adnan here suggests that in order to think/feel Being one must become aware that "being" is corporeal and acknowledge one's place in the world and relationship to the natural world. What is more, she also implies that the encounter with nature, especially with sublime landscapes such as those of "Yosemite Valley," can overwhelm the rational mind.

When Adnan reflects on questions of Being in her poetry, she frequently evokes ecomystical experiences in which—as David Tagnani suggests for the ecomysticism he identifies in the nature writing of Edward Abbey—"the object with which union is achieved is translated from a supernatural entity or force into the material world" (318).[8] For Adnan, these ecomystical experiences also depend on physical mobility, as in the following stanza from the poem "Sea":

> Soon, disoriented but keeping full speed, a body intact throws itself against demented waters: the two masses, the single spear-like and the oceanic other meet, clash, then fuse their weight in an ultimate reckoning with Being.
>
> (*Sea and Fog* 9)

In this excerpt, Adnan imagines the act of swimming or diving as a physical encounter between the swimmer and his/her "oceanic other." Adnan evokes a "meet[ing]" with the more-than-human world that provides momentary orientation and elation to a "disoriented […] body" in the form of a fleeting yet all the more powerful "ultimate reckoning with Being." Rather than just depicting an ecstatic unification of a "single" self with an ineffable transcendent entity, the emphasis in this scene lies on materiality, physicality, and movement as indicated by the "two masses" that "meet," "clash," and "then fuse their weight." Altogether, the scene can be said to conjure an ecomystical experience of nature that depends on "a state of consciousness brought about via the five senses interacting with the rest of the material world" (Tagnani 319). What is more, it also draws attention to the fact that physical mobility is an inherent part of being and indeed of dwelling the way Adnan understands it. When read metaphorically, the scene furthermore suggests that the mobility of the swimmer, the "disoriented […] body," which can be said to stand for the subject disoriented by the experience of migration, does not impede meaningful human-nature relationships but provides the motivation for the kind

8 Tagnani uses the term *ecomysticism* to distinguish his conceptualization of a "synthesis between materialism and mysticism" from theistic notions of mysticism, whether ecological in orientation or not, that view mystical ecstasy as a means to experience union with the godhead or another kind of immaterial being, concept, or force (318–20). He also uses the term to indicate that older ideas of nature mysticism (see, for example, the one proposed by J. Edward Mercer in *Nature Mysticism* 1913) need to be revised in order to allow for an ecomysticism to emerge that is capable of addressing the wider implications of "the ecological crises of the twenty-first century" (319).

of intensive engagement with the nature that may eventually lead to a more viable environmental ethics. The fact that the non-human in this passage is the sea is particularly significant, because it foregrounds a mutable and mobile/ mobilizing natural phenomenon. Rather than acting as a relatively stable point of reference that will fade into the background as soon as the speaker has permanently oriented herself by its constant, immutable presence, the sea encourages a sort of place-making that requires continuous reorientation toward an always changing non-human world, effectively challenging essentialist notions of authentic dwelling as the effect of arrival and successful emplacement.

Queering Ecological Desire: Re-thinking Erotogenic Environmental Ethics

In her dOCUMENTA essay "The Cost for Love We Are Not Willing to Pay," Etel Adnan not only discusses how her migration affected her view of nature, but also recalls how she learned to swim as a young child in the Mediterranean Sea, off the coast of Beirut. Her anecdote speaks to the poet's life-long attachment to the landscapes of her childhood, despite having led a migratory life. What is more, it invokes her love for the Sea as a queer desire for nature:

> The sea beat directly against the edges of the town, and there were rocks with little pools just half a mile from my house. My mother would sit on one of these rocks and let me paddle in the water. As a measure of security, she passed under my arm a string or a cord, something like a leash that she held carefully. Thus, I developed from my early years a sensuous response to the sea, a fascination, a need that I lived like a secret. It enchanted me, and it isolated me. It has lasted all my life. (Adnan, "The Cost" 5)

Remembering how she used to live in the immediate vicinity of the sea and frequently came into direct contact with nature already at a young age, Adnan evokes the beginnings of a life-long desire for a close physical, intellectual, as well as emotional relationship with the natural world characterized by "a sensuous response to the sea, a fascination, a need." When she suggests in this passage that her longing for an intimate connection with the sea made her feel "isolated" and when she implies that she felt like she had to conceal this longing that "enchanted" her so much, she frames her desire for nature using traditional elements of the queer coming-of-age narrative. Specifically, she recounts a scene of initiation and awakening followed by a period of secrecy, a life in the closet marked by confusion as well as elation. The poet's lifelong desire for nature as she depicts it in her essay is queer in the two senses Sara Ahmed spells out in *Queer Phenomenology*, first as "'oblique' or 'off line' (i.e. askew, aslant)" and, second, as a reference to "those who practice nonnormative sexualities" (161) as well as their practices and desires. On the one hand, Adnan expresses con-

cern that her desire for nature might be considered odd, if not outright deviant, by society at large, and on the other she makes sense of this desire by using a language of queer awakening. If Adnan indeed "lived" her desire for nature "like a secret" during some parts of her life, as she suggests in the excerpt, the poetry of her later life brings her queer/ecological desires out into the open. In collections such as *Seasons* or *Sea and Fog*, the poet's longing for an intimate connection to nature takes center stage. Acknowledging the disorienting experience of migration, Adnan's nature poems explore the speaker's intensely sensual, emotional, and intellectual relationship to the landscapes of Lebanon and California by overlaying them with evocations of profound longing for a lover who appears at once overwhelmingly close and increasingly out of reach.

In effect, Adnan's nature poetry gives expression to what Catriona Sandilands refers to as a queer "ecological desire" ("Desiring Nature" 170). Sandilands, in turn, draws from feminist social ecologist Chaia Heller, who, in *Ecology of Everyday Life* (1999), rethinks notions of desire "in the hope of radicalizing our approach to ecological questions" (7). Criticizing the idealization of nature and the narrow understanding of the function of desire in traditional "romantic ecology" (13), Heller argues for a "new kind of *social* desire for a just and ecological society" (69; emphasis added).[9] This social and ecological desire, she suggests, manifests in an "eco-erotic" (Heller 125) that is based on principles of "mutualism, differentiation, and development" (Heller 137) and attends to "the qualitative dimensions of our relationship to the natural world that are sensual, cooperative, creative, and elaborative" (Heller 141). Language and literature are crucial for imagining a political eco-erotic, according to Heller. Indeed, liberatory ecological desire, as she defines it, must be more than a personal, "associative desire for nature" (141). In other words, it must exceed the individual's desire to be close to nature. Rather, it must be transformed into or combined with a "[c]reative differentiative desire for nature" (142), which is to say a "yearning to sensitize ourselves to our relationship to the natural world" (143) as "unity in diversity" (142). According to Heller, the necessary critical sensibility can be fostered through "such mediums as philosophy, poetry, song, dance, or painting" (142). Instead of being merely aesthetic, then, poetic and non-poetic creative expressions of an eco-erotic must be informed by a critical social and historical consciousness,

9 In developing her argument on ecological desire as social desire, Chaia Heller builds not only on the radical socialist ecology of Murray Bookchin, she also discusses Audre Lorde's essay "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" and James Baldwin's "The Creative Process." Drawing from these queer, feminist, socialist, Black authors, who were interested in the poet's role as the one who re-imagines and ultimately transforms social and political relations, Heller speaks of the "socio-erotic" as "a continuum of social and sensual desires endowed with ethical, personal, and political meaning" (79) and as "a metaphor for a relational orientation that may counter capitalist rationalization" and in doing so "places social and cultural criticism on much firmer ground" (95).

Heller insists, and they have to interrogate cultural practices and conventions of representation:

> [A] radical love of nature entails that we become aware of the history of ideas of nature in addition to politically resisting social hierarchies that nurture distorted understandings and practices of nature as well. In particular, we must extend this critical self-consciousness to our poetic and visual expressions of our desire for nature. We must be critical of our use of metaphors and images of natural processes, making sure that they do not reproduce racist or sexist cultural stereotypes. (36)

Heller's language and argument here bear a striking resemblance to the language and argument Adnan uses in her documenta essay. Indeed, much like in Heller's feminist socialist ecological critique, Adnan asserts that the radical new "love" necessary to save the planet asks us "to give up many of our comforts, our toys, our gadgets, and above all our political and religious mythologies" ("The Cost" 6).

Etel Adnan's poetry promotes a radical love of nature similar to the one Heller conjures in her discussion of ecological desire. I say 'similar,' because Adnan's writing, unlike Heller's or that of Juliana Spahr discussed earlier in *Ecopoetic Place-Making*, focuses less on a structural critique of global capitalism and U.S. imperialism and more on an evocation of a utopian space in which the individual's capacity to love nature makes such a critique redundant. Still, Adnan's poems evoke a queer ecoerotic that enriches her representations of human desire for the natural world with references to the human tragedies of loss and displacement that result from global conflict. In doing so, Adnan's poetry gives voice to a politically-conscious queer/ecological desire that, to quote Catriona Sandilands, "does not suggest the 'liberation' of sensory pleasure in/for nature from its social context, but rather that the enculturation of desire includes and shapes different bodily relations to nature" ("Desiring Nature" 171). The specific "enculturation of desire" highlighted in Adnan's poems—one that takes experiences of migration and dislocation into account—indicates how the kind of "bodily relations to nature" that Sandilands describes become more complex as a result of mobility. Indeed, what Adnan's poetry suggests is that for the displaced persons living far from some of those places they are most deeply attached to, a queer/ecological "erotogenic ethics" (Sandilands, "Desiring Nature" 169) based on touch has to be revised in order for it to consider the sensuality of thought as an alternative, equally powerful source for a radical love for nature in the context of postmobility.

Desire for nature in Adnan's poetry frequently takes the form of an erotically charged longing for a female sea, as in the following excerpt from "Sea," one of the two poems collected in *Sea and Fog* (2012):

> Even when I'm swimming she seems to be at a distance. Her
> waters feel like an intimate encounter of differences. There's no

> transgression. We're mesmerized by immensity touching our body, and instead of a prison, being a liberation. (39)

Insisting on the sensual, emotional, and intellectual foundation of human-nature relations, this excerpt conjures an "intimate encounter of differences" that suggests a desire to be in close bodily contact with the sea and to fathom its "immensity," while also recognizing the natural world's essential otherness. Rather than merely viewing the feeling of "distance" that results from this "unity in diversity" (Heller 142) as proof of humans' limited capacity to comprehend the non-human environment, the speaker is "mesmerized" (Adnan, *Sea and Fog* 39) by the intimate physical encounter with the sea's "immensity" and experiences it as "a liberation." Preceded by a transition from the lyrical, embodied "I" of the first two lines to a collective, experiencing "we" in the second half of the stanza, the emphatic use of the word "liberation" at the end of the stanza's last line seems to signal both a liberation of the speaker from the confines of the individualized, rational self—again conjuring an ecomystical union with the more-than-human world as an explicitly material other—and a liberation from those societal conventions that position the queer/ecological desire for nature depicted here as a "transgression."

By acknowledging nature's strangeness, Etel Adnan's depiction of her speaker's desire for the sea gestures toward an eco-erotic that does not reduce queer desire to a desire for sameness. Instead, Adnan's work raises questions about the conventional symbolic organization of human-nature relationships in the Euro-American tradition, which, as Heller suggests, both exacerbates humans' exploitation of the environment and ignores social injustices (13). Adnan's poem "Sea" exposes these representational conventions and the structures of thought that form their basis by repeatedly employing poetic imagery that tries to make the otherness of non-human nature graspable through cultural metaphors—particularly erotic ones—while also trying to make a world in turmoil graspable through natural metaphors. In doing so, "Sea," like many of Adnan's poems, suggests that poetry invested in an eco-erotics that seeks to surpass the trappings of (heteronormative) romantic ecology must exhibit critical consciousness toward its specific and expanded historical context and engage in a sustained critique of dominant cultural, political, and religious mythologies as well as of the metaphors for human-nature interaction these mythologies provide:

> The sea. Nothing else. Walls ruptured. Sea. Water tumbling. Oil. Transparency. The sea. Field of stirring liquid. Gathering of pouncing waves going to battle. Into one's mythology, trees intrude, expand, shed shadows.

> A wave, a mouth; a horse arrives, submits, drowns. Streaked and bleeding sky. What is sky? To climb mountain peaks to overlook clouds. Water on water reverberates memory's mechanism.
>
> (*Sea and Fog* 3)

Combining descriptions of the more-than-human world with images of war reminiscent of H.D.'s meditation on WWII in *The Walls do not Fall* (1944), this passage depicts a tumultuous, dangerous sea and simultaneously conjures scenes of violent conflict. While references to "Walls ruptured" or a "bleeding sky" might apply to many different disasters and conflicts Adnan witnessed during her lifetime, the collection's publication in 2012 and the mention of "Oil" in the above passage seem to point at once to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill of 2010 and to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, about which the poet asks at the end of *Seasons*: "Are the pipelines of blood running in the bodies of the Arabs less / worthy than the oil running under their grounds?" (73).[10] Descriptions such as "pouncing waves going to battle" emphasize the extent to which the migrant speaker's perceptions of the natural world are shaped not only by "memory's / mechanism," that is, by personal recollections, but also by a more elusive yet all the same powerful cultural "mythology." In the case of Adnan's speaker, this mythology is a composite of many different cultural imaginaries and has been shaped by experiences of migration as well as by her changed relationship to the natural world ("Into one's mythology, trees / intrude, expand, shed shadows"). Refuting the stanza's initial assertion, this passage reveals that the speaker sees a lot when she sees "[t]he sea. Nothing else." Indeed, the sea "reverberates" with multiple meanings, meanings that challenge traditional representations without erasing the dramatic consequences caused by U.S. military interventions abroad.

As Greta Gaard argues, Western alienation from and exploitation of nature has gone hand in hand with a fear and repression of the erotic more generally and the queer erotic in particular (129). If we entertain the argument, as Catriona Sandilands does, that "the ecological crisis is, even in small part, a problem of desire—specifically, of its narrowing, regulation, erasure, ordering, atomization and homogenization" ("Desiring Nature" 186), then a queer revision of the eco-erotic needs to counter not only conventional representations of nature and human-nature relations, but also to counter the erotophobia and queerphobia inherent in these representations

10 Fueled in part by Western powers' desire to gain control over the Middle East's rich oil deposits, the 2003–2011 Iraq War, also known as the Second Gulf War, arguably left the region destabilized, "tumbling" and "stirring," and profoundly affected even those countries not directly involved in the conflict, including Lebanon, Adnan's country of origin. Beside *Sea and Fog*, Adnan's collection *Seasons* most explicitly references the 2003–2011 Iraq War, frequently by emphasizing the suffering of both civilians and soldiers on the "sacrificial ground" and on the "killing fields" of Iraq (67).

(see Lee and Dow 8). In this context, it is significant that the sea, the principal object of desire in Adnan's late poetry, is not only consistently imagined as female but also associated with nonhuman movement, human mobility, and a queer sexuality that holds both generative and destructive potential:

> Oh fire's explosion from a woman's gut! Organized fearful battalions on the march. Soldiers cover their eyes with flowers, given the season. Continents of drifting clouds on the move.
>
> Sea insomniac with jealousy, sky moving eastward. White foam covers the water. Disquieting silence. Matter's feminine essence surging as sea's quiddity.
>
> (*Sea and Fog* 3)

Notably different in tone from the two stanzas quoted in the last paragraph, this excerpt mixes the language of nature poetry, love poetry, and (anti-)war poetry. The speaker's preoccupation with the "sea's quiddity" (the sea's "Being") as a manifestation of "[m]atter's feminine essence" points not only to Adnan's preoccupation with questions of Being and dwelling discussed before, it also points to her speaker's queer desire for nature as a central theme of Adnan's poetry. The conflation of ecological and sexual-erotic desire in this passage is worth examining from a queer-ecocritical perspective, because, as Sandilands notes,

> the social organization of sexuality and eroticism in the late twentieth century constrains and organizes the experience of sensual desires in and for (nonhuman) nature […]. These restrictions and constructions not only impoverish our experiences of nature, foreclosing the apprehension and appreciation of an 'erotic tinge' in our relations to other organisms, but they also play into the maintenance and proliferation of significant social oppressions." ("Desiring Nature" 172)

By cautiously infusing human-nature relations in her poems with an "erotic tinge," Adnan does not only contest the constraints imposed on depictions of queer desire, she also contests the conceptual limitations imposed on representations of encounters with a more-than-human world on the move.

While the queer eco-erotic in Adnan's poetry most frequently finds expression in the female speaker's desire for an explicitly female sea—a choice that is interesting, given that the word for sea in Arabic (البحر) is masculine, while it is feminine in French (*la mer*)—the speaker's history of migration is what keeps the sea at a distance.[11] Although it may initially look as if Adnan uses the words "sea" and "ocean"

11 I want to thank Mahshid Mayar for pointing out to me the fact that the Arabic word for "sea" is masculine and for providing me with the word in the original Arabic script as well as with a transliteration into Latin alphabet.

interchangeably in her poems, many instances in Adnan's poetry suggests that she actually differentiates between the two. In *There*, Adnan's speaker for example mentions "leaving far behind the sea's / whiteness" as she is "carried by the voyage" to a place where "waters / submit themselves to the ocean's attraction" (49), and at the beginning of "Sea," she remarks: "The ocean is / near, the sea, far" (*Sea and Fog* 9). Because the Mediterranean Sea of her childhood and youth is far away, the speaker's longing for the sea's presence is all the more acute, even when she is near the Pacific Ocean. Indeed, even though the ocean is frequently "near" in her texts, it is often curiously out of reach. Several times in *Seasons* a woman is depicted in the process of walking toward the ocean or the cliff overlooking it without actually reaching the water (7, 15, 23, 25). When the speaker mentions the ocean, it is frequently close by but still at a remove, either "[b]y the dusty alley's end" (*Seasons* 15), "[i]n the background" (*Seasons* 28), or "behind the trees" (*Seasons* 30). In the poem "Fog," from *Sea and Fog*, the ocean also remains elusive, even as it exacts a strong pull on the speaker:

> [...] We're driving
> with no visibility down a winding and steep hill, toward army barracks, then to the ocean. It's not sure we will make it. But the fascination is fatal. It's fused with the world. (88)

In this moment, like in others in the same poem, the ocean is not only at a distance, it is also concealed from view by the notorious Bay Area fog (*Sea and Fog* 90). The fact that the ocean so frequently appears unreachable for the speaker or out of sight is of import here because in the world of war and conflict that Adnan depicts in her poetry, an immersion into the ocean would promise a deeply sought-after sense of relief in the experience of a becoming-one-with-nature in which one's worries recede into the background, at least temporarily. "Fog" suggests as much only one page later:

> We fear violence, but more feared is its absence. So heavy is the world becoming. Heavy in the soul. A few laps in the ocean will bring rest.
>
> (*Sea and Fog* 91)

It is no coincidence then, I would argue, that there are several instances in Adnan's poetry describing such a swim. While one of the two swimming scenes—the scene discussed earlier—begins with the remark "[e]ven when I'm swimming she seems to be at a distance" (*Sea and Fog* 39), the other describes the dive of "a body" while the speaker remains at a certain distance to the events that are enfolding (*Sea and Fog* 9).

The third intimate encounter with the sea, this time described from the perspective of the speaker, is framed as a memory rather than an experience in the present. More explicitly than in the other scenes, the speaker here directly addresses the sea as a distant lover and describes their reunion in explicitly sexual terms:

> If from so much afar you remember me, send a sign. I used to walk through flowered gardens down in streets with barely discernable figures; in full sun I was moving fast, accompanied by orange trees. Carried by this feast, I was reaching your shores, and, removing my clothes, I was softly going in, sliding toward your waters and swimming.
>
> (*Sea and Fog* 30)

Thinking back to a time when she "used / to walk through flowered gardens" toward the coast, the speaker calls for the sea to remember her "from so much afar." Apart from implying that some time has passed, since the speaker "was moving fast" in this way to reach the "shores" and may no longer be able to do so in the present, a point I return to later, this section also suggests that the speaker's migrations have separated her from the object of her longing. More obviously than the two other scenes, this scene could be read as a sequel to the childhood memory described in Adnan's documenta essay, in which Adnan recalls how she learned to swim in the Mediterranean Sea. While that anecdote evokes Adnan's queer/ecological initiation, the above scene depicts a temporary fulfillment of the speaker's longing for an intimately sensual, emotional, and intellectual connection with nature as an act of lesbian love-making ("I was softly going in, sliding toward/ your waters and swimming"). By emphasizing the physicality of the encounter as well as the fact that what she depicts is a distant memory, Adnan suggests that for a migrant and exile like her speaker, some of the most precious landscapes are anything but readily at hand. Place-making in such a context, especially place-making invested in evoking a queer eco-erotic may have to rely on a poetry that takes seriously both an erotics of touch and an erotics of thought that draws on memory as well as the imagination.

However evocative such scenes of the speaker's complete bodily immersion into the sea may be for a queer eco-erotic, then, they are also rather unusual for Adnan's poetry and especially her late poetry. While her collections do in fact depict moments in which the sensory impressions of intimate physical contact with the natural world overpower the speaker's faculties of reason, much of Adnan's poetry is concerned less with pleasures of the body and more with the pleasures of the mind. The erotic that emerges in Adnan's poetry from the migrant speaker's intimate entanglements with the natural world is thus not primarily the result of what Catriona Sandilands describes as a "blurring of bodily boundaries through eroticized tactile apprehension" ("Desiring Nature" 169), of matter touching the body. Rather, it is also importantly the result of thinking and reveling in "the miracle of matter itself" (Adnan, "Journey" 339). In her poetry, this emphasis on thinking frequently shows itself in explorations of those moments in which matter and mind encounter each other. As Adnan puts it in "Sea":

> Sea: mirrored mirror that distracts the soul from ecstasy. The uncontrollable desire to think the fleeting elements of the world, to fuse them into images, into words, is probably the most hypnotic of all of Eros' manifestations.
>
> (*Sea and Fog* 15)

In this stanza, which emphasizes the speaker's "uncontrollable desire to *think* the fleeting elements of the world" (emphasis added) and describes this act of thinking as "probably the most / hypnotic of all of Eros's manifestations," the touching of matter and mind resolves in a moment of unhurried contemplation and astonished appreciation for the natural world. Or as Adnan's speaker specifies on the same page, it resolves in an act of witness:

> To think is not to contemplate, it's to witness. We have to deal with the events that happen in the Palace's danger zone … By the dusty alley's end, the ocean unfolds its unlimited space. That cliff is poetry's jumping board. Words are cracked open, reused in bits and pieces. There's much agitation. Spring unattached itself from its elements. It has become Being.
>
> (*Seasons* 15)

If Adnan thus suggests in "The Cost for Love We Are Not Willing to Pay" that "[m]ore than another field of expression, mystical texts witness the experience of the fundamental unity of love" (5), she certainly assigns herself and her poetry a similar task, while also noting under what circumstances physical closeness can and cannot be the basis for the kind of ecomystical experience her poetry repeatedly evokes. At the same time, her differentiation between contemplation and what seems to be the worldlier and more outward-turned activity of thinking/witnessing stresses that for Adnan loving nature and loving the world are political acts. Writing "poetry" and using poetic language in which "[w]ords are cracked open" are not a frivolous pastime in this scenario, they are a necessity.

Even though Adnan's poetry returns again and again to the same places and natural phenomena—whether trees, the weather, the seasons, the sea or fog—the intimate encounters of matter and mind her poetry evokes as frequently produce moments of profound confusion as they produce moments of clarity or illumination. This confusion, however, does not lessen the urgency of the speaker's passionate longing for a "fundamental unity of love" with nature, on the contrary. In the following stanza from "Sea," for example, the speaker's desire for the sea is powerfully expressed through negations and the repetition of sounds, which create the effect of an exhilarated mind struggling to comprehend what it will never grasp fully:

> And what is this surge of the stupendous and quasi un-nameable entity, where un-numbered amounts of bubbles unbreakably

> bound to each other make a eulogy for smallness while creating
> the most maddening form of an elusive infinity?
>
> (*Sea and Fog* 10)

Faced with the sea's and indeed also the ocean's "elusive infinity," Adnan's speaker is fully aware that her desire for nature and the passionate love it engenders is a fantasy: "The sea is momentous duration. / A passion for her is love for an illusion. But what else is there to / be had?" (*Sea and Fog* 18) she writes. Still, throughout her collections, the speaker affirms her passion for the sea, and by consequence her queer/ecological desire for nature, even if the confrontation with this "quasi un-nameable entity" pushes her rational faculties as well as her capacity for poetic expression to the limit. "Can I comprehend you in ignoring intelligence, and contain your immensity? (*Sea and Fog* 22), the poet asks and then comments in addressing the sea directly: "When the cold freezes you, it slows down my blood. Under the moon's attraction you rise and fall as my mind vacillates and fails" (22). It is this struggle of the poet, despite the limits increasingly imposed on her by her own body, to continue thinking and writing poetry as a way of bearing witness to nature's incomprehensible "immensity" (*Sea and Fog* 39), not only for herself but also for generations to come, that I discuss in the following as a queering of ecological futurity.

Queering Ecological Futurity: Ecological Empathy and the Poetics of Disorientation

Etel Adnan's nature poetry can be read as a poetry of place-making that suggests that the disorientation produced by experiences of migration and the reorientation process it sets in motion affect human-nature relations long after the migrant has reached a state of relative immobility. But Adnan's nature poetry is a poetry of post-mobility in yet another sense: *Seasons*, *Sea and Fog*, and *Night* explore not only a queer orientation toward and a queer desire for nature in the aftermath of migration, they also exhibit an awareness of how the speaker's engagements with nature change as a result of aging, also, though not exclusively, with regard to the limitations old age imposes on the speaker's physical mobility and access to nature. The awareness of these limitations in Adnan's poetry is accompanied by an apocalyptic imagination that is both personal and political, spiritual, and ecological. It wavers between despair and hope, resignation, and the determination to affect some kind of social change as it grapples with the certainty of death and what this certainty means for humans' shared responsibility for present and future natures.

In her book *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination* (2013), Nicole Seymour discusses contemporary queer novels and films that imagine "empathetic, ethical interrelationships between the queer and the non-human" (23).

Drawing from the "queer optimism" of Michael Snediker and José Esteban Muñoz's take on "queer futurity," which finds utopian potential in cultural expressions of queer desire and sociality that may or may not reflect on the future explicitly, Seymour suggests that works of art may produce both queerer and more ecological futures.[12] Art can do so, she argues, by drawing its audiences' attention to, and inspiring care for, nature without perpetuating "the value set of normative, reproductive heterosexuality [that] establishes strict, moralized limits to futurity" (Seymour 12). Indeed, she proposes, that "any kind of environmentalism that does not operate within those limits—that is, that does not operate out of *immediate or extended self-interest*—is 'queer'" (Seymour 12; emphasis added). Immediate and extended self-interest are conflated in the heteronormative logics of a future-oriented mainstream environmentalism, she explains, because it demands that we protect the environment in order to protect our own future and the future of our children (Seymour 7). According to Seymour, this logic should be countered, or at least complemented, by a "queer ecological empathy" based on the ability to "imagine someone or something to whom environmental destruction *would*, and does, matter" (Seymour 18; emphasis original), but who is not an immediate or close relation (27). I want to posit that Adnan's late nature poetry is queer and ecological in Seymour's sense, for two reasons: first, because it draws attention to an aging speaker for whom the most awe-inspiring natural phenomena and experiences in nature are increasingly out of reach; and, second, because it seeks to inspire care for a future nature that this speaker (nor her descendants) will not live to see. At first glance, Adnan's poems, like many works by writers with a migratory background, seem primarily focused on the past and the present rather than the future. When they evoke the future, especially her late poems seem to do so much more by centering on the inevitability of death rather than on the dangers of future environmental catastrophe. Despite these tendencies, however, Adnan's poetry of post-mobility invites readers to contemplate the very question Seymour asks when commenting on the role of literature for the production of queerer and more ecological futures: "What if we could imagine that environmental catastrophe does matter, even, or perhaps especially, if we are not going to witness its effects?" (18)

12 In different ways, both Snediker and Muñoz resist the queer pessimism of Lee Edelman, who in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) proposed a radical new queer ethics based on an uncompromising critique of "reproductive futurism," urging queers to resist rather than to comply with societal demands, symbolically organized around the figure of the child, to sacrifice the present for the sake of an allegedly better future. On the contrary, in *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions* (2008), Snediker rereads lyrical poetry by Emily Dickinson, Hart Crane and Elizabeth Bishop focusing on forms of positive affect rather than on more common critical categories in queer studies such as melancholia or shame, suggesting that queer desires have always also been imagined with an eye to and in the hopes of better futures.

While many of Adnan's collections are infused with references to migration, travel, and other kinds of mobility, her later collections also convey the poet's desire to arrive and make a permanent home for herself, even as her poems acknowledge that such an arrival does not cancel out the changed perspectives on nature produced by previous experiences of mobility. The following passage from *Seasons*, for example, indicates that the speaker is tired and worn out from years of moving: "Pulled down by the afternoon's / implacable passing, there's no way to see the beach. I carry years of / wandering on my back. Would like to shed them" (Adnan 37). The last two sentences explicitly express the speaker's desire to arrive or at least to pause. I am quoting the preceding sentence as well, because the longer excerpt illustrates that instances of mobility, such as the voyage in Adnan's poem "Manifestations of the Voyage" or the "wandering" in the above quotation, also need to be read with close attention to their temporal dimension rather than only their spatial one. Indeed, in the lines just quoted, questions of mobility and temporality are bound together. The excerpt indicates that what has left the speaker feeling "[p]ulled down," that is, what has made her weary and exhausted, are not only her "years of / wandering" but also the "afternoon's implacable passing." This double emphasis on the inexorable passing of time (in both the short and the long run) is suggestive of the fact that the speaker is not only a migrant and world traveler but someone who has reached a moment in her life when time has become a matter of more immediate concern. Significantly, this moment is also one in which her exhaustion, which seems mental as well as physical, keeps the formerly wandering speaker from visiting the beach and thus from encountering the sea she so dearly loves. While there are certainly other ways of reading these lines, I read them as a commentary on human-nature relations in the context of mobility that open up questions about precisely the two senses of the term *post-mobility* addressed in Adnan's nature poetry: post-mobility as the aftermath of migration and post-mobility as the increasing physical immobility associated with old age.

Adnan's most recent works contain countless references to death, aging, as well as to physical and mental decline. "Some people witness / their soul's death before dying. That's an apocalyptic event, a private eclipse" (Adnan, *Sea and Fog* 67), she writes in "Fog." In "Sea," she comments with a combination of puzzlement and resignation: "But the universe is alive, so how can its parts die? Still, we die" (*Sea and Fog* 25). And yet elsewhere in the same poem she muses:

> The body produces that superstructure we call mind. When they work together there's elation. But they can go – too often – their own ways, the body, damaged beyond repair, the mind destroyed beyond recourse. All the while the world manifests its overwhelming power.
>
> (*Sea and Fog* 47)

For a poet who figures place-making not only as a "clash" of the "body" with its "oceanic other" (*Sea and Fog* 9) but also as a "confluence" of "mind and environment" that produces "a continuous spark" (*Seasons* 37), these statements are not only about physiological decline, whether as a consequence of aging or due to the mutilations inflicted on the minds and bodies of people by war. They are also about a diminished capacity to be in and with nature and to enjoy this experience physically as well as intellectually:

> [...] Winds sweep
> the imagination while the spirit dries up. Small memories drift away. The brain – soft bag – collapses on itself. Stripped speech patterns float in the soul's canyons where things are perennial.
>
> (*Sea and Fog* 4)

As if it wasn't enough that people's physical capacity to encounter the natural world intimately diminishes with old age due to a decrease in mobility that keeps nature at a distance, Adnan suggests here, so does the intellectual ability to remember past encounters and to communicate one's experiences to others. Or, as Adnan puts it quite succinctly in "Sea": "Without a body there's no soul and without the latter there's no / way to speak about the sea" (*Sea and Fog* 22). The prospect of no longer being able to speak about the sea and, accordingly, the prospect of no longer being able to bear witness to her desire and love for nature fills the speaker with deep regret: "There's so much life around me, and I will have to leave" (*Night* 27).

Several more passages in *Seasons*, *Sea and Fog*, and *Night* point to the ways in which old age limits physical mobility and, by consequence, the speaker's immediate access to nature. This is the case, for example, in the passage discussed earlier, in which a dive into the ocean, that is, the merging of body and sea evokes an ecomystical experience and which I quote here again for the sake of readability:

> Soon, disoriented but keeping full speed, a body *intact* throws itself against *demented* waters: the two masses, the single spear-like and the oceanic other meet, clash, then fuse their weight in an ultimate reckoning with Being.
>
> (*Sea and Fog* 9; emphasis added)

Adnan's insistence in this particular scenario on the fact that the body mentioned here is not just any kind of body, but a "body *intact*" and the fact that this body "throws / itself against *demented* waters" rather than "softly going in" (*Sea and Fog* 30), as in the bathing passage quoted earlier, points to bodies and potentially also minds that are not or no longer intact, including bodies and minds harmed by war or affected by illness and old age. To repeat a passage in *Sea and Fog* discussed earlier that strongly resonates with the one above:

> The body produces that superstructure we call mind. When they work together there's elation. But they can go – too often – their own ways, the body, damaged beyond repair, the mind destroyed beyond recourse. All the while the world manifests its overwhelming power.
>
> (*Sea and Fog* 47)

Whatever intact "body" (Adnan, *Sea and Fog* 9), is referred to in the first passage—the use of the indefinite article "a" ("a body") indicates that the speaker is either only an observer to the scene or that she imagines it without her own involvement—the excerpt implies that an ecstatic union with nature of the kind described above for the person entering the water has become an experience of the past for the aging speaker.

Other passages from Adnan's more recent nature poetry corroborate such a reading. Indeed, while both *Sea and Fog* and *Night* contain verses in which the speaker remembers climbing mountains (*Sea and Fog* 3, 53; *Night* 12), "Night" also features in the following passage, which once more alludes to the fact that the speaker may no longer be as mobile as she used to be:

> Not to be able to climb up a mountain, run from this place to the next, see things improving for friends or nations or even a clear day, not to stop the torture…
>
> (*Night* 10)

More explicitly than in the passages already quoted, this excerpt links the speaker's inability to move about freely in the world and in nature with an inability to witness, let alone effect positive change in a world in which "nations" such as the United States remain involved in military conflicts in which "torture" is an all too frequent occurrence. Like in this instance, personal and global scenarios of decline ("Not to be able to [. . .] see things improving for friends or nations") as well as environmental and non-environmental scenarios of doom are frequently juxtaposed in Adnan's poetry. While this juxtaposition speaks to Adnan's complex apocalyptic imagination, it also gestures toward the kind of empathy for strangers and for nature as even stranger kin that Seymour considers to be crucial for any viable imagination of a queer ecological futurity. Put differently, Adnan's late poetry gestures toward a queer and an apocalyptic environmental ethics.

Unlike Craig Santos Perez and Juliana Spahr, who I discuss in previous chapters, Adnan rarely addresses environmental degradation directly.[13] Indeed, she mentions

13 Adnan mentions "global warming" (*Seasons* 49) and its effects on the natural phenomena she closely observes on several occasions. Keenly interested in weather patterns, Adnan for instances refers to the increasing occurrences of "mega-storms" (*Sea and Fog* 94) and "September fires" (*Sea and Fog* 72) which have begun to "engulf big chunks / of California" (*Sea and Fog* 74)

environmental degradation more frequently in her earlier publications than in her more recent ones. And when she does, she frequently combines references to global environmental catastrophe with personal musings about death. In the following passage from "Spreading Clouds. . . ," a poem published as part of *The Indian Never Had a Horse & Other Poems* (1985) that she dedicated to June Jordan, for example, Adnan not only warns of the possible future consequences of present-day environmental destruction, she also addresses her parents' death. Employing a language of protest reminiscent of her own beginnings as a poet during the Vietnam War as well as of Jordan's uncompromisingly political and rousing rhetoric, the poem demands that everyone "look what we did to our common / mother Earth!" (Adnan, *The Indian* 69). A little later, in a passage in which the speaker remembers "the Greek eyes of [her] / mother looking over the / agony of [her] Arab father" (71), the tone drastically changes, prefiguring the more introspective and much less combative tone of Adnan's later writings:

> I don't want to watch our
> planet go the way they
> did:
> reluctantly having learned
> the great secret at the moment
> of the Great Journey.
>
> (*The Indian Had a Horse* 71)

The "great secret" Adnan refers to here, the secret her parents only learn at the moment of the father's approaching death, I would suggest, is the secret of a love that by far surpasses the boundaries of heteronormative romantic love also alluded to in the exchange between the speaker's father and mother. For their daughter, the nature poet who gives voice to a queer ecological desire in her writing, this love is one that turns to the natural world with appreciative attention as well as empathic care. When Adnan insists in this poem that she does not want to "watch our / planet go the way they / did," she implies not only that environmental catastrophe is looming, she also expresses the hope that others will learn the "great secret" sooner than her parents did. For Adnan, this means that they embrace the radical love for the world she

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more and more frequently in "these times of global over-heat" (*Sea and Fog* 45). Environmental degradation too figures in poems such as "Spreading Clouds…" from *The Indian Never Had a Horse & Other Poems* (1985) and in "The Manifestation of the Voyage" from *The Spring Flowers Own* (1990), both of which contain passionate pleas against environmental destruction. As discussed in more detail above, *Sea and Fog* points to uranium mining as a highly exploitative and destructive activity (85) while both *There* and *Seasons* lament the pervasiveness of chemical pollution (*There* 23, *Seasons* 2).

advocates before it is too late, allowing for even queerer and more ecological futures than her parents' generation or her own may be able to imagine.

A section of the poem "The Manifestation of the Voyage" (1990) is yet another place where she juxtaposes a discussion of impending global environmental catastrophe with very personal reflections about death. In this text a "brutalized" and "devastated" (89) Earth lies dying, just like and yet also unlike the speaker's mother:

> And Earth?
> I found her wounded
> - is she in agony?-
> [...]
> It is not my mother who's dying
> over the silk of her bed
> it's Enormous Death herself [...]
>
> (*The Spring Flowers Own* 89)

Suggesting an incomparability as well as a comparability of two very different deaths, this excerpt raises the question whether and (if so, then) how human beings can make sense of these kinds of imminent catastrophes that push the mind toward its limits of comprehension, whether intellectually, emotionally, or spiritually. While the death of a loved one, and especially that of one's mother, may indeed mean the end of the world as one knows it, "Enormous Death herself," as I understand Adnan here, actually means the end of the world as we know it, if not the end of the world as such. The paradox Adnan seems to express here is that, for those who love nature as passionately and deeply as she does, observing these two kinds of apocalypses, the private and the global one, may in fact feel very similar, while for many others the mere idea of comparing the two might seem absurd. Yet, precisely because of this discrepancy, the event more widely acknowledged to be a tragedy of "Enormous" proportion, that is, the personal experience of having to face the approaching death of a loved one, helps to convey the enormous tragedy of a looming environmental catastrophe. In turn, conveying not only the information that such a catastrophe is ahead or already under way but placing it within a more familiar emotional framework may help to produce what I have described as a radical, queer ecological empathy for nature.

Of course, such a queer ecological empathy has very little political import if it overwhelms those who grieve for nature in ways most only grieve for their closest of kin. As Lynn Keller notes in relation to the political limitations of apocalyptic discourse, anticipating environmental catastrophe, especially when there are clear signs that it may already be well under way as in Adnan's poems, may cause paralyzed inaction rather than a change of thinking and behavior (Keller, *Recomposing Ecopoetics* 101, 104). "The Spring Flowers Own," the companion piece to "The Manifestation of the Voyage" in the collection of the same name, warns about precisely this dan-

ger. It suggests that the prospect of one's own death, and indeed in this particular case the growing awareness of its inevitability that comes with aging or other imminent threats to one's life, can dull people's senses toward environmental dangers such as the effects of global warming, especially when the effects in question seem like problems that may never affect them directly in their lifetime:

> temperatures on earth are
> rising
> but we wear upon us some
> immovable frost
> everyone carries his dying as
> a growing shadow.
>
> (Adnan, *The Spring Flowers Own* 35)

Rather than chastising "everyone" for what the poem seems to consider a very human tendency (that is, to hold most dear what is closest to us, including our own lives), Adnan's poetry responds with compassion to the understandable limits of human empathy for nature in the face of mortality. Still, her poems also point to the very real problems arising from this failure of the imagination in the present and the consequences this failure may cause for the world's future. Adnan's poetry insists that our actions in the present—which in Adnan's case means how we interact with, how deeply we think about, and how radically we love nature—are of essence, because they either allow for or preclude the possibility of queerer and more ecological futures.

While much of Adnan's later nature poetry extends compassion and understanding to those who fail to love nature deeply enough, it also occasionally provides clues about how one might develop a radical queer/ecological empathy for the world especially in the face of death and approaching environmental catastrophe. As one stanza from the poem "Night" implies, such a more defiant perspective may be the effect of aging and coming face to face with one's own mortality: "The wedding of history with the coffee we drink in our ever / shrinking days awakes our need to reinvent love" (Adnan, *Night* 9). In these powerful yet unpretentious lines, Adnan conjures passages from the same collection and her earlier writings in which the juxtaposition of everyday occurrences and events of global import create a feeling of desperation and powerlessness in the face of violence and destruction (an example is "To be in a Time of War" from *In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country*). In the passage from *Night* I just quoted, by contrast, this sense of helplessness is transformed into an confirmation of what I take to be Adnan's key concern in her poetry on nature, mobility, aging, and death: a desire to affirm the value of an all-encompassing love for the world in general and the natural world in particular, and—upon being confronted with the fact of "our ever / shrinking days"—to bear witness to this love in her poetry. As I would like to suggest, her poetry stands as a powerful example of the commitment

this kind of love requires, introducing those who may yet live to see the future that needs saving to the kind of queer ecological empathy on which a radical love for nature must be based. Put differently, Adnan's nature poetry of post-mobility is "illustrative" (Heller 159) in Chaia Heller's broadly defined critical-pedagogical sense of that term, in that it expresses faith in reading nature poetry as a way of enacting a queer ecological futurity in the present and, in doing so, of making more likely those queerer and more ecological futures that can avoid perpetual conflict and environmental catastrophe. In Adnan's poetry of post-mobility, this enactment of a queer ecological futurity relies on an apocalyptic environmental imagination and ethics.

When Heller speaks of the importance of the "illustrative moment" (159) of ecological desire in *Ecology of Everyday Life*, she speaks of the need to teach and communicate resistance against those practices and ideologies that encourage the exploitation and destruction of nature. According to Heller, "illustrative opposition must be sensual: it should constitute the ultimate body politic in which we literally throw our bodies into social contestation, taking illustrative and expressive direct action" (159). The insistence that those who protest the intersecting oppressions of sexism, racism, capitalism, and environmental exploitation put their actual physical bodies on the line is certainly anything but misguided. Still, Adnan's poetry of post-mobility suggests that there must be options of "expressive direct action" other than the ones insisting on immediate experience. Indeed, her poetry may be considered a form of expressive direct action, insomuch as it highly values thinking as a "sensual" engagement with nature. Following Seymour's line of argument, then, I would stress the value of Adnan's poetry as a "remarkable *achievement* [/] of imagination" (Seymour 10; emphasis original). Seymour's statement harks back to José Esteban Muñoz who, in reading Ernst Bloch, stresses the "anticipatory illumination of art" (3), that is, art's ability to gesture toward politically productive "utopian feelings" (3) that may be put to work in order to imagine and enact better and queerer futures. Like Seymour I want to take this argument one step further in order to explore how art like Adnan's poetry may imagine and enact futures that are not only queerer but also more ecological. As I want to suggest in closing, the "anticipatory illumination" of Adnan's poetry works by way of a poetics of disorientation that attempts to make the experience of disorientation caused by displacement and by a sense of approaching personal and environmental apocalypse graspable in the act of reading.

Aphoristic and impressionistic, contemplative and at times highly philosophical, Adnan's nature poetry requires several re-readings, before larger themes emerge and the meaning of certain passages becomes clear through accumulation. In the same vein, her texts demand patience and make readers work for pleasurable moments of startling insight and new perspectives on seemingly familiar topics. Reading page after page of Adnan's loosely jointed reflections, some readers would certainly come to enjoy the meditational effect of her long poems, which depends on the continual return to similar subject matters from a variety of perspectives. Many

readers, however, even those willing to engage in the interpretative labor Adnan's nature poems require, might experience a strong sense of confusion due to abrupt changes of topic between and even within stanzas, the oblique references to mythology, history, philosophy, and art, and the idiosyncratic system of symbols underlying her poetry. And so, if her poetry about nature is in part motivated by the disorientation caused by experiences of migration and records a reorientation process that remains forever incomplete, Adnan's poems about natural phenomena also enact this disorientation on the page. Swept away by "the maddening effect of a /constant present" and allowed only brief moments of "rest" in "memory" (*Night* 13), Adnan's speaker takes her readers on a dizzying journey through time and space, reminiscent of what Gertrude Stein in reference to her own poetry described in her essay on war and poetics, "Composition as Explanation" (1926), as a "continuous present" (499):

> There's space, for sure, we're of it, but where's time? Where from? There's change, and it is movement. No doubt. So time, abstracted from change, is movement represented by a watch's needles. The measure of change we call time. As we fear death, a fatal change, we fear its progression in everything. Although we love change and marvel at movement.
>
> (Adnan, *Sea and Fog* 43)

In my understanding, the lesson to learn on this journey undertaken "by a watch's / needles," which inevitably takes readers closer to the uncertain futures looming in Adnan's poetry, is to keep searching for the all-encompassing love that drives the speaker, despite the fact that or, maybe exactly because, "death, a / fatal change" manifests "in everything." In other words, the lesson to learn from Adnan's poetry in the midst of a world that is all about "change" and "movement" is to keep looking at nature.

Searching for a radical love that will save the world, Adnan's poems suggest, means to arrive at the realization that the great secret one has been looking *for* is to be found in what one has been looking *at* while on that journey and while reveling in the pleasures this act of looking produces:

> The only absolute this mind can apprehend is the pleasure of being only a temporary visitor to this transient garden. That happened ten minutes ago. A summer breeze is worth a night of love.
>
> (*Seasons* 67)

Because each and every one of us is "only a temporary visitor in this transient garden," Adnan's poems encourage her readers to look patiently and closely at nature while we still can. The following passage from *Sea and Fog* expresses the urgency behind the prompt that we take the time to look:

> The sea is to be seen. See the sea. Wait. Do not hurry. Do not run to her. Wait, she says. Or I say. See the sea. Look at her using your eyes. Open them, those eyes that will close one day when you won't be standing. You will be flat, like her, but she will be alive. Therefore look at her while you can. Let your eyes tire and burn. Let them suffer. Keep them open like one does at midday. Don't worry. Other eyes within will take over and go on seeing her. They will not search for forms nor seek divine presence. They will rather continue to see water which stirs and shouts, becomes ice in the North, vapor in the tropics.
>
> (*Sea and Fog* 31)

Using staccato phrases, direct reader address, word play, and a repetition of sibilants, this exceptionally long stanza gives the impression of a speaker who stops herself along with the reader, leaving both of them out of breath. Having thus stopped, the speaker once more reorients her readers toward her much beloved sea, pleading with us to "look at her while [we] can" because one day soon "[we] won't be standing" and instead be "flat, like her." Playing with line endings and unsuspected enjambments, this passage suggests that both "[o]ther eyes" and "[o]ther eyes within will take over and go on seeing / her," especially once the speaker and her current companions will have been forced to move on, both literally and figuratively. If we learn to "[s]ee the sea" and to love her radically enough, this poem suggests, those coming after us may "continue to see water which stirs and shouts,/ becomes ice in the North, vapor in the tropics" rather than witnessing the kinds of climatic changes Adnan occasionally alludes to in her poems. Here as in many places in her hauntingly beautiful poetry, Adnan reminds us what we could lose sooner than we might expect, if we fail in the almost impossible task she has set for us: to love nature more than "our comforts, our toys, our gadgets, and above all our political and religious mythologies" and, in doing so, to save nature as the very basis of our existence. As Adnan puts it in *Sea and Fog*:

> The forest is shaking terribly. Waves howl and break in jets of water. What beauty, this fury! Sea: it's because she is that we are, and when she disappears we'll cease to be. It's only in relation to her that we find some worth to our existence. (45)