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5 Seasonal Feelings

Reading Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* During Winter Depression

Kaisa Kortekallio

In Helsinki, November 2017 has been exceptionally cloudy and rainy.¹ I have been reading Paolo Bacigalupi's climate fiction dystopia novel *The Windup Girl*. The narrative weaves together the societal and ecological crises of a future Bangkok, generating an atmosphere of fear and violence. During the two weeks of reading, feelings of anxiousness and tension have gathered in my body, intensified by the resonance between the weather and the novel.

The day after finishing the novel, November 15, brings with it a partial resolution of the tension. After weeks of heavy skies, the cloud cover parts, revealing a harsh white winter light. I walk the early afternoon streets in a quiet old district of Helsinki, Kruununhaka, and cry. At the moment of crying, my bodily experience is still permeated by the tensions and intense affects of the novel. I become aware of my body as a unified material thing, a block of flesh that carries itself along the streets. My perceptual awareness of the physical space is heightened, and along with the awareness comes a feeling of bodily porousness: the harsh afternoon light not only surrounds me but enters me, my whole body is weighed down by the pull of the earth and the cold weight of the nineteenth-century stone and brick buildings. The muted colors and ornate details of the buildings impress me with unusual force.

In this chapter, I propose that crying on the street after reading a climate fiction novel is a moment that opens up to both New Materialist and phenomenological analyses and that the experience can also loop back to literary interpretation in the cognitive-narratological vein. My affective response emerges from the interaction of human and nonhuman forces: the clouds, the light, the novel—and the theory. Under the influence of New Materialism and cognitive narratology, I pay more attention to my bodily feelings and to the nonhuman forces present in the situation.

The experience of reading a novel is, however, not yet an interpretation but a complex tangle of thoughts, feelings, impressions, and associations that does not follow any particular theoretical model. In describing and analyzing the act of reading the novel, including the crying episode that immediately followed, I aim to retrospectively and partially explain the

cognitive and affective dynamics involved. The chapter discusses how reading a novel participates in embodied experience and asks whether an affective response such as crying could be employed as part of literary interpretation. I propose that in the crossroads of New Materialist and enactive perspectives on literature, the reading body can be considered as an affective being that makes sense of its environments through bodily feelings (cf. Colombetti and Thompson; Neimanis). As an embodied being constantly adjusting to and conversing with the surrounding materialities, the reader may creatively involve many kinds of events and things, human and nonhuman, into the reading experience. As a scholarly subject, the same reader can analytically describe the threads and knots that form this ever-changing tangle.

While the focus of this chapter is on the phenomenology of reading, I will also attend to the formal features of the novel that participate in the affective experience—descriptions of material things and forces, as well as the structure and pace of narrative events. I suggest that during the course of reading the novel, affective responses to these features accumulate and give rise to bodily feelings of anxiousness and tension that play into the general depressive mood generated by the seasonal darkness of Finnish winter. Building on both cognitive reading studies and New Materialist philosophy, I call this effect *reciprocal amplification* (cf. Kuzmičová “Does It Matter”; Neimanis).

Reading climate fiction in the year 2017, one cannot dismiss the physical environment. The weather is increasingly strange: even in Southern Finland, which tends to have a moderate climate, the fall of 2017 is characterized by freak storms and unusually high temperatures. To read in November is to read during heavy rains and rapidly decreasing sunlight. The darkness, while not dependent on the weather as such, is made unusually depressing by the heaviness of the cloud cover and the lack of snow. In some parts of Finland, including Helsinki, the cloud cover does not break for three consecutive months. In an autumn this dark, the symptoms of *seasonal affective disorder* are exceptionally severe too. In this chapter, I describe my personal experience with seasonal affective disorder as a “space of possibility” (Ratcliffe 358) that shapes my affective encounter with the novel.² In my view, the seasonal mood should be considered an environmentally emergent phenomenon rather than merely an “inner” state of an individual experimenter.

In adopting an approach that considers both mood and physical environments as part of the reading experience, I take a critical stance toward the common literary-theoretical metaphors of *transportation* and *immersion*. In analyses and theories of reading that apply these terms, the reader’s consciousness is figured as carried away to a fictional realm, “not only assumed to engage in mental travel into distant imaginary worlds, but also become temporarily decoupled from their own world as part of the same process of transportation” (Kuzmičová “Does It Matter” 291).³ In the metaphorical

model of transportation and immersion, physical environments are mostly treated as distractions that hinder a fully immersive aesthetic experience. This chapter considers what happens when the reader's consciousness is *not* decoupled from the world but rather allows the physical environment to enter and shape the reading experience.

Enactivism and New Materialism

The enactive approach to literature and cognition focuses on the reciprocal dynamics between environments and reading minds. Enactive theory draws from cognitive sciences, systems biology, ecological psychology, and phenomenology, building on to the notion that cognition is embodied, situated, and co-emergent with the cognizer's environments (Varela et al; Noë; Thompson). The approach centers on the hypothesis that cognition involves skillful activity—perceiving, for example, “isn't something that happens in us, it is something we do” (Noë 216). Crucially to the main theme of this chapter, the theory also views affect and emotion as aspects of cognitive activity (Colombetti; Colombetti and Thompson).

From an enactive perspective, reading a fictional narrative is a “skill-orientated interaction between a reader's embodied mind and the literary object” (Polvinen 140). Focusing on imaginary environments, enactivist literary research has discussed the “presence” of the reader in terms of virtuality: when encountering fictional environments, the reader experiences something like bodily echoes or traces of actual events, movements and feelings, creating mental images based on both the cues provided by the narrative and their personal experiential backgrounds (Caracciolo “The Reader's Virtual Body”; Kukkonen; Polvinen). This focus already acknowledges that actual environments participate in the reading process but discusses them on a rather general level. However, as demonstrated by Anezka Kuzmičová (“Presence,” “Does It Matter”), the theory also allows for a mode of thinking that puts more emphasis on the particularity of actual environments.

New Materialist perspectives provide means for considering the particularity and materiality of actual environments more closely. Moreover, they propose practical techniques for materialist reading. Some New Materialist thinkers have suggested that conscious orientation toward nonhuman material agencies—and toward embodied experience as an interface between the human and the nonhuman—can be employed as a means of developing posthumanist sensibilities (e.g., Coole and Frost, Neimanis). In New Materialist ontology, material things are considered as dynamic and active: in friction, movement, growth, and breakdown, they generate difference. *Matter* refers to “phenomena in their ongoing materialization” (Barad 151). The focus of New Materialist analyses is thus on the dynamicity of material processes, including processes that involve humans.

Reading can also be considered as a material process. In their formulation of material ecocriticism, Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann propose

that a New Materialist approach to reading can “focus attention on bodily experiences and bodily practices (where ‘body’ refers not only to the human body but to the concrete entanglements of plural ‘natures,’ in both human and more-than-human realms)” (Iovino and Oppermann 76). They also propose that material-ecocritical reading has “the ethico-cognitive potential to upgrade our sensorium” (Iovino and Oppermann 87). I appreciate their assessment and suggest that the ethico-cognitive potential could be explored and developed with the help of the enactive approach. Instead of subscribing to the transhumanist term “upgrade” that metaphorizes the sensorium as a technological apparatus undergoing linear improvement, I would suggest that the potential can unfold in countless directions. If different dance styles and musical preferences “cultivate different forms of bodily awareness” (Colombetti 164), our reading habits can have similar effects as they inform our bodily patterns of response (see Warhol; Caracciolo “Perspectives”).

I begin the main part of the chapter with a brief discussion of moods evoked by seasons and narratives, outlining how moods are constituted through bodily feelings as part of environmental experience. I consider how my affective responses to Paolo Bacigalupi’s novel *The Windup Girl* both resonate and clash with my seasonal mood and analyze the affectivity of descriptive passages in the narrative. I explain how the notions of *environmental propping* (Kuzmičová, “Does It Matter”) and *amplification* (Neimanis) can help articulate the experiential dynamic of materialist reading. In conclusion, I suggest that materialist analyses of this kind can make the more-than-human affectivity of both environments and literature more readily available to perception.

Seasonal Mood, Bodily Feelings, and Affective Responses to Narratives

An embodied subject is always in a mood of some kind (Ratcliffe 362). Discussing depression in particular, Ratcliffe stresses that deep moods—or existential feelings, as he terms them—give shape to the possible engagements with the environment: sadness, for example, is “how one finds oneself in the world rather than an emotion that one has within the world ... [one] cannot see outside it” (360). Mood is also often theorized through weather analogies (see, e.g., Colombetti). Sadness, like rain, envelops the experiencing subject completely—in a specific location, or a specific body, there is no “outside” to either mood or weather. Whereas affects and emotions are episodic, like bouts of rain or gusts of wind, moods are considered in terms of cold or warm fronts or climate fluctuations. An anxious mood generally lasts for longer than an episode of fear, and whereas fear targets a specific object, say a speeding car, anxiousness generally does not have a specific target. Anxiousness can also be “in the air,” outside of individual bodies rather than emerging from them, a collective phenomenon (Colombetti 77–82). The notion of mood can thus be

very close to the notion of *atmosphere*—it is somewhere between feeling and environment, an affective relationality.⁴

Ratcliffe emphasizes that moods should be considered in terms of bodily feelings. This does not mean that moods should be conceived as feelings internal to the body or even experienced as associated with the body. Rather, the body can be something through which we feel something else or relate to the world (363). In the case of seasonal affective disorder, seasonal and meteorological conditions are experienced through long-term bodily feelings, such as fatigue or heightened sensitivity to light.⁵

Weather-related moods are common folk-psychological knowledge, and for art and literature, the connection is described often enough to have become clichéd.⁶ Clinical-psychological research also strongly suggests that weather affects mood—differently depending on the individual but significantly nonetheless. Seasonal affective disorder is associated both with personal vulnerabilities (retinal sensitivity, genetic variations, hormonal levels, attitudes) and environmental conditions (the availability of natural light, weather patterns), and it typically presents itself during the dark winter seasons of Arctic areas (Rohan and Rough). The phenomenon of seasonal moods highlights not only the embodied nature of cognition but also how the mind-body is constituted in systemic interactions with its environments. The severity of the symptoms of winter-type seasonal affective disorder—most typically, fatigue, depressed mood, and anhedonia—tend to vary from winter to winter, and even if there is no consensus about the exact reasons for the variation, the Oxford Handbook overview points to “climatological variables”—i.e., changes in weather (Rohan and Rough 256).⁷

Even though seasonal moods are not necessarily as deep or persistent as the depressive states Ratcliffe discusses, they too envelope subjective experience, including the experience of reading fiction, affecting one’s expectations, judgements, and affective responses. We can thus assume that mood, and the link between mood and physical environment, matters to reading. But how can we describe the interplay between seasonal moods, on the one hand, and the affective responses evoked by a narrative, on the other?

Building on Ratcliffe’s notion of moods as bodily feelings, Marco Caracciolo has argued that narratives can elicit moods through evoking emotional responses (“Perspectives”). Caracciolo argues that “mood is not just a function of narrative contents—the situations and characters represented by a text, and the circumscribed emotions they elicit—but of narrative style and structure as well” (18). I share this view and seek to demonstrate in my reading how a number of factors in the text work together to elicit bodily feelings—specifically, tension and anticipation—and how these feelings mesh with seasonal mood.

Viewing mood as part of environmental experience calls for a conception of feelings as something else than manifestations of interior emotions—a model that allows factors external to the body, such as weather and fiction,

to play into the formation of feelings. Robyn Warhol has mobilized such a model in the context of feminist narratology, considering feelings as *performative* rather than *expressive*. In the performative model, the body is understood “not as the location where gender and affect are expressed, but rather as the medium through which they come into being” (10). According to Warhol, literary criticism and film theory have tended to use the expressive model and thereby “granted privilege to the idea that every person harbors ‘real’ feelings, whether consciously or subconsciously expressed, and that literary texts tap into those feelings in more or less legitimate ways” (14). Warhol links this claim to the modernist prejudice against popular forms that “so readily and mechanically arouse emotion: it’s too easy; it must not be ‘authentic’” (35). In the performative model Warhol advances, feelings are always socially and culturally constructed to some extent, and bodily events such as crying over a sentimental novel are considered in terms of *generating* rather than expressing feelings.

The role of narrative form in this model is somewhat technological. Resonating with certain enactivist views of narrative (Polvinen), Warhol’s view considers narrative structures as “devices that work through readers’ bodily feelings to produce the physical fact of gendered subjectivity” (24). Crying, in such a view, is a response that generates bodily feelings in a pattern typical to the narrative form in question—the marriage plot, the family drama, or in the case of the act of reading described in this chapter, the catastrophic structure of a climate fiction narrative. Even if the exact constituents of mood are difficult if not impossible to pinpoint on the textual level (Caracciolo, “Perspectives”), Warhol’s work suggests that one fruitful way to proceed toward an analysis of the constitution of mood is to conduct analyses of how bodily feelings are generated in response to specific textual features.

Seasonal Mood as a Space of Possibility

The Windup Girl is usually characterized as climate fiction or dystopia.⁸ It envisions a twenty-third-century Thailand based on contemporary climate science scenarios. In the storyworld, global warming has raised the sea levels, fossil fuel sources have become depleted, and an ecosystemic collapse has occurred on a global scale. People and crops alike have been decimated by recurring pandemics. Weather has become unreliable, as the dry and wet seasons do not follow each other in a predictable pattern. The plot of the novel follows the development and outbreak of a societal crisis in Bangkok, entangling human life projects with political and ecological events.

In November 2017, I read *The Windup Girl* in the affective context of the immediate physical environment of reading. On most days, I read on the top floor of the university library, with a view over the roofs of Kruunuhaka and the shifting masses of rain clouds. Every day around 2 PM, the sky starts turning dark. During reading, I write notes that track both my frustration with

the novel's manipulative narrative techniques and my affective responses to the season.⁹ In them, I recognize the structure of feeling that characterizes the novel: tension is first created and accumulated through affective descriptions and plot events (the details of which I will not discuss here) and then resolved through fast-paced and violent narrative events.

It isn't just the characterization, it is the narrative structure too: the rhythm, the cues. The first bloodletting. Manipulation of affect. I feel constricted by these devices, more so than when reading PB's short stories.

I yawn; my eyes water. I am tired under the fluorescent lights, in the whirl and hum of the snack cooler in the corner of the reading hall.

(Kortekallio 9.11.2017)

The note mentions some of the typical expressions of seasonal affective disorder: increased sensitivity to artificial light and sound and a feeling of being constrained. It also records a feeling of irritation with the narrative structure of the novel and with the obviousness of its techniques. At the time of reading, I recognize the pull of the narrative as an invitation for a particular kind of excited, forward-leaning engagement typical to thrillers, and yet my prevailing mood does not provide a possibility for such excitement. I continue to feel the affects particular to individual scenes in the novel, which I will describe more closely in the following section. The violence of the scene I refer to as "the first bloodletting," in which the Thai Environment Ministry officials terrorize the streets in vengeance of the death of their popular leader, still causes my throat to tighten in fear and disgust. I recognize this feeling as a response proper to the design of the narrative and the scene as the first mark of the turning of the narrative's atmosphere: the accumulated tension of weather and political climate begins to crack, to be resolved in the ending climax.

Anezka Kuzmičová has discussed the ways in which literary imagination is affected by physical environments ("Does It Matter"). She calls this process *environmental propping* (299). In her example: when reading *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, your mental images of the fictional Congo River could be affected by the sound of water from a nearby fountain, and the author's descriptions of the Congo can in turn make you more acutely conscious of the sound of water in your own immediate environment (296).¹⁰ Kuzmičová also mentions that physical environments may shape mental imagery more intensely in the case of affective genres such as horror fiction or thrillers (298). Fiction that foregrounds environmental affects, as climate fiction does with its descriptions of weather phenomena, could arguably also provide more cues for environmental propping.¹¹

This reciprocal model of environmental propping helps to articulate the attentional and affective dynamics of my reading experience. The fictional environment of *The Windup Girl* and the actual environment of

my reading are partly juxtaposed—the novel portrays a busy city during a hot and dry season, whereas Helsinki in November is chilly and rainy with very few people on the streets. However, there are some shared aspects to the experientiality of these environments, primarily the weather-related anxiousness and increasing bodily tension described above. The experiential similarity of these affects serves to amplify the overall experience of anxiousness and bodily tension.

Within the space of possibility created by a weak and persistently tired mood, I am not capable of feeling the thrill proposed by the novel. Rather, I grow weary of the affect.

Chapter 40: excessive violence and destruction. I am almost completely desensitized. My feelings are all meta: I am frustrated by the novel. I doubt its merits. Very little immersion here. Maybe it was different the first time.

(Kortekallio 13.11.2017)

In the second note, written in forced, short-worded bursts of effort, feelings of fatigue and frustration clash with the affect suggested by the narrative, as its pace and intensity increase toward the end. In my seasonal mood, I have no interest or strength for encountering the novel's intensities—whether they are violent, as in the climax of the novel, or liberating, as in the epilogue in which the slave girl Emiko finds freedom in the flooded city. The ending of the novel falls flat.¹²

Environmental propping and phenomenology of mood help to explain how the affects of anxiousness and bodily tension are amplified in the reading experience. To describe the dynamics of this event more closely, I now turn to a textual analysis of the affective descriptions in the novel.

Building Tension Through Affective Descriptions

In *The Windup Girl* there is no single protagonist, nor a hero; rather, the storyworld and its events are explored through a number of prejudiced, traumatized, profit-seeking characters from many walks of life. The individual perspectives also represent different sectors of the future Thai society, reiterating popular character types: the spy, the action hero, the sly Oriental merchant, and the artificial girl. Bacigalupi's formulaic characterization does not invite me to engage with the characters as individual personalities, to whose goals and aspirations I would emotionally commit. It does, however, offer many opportunities for attuning to bodily feelings, as the characters move and act in their surroundings. The emphasis on bodily feeling and action is so prevalent that it seems more appropriate to refer to these constructs as "fictional bodies" rather than "characters."

Due to this formulaic yet robustly corporeal style of characterization, the focus of my reading is on the *affective* responses elicited by the material aspects of the narrative rather than the emotional responses Caracciolo discusses (“Perspectives”). The affectivity of narrative contents and style, such as the glare of a fictional sun or the fast pace of action sequences, is experienced as sensory and kinesthetic but not necessarily as emotionally valenced. I veer away from conceptualizing the characters primarily as fictional personae who the reader is supposed to encounter primarily through social and psychological schemata. Rather, I consider the fictional bodies and experiences in terms of their material affectivity, which is comparable to the affectivity presented by the fictional nonhuman forces and things (e.g., sunshine and windup springs) and the materiality of narrative style (e.g., the pace and rhythm of the text).

In spite of their variation, the fictional bodies are fairly similar: the prevailing tropical heat wave affects all of them in visceral ways. All bodies are objects to this nonhuman force. In the story, the yearly monsoons are months late, and the heat and drought are becoming intolerable. Bacigalupi’s Bangkok is a city below sea level, and a great dike and a system of pumps protect it from the rising water. The presence of the blocked water of the Chao Phraya River emerges as both a threat of destruction and a hope of relief:

The heat of the Yaowarat slum is full of shadows and squatting bodies. The heat of the dry season presses down on him, so intense that it seems no one can breathe, even with the looming presence of the Chao Phraya dikes. There is no escape from the heat. If the seawall gave way, the entire slum would drown in nearly cool water, but until then, Hock Seng sweats and stumbles through the maze of squeezeways, rubbing up against scavenged tin walls.

(99)

In the first sentence of this passage, it is *heat* that is full of shadows and squatting bodies—not the slum. Heat is thus subtly positioned as the encompassing condition—or a space of possibility—for the described events. The word *heat* is bluntly repeated in three consecutive sentences, underscoring the inescapability of the seasonal weather. Moreover, the affective imagery of the passage consists of phrases that point to heavy, constraining forces above and around the experiencer: “the dry season *presses down* on him,” and “the *looming* presence” of the dikes evoke a feeling of oppression from above, and the “maze of squeezeways” through which the focalizer “sweats and stumbles,” “rubbing up” against the walls, evoke a feeling of being constrained from all sides. The potentiality of the flood, the “nearly cool water,” emerges as the force that could wipe away all these oppressive constraints.

Descriptions of this kind are frequent in the novel. My bodily feelings attune to the descriptions of oppressing heat in which the sun “glares down” (171) and “hammers down” (147), “no breezes blow” (125), and “nothing with any intelligence is moving” (125): the characters sweat, their “lungs burn” (147) and they “breathe shallowly” (147). Through these simple descriptions, formulated with consistent wording and tone independent of the particular focalizer, the affects of heat and sweating under the sun become present as experiential traces that enable sympathetic attunement to the fictional bodies in the novel. I feel their need for fresh air and water, their fatigue, and the intensity of waiting for the rains. As mentioned above, this is an effect linked to the affective descriptions, not so much to characterization or narration.

To highlight the more-than-human aspect of this bodily response, we can compare it to response elicited by the affective descriptions of non-human bodies: iron springs and working animals. A particularly forceful description of materiality in the first chapter of the novel accounts for the winding of a large iron spring used to kinetically store the energy with which factories and electric devices are run. The spring is “tortured into its final structure, winding in on itself, torquing into a tighter and tighter curl, working against everything in its molecular structure as the spring is tightened down” (15).

As with the above passage, the affectivity of the description rises from the blunt repetition of a keyword (“tight”) and to indicators of motion (winding *in on itself* and tightened *down*, suggesting a gradually spiralling motion). The structure of the sentence also plays into affectivity by way of cranking out phrase after phrase before ending to a full stop—the iterative rhythm of the sentence matches the feeling of eager anticipation or the increasing muscular tension experienced when completing a heavy physical task.

The “tortured” metal of the springs is wound by giant bioengineered elephants, “megodonts,” that “groan against spindle cranks, their enormous heads hanging low, prehensile trunks scraping the ground as they tread slow circles around power spindles” (11–12). Note, again, the constrained and downward motions. I feel the kinaesthetic echo of the physical tension in both the springs and the megodonts’ muscles as a tension in my neck and jaw. In this affective response, I experience the materiality of fictional human bodies in a similar manner as I do the materiality of fictional nonhuman bodies, animate and inanimate alike.¹³

During the act of reading the novel, the increasing tension affects the reader both through singular descriptions, such as those above, and through the dynamics of narrated action. The accumulation of affective responses can evoke an anxious or constrained mood in the reader, depending on the reader’s previous experience with actual constraints, such as forced labor or distressing weather.¹⁴ In this way, the fictional environment affects my reading body by calling up bodily memories of previous experiences of weather and material things and by evoking more general bodily feelings of tension and movement. Before reaching the end of the novel, such bodily

feelings can accumulate into a considerable mood-amplifying force. Robyn Warhol has discussed this kind of accumulation in the context of watching soap-opera television as a daily routine.

For some viewers, the intensities are a form of background noise in a life otherwise detached from the concerns of the soap-opera plot; for others—particularly those who are moved enough by the story line to want to write about it online (or, in my case, in this chapter)—the intensities are more present, more vividly a part of daily consciousness. To watch every day is to be carried on that wave of intensities, to experience the build-up, the crisis, and the undertow of response as one of the structuring principles of daily life.

(118–19)

Warhol discusses this dynamic in the context of gendered feeling, but her insights can be applied more generally to other patterns of feeling. While Warhol argues that the soap-opera viewer is “continually regendered as effeminate, whether you are male or female” (119), we can argue that continued engagement with affective narratives of any kind plays into the patterns of feeling performed by the reading/viewing body. However, from a New Materialist perspective, we should also consider how other factors, such as seasonal conditions, play into these patterns.

Conclusion: Reciprocal Amplification of Affect

In this chapter, I have considered mood from the phenomenological perspective put forward by Matthew Ratcliffe, as bodily feelings. I have shown how a seasonal mood in particular opens up to phenomenological analysis. However, as seasonal mood is so prominently dependent on environmental factors, other perspectives are also needed in considering it. From an enactive perspective, seasonal mood is an emergent phenomenon arising from the interactions of human bodies and environmental conditions. In New Materialist terms, seasonal mood is generated in the entanglement of the material forces of weather, human embodiment, and literature.

In my reading of Paolo Bacigalupi’s *The Windup Girl*, I considered how affective responses to descriptive and narrative techniques can accumulate bodily feelings and evoke moods. By using kinaesthetic and spatial language, Bacigalupi’s descriptions of material forces call up experiential traces of previous embodied experiences, generating bodily feelings of tension, weight, constraint, and movement. During reading, these feelings add up to a considerable mood-amplifying force. The experiential dynamic of mood is further amplified by mutual environmental propping between experiencing the dark season and the imaginative rendering of the fictional bodies and spaces.

Based on this instance of reading *The Windup Girl*, it appears that focusing one’s attention to bodily feelings and experiential patterns tends to

either enhance or entirely deflate their intensity. In both cases, the bodily feelings are more available to consciousness than in casual modes of reading. Kuzmičová's notion of environmental propping begins to articulate this dynamic of reciprocal amplification, and New Materialist perspectives on experience may help theorize it further. Reciprocal amplification may provide a way for cultivating posthumanist forms of experience (cf. Iovino and Oppermann). New Materialist scholar Astrida Neimanis has suggested that artworks and scientific findings can amplify our experiences of nonhuman forces and entities, serving as "mediating prostheses that open certain experiences for us, but foreclose or restrain others" (Neimanis 61). When this line of thought joins the thread of enactivist philosophy, we can articulate the experience of crying on the street after reading a novel as an instance of embodied and environmental sense-making.

On November 15, I walk the streets of Kruununhaka and cry. The physical act of crying can be described as something of a cognitive epiphany, enmeshed in what Ratcliffe describes as a temporary shift in deep mood (366–67). My seasonal mood breaks, unveiling a moment of silent clarity. If there is a convergent pattern connecting my moods and the weather, it is only fitting that epiphany emerges on the one bright day after weeks of watching rain clouds shift and roll.

Within this epiphany, the realization about the novel—the beginning of a new interpretation—comes through an experiential analogy. Walking the momentarily bright streets, the fatigue and tension gathered in my body present themselves in their full weight. I feel permeated by both the bleak affect of the novel and the darkness of the past weeks' weather, muscles and intestines heavy with fatigue. The oppressiveness of the weather is matched and merged with the oppressiveness of the novel. In analogy, the novel is a material force, not unlike the clouds and the light. I live with it like I live with the weather, feeling the shifts and weights in its affective patterns. It affects both my momentary bodily feelings and my general mood.

In a New Materialist vein, the literary artifact *The Windup Girl* can be considered as a mediating prosthesis that amplifies my awareness of nonhuman materialities and sensitizes me to their effects. On the other hand, my physical surroundings, including the season and weather phenomena, provide environmental propping that guides my attention to the affective cues of the novel. Through attending to the shifts in bodily feelings, we can begin to make sense of the reciprocal amplification of affect that is generated in the entanglement of human bodies, literary artifacts, and physical environments. In deliberate experiments such as this, the material and nonhuman aspects of lived experience are made available to perception in a striking way. However, those aspects inform our experience all the time, in modes subtler than epiphany. I suggest that attending to bodily feelings and carefully articulating them—not as peripheral but as integral to both New Materialist and enactivist approaches to literary interpretation—develops a richer sense of the material dynamics of bodily reading.

Notes

- 1 This chapter was written during a research period in the consortium project Instrumental Narratives: The Limits of Storytelling and New Story-Critical Narrative Theory (2018–2022), funded by the Academy of Finland (no. 315052). It has been constructed from a pile of notes with the generous and significant help of the editors of this volume. I want to thank all of them, and Marco Caracciolo especially, for guiding me to the work of both Anezka Kuzmíčová and Robyn Warhol.
- 2 Ratcliffe grounds his idea of moods as “spaces of possibility” in Heidegger’s notion that mood is a “background sense” of belonging to a world (rather than an intentional state in itself). In different moods, different objects in the world matter to us in different ways, and we experience the world as offering different kinds of significant possibilities. “Mood constitutes a phenomenological background in the context of which intentionally directed experience is possible” (Ratcliffe 357).
- 3 See also Gerrig; Green and Brock.
- 4 Ahmed argues that moods can define the borders of collective bodies, producing both in-groups (the ones who share a mood) and “affect aliens” (the ones who do not). In popular media and academic accounts, epochs are often defined in terms of a dominant public feeling: an emotion that when named expresses something about what it feels like or felt like to live in that particular period. For example, the Cold War 1950’s in the USA and UK was called a time of paranoia, and our current epoch has been characterized as “the age of anxiety” or “the age of fear” (Anderson 107–108).
- 5 As the examples demonstrate, bodily feelings should not be equated with *emotions*. Bodily feelings vary from emotionally neutral sensations to deeply emotional bodily experiences. Bodily feeling and *affect* can be used as partly overlapping concepts, but whereas bodily feeling is tied to an individual body, affect can be considered as a collective or cultural phenomenon that informs feeling (cf. Ahmed; Seyfert; Vermeulen).
- 6 To mention a few examples: seasonal moods and atmospheres play a significant role in Victorian and Gothic imagination (the mists and storms in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*), in magical realism (the immobilizing dry season in Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *A Hundred Years of Solitude*), in speculative fiction (the psychologically warping effect of the flooded tropical areas in J. G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World*), and in contemporary climate fiction (the hopelessness of a parch-dry Earth in the film *Interstellar*).
- 7 The overview also stresses the relevance of other factors, listing “the time of year assessed, length of residency, acclimatization, sociocultural factors, and within-time zone longitude, which affects wake time relative to sunrise” (Rohan and Rough 256).
- 8 The reading of *The Windup Girl* that I describe here is not a first reading—rather, it is an experimental exploration of a narrative I already know well. *The Windup Girl* is a climate fiction novel that features plenty of descriptions of bodily experiences connected to weather phenomena. Reading these descriptions during the darkest time of the year, during which seasonal affective disorder always reliably affects my bodily experience, is a choice that deliberately amplifies the situational aspects of a singular reading.
- 9 The reason for citing my original notes rather than just paraphrasing them lies in their communicative force. I believe that the particular phrasing and rhythm of notes written during the reading event carries traces of the feelings of that time and that those traces can evoke experiential echoes in the readers of this essay—much in the same way as fictional texts can. The notebook entries thus contribute to my communication of the reading experience.

- 10 As Kuzmičová notes, this scenario is atypical in its clarity: in most natural reading situations, imagination and stimuli would mingle in less clear-cut ways. Kuzmičová also discusses instances of epistemic awareness in which the environmental stimuli (e.g., the sound of running water) are not consciously perceived but still affect the formation of mental images (Kuzmičová, “Does It Matter” 296; see also Schwitzgebel).
- 11 Material ecocritics have suggested that nonhuman entities—such as rivers—can participate in the writing process through affecting and impressing the writer’s human body (Iovino and Oppermann). The cognitive aspect of this kind of material-creative dynamic could also be discussed in terms of environmental propping. For critical work that combines material ecocriticism and cognitive theories of affect, see Weik von Mossner.
- 12 Were this a clinically depressed mood, the desensitization could become habitual, making it difficult or impossible to feel with the novel altogether. In the case of seasonal affective disorder, however, the mood can shift and fluctuate with the weather.
- 13 The winding movement is evoked as both a component of and a metonym for the societal tensions. Within the tension, there is the promise and risk of release: controlled release brings success, uncontrolled release causes violent destruction. In the first chapter of the novel, one of the working megodonts goes mad and wreaks havoc in the factory, foregrounding the chaotic release of long-wound societal tensions that takes place at the climax of the novel. The central image of windup springs is also foregrounded in the title of the novel, emphasizing the importance of increasing tension as a central kinaesthetic motif.
- 14 This experiential dynamic has been theorized extensively in the enactive approach (see Caracciolo, *Experientiality*, for an overview and a theoretical model and Kortekallio for a provisional method).

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