Morgan Cohen

"can you tell the rhetorical difference?": Foraging and Fodder in Rita Wong's *forage*

Throughout her oeuvre, Rita Wong critiques the mechanisms by which the capitalist system "by demon hand, demand" (*forage* 39) determines the market. She analyzes how individuals are caught within this system and therefore within polarizing tendencies to make "free trade or free will" (39). The latter is further complicated by Wong in *forage* (2007) when she poses the question, "can you tell the rhetorical difference?" (39).[1] The received axioms or "status-quo stories" (Wilson 12) are proposed as self-evident within free market economy narratives, because they exist to avow their situation. The "rhetorical difference" is thus derived by analyzing phenomena[2] to discern the diffraction[3]—it is dependent on how knowledge is situated.[4] In particular, *forage,* Wong's second collection of poetry, explores the subversion and lexicon of such "familiar" cultural narratives—that is, status-quo stories—with their less familiar affects.[5]

The definition of "forage" is to conduct a "wide search over an area in order to obtain something, especially food or provisions" ("forage"). By "forage," Wong largely means the process of scouring to locate the sources of cultural malaise. Forage, however, has another layer of meaning derived from its Germanic origin, also pertinent here: it means "fodder," that is, "a person or thing regarded only as material for a specific use" ("fodder"). The undercurrents of foraging (scouring) and fodder (material for specific use) run throughout the collection. Calling upon her skilful use of poetics, Wong challenges material interconnectedness by revealing how neoliberal ideology

supports and inextricably links status-quo stories to the socio-political and the cultural; that is, *identity* is not only surrounded[6] but also rendered by constructs of commodification that are determined through language and physical bodies. Foraging and fodder are in tension in Wong's collection. Therefore, in this essay, by invoking protean assemblages of mattering in relation to effectual identity, I explore the actant's search for sustenance as they become caught within a capitalist system's fodder—"status-quo stories"—for the functioning of neoliberal machinery.

Wong explores how methods of foraging bifurcate the meaning of agency depending on how it is situated through either "intra-acting" or interacting. Karen Barad, in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, defines "intra-action" as "*the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*" in contrast to "'interaction,' which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction" (33, emphasis original). Barad argues that "*agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements*" (33, emphasis original). Her neologism aligns with Jane Bennett's theory of "distributed agency," which does "not posit a subject as the root cause of an effect" (31); rather, as Bennett writes, there is "always a swarm of vitalities at play" (32), and this paradigm differs from the empirical, linear causality of agency that positions action, or motion, as "willed or intended . . . where motion can only be willed or intended by a subject" (Mathews 35). These positions reveal how agency, in relation to foraging, differs depending on how it is situated. Fodder as "material for specific use" utilizes status-quo stories within the parameters of interacting, rather than intra-acting, and therefore does not consider the protean elements within the system; meaning is therefore defined by linear causalities in opposition to vibrant materiality.[7] Material interconnections and their limitless capacity for meaning are obliterated when an object, self, becomes a commodity—when it becomes contextualized as fodder.

Foraging, the processes of locating the source of the malaise, reveals the fodder of neoliberalism through status-quo stories. Neoliberalism is explained by Julie A. Wilson as an ideology that informs and shapes the way everything is perceived—from identity, to global social issues, to the organization of narratives that places "competition at the center of social life"

(2). The study of neoliberalism requires "conjecture" about the "world in its totality" to be able to make connections "between different processes, happenings, and people" (9). This approach aligns with New Materialism, as it "compel[s] us to think of causation in far more complex terms; to recognize that phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and forces and to consider anew the location and nature of capacities for agency" (Coole and Frost 9). From a neoliberal perspective, the "market is no longer imagined as a distinct arena where goods are valued and exchanged; rather, the [capitalist] market is, or ideally should be, the basis for *all* of society" (Wilson 2-3, emphasis original). Within this framework, identity or the "self" becomes profoundly affected by a sense of malaise—the disconnection that a capitalist system promotes, that creates one's "subordination," and that facilitates what feminist theorist AnaLouise Keating calls "self-enclosed individualism" (Wilson 3). "Self-enclosed individualism" presupposes that the self is separate from the rest of the world: "It's me against the world" (Keating qtd. in Wilson 3). This is a misperception, however, since individual selves "alone cannot control their fates in a global, complex, capitalist society" (Wilson 4). Juxtaposing neoliberal notions of identity with New Materialist figurations of self is not characterized through distanced observations, but rather through agential notions of space. Space inhibits assemblages of matter, where to be part of assemblages, as described by Bennett in *Vibrant Matter*, is

> to mod(e)ify and be modified by others. The process of modification is not under the control of any one mode—no mode is an agent in the hierarchical sense. Neither is the process without tension, for each mode vies with and against the (changing) affections of (a changing set of) other modes, all the while being subject to the elements of chance or contingency intrinsic to any encounter. (22)

This reveals how the rhetoric *surrounding* identity differs when rhetoric is agential, and uncovers how meaning is intertangled with matter.

Competition, anxiety, and a rejection of interconnectedness—or "intra-action"—these are the effects of neoliberalism, which are perpetuated by what Keating calls "status-quo stories," a concept Wilson elaborates upon within the context of neoliberalism (12). These stories are framed as perennial, as an intrinsic part of life—yet they are not. They are a subjective element, an ideology that transforms with and over time. If they are not

challenged, the stories continuously avow existing dominant cultural notions—such as the free market economy—which are misleadingly reinforced as "ethical roadmaps" (Keating qtd. in Wilson 12). The process of unlearning these status-quo stories fuels the belief in a better world, a belief Wilson conceptualizes through Henry Giroux's notion of "educated hope" (qtd. in Wilson 16). "Educated hope" is unromantic hope which does not imagine a future that resembles the present, but rather creates a version of the future beyond a neoliberal framework (16). To attain this reality, neoliberalism's axioms need to be deconstructed, which is done by revealing, highlighting, and analyzing the material objects of status-quo stories.

These stories are difficult to identify because their "footprints" exist largely as ghostly traces. As Jeff Derksen observes in *Annihilated Time*, neoliberalism wears a "mask of the 'transparently self-evident'" (17). It functions because, at its core, neoliberalism is informed by neoclassical economic tenets. The foundation of this study of economics runs parallel to natural science, specifically classical mechanics, which consequently reduces "human motivation" and experience to static equations that are seemingly "objective"—"free" from "ideological or political prejudice" (Varoufakis 31, 34, 30). Without context, and situated as "fact,"[8] neoclassical economics measures individual, subjective experience and equates it with rationality, with specific use, to the maximization of utility—to pleasure. Yanis Varoufakis writes in *Foundations of Economics* that this notion of cultural objectivity is rationalized within an empirical argument: nothing can be known "without the benefit of experience" (336). The assumptions, however, are based in the belief in a constant environment and a rational (specific use) subject. Economists control the mechanisms by which experience is systemized, so "no observation can contradict them" (341). Neoclassical economics functions as neoliberalism's nucleus, issuing directions to the rest of the machinery, and without the provision of its normalizing axioms, that is, "the complex language of economics which is used to dress up those interests and keep us in the dark" (352). Varoufakis claims it is worthwhile understanding neoclassical economics, even if it does not contain "truth," because "it is the dominant ideology (or mythology) of our era" (376) and, therefore, immunizes against the "lies of economists and the deceptions of politicians who employ economists to weave their poisonous webs" (376-77).

Neoliberalism utilizes language to obscure material realities by issuing statements that are seemingly definitive or self-evident.

Some scholars have already done key work in relation to neoliberalism and Wong's critique of capitalist structures, including status-quo stories. Roy Miki's essay "Are You Restless Too? Not to Worry, So Is Rita Wong," for example, discusses the corporate deflection of responsibility and calls for accountability regarding capitalist society. Through the metaphor of two men fighting to the death while they sink in quicksand, Miki frames his essay around questions about why they are fighting each other instead of figuring out how to escape. He explains the logic for this tendency, as does Wong in *forage*, and particularly its formulation in response to environmental pollution, political entropy, and systemic racism (Miki 179). These inherited anxieties are displaced deliberately onto the body politic and are mediated by external and internal forces: "external forces that are internalized, even as we move to externalize what is internal" (181). The body politic is thus blindsided, as a tidal wave of misinformation leads to mass confusion. The individual becomes ensnared within "the vicissitudes of capital accumulation and the global struggle for power generated on its behalf" (182). Simultaneously, the ensuing instability gives rise to "surveillance technologies," "genetically modified foods," and "mass media with its hunger to spawn a profusion of information and images" (182). Miki, like Wong, analyzes how the market economy "trumps" democracy because of the mutually advantageous relationship between government and corporations. This relationship further solidifies identity as a commodity. Technology for tracking movement, paid for by taxes, has turned human experiences and intra-actions into data, which is sold to corporations, and which corporations in turn use to feed back into the free market system as the "demand" that they then must supply.[9]

In a similar vein, but with greater emphasis on environmental consequences, Laura Moss provides an analysis of Canada's platitudes related to "environmental awareness" and untold narratives revolving around seeds, corporate ownership, and commodities. Using texts such as Wong's *forage*, her essay gestures toward environmental issues, and questions "who owns biodiversity?" (73). For Moss, the quotation marks around "environmental awareness" are ironic. "Canada's natural beauty" (Canadian

Heritage qtd. in Moss 66) is a part of the national axiom, while Canada's leaders consciously damage the environment in order to participate in the global market economy of oil. Such apparent "environmental awareness," Moss observes, is just as disingenuous as the nation's commitments to a "*spirit* of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples" (Canadian Heritage qtd. in Moss 66, emphasis mine). She thus highlights the importance of recognizing "how stories come to us, how we sit in relation to them, and how they change over time" (76). These duplicitous narratives "forage" and use citizens as "fodder": they search for gaps within societal belief systems and redirect attention so that significant information, which should be illuminated, is instead able to slip through the cracks and become obscured. If these narratives never see the light of day, damage ensues.

Within *forage*, Wong develops the space to discuss the complex impetus of the free market economy and its nexus without naming the effects of the system she critiques. Instead, Wong explores its *affects*. She counteracts linear frameworks by reimagining the system and dismantling its banalities and euphemisms. Throughout *forage*, therefore, Wong attempts "to shift the syntax, trying to break it open, trying to make space for other ways of perceiving or structuring or organizing" (Milne 347). Within the form and content of the collection, Wong uses forage and fodder to extend discourse and to create space to challenge cultural elements, such as received histories and systems of value, without being inflexible in terms of ascribing them meaning. This is more generally what her poetic forms allow for and even encourage: connecting ideas and fostering understanding without being prescriptive, without limiting or containing possibilities. As Greg Garrard asserts in *Ecocriticism*, responsible humans have an implicit duty to let ideas unfold organically, intuitively, rather than "forcing them into meanings and identities that suit their own instrumental values" (34). My own investigative process of "foraging" in this essay shows, however, that paradoxically, a less organic, empirical methodology can be mobilized in order to understand Wong's poetical technique and render the connections she makes within her collection. I will do so by interweaving the frameworks constructs of identity, self-evident narratives, and agency to reveal how without situated knowledge of intra-actions within a space, processes become fixed, which solidifies status-quo stories.

The language in *forage* is comprised of a "parallax methodology, or a methodology that is more process-based than generative 'outcomes'" (Derksen 255), which contrasts with neoliberal valuings of ends instead of processes. In an interview with Heather Milne in *Prismatic Publics,* Wong explicitly states, "I don't like the way English has been used as a colonial force to limit perception or limit point of view, because I feel language, syntax, diction, all of it, enables different ways of imagining the world or being in the world" (Eichhorn and Milne 345). She adds that she uses poetry not to address issues, but rather as "a way of thinking through those issues" (344). In *forage*, Wong specifically questions form and inherited ideological constructs and tries "to figure out how and why the language is working the way it does" (Eichhorn and Milne 344). She gets to the core of *why and how* ideologies call upon language to uphold their hegemony. As she conveys to Milne, "Some of what is going on in *forage* is a sense of language itself being infected. It is spliced and respliced. I guess pushing around and questioning form as part of that process without necessarily knowing what's right or wrong but just trying to figure out how and why the language is working the way it does" (345). Throughout *forage*, the language Wong deploys embodies and critiques her subject in relation to its environment. She frames the attained meaning as "ought," rather than "is"—as ideal rather than real—by valuing what she is creating through the very language, which counteracts the "factuals" circulated by neoliberalism. More broadly, she runs against conventional literary forms of "the English tradition" of poetry to reflect how her subject works counter to its environment (Milne 352).

forage, as a whole, explores these interrelated and complex networks that support status-quo narratives through fodder. In the first poem of the collection, titled "value chain" (11), Wong introduces the links between cultural "enigmas," such as politics and the free market economy, and anthropogenic climate change—challenging dualistic, pragmatic thinking. By doing so, she creates her own "value chain" (11)—a set of actions performed to provide a service or product to the economic market—as an antidote: that is, this very collection of poetry. She forages, dismantling the system, by revealing its fodder. Each set of lines in "value chain" denotes elements within the neoliberal system that she then addresses further throughout the collection; while individual lines inform and support the

others, no line can be analyzed to the fullest extent independently. As one instance, there is a line in "value chain" that reads, "heaps of dolls burn for the sins of their owners" (11). Within the context of this cultural practice, the dolls apparently represent their owners' "sins" and are absolved by ceremonial burning for the price of three thousand yen. Wong elsewhere explains, however, that

> the sin part is my own poetic license or interpretation of a ceremony that may have many other meanings for the people who conduct it. More generally, for me it's about mulling over the fine line between making scapegoats or finding ways to release things that owners may need to take responsibility for instead of distributing out that burden. It's a rather messy process, not easily summarized or reduced. (Wong, "Re: From Dr. Linda Morra")

As Wong states, these ceremonies cannot be "easily summarized or reduced" because of the systematic interconnected structures that at once support and yet are also obscured by the said ceremonies. The intricacies of the relationship between identity and agency are occluded by static narratives that limit understandings of the elements of one's actions. Wong summarizes one of the many possible dynamics in a previous line that calls upon the "internal frontier" (11). The latter is a political concept that constructs polarizations—the "us" and "them" within society—and prevents hope by constructing a new identity, as one's "former" identity has no place in the future. The perpetuation of these myths undergirds an identity that is based on a limited value—specifically economic—within the specified neoclassical economic, or neoliberal, system. Foraging, acting within the system, reveals the relationships between objects and the enforcement of the subject(s) within status-quo narratives.

Throughout *forage*, Wong endeavours to shed light on the complexity of the elements that uphold the system within status-quo narratives. As one example, in "the girl who ate rice almost every day" (16), the opening lines are juxtaposed with factual data about genetically modified food patents. "the girl who ate rice almost every day," through its structure of parallel columns with factual prose on the left and a poem on the right, showcases the division between what we think we know of food as it has been informed by the industry and as it has been disseminated by status-quo stories. Miki observes how Wong uses a similar structure within another poem, "domestic

operations," for a similar purpose: she "juxtaposes two voices, one in roman type and the other in italics," with "[t]he former in a state of heightened apprehension . . . whereas the latter assumes a critical edge" (189). Within "the girl who ate rice almost every day," however, Wong uses the perspective of "slow," the poem's young heroine, to contrast the subject of the poem and her cyber scavenger hunt by which she outlines in detail how to obtain information regarding patents on different types of food, such as soybean, rice, corn, tomato, potato, wheat, and cauliflower. In doing so, Wong exposes readers to different types of second-order intentionality persuasive strategies that obscure daily material realities.

As part of the processes of reclaiming agency—that is, understanding neoliberal rhetorical strategies by foraging—slow counters the fallacies imposed by status-quo stories. Her becoming through agency occurs when she is offered and accepts a "free sample" (16) from the manager who has a "drosophilic glint in his melanophore eyes" (16). *Drosophila*, a fruit fly and an agriculture pest, is used for genetic research because of its many species. The manager, who is responsible for organizing the place where one obtains food, is thus symbolic of and instrumental to monoculture farming: the process of genetically engineering foods reduces the amount of variety in possible genes and that, in turn, reduces the number of species produced and leads to a monoculture farm. This monoculture farm requires a significant number of herbicides and insecticides. As a result, nature eventually adapts—pests become resistant, so a new form of resistance is required. That need sends scientists back to recreate another "pest-resistant" genetically modified food. This constant disruption and then adaptation of nature continuously fuels the chemical industry and increases the likelihood of no return.

The fodder is disrupted when slow eats the "free sample" (16), beets, and gains the ability to see the "corporate magic" surrounding her (17). This is unusual because beets are known as an aphrodisiac; their chemical composition contains tryptophan and betaine, which promote a feeling of well-being. In this instance, the beets, which are offered to her by the snake-like manager, are a symbol of temptation and original sin: once she has eaten them, however, her awareness disrupts her disenchantment with reality. Likewise, the aphrodisiac effect which beets are supposed to produce is

counteracted by their genetic cross with "not cabbage but cows" (16).[10] This reveals not only the outrageous crossing of elements of nature but also the geneticists' lack of awareness of (or concern about) the *affects*[11] of altering DNA. slow's own ambivalence toward the unnatural cross of beets with cows, moreover, conveys the normalization of, and her disconnection from, the violations of nature.

In actively countering the fodder, slow departs thereafter to connect with nature; she solidifies her connection with her environment by neither idealizing it nor ascribing to it negative consequence, as humans and nature are intrinsically linked. Garrard discusses the link between humans and nature, and how this relationship has created values based on exploitation of the human environment—a relationship that slow challenges. Garrard reads culture as rhetoric and delineates how nature has been converted by capitalism "into a market commodity and resource without significant moral or social constraint on availability" (Plumwood qtd. in Garrard 69). slow endeavours to reconnect mind and body to prevent herself from becoming distracted by the spectacle and marvels of genetic engineering—being seduced by capitalist machinations. She seeks comfort from the "roots of their bach-flower" (17), which reputedly restores the link between mind and body and reaffirms a connection to nature. She thus seizes on the capitalist disconnection from its exploitation of nature, and acts using the insight she gains from the deconstruction of status-quo stories, whereby she confronts her own apathy.

The maintaining of narratives through fodder is what Wong unpacks within this poem and elsewhere in the collection. In "domestic operations" (42), for example, the mass media engages in deception to solidify status-quo narratives. The repetitive, distracting, and irrelevant information of such narratives reinforces a sense of hopelessness and confusion. As Wong shows in this poem, the invasion of mass media—"being invaded by CNN"—is "in the hands of the arms manufacturers / running the commercial breaks" (42). The inundation of commercial breaks means that crucial information is lost in the translation of "nuclear spectres" (42): "the corpse 'democracy' won't see in that unblinking stare" (42). Unfortunately, sensationalized rather than situated rhetoric reinforces domestic operational patterns of exploitation. The space in which these narratives are promoted is "as fractured as the

globe"[12]—by which Wong refers not only to the planet, but also to the human eye, the act of seeing and acquiring insight (42). That space fractures the sight of interconnectedness with invading narratives that invoke "us" vs. "them" paradigms and that perpetuate emotions of combat and distrust; eventually, these narratives fracture the ability to not only see such interconnectedness but also to feel it. Eventually, the mechanisms by which the media inundates its recipients with mass amounts of irrelevant and disconnected information create both this *decontextualization* and a kind of apathetic "hypnosis" by which "the walled mind becomes a coffin" and "guises the very ground it violates" (42). Bombarding these recipients with distorted information ("war-torn era, warped shorn blare on" [42]), ultimately undermines critical thinking; what is left is a "glazed look . . . the screen, strident with what it excludes" (42).

Wong is hyper-aware of the tactics of decontextualization, and how the ambiguities of poetry can both limit and heighten nuance, since preconceived beliefs may condition what is perceived; still, she uses poetic language itself as a tool to elicit thinking. Wong does this through irregular rhythms, syntax, representational language, poetic style, and diction, which exhibit the many ways that self is manipulated as fodder. In *Poetry Matters*, Milne suggests, following Megan Simpson's argument in *Poetic Epistemologies*, that innovative poetry "can make thinking visible, and by extension, can make social and political engagement visible" (11). In *forage*, Wong destabilizes our assumptions about language; she makes conventional usage of language discernable, and, in so doing, makes the effects of free market capitalist interventions in human life and anthropogenic climate change equally observable.

One of Wong's strategies for doing so is her use of capital or uppercase letters—or, rather, the lack thereof. Wong's writing suggests that poetry has no capital, with the pun fully intended: its value is not dependent on economic or specific usefulness. When she does make use of capital letters, they are deployed against the neoliberal system—for emphasis. Throughout the whole collection, "capital" or majuscule letters are only used in abbreviations and in relation to economic capital. In "the girl who ate rice almost every day," for instance, capitals exist within the factual information in italics, which contrasts with and slackens the narration, where no capital

letters are used. In "damage," it is "ATM" (45); in "23 pairs of shoos," it is "ARPANET"[13] (38); and in "trip" it is "NO" (15). Each of these instances denotes its identification within a capital(ist) system, whereas in other poems the capital letters are abbreviations, such as "BMW" (32), "DNA" (49, 56), and "UV" (70)—often highlighting how fragmented language limits thought. That limitation also explains why, as characterized by Giroux, America is "at war with itself": mass media and corporate culture have fostered "a repugnant escalation of intolerance and violence. . . . [T]he conditions for totalitarianism and state violence are still with us, attacking multiculturalism, criminalizing protests, smothering critical thought, ridiculing social responsibility" (qtd. in Milne 238-39). By encouraging the act of "foraging," Wong attempts to push the discourse beyond limiting polarizations.

To extend perception, many of Wong's poems within the collection include handwritten quotations or accounts of experiences by others written at the margins of and around the poems themselves. These accounts provide additional context to the poem at hand, therefore allowing for the broadening of interpretation. One such poem, "nervous organism," contains a quotation by the influential Canadian critic Northrop Frye. Frye proposed the importance of understanding beyond the words of the author by emphasizing the need to understand a poem in context. The quotation from *The Anatomy of Criticism* included by Wong challenges the belief that the specific use of a poem—the poem as fodder—is a source of emotional release. If a poem

> does not describe things rationally, it must be a description of emotion. According to this, the literal core of poetry would be a *cri de coeur*, to use the elegant expression, the direct statement of a nervous organism confronted with something that seems to demand an emotional response, like a dog howling at the moon. (qtd. in Wong 20)

Frye, however, does not believe that poetry is exclusively a "description of emotion." "nervous organism" diffuses Frye's quotation, because it lacks "rational" descriptions or evocation of emotions. It does not contain sentences but instead dashes in between each presumably separate line of thought, which generates the sense or image of everything connecting, while not explicitly providing concrete understandings. Poetry resists being used as emotive fodder: Wong counteracts a linear, singular story by providing a

broader context, and, in so doing, disallows the imposition of a definitive or prescriptive identity onto vibrant matter.[14]

Wong also demonstrates how language might impose meaning and identity onto an object. In "damage," for example, she outlines the effects of prescribed value through a market economic lens, illuminating the different manifestations of damage that afflict the body politic. She does this by using the language of power. Varoufakis explains that language was once tied to the power of religion, but is now tied to the power of neoclassical economics. He writes that in the past, "the ideas forming the web of beliefs which acted as the glue holding together society's institutions, [which] gave priests and leaders power over their subjects and determined the capacity of society to hang together," were "religion, mythology [and/or] witchcraft," while "[i]n today's society, religion has been substituted by neoclassical economics" (Varoufakis 376). Wong provides an example of the language of power at work in "damage." As indicated in the footnotes, this poem is inspired by "FTAA protests in Quebec City 2001" (45). The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) was a proposed trade agreement that would have expanded NAFTA. It was rationalized and legitimized by the axioms related to "bolstering the economy," although this rhetoric was a facade. Like NAFTA, the FTAA would have commodified the damage engendered by the reduction and elimination of labour, and the diminishing of environmental standards in the Americas. This proposed "trade" agreement fundamentally increases corporate rights and profit by reducing public rights. Since limiting rights and high profit margins become interdependent, *value* is determined through commodification of land, labour, and capital—the neoliberal form of identity.

Wong displays how, within this system, the only thing perceived as worth losing is thus defined within and by the terms of financial discourse. The first line of "damage" links personal identity to harm: "people walk around in various states of damage" (45). People are rendered through the terms made available by discourses of capitalist economy: "damaged goods. mismanaged funds. poverty rampage in corporate attire" (45). They are exploited and then dehumanized because of this discourse. Identity and commodity are thus systemically fused together. Bankers and corporations absolve themselves of the responsibility of creating this damage, displacing it onto the individual. When there is a loss because of the law being "mowed,"[15] there is a significant

amount of "moaning" for performance's sake, from the ones who "mowed the law" and aided in the loss (45). Profit, as Wong shows in this case, is far more important than laws that govern those who are not wealthy enough to own, control, or shape the system. But, even as this economy continues, Wong stipulates by the insertion of "last *financial post*" (45, emphasis original) that this economic model is not indefinite and cannot sustain itself for much longer: it will eventually crash or be overturned. She also uses the "last *financial post*" as a partition. The whole poem, especially the beginning, contains quick and succinct lines, mimicking a fast-paced, for-specific-use environment. After "the last *financial post*," the straightforward language of capital develops undertones that are not as forthright, which denotes a change in embodied perceptions of capital. Whereas once economic doctrines were merely a part of a whole society, they have become its core—the only *damage* within this system becomes economic damage.

Wong thus brings the discourse of the market economy into focus, isolating the different ramifications and identifications of commodities when she asks, "when did i become a commodity? a calamity? indemnity?" (45) that "facilitates fascism" (45). Here, Wong locates the malaise: the lowercase "i" (45) has no value to society. This mechanism of identity through worth that is based on monetary wealth creates a world in which democracy can be bought through political transactions. It also limits change, since the only action within this society that has value is that of economics. "ATM" (45), incidentally the only capitalized word in this specific poem, is also the place where one apparently withdraws money—and identity. It stands for "automatically tracks movement" (45), the apparatus of capitalism's surveillance. This form of capitalism is an assault on agency, because it solidifies movement. Capitalism functions through tracking consumers' whereabouts and "experiences." It thus translates intra-actions into a static notion of identity and sells that movement and its corresponding data to industry. It does so in order to sell it back to the consumer formulated as a commodified experience. This connects to the "totalitarian market" (45), which is a means by which power is claimed.

Whereas "damage" explores the "source"[16] of the malaise, "23 pairs of shoos—a response to Kathy High" is one of the poems that uncovers its "sink"[17]—that is, how we become fodder, or how corporations assume control

over the human body. Wong alludes to High's work because they share similar ideas about or attitudes toward nature; through art, High challenges culture's perceptions of animals—specifically the rat, an animal that is depicted as a carrier of disease and yet is also typically a *resource* that is used to find cures for disease. High is not against animal research, but, as her art suggests, she believes that kinship bonds between humans and animals should be principled. This kinship reinforces the notion that these animals are not expendable resources or commodities, but rather a part of our existence as relations. High also alludes to the fact that a parallel exists between individuals in Western society and rats in a maze. When we are subjected to corporate conditions, which render us too anxious to be aware of what is really happening, we become fodder, like the rat.

Wong explores the question of agency within such material relationships—how indeed can we resist the commodification of human bodies? In "23 pairs of shoos," she examines how neoliberal actors have been able to manipulate psychological, emotional, and genetic behavior, which Wong expresses through the lines, "child of ARPANET / resides on my fingertips" (38). In other words, control over knowledge is facilitated by the Internet: it allows one to access an indeterminate amount of knowledge at one's fingertips. The technical coding and the tracking data of the Internet is in a similar format as the "code" to life, the sequencing of DNA. This Internet data is used to predict users' actions—which are then commodified—and then to impose identities upon users. All this information, which the Internet supplies, is apparently prescriptive, limiting who one might be, and yet it attributes such information to biology: "analyse the fingernails / to find out if she's queer" (38). These codes instead provide enough information to produce an individual as a commodity, not as vibrant matter.

Wong emphasizes the distinction to be made between individuals as commodities ("fodder") and persons capable of "foraging" through poetic structure. In "23 pairs of shoos," a human's twenty-three pairs of chromosomes are reflected in the poetic lines to suggest the importance of understanding how information is traded in the modern world. By the third set of lines, there is a break at the end of the line. When the third chromosome in living organisms actually breaks, the genes at the end are deleted and "the chromosome cannot copy (replicate) itself normally during cell division"

("Chromosome 3"). Since chromosomes are only visible within the cell's nucleus when they reproduce, this pair becomes immaterial—a burden within the system. Wong's poetic structure thus serves as a stand-in for what is overwhelmed by the numerous neoliberal influences: "overdetermined and undermined / she nonetheless navigates with a 'ripped-up, ragged map'" (38). Although the map is "ripped-up" and "ragged," it is still a map, a colonial tool of power, of "navigation." Wong shows that colonizing, corporate practices are inescapable in contemporary society, as they continue to encroach and subvert power, and even have a direct bearing on the fundamental biology of human beings. With the appropriate critical tools, however, it is possible to reclaim agency by understanding the system.

In spite of the ills of free market capitalism, therefore, Wong offers an alternative based on "educated hope" (Wilson 16). She asserts that we are the translators of our own intra-actions or identity; the latter does not need to be imposed onto us. So, she enjoins her readers to regulate "self-sovereignty over our genes" (Wong 39). Mimicking the system, Wong poses a question in the form of a false binary: "free trade or free will" (39)? Ultimately, she claims it is neither. Why? Deceit within second-order intentionality is "at work": there is an inability to "tell the rhetorical difference" because of the lack of self-recognition. Humans have been indoctrinated to see themselves as unidimensional and detached. So, in "23 pairs of shoos," "she [the subject] walk[s] right past her offspring" (39); she does not even recognize them as part of herself within this "fly-by-night / fetuses inc" (39), because it is an unreliable and evasive system that thrives on uniformity. Those who see beyond the system's deceptive framework are told it would be better to "give it up" or put it up "for adoption" (39), because no one wants to take responsibility for the prevailing cultural issues, and because it provides excuses for why others should inherit them instead. The naive "child" (39), and, more broadly, members of society, can "refuse" (39) the system by fighting it. So how does one navigate this world? "[H]ow do we measure emotional crops?" (39). So much of nature has been altered by corporations, and what is still considered authentic is based in fallacies. The next line, "wombs / unite," suggests that by uniting and fighting the system together, by having agency, by protesting and facilitating important discussions, "the unconscious rises in my throat" (39). That unconscious will "drag the child

along / despite itself" (39)— kicking and screaming, protesting and railing against the system that would do it harm.

The fragility of the system is described in "domestic operations 2.0" (43), following the violation of communicative space in "domestic operations" (42). Wong writes that "the eagle will plummet" if discourse is limited, "if one religious wing refuses to hear the other religious wing" (43), because of unyielding sacred beliefs in a narrative that contains value and therefore identity. The poem meanders around the discourses surrounding the change that needs to take place to go from "apathy to anarchy . . . locating hope in the unpredictable and the shared" (43). The different themes in the poems within the collection direct the reader to different modes of critique, while the one thing that is constant is the need to challenge modes of thought. It is an ongoing process of becoming whereby identity is reformulated by locating self within space.

The importance of foraging, Wong shows in this collection, must be vitally contextualized in order to understand the undercurrents,[18] to counterbalance the fodder, that is, the status-quo stories, within society. The apparent "truths" generated by neoliberal culture are embedded in status-quo stories that call upon seductive rhetoric and notions of stability. So, Wong uses poetry to reveal and take apart such stories. She states that for her, at a young age, "language was a place where I could question and also reflect on what was going on in my life," and she continues to use it to "think through" issues such as "justice and human rights" (Milne 344).[19] Throughout *forage* and her other works, she emphasizes the importance of interconnectedness, which is why she focuses on poetry: "[W]ords teach you where you can take your actions, and what you might do, and they may help to guide you towards a world that we need to build together" (Wong, "on the journey").

In *forage*, Wong deconstructs these narratives by drawing out and upon critical thinking skills. She thus offers us a map—through her life, through her writing—of how to navigate this world and protest against free market capitalism through "educated hope," while pointing toward solutions to these problems. As Wong suggests throughout *forage*, critical thinking is crucial to the undoing of neoliberal status-quo stories, and will provide new-found insight, new possibilities, and new and productive avenues to being in the world and being accountable to it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Dr. Linda M. Morra, with whom I developed the idea for this paper during an independent study under her direction; Rita Wong, who answered my queries about forage; and the readers of the essay, who helped me to push further my insights into Wong's work.

NOTES

1 Rhetoric is often generally depicted as a seemingly innocuous strategy that actually defrauds by persuasive tactics. Kennedy, in "A Hoot in the Dark: The Evolution of General Rhetoric," writes that rhetoric is a "phenomenon of public discourse in which cultural and political values find expression" (105). He further outlines three different orders of persuasive intentionality in reference to expression. The first is "'zero order' intentionality on the part of the organism, which gives off a sign"; the second is "'first order' intentionality" where the organism can choose to give a sign; while the third is "a 'second order' of intentionality that involves a conception of their own and another animal's beliefs" (111). Kennedy claims that rhetoric "begins" with "zero order" intentionality. So, Wong's question "can you tell the rhetorical difference?" has a multiplicity of answers depending on the qualifications of rhetoric within this framework. It is largely dependent on the situating of the situation.

2 In "Posthumanist Performativity," Barad relays Haraway's juxtaposition of diffraction and reflection in *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience*. Whereas reflection is a direct reproduction of difference, diffraction analyzes the effects of difference through relations of space.

3 In "Posthumanist Performativity," Barad juxtaposes diffraction and reflection. Barad situates diffraction in opposition to the meaning derived from reflecting difference. Diffraction analyzes, instead of observes, how the difference, or the notion of difference, is constructed.

4 Donna Haraway's essay "Situated Knowledges" analyzes how "translating knowledges" (580) differ and argues that it is important to explore how "meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life" (580). Here she emphasizes the importance of understanding space by asking the question "[w]ith whose blood were my eyes crafted?" (585). Haraway denotes that it is important to understand the circumstances that precede the present that form physical and figurative modes of sight.

5 Sara Ahmed in "Happy Objects" writes about "thinking through affect as 'sticky.' Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (29). She continues to form the connection to emotive responses, specifically happiness, and how happiness is not something that just "happens" and does not "depend on outside events, but, rather on how we interpret them"—that is, "[t]o be affected by something is to evaluate that thing" (30-31).

6 On the idea of being "surrounded," Gregory Ulmer analyzes how choric invention lies in recognizing fault lines between the underlying assumptions and subject positions offered by different institutional discourses. It is a mode of self-discovery meant to reveal the ways

in which the subject is composed (rather than surrounded) by these discursive networks. To be surrounded would mean the subject precedes contact with these networks, that she is a coherent whole perhaps interrupted by the overflow of these networks. But, to recognize that the subject is constituted by these networks means both recognizing our debts to such networks and forgoing the fantasy of an original coherence. (qtd. in Santos and Browning)

7 Bennett in *Vibrant Matter* writes about how matter is conceptualized as "passive or mechanical [and] under the direction of something nonmaterial, that is, an active soul or mind," as opposed to "materials as lively and self-organizing" (10).

8 Although the principles of neoclassical economics are in constant flux, reflecting the society they fortify, their crux remains constant because its discourse is definitive. Edward Schiappa explains in *Defining Reality: Definitions and the Politics of Meaning* that "no definition is inevitable" (xii) and that "definitions can be understood more productively as involving claims of 'ought' rather than 'is,'" which bridges the gap between "facts and values" (5, 6).

9 Miki claims that "favorable," or capitalist-induced Western principles, which Wong explores in *forage*, usually include military force in order to safeguard order and security. The apparatus of globalization and militarization has been obscured by "the so-called War on Terror" (196). Ultimately, Miki argues, Wong sees how "we consume what the suits [neoliberal system] serve up with their imperial hardware" and observes that we should no longer wait to be told what to think, and what to do, but rather "circumvent the language of ownership and commodities" (200).

10 This is an example of how Wong tries to understand "what . . . it mean[s] to take that [genetic modification] apart and put it back together in unexpected ways" (Milne 345).

11 "Affects" instead of effects because in this situation linear causality does not provide further insight. The affects cannot be described through empirical data, as empiricisms do not notice intra-actions.

12 Globe rupture is "an extreme eye injury . . . where the eyeball can split open. This can be due to trauma directly on the eye or around the eye" (Porter).

13 ARPANET, or "Advanced Research Projects Agency Network," is a product of the US Defence Department in the 1960s predating the Internet. Its supposed purpose was to link networks without a "base of operations," such that if the base were attacked the network would still be whole (Featherly).

14 A reference to Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*.

15 This expression has curious reverberations elsewhere: "The relentless siege and savage attacks are punctuated by episodes of 'mowing the lawn,' to borrow Israel's cheery expression for its periodic exercises in shooting fish in a pond as part of what it calls a 'war of defense'" (Chomsky and Pappé 160).

16 Source (ecological): A process that puts the gas into the atmosphere or transforms one kind of gas into another.

17 Sink (ecological): A way of removing a substance or energy from a system.

18 Wong, throughout her works, constructs an alternative way of mapping experience though poetry by addressing undercurrents. In *perpetual* (2015), co-published with Cindy Mochizuki, she linguistically integrates herself and the reader into the "hydrological cycle; this planet's crucial circulatory system" (1) by situating embodiment with one's interaction with water. Her work with Fred Wah, *beholden* (2018), contains meandering juxtaposed lines of poetry which follow a mapped narrative, a mapped body of water: the Columbia

River. This highlights how narratives are mapped: "keep the language and the story honest, don't call a reservoir a lake . . . don't naturalize the hubris, don't hide the arrogance of destroying what you don't understand. listen for what's underneath the narrative of convenience" (27-29).

19 In an interview, she observes that she does not mind being called an "activist," even though her mentor warned her "not to let people call you an activist because you have to do all the work and they don't." Wong feels compelled to do the necessary "housekeeping" or "homework" because, she argues, it is part of her responsibility living on Indigenous "unceded . . . territory." But she concludes by saying that this activism will look different to each person, because people "carry different gifts and different skills" (Wong, "on the journey").

WORKS CITED

Ahmed, Sara. "Happy Objects." *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, Duke UP, 2010, pp. 29-51.

Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Duke UP, 2007.

—. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2003, pp. 801-31.

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Duke UP, 2009.

Chomsky, Noam, and Ilan Pappé. *On Palestine*. Haymarket, 2015.

"Chromosome 3." *Genetics Home Reference,* US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, 18 Aug. 2020, ghr.nlm.nih.gov/chromosome/3#. Accessed 25 Feb. 2021.

Coole, Diana, and Samantha Frost. "Introducing the New Materialisms." *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, edited by Coole and Frost, Duke UP, 2010, pp. 1-43.

Derksen, Jeff. *Annihilated Time: Poetry and Other Politics*. Talonbooks, 2009.

Eichhorn, Kate, and Heather Milne, editors. *Prismatic Publics: Innovative Canadian Women's Poetry and Poetics*. Coach House, 2009.

Featherly, Kevin. "ARPANET." *Encyclopedia Britannica,* 23 Mar. 2021, www.britannica.com/topic/ARPANET. Accessed 27 Feb. 2021.

"Fodder." *Lexico.com,* Oxford UP, 2020, en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/fodder. Accessed 25 Feb. 2021.

"Forage." *Lexico.com,* Oxford UP, 2020, en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/forage. Accessed 25 Feb. 2021.

Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism.* 2nd ed., Routledge, 2011.

Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1988, pp. 575-99.

Kennedy, George. "A Hoot in the Dark: The Evolution of General Rhetoric." *Rhetoric: Concepts, Definitions, Boundaries*, edited by William A. Covino and David A. Jolliffe, Allyn and Bacon, 1995, pp. 105-21.

Mathews, Freya. *For Love of Matter: A Contemporary Panpsychism*. State U of New York P, 2003.

Miki, Roy. "Are You Restless Too? Not to Worry, So Is Rita Wong: Towards a Poetics of the Apprehensive." *In Flux: Transnational Shifts in Asian Canadian Writing*, NeWest, 2011, pp. 177-205.
Milne, Heather. *Poetry Matters: Neoliberalism, Affect, and the Posthuman in Twenty-First Century North American Feminist Poetics*. U of Iowa P, 2018.
Moss, Laura. "Modified Seeds and Morphemes: Going from Farm to Page." *On the Other Side(s) of 150: Untold Stories and Critical Approaches to History, Literature, and Identity in Canada*, edited by Linda M. Morra and Sarah Henzi, Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2021, pp. 66-79.
Porter, Isaac. "Globe rupture / Severe eye injury and surgical repair—A State of Sight #103." *Porter Ophthalmology*, 19 Mar. 2015, www.eyeporter.com/Blog/March-2015/Globe-rupture-Severe-eye-injury-and-surgical-rep. Accessed 12 Sept. 2020.
Santos, Marc C., and Ella R. Browning. "Maira Kalman and/as Choric Invention." *Enculturation: A Journal of Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture*, no. 18, 8 Dec. 2014, www.enculturation.net/kalman-choric-invention. Accessed 25 Feb. 2021.
Schiappa, Edward. *Defining Reality: Definitions and the Politics of Meaning*. Southern Illinois UP, 2003.
Varoufakis, Yanis. *Foundations of Economics: A Beginner's Companion*. Routledge, 1998.
Wilson, Julie A. *Neoliberalism*. Routledge, 2017.
Wong, Rita. *forage*. Nightwood, 2007.
—. "Re: From Dr. Linda Morra (Bishop's University)." Received by Linda Morra, 16 Apr. 2019.
—. "Rita Wong on the journey of 'beholden.'" *Youtube*, uploaded by Ricepaper Magazine, 21 Oct. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1HdtqlZvbE. Accessed 25 Feb. 2021.
Wong, Rita, and Cindy Mochizuki. *perpetual*. Nightwood, 2015.
Wong, Rita, and Fred Wah. *beholden: a poem as long as the river*. Talonbooks, 2018.

Errata

Instead of how they appear in issue 244, notes 2 and 3 of Morgan Cohen's article "Foraging and Fodder" should read as follows:

2) Karen Barad distinguishes between phenomena, as opposed to phenomenon, in "Posthumanist Performativity." She claims that phenomena considers the meaning of an object in relation to the affect of its situation; it considers all elements of space including the positioning of the observer, writer, storyteller, and so forth, whereas phenomenon is a fixed observation.

3) In "Posthumanist Performativity," Barad relays Haraway's juxtaposition of diffraction and reflection in Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience. Whereas reflection is a direct reproduction of difference, diffraction analyzes the effects of difference through relations of space.

We apologize to author Morgan Cohen and our readers for this error and for any confusions it may have caused.