

Averie Timm
 25 November 2012
 Evolution of Cooperation
 Final Project Summary

For my final creative project, I have chosen to focus on human beings at the point of carrying capacity, and the way in which the roles of cooperation and competition evolve once we reach this point in population growth. Much of my research was spent uncovering the fundamentals of what carrying capacity is, and the theories surrounding what factors allow and cause a species to reach this point. My leading definition for carrying capacity came from “Carrying Capacities and Low Population Growth” by Catherine H. Maserang. She suggests carrying capacity is the maximum population that can be supported and maintained by the environment [9].

My research for the final creative portion surrounded four different categories in regards to carrying capacity: 1) Environmental Limitations, 2) Technological Potential, 3) Population Growth, and 4) Social Dilemmas. Throughout “On This Evening’s Nightly News Broadcast,” I attempted to interweave each of these components in a way that would allow the reader to conceptualize a world that has reached carrying capacity, while fictionalizing a situation in which the topic of this class, the Evolution of Cooperation, is apparent.

While researching how cooperation/competition might evolve at the point of carrying capacity, I focused on “Social Dilemmas: The Anatomy of Cooperation” by Peter Kollock, “Kindness in a Cruel World: The Evolution of Altruism” by Nigel Barber, “Carrying Capacity: Earth’s Bottom Line” by Sandra Postel and “Cooperation vs. Competition” by Martin A. Nowak and Karl Sigmund. For the basis of my definition of “social dilemmas,” Kollock suggested they are “situations in which individual rationality leads to collective irrationality” [183]. Thus, we find that social dilemmas are ultimately a conflict between individual interest and collective interest. As I learned from these readings, competition increases during carrying capacity as individuals must fight to survive. Thus, genetic relatedness becomes a stronger determinant of altruism between individuals at the point of carrying capacities. An individual will be more likely to perform an altruistic act, perhaps even one that is purely altruistic (giving one’s life for the sake of another’s survival), if the individual for whom they are performing the altruistic act has related genes that might be carried on. Thus, the prevalence of social dilemmas will increase once carrying capacity has been reached, because the individual will always be better off forgoing collective rationality.

Thus, we see that in the creative work, forgoing individual rationality has led to collective irrationality as the government begins to regulate fertility, separating the American citizens into those who can procreate and those who are not allowed to (based on intellect). The system begins to favor competition as the plight for survival intensifies and the frequency of death increases. Meanwhile, Manny performs an act of pure altruism when he gives his own life so that his brother, Web, can stay alive.

In “Carrying Capacity: The Tradition and Policy Implications of Limits” by Virginia Deane Abernethy, she writes: “Ecologists take into account that humans are not generally altruistic, because altruism like other behavioral traits is to some extent

heritable, and altruists are less likely than others to leave offspring. Behavior and culture that lead to extinction of those who practice them cannot be moral, by definition” [14]. Understanding this notion was extremely pertinent to the creation of my final project, as it was crucial to recognize that altruism is not a *genetically* successful behavior. The character Manny acted out of compassion for his brother Web, allowing Web to live while he perished, but this does not make his genes successful. Instead, altruism could be said to have evolved, and continue to keep evolving, through culture. We see that in the end, Web tells the story of what his brother did for him, and the tale of his altruism is transmitted by word of mouth, potentially motivating others to act the same.

Because the creative thrust of this project was centered around fiction, it was important for me to consider the role of language in carrying capacity, in terms of both how individuals in the future would communicate and also what effect this would have on how cooperation had evolved. Martin Nowak explores this notion in Chapter 9 of his book *SuperCooperators*, in which he writes, “With the emergence of homo sapiens, units of spoken mental information now began their own strategies for self proliferation and cooperation” [172]. Competition, in human beings, is a communication-based behavior and thus, is formed by language. Nowak believes that language is inherently how human beings perceive themselves, and thus, how they relate to others. The language I utilized for “On This Evening’s Nightly News Broadcast” was choppy yet descriptive, interrogated and dramatized by media and technology.

Ultimately, I have created this final project with my thesis in mind. The research that has gone into this short story for the class has inspired me to write a thesis based on the concept of carrying capacity, and to focus on what the world will become in the years 2050 to 2100. This short story will ultimately become a part of the thesis. The audience for this piece is one that is interested in the discussion surrounding our future as a human species, and is conscious of what kind of world the intensification of environmental degradation coupled with an increasing population growth, advanced technological potential, and social dilemmas that favor collective irrationality will create. The audience for this story will not be limited to the Evolution of Cooperation class, as eventually the thesis will be showcased in the spring to a larger selection of individuals. As both a participant in this class and as a writer, I would like this work to inspire others to contemplate the role that competition and cooperation plays in their everyday lives, and to notice the role it plays in the larger scheme of society, and to our future as human beings.

Annotated Bibliography

Abernethy, Virginia Deane. "Carrying Capacity: The Tradition and Policy Implications of Limits." *Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics* 9.18 (2001): 9-17. PDF file. This article gives a clear definition to the concept of "carrying capacity," suggesting that it is "an ecological concept that expresses the relationship between a population and the natural environment on which it depends for ongoing sustenance" [9]. Abernethy states that while technology may be believed to quicken the pace in which a population reaches carrying capacity, it may also allow the human population to live outside of the limits nature implements. Reaching carrying capacity, Abernethy believes, would bring about catastrophic change to the human population. She also goes on to explore three conflicting worldviews (ecological, romantic, and entrepreneurial) on the notion of limits to both resources and human moral capacities.

Barber, Nigel. *Kindness in a Cruel World: The Evolution of Altruism*. Amherst: Prometheus, 2004. PDF file. In Chapter One: "Altruism: Birds Do It, Bees Do It, People Do It," Barber is discussing the nature of altruism, when a being puts another being's survival before his or her own survival. By exploring altruism in three separate animal societies— that of birds, bees, and humans— Barber draws necessary conclusions about how altruism functions on a fundamental level, and as populations grow and resources become more trivial there is an essential shift that occurs between the frequency of competition as opposed to cooperation, or altruism. Barber notes that genetic relatedness is a determinant of altruism between individuals.

Kollock, Peter. "Social Dilemmas: The Anatomy of Cooperation." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 183-92. *JSTOR*. Web. 21 Sept. 2012.

<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/223479>>. This article delves into the relationship between "social dilemmas," which Kollock defines as "situations in which individual rationality leads to collective irrationality" [183] and cooperation. Kollock explores the use of behavioral "games" as models for social dilemmas (The Prisoner's Dilemma, the Tragedy of Commons, and the problem of providing Public Goods) to suggest essential benefits and harms to using metaphorical stories such as these when discussing the role of cooperation in populations.

Maserang, Catherine H. "Carrying Capacities and Low Population Growth." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 33.4 (1977): 474-92. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 Sept. 2012.

<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3629753>>. This article gives another definition of carrying capacity, suggesting that it is the maximum population that can be supported and maintained by the environment. What I am particularly interested in about this article is what Maserang suggests as a correlation between low population growth and a population's proximity to carrying capacity, finding that the lower a population growth is the closer a population is to reaching carrying capacity. Additionally, Maserang finds that literacy has a high impact in increasing or decreasing a population's growth and density levels.

Nowak, Martin A. *SuperCooperators*. Comp. Roger Highfield. New York: Free, 2011.

Print. In chapter nine of this book, "The Gift of the Gab," Nowak explores the role of language in shaping the way information is transferred among human beings, thus having a significant effect on the notion of cooperation, and the evolution of

humans in general. In essence, Nowak claims that language created the modern human being, shaping the way it not only communicates with itself but with other organisms, and its environment.

Nowak, Martin A., and Karl Sigmund. "Cooperation versus Competition." *Financial Analysts Journal* 56.4 (2000): 13-22. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 Sept. 2012.

<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4480255>>. While the author notes that the piece is not typical for the journal it is being published within, *Financial Analysts Journal*, I believe that this article seems to tie together components of the economy with that of science, suggesting that cooperation and competition are becoming deeply rooted in the market as society becomes increasingly bound to financial constraints. Nowak discusses the topic of "reciprocal help" as coined by Darwin to suggest that human beings give and receive aid to each other, willingly or not. Nowak also delves into the differences between kin selection and reciprocal aid.

Postel, Sandra. "Carrying Capacity: Earth's Bottom Line." *Challenge* Mar.-Apr. 1994: 4-12. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 Sept. 2012. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40721506>>. Postel suggests that earth's capacity is controlled by a limitation of food and resources, as well as by the amount of waste that we produce and the technologies we choose to utilize. As resources become fewer, and hunger increases, Postel believes that competition will increase amongst individuals as the plight for survival becomes more intense.

"World Population in 2300." *United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division*. United Nations, 9 Nov. 2003. Web. 21 Oct. 2012. <<http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/longrange2/longrange2.htm>>.

Averie Timm

20 November 2012

Evolution of Cooperation

Final Creative Project

“On This Evening’s Nightly News Broadcast”

It started with the bees. They were overworked, enslaved. The keepers were driving them back and forth across the country in super-semis to pollinate fruits and almonds. The hives were boxed on top of each other, closed and cradled then maneuvered across one border to the next. Many of the trucks crashed along the way, sending the bees swarming in various directions. The bees forgot how to communicate. They started flying in spastic patterns. They looked lazy and disoriented, bloated. They flew out of their hives to collect pollen but lost their path on the way back. They wandered around until they were exhausted then gave up searching and died. We found them stuck to the bottom of our shoes, their wings crushed and moist. Some said it was the chemicals we had been using for so long to make the plants bigger. I collected the dead bees and put them in jars. When the smell leaked through the metal tops I had to let go. I dumped them all in the road and a rat came by one night and ate the piles.

The groceries stores suffered before the people did. Apples and blueberries disappeared from the shelves then the rest of the produce went too. It came down to broth and boiled cabbage, coffee and toast for breakfast. Wealthy individuals became unsatisfied and understood what it felt like to eat poor but they kept eating a rich portion.

The poor became poorer and withered away only there wasn't space left in the cemeteries, so the President instructed: "Fire up the ovens!" and the dead became ash. The whole world depended on broth and boiled cabbage and feared becoming a pile of ash on a tray before the Food and Drug Administration stepped in and proclaimed a new technique that would allow us to synthesize our own plants. The statement was issued on the evening's Nightly News Broadcast:

THE WORLD'S COEVOLUTION WITH PLANT LIFE HAS SHIFTED, AND WE ARE NO LONGER ABLE TO RELY ON A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD'S FRUITS AND VEGETABLES. WITH THE INVENTION OF *Grenaline!* THE WORLD WILL NO LONGER SUFFER FROM HUNGER. WE WILL ESTABLISH OUR OWN SIMULATED PLANTS, RIDDING OURSELVES FROM A DEPENDENCY ON POLLINATION. THIS WILL ALLOW US TO CREATE PLANT-LIKE HYBRIDS, WHILE ENHANCING THEM WITH NUTRIENTS SPECIFICALLY MANIPULATED FOR THE WELL BEING OF THE HUMAN POPULATION. *Grenaline!* PLANTS ARE MADE FROM SUSTAINABLE FIBERS THAT MIMIC THE STRUCTURE OF EDIBLE PLANTS. WITH GRENALINE, WE WILL BECOME STRONGER AND HEALTHIER. WE WILL LIVE LONGER.

"Well, Web. I guess that solves things," Manny, my older brother, spoke to me as we sat on a trash-picked couch in a one-bedroom shanty in Roswell, New Mexico. The room overlooked a swimming pool filled with garbage and sealed. We turned the volume off and watched the headlines roll by. It was the fifth day of April, 2082. We were hushed by the static of the Nightly News Broadcast. On the screen: fat bodies pressed against fat bodies consuming various forms of processed corn and the bottom teletext read: "BREAKING: WORLD HUNGER CRISIS SOLVED." My mind went to the starving black children multiplying in Africa, their boiled bodies rotting away because there wasn't any dirt left below to dig for graves.

Manny and I had come to recognize that we missed the *Independence* days of the United States of the America when our country was still recognized by its pies and

freedom. When those things disappeared, we started to wonder what might replace them. Greed, power, corruption, all possible we thought. But never this, no. Not to this extent. We never predicted that the world would become a landfill littered by pigs and plastic.

With *Grenafine!* we could eat again as the natural earth was replaced with an imitation of it on our plates. We watched the world around us get fatter, people pushed on top of people. The land filled as everything became larger, taller, higher. Empty space was admired, then purchased, then built upon and flooded with bodies. Soon the President decided to step in. He wore a finely pressed pair of khaki trousers and a golf shirt as he spoke to the American people. The Nightly News Broadcast played us the urgent message, but due to recording issues the President's mouth moved a second later behind the audio, making the President seem like a ventriloquist to his own words:

ONLY A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF THE POPULATION OF AMERICA WILL HAVE BABIES. THIS IS TO BE DECIDED UPON BY AN INTELLECT TEST THAT EVERY HUMAN BEING WILL BE SUBJECT TO TAKING. THE TOP 50% WILL MAINTAIN THEIR ABILITY TO REPRODUCE, THE REST WILL BE EXAMINED AND FIXED ACCORDINGLY.

We took the test without question; we knew the consequences for not abiding. I started swallowing water over and over again to provide a reason for feeling so heavy.

1| If a doctor gives you 12 pills then tells you to take one pill every half hour, how long would it be before all the pills had been taken?

2| When Jack, James, Jim and Jane stand by age, Jack being the youngest stands first while James brings up the rear. However, when they stand by height, Jim being the shortest stands first while James comes to the third spot. In both lines Jane remains at the second position. Who is immediately younger than James?

- 3|** Ganges is to India as Volga is to...
- 4|** If 3 men can dig 6 trenches in 4 days, how many days would it take for 24 trenches to be dug by 4 men?
- 5|** Unscramble the following letters and choose the category in which it fits:
SATAALURI (Planet, Country, Language, or Animal)
- 6|** 18825135 is to rhyme as 1851191514 is to:
(Played, Ration, Reason, or Tuition)
- 7|** A man builds a house with four sides of a rectangular construction, each side having southern exposure. A big bear comes along. What color is the bear?
- 8|** Sally likes 225 but not 224; she likes 900 but not 800; she likes 144 but not 145. Which does she like-- 1600 or 1700?
- 9|** The same word can be added to the end of GRASS and the beginning of SCAPE to form two other English words. What is the word?
- 10|** If a circle is one, how many is a hexagon?

Manny and I passed the test but it didn't take long before those deemed "infertile" were prosecuted further. They became inferior and retreated to their own colonies and neighborhoods. They were paid less, allowed less space. The insolent ones were killed for entertainment, we chose to witness it. The show was held at an arena in Albuquerque, and everyone was raving about it. It has already been featured on the Nightly News Broadcast because the First Lady went to see it and brought all six of the President's children.

It was the Fertile against the Infertile in an arena called the "Ring of Righteousness." The Infertile weren't given weapons, and had to run or hide instead. If they could make it past the half court line, past the Fertile men with their guns and knives to touch the opposite wall they made it to the next round. We saw one Infertile do this a few times. He was sneaky, quick. He weaved in and out of bullets, dodging bludgeons and blasts. During the third round the referee blew the whistle and the Fertile launched from their positions on the wall toward center ground again. That one Infertile who'd managed to live, he staggered to the middle and dropped to his knees. He took off his shirt and started to take off his pants and was shot dead, a nearly naked man.

The crowd roared and the scoreboard flashed 9-0. We bought more popcorn. After the show Manny said, "That was oddball."

And I said, "What part?"

Manny wanted to know more about the men who were doing the slaying. There were three of them— men with large ammo guns— one of them with a fierce long blade, and each had a perfectly carved mustache and slick black hair. Sometimes they grimaced but mostly they were entranced, even the blood didn't faze them even if it came out in spurts or puddles.

"Do you remember their tools?" I asked.

"But what I mean is," Manny said, "Who sleeps with those guys at night?"

When we got back to our house in Roswell I had dreams about the moon falling sheer out of the sky.

The Universal Alarm Clock woke everyone up in North America at 7:30 the next morning and we started our day together. I made our rations of coffee and dry toast and the headlines were projected.

Reports of bodies

Reports of bodies

Reports of bodies

Reports of bodies

Reports of bodies piled on top of bodies.

"If there is ever a time in our lives when I have to be smashed in between two others, rescue me please?" Manny asked.

"Of course," I said, "If only I am able to wedge you out whole."

Manny put on his garb— a grey jumpsuit with pockets for pens— and prepared to go to work at the Daydream Center for Healing and Recuperation. For a handsome fee, elderly individuals could come to him for assistance, in which case he hooked them up to a breathing lung that pumped them full of DMT. They would fall into a deep, lulled state of mind. One time, he told me, there was a particularly ancient man—116 years old, with wrinkles that weighed down his eyelids— who recounted the following vision:

In the middle of a meadow there stood a deer, bashful eyed and delicate. The deer's hair was smooth, and glistened in the light of the sun. It was midday, and the tall grass stood still. The world was undisturbed, and it seemed as though this moment could go on forever. Suddenly, there came from the woods a murmur of locusts. Thousands of humming bodies flew through the air to surround the lone creature, and it let out one last bleat. The locusts absorbed the deer, and ascended into the heavens above,

disappearing into the clouds.

As we exited the apartment and prepared to hop on our cycles I said, “See you later old pal.”

And Manny said, “So long good buddy.”

And I said, “Wait! One snapshot.”

Manny said, “Oh, fine. But only one.”

We had a Minolta camera from the 1980s that I uncovered in a salvage shop when Manny and I were teenagers. We’d taken rolls and rolls of film since then but had no way of developing it. We kept the canisters stacked like postcards. It didn’t matter to us whether we ever saw the photos again, we knew what images they held. In this one, Manny was wearing his jumpsuit with one hand on a hip and a grim look on his face. In the background, there was a plastic bag blowing in the wind and under a yellow smiling head the text spelled out: “HAVE A NICE DAY!”

I worked at the International UFO Museum and Research Center as an assistant to the Director, but there hadn’t been a Director in years. The museum was opened in 1992 and remained of Roswell's biggest attractions, not counting the supermart. Business had been slow during prior weeks but that day not a single out-of-towner walked through the door. Usually there was a straggler or two who came by but when they realized that we didn’t offer guided tours, they realized there was nothing much to tour on their own anyhow. The information hadn’t changed since the museum opened, nor had the original mannequins that were painted grey and stretched to resemble extraterrestrials. The

laminated artifacts were coming un-laminated, but we had no cause to replace them. I worked with two others, a man named Mojave and a woman named Bee. Mojave was a real turnip, a man who sat down to pee, but Bee had moments of charm. If the state of things hadn't become so dire, I would have asked Bee to be my lover. I would have said, "Bee, will you bee my lover?" and she would have replied, "Buzz off," and we would both have had a real good laugh about it, though I would have been asking the question seriously.

I found myself wandering to the pasture behind the museum, then squatted to lie down and rest my bones against the dry Earth. The world looked empty from there, as if I was floating above the sky instead of the sky floating above me.

The air was too quiet for comfort when the dust began to collect. It picked up momentum and spiraled within itself, pulled this way and that by a magnetic force. A school of silver specks appeared in view and the hue radiated as they swam through the air towards me. Their bodies formed a double helix that was revolving, and as they refracted light from the sun off their shining splendid backs, choreographed shapes appeared on the ground below. Bee and Mojave had come outside, and Bee whispered a hushed "Could it be?" and Mojave remained expressionless and continued to droop. As the beings undulated, they gave off a high-pitched ringing sound, and it was growing louder. Soon, we were covering our ears in agony, crouched low to the ground to witness their magnitude, as the wind maintained a quickened pace.

The rest of the world dissolved as the light beings surrounded my body, covering me in my own reflection. I tried to see them and could only see myself staring back, standing there in awe. The ringing sound they made had hushed, and as I listened closer I

heard them whistling a harmony, a million pitches fitting together as one. My image on their backs began to morph, and I watched as flecks of myself started to break apart and dissolve. I saw myself become them. I looked down to my limbs and made sure I was still a solid person, fully intact. But when I did this, the beings disappeared as quickly as they came, and I was left whole. I wished I had brought the camera. I ran home to tell Manny.

The media had a fit: RARE EARTHLY DRONES SEEN HOVERING OVER SKY IN ROSWELL

They tried using logic to explain: REBELS FROM IRAN SEND UFO-LIKE OBJECTS TO UNITED STATES TERRITORY

They wanted us to believe: THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS LIFE OUTSIDE EARTH

They were afraid: WE ARE ALL EACH OTHER HAVE

“Tell me, what was the energy like?” Manny stood there waiting and anxious, like a dog. “Could you see the aliens from where you stood?”

I told him how it happened, what they looked like as they moved. “I only saw them vaguely. The sun was radiating off the metal and it blinded my vision.”

“But surely you can tell me more. What did they look like? How did they feel?”

“They surrounded me,” I said.

Manny paused and something clicked within him, a nerve or a sentiment. “What do you mean they surrounded you? Were they friendly?”

“Something like that.”

“I don’t understand,” Manny said.

“Why not?” I asked, “I saw them swooping in the sky, then they moved closer and eventually it was like they were--”

“Web, you have no idea what their intentions are. You have to think this through. You can’t just throw yourself on top of any cosmic experience that comes along.” There was a glimmer of distrust in his voice and he made me start worrying too. “You can’t just allow yourself to believe in circumstance.”

“Their energy was heavenly,” I said, defiant and trying to ignore him but we heard a knock and suddenly the Nightly News Broadcast was on our welcome mat.

BREAKING NEWS: IN AN ASTONISHING ACT OF EXTRATERRESTRIAL COMMUNICATION A ROSWELL RESIDENT HAS BEEN CONTACTED BY ALIENS.

Here, I was seen standing next to Manny in our doorway as the tape rolled on. The host, Bob Brightside, said to us, “Gee, you guys look an awful lot alike. You must be brothers.” There was a moment of dead air as we both stared straight into the lens. Then we nodded: Yes, we are. This was the moment Manny had been waiting for. “Now tell us,” Bob Brightside said, “Which one of you was contacted by the aliens?”

Without skipping a beat, Manny look at me and said, “I was.”

When the last cameraman left, I questioned Manny as he sat by the windowsill. “Why did you do it?” I had my hands clenched: open, close, open, close.

“I was afraid of what might happen to you,” Manny said. I’d never seen him this low before. His cheeks were hollowed, sunken in. His face was illuminated by the glow of the night, and he seemed to be holding the moon in place with his mind.

“I didn’t want your help.”

“No,” he said, “but you needed it and I’m the only person around to protect you.”

We rose to a new Roswell. On the first day, flocks of human beings arrived at the UFO Museum— both Fertile and Infertile— to meet Manny. Priests and priestesses brought their trinkets, whispering to the wind the *om* of their blessings. Scholars, mystics, the fat and the thin, the poor and the wealthy, the ordinary and the not, brought what they had and set up camp. The Dalai Lama visited and deemed the ground holy, saying like every man before him had said to life outside his own comprehension, “We come in peace.” Behind his conviction was fear, behind his fear was his failure to understand that we only ever come in peace for a short while.

I watched it all from my office window. Manny stood in the middle of the masses, revered as their chosen one. He was flowered with gifts and token pieces from faraway lands. I studied his motions, the way he perpetuated their worship with every given prayer. Bee entered the office and was covered in glitter, leaving a trail of sparkles behind her as she walked. She looked like she had seen a lifetime of moments unravel in just days. Together we watched the people outside bending to kiss the ground where I once stood, where Manny was giving a benediction. Some people were crying, and their spines rattled like twitching beetles. Bee leaned over and kissed me on the cheek, leaving a wet residue that I assumed to be glitter.

“You’re a good man,” she said, “I thought you should know.”

“I do,” I said.

“I thought you should know that I’ve always wanted to do that.”

“Do what? Kiss me?”

“Let you know you’re a good man.”

On the second day, the museum bathroom flooded from visitor use and we had to blockade the front doors shortly after. Break-ins were becoming prominent, everyone wanted an artifact to cherish. They believed there was power invested within the replicated alien relics. I stole an old pin from the museum to give to Manny as an offering. I needed to find out if he had predicted this might happen. Did he see himself being revered as the chosen one all along?

“Thank you,” he said, but as I went to pin it onto his pocket the needle slid into his skin. Manny bled a slow stream of maroon. The tattoo of a snake coiled on his arm was smeared in it, as the snake became not just any snake but a dying one.

“Geez!” he said to me. People rushed to bandage his wound, crowding me out before I could muster an apology. He didn’t know what he was doing up there. It should have been me who was exalted.

By the third day I was mingling amongst the madness, hearing the way theories were born: *The aliens were lunar. They had been powering the moon with their energy for aeons upon aeons. They came to tell us they’d be back. They would return soon, and when they did, they would take Manny with them to learn their ways.* Each morning and night these people gathered around to feed off of Manny’s aura, treating him like a newly fallen God.

On the fourth day, they started calling themselves the Children of the New Aeon. They painted their faces with acrylic and markers, and when those ran out they painted

their faces with mud. Manny shared his visions with the people, remarking that he could feel the future in his fingertips. People listened. I wondered if the future he felt in his fingertips was the same one I dreaded in my mind.

Then they built a podium on the fifth day so Manny could be closer to the sky. He seemed to be in a state of exhaustion, his eyes were cloudy but he wore a look of contentment.

6: He stopped eating.

7: He said it was necessary.

8: He began to lose color.

9: He lost his sense of language.

10: The aliens came back. On that halcyon day, I heard the whistling noise from afar and the loudness signaled their return. Gasps echoed across the crowd and someone shouted, “Look! There!” The school glimmered towards us and we were captivated by its luster, by the way it radiated a spellbinding lure. Even when they descended upon Manny, I remained in a trance. The aliens enclosed Manny’s famished frame and vibrated until their harmonies were violently screeching. All at once, they tore Manny into a million pieces but just before they did this he screamed and through the noise and fervor I swore that he was saying my name. Their brilliance lifted once more as they departed into the sky and that time the sun did not block my view.

I bit my tongue for the following weeks to avoid opening my mouth. Everyone had a story they wanted me to tell. I closed myself within our old walls and thought of

Manny drifting in the atmosphere, vaporized particles of him mingling with vaporized particles of the deer.

When I emerged, Roswell was the 5th largest city in the world. All the attention was on us, on me telling Manny's story. I broke the silence and spoke of his altruism. He was exalted beyond measure. The witnesses of his abduction were far too many and now Roswell symbolized the greater good of humanity. Nobody could deny his grace but nobody could bring him back from the dead either.

Did he see this in the grand scheme of things?

When we were sitting at the arena, did he know it was in his destiny?

Here's the only way I can make sense of it: If I think of planes, circular planes, flat but broadened, I think of the universe and our world and the people that inhabit it; small, but round and full. I think of the place I reside within, the representations that follow or judge me, the way in which these interpretations have allowed me to co-inhabit or not. I think about the way people react with other people, the chemical combustion that occurs when one soul meets another, the way in which we connect or disconnect. Life appears to our consciousness as a paradox.

I hope Manny can see me from where he is now. When I take a breath, I imagine I am inhaling the best of him.