

Drowning in Digital Discourse: Internet Thought-Spirals in John Green's *Turtles All the Way Down*

Technological developments in the 21st century offer unprecedented opportunities for adolescents to learn about the world around them. In contemporary Young Adult (YA) fiction, technological engagement is routinely depicted through texting or in the evolving online environments of social media. Moreover, the advent of certain Internet spaces, such as search engines and Wiki pages, provide adolescents access to volumes of unfiltered information to reference. Yet an element often elided in analyses of these texts is the affective response to living in a digital world; my paper looks beyond the Internet's depiction and towards its affective role within the text. Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth claim that affect "marks a body's belonging to a world of encounters" (2), but what encounters occur within a digital space? With vast amounts of data available, how are adolescents to mediate it, or keep it from habitually emphasizing their intellectual inferiority?

I look to John Green's *Turtles All the Way Down* (2017) to elaborate upon the affect of existing in a digital world. Set in modern-day Indiana, Green's novel follows sixteen-year-old Ava Holmes's struggle to be a good friend, daughter, and detective, while anxiety regularly permeates her thought process. Struck silent from vicious thought-spirals, Ava often turns to the Internet to seek answers for her unending questions. From Wikipedia articles on "Human Microbiota" to *Star Wars* fan-fiction that all-too-closely resembles her life, Ava's anxiety over her body and identity is exacerbated in digital spaces. As a result, Ava fails to locate her "self" digitally or in reality, rendering her imprisoned in a body she cannot identify with and a mind she did not choose. Thus, I argue that the text enacts a space of affective development by paralleling the recursive tendencies of anxiety with the vastness of digital data. By mapping the effects of mental illness onto the development of online spaces, *Turtles All the Way Down* illuminates the ways in which technology enhances and diminishes affective responses to the complexities of mental health.