

Making Kin and Attending to Place in the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Environmental humanities scholars are studying the ways in which human lives are knotted together with other beings, for better or worse. At the same time, many of these scholars are calling for a reconceptualization or ‘improvement’ of human/nonhuman relationships. Stemming from these ideas, this portfolio explores the ways in which connections to place and other-than-human beings were made during the Covid-19 pandemic. The global pandemic has been a disrupting force and as such, has greatly influenced the ways in which people are living their daily lives. The first portion of this portfolio examines the ways in which participants related to ‘nature’ before and during the pandemic; the ways in which they were engaged with the nonhuman world around them during their interactions; the connections they made between places and beings; the ways in which ‘pandemic living’ helped them to form connections; and the reflections participants made about the conditions leading up to the pandemic, and the possible futures that may result from it. These findings are based on interviews with sixteen other MES students. This portion concludes with possible implications for environmental education, which is also broadly concerned with the ‘improvement’ of multispecies relations. The second part of this portfolio is a narrative-style autoethnography that examines the narratives and actions that affect relationships to place, specifically one’s familiar ‘home place,’ and considers some of the ethical considerations of being a ‘good neighbor.’ Both pieces examine the different ways relationships formed with place and other-than-human beings, as well as the relationships themselves, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Foreword

I came into my Master's degree wanting to learn about the different influential narratives that western culture tells itself, and how these narratives impact our relationships with other beings and our environments. Specifically, I studied narratives surrounding the more-than-human, understood as the idea that to be human is to be more-than-human¹ – we are always and already knotted and entangled with a multitude of other beings who make us more-than-human; and what it means to be more-than-human in the Anthropocene. These topics are of particular interest for environmental education, and so part of learning has also been dedicated to how narratives and relationships can be shaped by environmental educators. My area of concentration can be further broken down into the following components 1) Multispecies perspectives, 2) Narratives and storytelling for education, and 3) Alternative narratives for environmental education. This portfolio will also address certain learning objectives related to my area of concentration including: 1.1) Develop a critical understanding of Western definitions and perceptions of 'nature' (and its associated binaries); 2.2) Develop an understanding of how storytelling can be used as effective education; 2.3) Develop a critical awareness and understanding of Anthropocene/environmental narratives, and how these narratives may affect actions and worldviews; 3.2) Explore alternative narratives that can be used to supplement traditional (stewardship, conservation, sustainable development) environmental education narratives; and 3.3) Meet the requirements of the Environmental/Sustainability Education Graduate Diploma.

The two pieces that make up this portfolio – an academic research article and a narrative-style autoethnographic essay – are based on an idea I had from my personal experience during the

¹ Throughout this portfolio I use the term 'more-than-human' to describe the condition of being human, and the ways in which human beings are always entangled and knotted with that which is not-human, making us always and already 'more-than-human.' I use the terms 'other-than-human' or 'nonhuman' to describe all the other beings who are not human.

Covid-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, like many others, I had copious amounts of time in a home that I was no longer regularly leaving, and so my partner and I thought that this was a great time to adopt a dog. Along with the pandemic, our dog, Naima Chompsky, changed the way in which I was perceiving and paying attention to my home and the surrounding environment. The way in which these two events influenced me was also tempered by being a student in the MES program; and thus, my research topic was born. Although both pieces are based on this original idea, they each take their own form through expressions of different types of connection.

The first piece of my portfolio works to understand the attitudes that other MES students hold toward/about ‘nature’ and other-than-human beings, and the ways in which they characterize these relationships. Furthermore, in working to understand what it means to be more-than-human in the Anthropocene, it is important to understand what it meant to be more-than-human during the global Covid-19 pandemic. For this part of the research, I interviewed 16 MES students about their interactions with other-than-human beings during the Covid-19 pandemic. This particular aspect of research had been previously unfamiliar to me, and I often found I struggled with making sure the participants voices came across in my writing. The piece ends with how my research may have implications for environmental education, especially which pedagogies/narratives seem to be the most effective in ‘improving’ relationships with other-than-human beings and our environments. Thus, this research allowed me to better understand components 1), 2) and 3) of my area of concentration, and learning objectives 1.1), 2.3), 3.2), and 3.3).

The second piece of my portfolio is written in a narrative style, that also explores cultural narratives (my own and others) and how these narratives affect connections to place by reflecting on my own connection to my home, and the stories that are told about it. Throughout the autoethnography I also examine my relationship to the other-than-human beings around me, and

what it means to be a ‘good neighbor.’ The autoethnography discusses the stories which have shaped this place I call home, and what it means to really call a place *home* and the responsibilities that result toward the larger human and other-than-human community. This piece is written in a narrative-style, in part to reflect on the importance of narratives and to flex a creative muscle that is often unused in academia. In this way, it works to help me understand components 1), 2) and 3) of my area of concentration, and learning objectives 1.1), 2.2), 2.3) and 3.2).

Table of Contents

Abstract / ii

Foreword / iii

Making Kin in the Covid-19 Pandemic: An Article / 1

 Introduction / 1

 Methods / 6

 Relating to Nature / 9

 Ways of (Dis)Engagement with the Nonhuman World / 14

 Physical Engagement / 16

 Emotional Engagement / 16

 Sensuous Engagement / 19

 Disengagement / 19

 Place and Beings / 22

 Pandemic Mode of Living / 28

 Changing Relationships / 35

 Possibilities: Pasts and Futures / 38

 Conditions for a Pandemic / 39

 Imagining the Past / 40

 Possible Futures / 41

 Implications for Environmental Place-Based Education / 44

 Slow Pedagogy of Place / 44

 Critical Place-Based and Land Education / 45

 Conclusions / 47

References / 49

Attending to Place in the Covid-19 Pandemic: An Autoethnography / 52

Bibliography / 67

Making Kin in the Covid-19 Pandemic: An Article

Introduction

In May 2014, anthropologist Celia Lowe wrote an essay for the *Environmental Humanities* Living Lexicon entitled “Infection.” Written about six years too soon, this definitional prophecy outlines the world-changing abilities of an infection. Lowe states that “Infection is an event; a becoming with. Infection is a ‘fluctuation’ in the present order of things. [...] Infection can create a ‘we’ where there was once an ‘I.’ We might not always like this emergent multiplicity however” (2014, 301;303). Contrary to the isolation, physical distancing and fear that governments around the world mandated, the global Covid-19 pandemic has proven Lowe right and the world has seen many movements, peoples and other-than-human beings come together on both large and small scales for a variety of reasons – from the Black Lives Matter and #LandBack movements to the mass adoption of companion animals – in order to work for worlds that they hope will be better than the current ones we live in.

One such world is that of the ‘more-than-human’ (Abram, 1997). To be ‘more-than-human’ is to exist in the reality that humans live entangled lives with nonhuman others. This entanglement means that human beings become who they are *with* these nonhuman others and can therefore be considered more-than-human.² To be more-than-human is not passive, but an active becoming that is fluid and ever-changing. Howard,³ a participant in this study, remarked that “we do know that Covid moved to ferrets, ferrets and two deer and then the question is where are they going to go next right, because like *it's not just a human disease, right*” (emphasis added). Likewise, Lunstrum

² While many Western cultures/societies are finally realizing our connection and reliance on other-than-human beings, Indigenous peoples have known about and practiced these relationships since time immemorial. For example, the Anishinaabe concept of ‘all our relations’ describes the ways in which all the beings in creation have relationships and responsibilities to one another (McGregor, 2013).

³ Howard is a fictitious name. No real names of participants were used; all participants were randomly assigned names that are used throughout the article.

et al. argue that “with viruses written into our DNA, the human is, at its genetic core, more-than-human” (2021, 1512). Thus, if anything is more-than-human, it is the Covid-19 virus. The species-crossing, zoonotic abilities of the Covid-19 virus demonstrated our more-than-humanness to people around the world (see for example Kiros et al. 2020). The solitary, self-contained unit of ‘me’ is now a ‘we’ and an ‘us’ – the permeability of ‘me’ now apparent from our shared breath, that potential carrier of infection. The shared breath that turns ‘me’ into ‘we’ is what Lowe (2014) describes as an infections ability to invade and breach boundaries. Our relationality to both human and other-than-human beings became apparent to many during the Covid-19 pandemic. Not only that but many beings’ (both human and not) relationships to each other, and all life, were ended rather abruptly by the Covid-19 virus. Thus, the goal of this study was to determine if and how participants’ relationships with other-than-human beings and their environments changed or formed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The topic of this paper is situated in multispecies or posthumanist scholarship, an offshoot of the traditional Eurocentric, anthropocentric humanities tradition. In moving away from the traditional anthropocentric view, many scholars have described the importance of improving and creating multispecies relationships and kinships in the western world (see for example Plumwood 2012; Tsing 2012; Kimmerer 2013; Haraway 2016; Van Dooren et al. 2016; Govindrajan 2018). This ‘ontological turn’ has been used to address the destructive global impacts of human action on the world, and in doing so, has been used to show how human lives are interconnected with nonhuman beings. The ‘improvement’ being called for has been conceptualized in several ways, such as viewing our relationships with other-than-human beings as reciprocal, as opposed to hierarchical (Kimmerer 2013). Regardless, western scholars are finally acknowledging that “as with all living organisms, human lives and ways of life cannot take place and be described in

isolation” (Van Dooren et al. 2016, 2).⁴ The goal of multispecies scholarship is then to focus “on the multitudes of lively agents that bring one another into being through entangled relations” (Van Dooren et al. 2016, 3). Or, to ask questions such as: “What does it mean to live a life that is knotted with other lives for better or worse?” (Govindrajan 2018, 3).

This study draws from the work of scholars in multispecies studies: Donna Haraway (2015; 2016), Radhika Govindrajan (2018), and Anna Tsing (2012). Haraway defines kin as “something other/more than entities tied by ancestry or genealogy” (2015, 161). She claims that in this understanding of kin, one may become beholden to other beings, in the same way one may feel responsible to/for their family or future generations of family. Making kin is Haraway’s way to engage with or respond to other-than-human beings in meaningful and reciprocal ways to achieve multispecies flourishing. Furthermore, she states, “kin-making is making persons, not necessarily as individuals or as humans” (Haraway 2015, 161). Thus, part of the process of making kin is acknowledging other-than-human beings as Persons, i.e., beings with agency and emotions that are not reducible to ‘animal instincts.’ Likewise, Govindrajan explores how specific humans formed kinship bonds with specific animals; she takes an approach where she was “committed to rendering animals as [she] encountered them—not as a symbolic foil for human representations but as subjects whose agency, intention, and capacity for emotion was crucial in shaping the relationships they made with humans” (2018, 6). Moreover, she makes clear that “to be related to another is to be imbricated in their making even when one is indifferent to, disgusted by, or hostile to them. Mutuality and connection do not imply an erasure of difference or hierarchy” (Govindrajan 2018, 4).

⁴ The idea of ‘multispecies scholarship’ comes from a western tradition and speaking about it as ‘new’ erases the knowledges and scholarship of many Indigenous peoples and perpetuates colonial structures and legacies (Sundberg 2014; Todd 2016; Springaay and Truman 2018; Whyte 2018).

My definition of kin draws from both Haraway and Govindrajan, wherein kin can be understood as beings who are tied together not by simply ancestry or genealogy, but as beings whose individual labors/actions, agency, and emotions have propelled them into a reciprocal relationship with the other. The importance of making kin is part of the process of changing the story of the Anthropocene. Haraway claims that “making kin and making kind (as category, care, relatives without ties by birth, lateral relatives, lots of other echoes) stretch the imagination and can change the story” (Haraway 2016, 103). Making kin is a process that is entwined with the process of becoming more-than-human. These notions maintain that humans live entangled lives with nonhuman others and so are always and already ‘more-than-human.’ This designation is similar to Govindrajan’s concept of relatedness, which “capture[s] the myriad ways in which the potential and outcome of a life always and already unfolds *in relation to* that of another” (Govindrajan 2018, 3, original emphasis). This concept of relatedness is exactly what it means to be more-than-(just) human. Human lives and bodies are porous; they are affected by and effect other-than-human beings and things daily. This idea was brought into stark relief by the pandemic; the constant tracking of the virus clearly demonstrated the ways in which we effect and are affected by others. The aim of this paper is to explore the ways in which kinship bonds are formed and the effects of these bonds on their human counterparts.

Lastly, the design of this study was based on Anna Tsing’s argument that “familiar places are the beginning of appreciation for multi-species interactions” (2012, 142). She claims that by returning to the same places again and again, especially when one is attentive, places become familiar. Further because familiar places are often also shared spaces with other beings, they can become a site for multispecies interactions. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many people were stuck in their homes and were not allowed to travel far from them. Consequently, many people

took to daily walks/excursions/explorations in the local areas around their homes. I argue that these areas have become familiar places and thus more spaces for multispecies interactions. Additionally, I argue that because of the Covid-19 pandemic people's relationships to the other-than-human beings around in what are now familiar places, have changed.

There are other scholars who are also studying similar phenomenon related to the Covid-19 pandemic and multispecies relations. Eben Kirksey (2020) argues that the emergence of Covid-19 can be considered a kind of multispecies assemblage, where a number of different species may be implicated in, or at least thought to be implicated in the spread and proliferation of the Covid-19 virus. Conversely, Thom Van Dooren (2020) argued that the human-response to discovering pangolin to be carriers of Covid-19 should be a “way to think more deeply about the consequences of our relationships with other animal species... what we owe to them, and the world that is being ushered in by our widespread failure to devise ways of living well in this broader community of life” (n.p.). Adam Searle and Jonathon Turnbull discuss how the harmful narratives around “resurgent natures” overshadow “stories of multispecies cultivation and conviviality” and ignore the labor that is needed in order for these multispecies relationships to flourish (2020, 292). My research topic similarly wonders how Covid-19 has affected our other-than-human relationships. However, my research focuses on the connections that may have been made between human and nonhuman species, and what this may mean for who we consider kin.⁵ Furthermore, my research is colored by the environmental education movement, and the rethinking around these multispecies relationships called for by both environmental educators and multispecies scholars.

⁵ While my research focuses on connections between beings, the Covid-19 pandemic has been an isolating time for many, and may in fact have also caused some disconnection between beings, created new ambivalences, and so on.

Methods

Due to the importance given to stories and narratives in multispecies scholarship as a way of improving human and other-than-human beings relationships in western cultures, I chose narrative inquiry as my methodology for this study. The basis of narrative inquiry is the study of experience through stories. D. Jean Clandinin draws on “Dewey’s two criteria of experience to develop a narrative view of experience” (Clandinin 2006, 46). The first criterion is interaction, wherein people are never considered in isolation but always in relation to other beings. The second criterion is continuity, where she argues that experiences are compounded, or that “experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences” (Clandinin 2006, 46). These interactions and lived experiences are often conceptualized and understood in the form of a narrative.

Similarly, Brian Alleyne argues there is a need for narrative ways of knowing. He claims this way of knowing “operates in an emotive or emotional and expressive register as opposed to the rational register of paradigmatic condition” (2015, 40). I believe that this relational, emotive understanding of experience through narrative is a good way in which to study how the pandemic has changed the relationships people have to other-than-human beings in their lives. By telling their stories, I hope to gain a sense of what their relationships may have been like before the pandemic compared to what they are now. Relationships and connections to place and other beings are often not necessarily explicit, and therefore these are able to come out implicitly through the narratives of the participants.

I interviewed sixteen ($n = 16$) York university graduate students for this study. There were two main inclusion criteria for participants: 1) they were/are students in the Master in Environmental Studies (MES) program at York university (all participants started the program

between September 2019 and September 2021), and 2) they lived in their homes in the period between the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020 to February 2022 (time of interview) for *at least* one year. In choosing these criteria I wanted to establish certain commonalities of experience between participants. As students in the MES program, participants have an assumed common baseline of care/interest in environmental matters that may not necessarily be shared by the general populace, which allows for patterns of changing relationships to emerge without grand outliers. However, while MES students share some interests and academic classes, participants had a variety of academic backgrounds, including urban planning, law, philosophy, and environmental education. Furthermore, as students during the pandemic, participants were under stay-at-home orders. Since movement restriction was an important factor of this study, it was key that participants had a certain number of hours working from home, as opposed to others such as essential workers who would have had a very different pandemic experience. In hindsight, having MES student participants also helped to establish what kinds of knowledge, classes and learning techniques help to change people's perceptions about nature and the environment especially regarding the MES program. Participants talked about certain classes and ideas that they learned that were influential to the ways they approached their relationships to nature and other-than-human beings.

I used a form of non-probability sampling, called quota sampling, where the desirable characteristics, described above, were decided and I found participants that fit those characteristics. Participants were recruited through email and through posts on a York University MES (unofficial) discussion board called Discord. Since participants were all recruited from the MES program, participant ages generally ranged from early twenties to early thirties, with varied life experiences. Participants were asked general questions about how they define and relate to 'nature'; which

nonhuman others they interacted with over the year in their home, as well as a variety of questions relating to these interactions including: what they were doing during these interactions, the frequency of these interactions, if these interactions were new during the pandemic, if they learned anything new through these interactions, if their relationship to the nonhuman other changed through these interactions; and if the participant's relationship to 'nature' changed during the Covid-19 pandemic and in what ways.

The interviews were semi-structured, conducted over zoom in accordance with social distancing protocols, and were all on average one hour in length. I recorded and transcribed the interviews. Keeping in mind the critiques on the power imbalance that often occurs between researcher and participant (for example see Nagar 2014), participants were sent the finished typed transcripts after the interview, with an invitation to read through the transcript and elaborate on or disregard anything. Transcripts were not verbatim and thus did not include utterances such as 'like' or 'um' since affective elements of speech were not considered important to the study. Instead, coding and analysis were focused on the verbal aspects of speech i.e., the content of the speech itself. To protect the identity of participants, each was given a random fictitious name, which is used throughout the article.

I analyzed the data using the type of narrative inquiry often called "analysis of the narratives," wherein it is the narratives described in the interviews that are analyzed; themes and issues were interpreted from the narratives (Alleyne 2015, 30). To achieve the analysis of the narratives, I coded the interview transcripts to find codes then themes from the interviews (as described by Saldaña 2014 and Alleyne 2015). From sixty-six codes produced from coding the transcripts, six main themes of relationship categories emerged. These themes were then used for analysis and interpretation of the narratives describing participants varied relationships with

nonhuman others. The six main themes discussed in this article are: Relating to Nature, Ways of (Dis)Engagement with the Nonhuman World, Place and Beings, Pandemic Mode of Living, Possibilities: Pasts and Futures, and Changing Relationships. The article concludes with reflections on Implications for Environmental Education.

Relating to Nature

If we were to regard ourselves as ‘fields of care’ rather than as discrete objects in a neutral environment, our understanding of our relationship to the world might be fundamentally transformed. (Neil Evernden 1984, 47)

Evernden describes this field of care as a kind of phenomenological extension of the self. He uses the example of a fish that protects his territory. He states that the fish “regards himself as being the size of the territory, no longer an organism bounded by skin but an organism-plus-environment bounded by an invisible integument” (1984, 44). In this same way, it is also possible for us to relate to our environments as extensions of our self. Therefore, how we as human beings relate to nature and the other-than-human beings around us depends heavily on the ways we think about the concept of ‘nature’ or our environment. For this reason, participants were asked for their definitions of the word nature, and to describe their relationship to nature before the Covid-19 pandemic in light of this definition. Participants gave mixed and often conflictual responses. As Howard stated: “it is a kind of overused or loaded concept that can be defined quite differently depending on our view of nature [...] because the word nature could also be used in other contexts, right?” The contradictory definitions and language used by participants is an indicator of how deeply entrenched certain images and thoughts about nature in western culture and society are – even when actively trying to combat this hegemonic narrative, which as MES students, many participants are.

Comments on the presence and meaning of a nature-society binary were prevalent during this portion of the interview, although responses regarding said binary did vary. This western dualism is often thought of as a major roadblock in our relationship with the other-than-human beings around us. Nature-society and human-animal are often distinguished, either through hard lines (i.e., Charlotte's idea of the "natural world" as "very separated from like urban areas") or soft language (such as Chloe stating she is not yet "totally immersed in nature"), which was often unacknowledged by the participants. Conversely, Lucas described what can be considered a very clear separation between humans and nature. He argues that humans and nature are separate, and that once you have "oil refineries and cities and things like that," what was once nature becomes damaged or "nature-in-crisis." He gives an example of a lake that has been heavily polluted, arguing "okay, this is still a lake, but you can't swim in it, you can't drink from it. So, I guess it comes down to a question of utility – of can you still utilize this in a way that sustains life?" Whereas some of the participants, such as Sarah and Isaac were open about trying to go to the places that they believe are "minimally touched" by humans while maintaining the falsity of the nature-society binary. For example, Sarah mentioned that while she tries to go to places that are as "minimally touched by humanity" as possible, she also "doesn't really believe in the true wild." How can we reconcile one with the other? How can we escape this concept of nature as separate from humans, and what will it mean for our relationships if we cannot?⁶

Some participants discussed how while they believe at least theoretically that humans are part of nature, the concept of nature itself as it is used in western society, is helpful to them to delineate the nonhuman world from the human world, or nonhuman environment from human-

⁶ Throughout this paper, unless otherwise stated, I use the term 'we' to refer to those of us who have been taught by Western culture and society that human beings stand apart from nature. This group includes myself as well as my fellow MES student participants, and settler Canadians in general as well.

built or urban environments. So even those participants, and people in general who believe that humans are part of nature or disagree with the general use of the term, when they speak to the general populace, they use the term nature to indicate a separate entity. For example, Sarah describes how the term nature “[upholds] the idea of nature as something like boundaried from like who and what we are as even just like bodies in the world, that that is like a part of colonial structure.” Then she goes on to say that “but then also nature, like in my everyday use is like, you know, I want to get to places from where I live that are minimally urban as possible.” Similarly, James says that in his own thinking, ‘nature’ “is like human built environments versus not.” This poses a problem for discourse – how can we have a discussion when we cannot settle on what terms mean? And if we are trying to redefine the terms we use, is it useful if others continue to use the old definition? Do we instead need new words, to go along with new stories? Words only serve us in so far as we agree on their meanings.

Comparably, even those participants who state that “nature is everything” or that they are trying to rethink or redefine their concept of nature, still use language that indicates the nature-society binary goes much deeper than merely acknowledgement can undo when they describe their own interactions and experiences. For example, Isabella said that what nature means to her is “something I’m kind of working on trying to unpack, where it’s like a park could be nature even though it’s kind of a more constructed space.” However, for her “the first image to come to mind is always like I hate saying like pristine, but those like natural landscapes that just seem to fall within the definition, categorically if that makes sense. So, the forest, or the prairie, or the sea...like that for me is the first thing that comes to mind.” The idea of nature-as-landscape is ingrained in the western subconscious; we can see this in the way that environmental NGOs and not-for-profit groups make appeals to this idea of a pristine landscape/wilderness to get people to care about

‘nature.’ Monica states something similar, arguing that “it’s interesting when we talk about the natural world it seems so detached from where we are or how we think about things, and I think it was created to do that.” I think that it is largely this idea that we need to break away from as a society.

After participants were asked to define nature, they were asked to describe their relationship to/with nature before the Covid-19 pandemic (meaning prior to March 2020). Half of the participants described their connection to nature before the pandemic as something less-than it what was at the time of the interview, stating that it was things like “not as strong,” “more disconnected,” and “limited.” Additionally, many participants stated that before the pandemic their relationship with nature consisted of “going to” places, such as international travel, Ontario cottage country, camping in provincial parks or to the beach. Chloe said that her relationship to nature consisted of “going to the beach or like going for occasional walks, you know, and kind of understanding and appreciating nature on a screen.” Olive likewise stated that before the pandemic, “[nature] would always mean a place that I was going to go to, instead of experiencing nature as a relationship.” The idea that one must “go to” nature showcases how deep the perceived separation between nature and society is. This idea that one wants to escape their life and go to a place to experience nature is also in large part a settler colonial legacy. It sparks the idea of nature-as-(land)escape, and likely harkens back to the original purposes of conservation areas for the amusement and control of white wealthy settlers (see William Cronon 1995).

Furthermore, the idea of nature as somewhere to “go to” as opposed to something that one can enter into relation with is harmful for the way in which nature becomes objectified. This objectification makes it easier for people to participate in its exploitation and extraction. Whereas, if participants relate to nature as a thing-in-itself as opposed to an object which can lead to

“commodity fetishism, consumerism [and] environmental devastation” (Potkay 2008, 391). Where instead a ‘thing’ becomes important because it merely exists, it is harder to be party to its exploitation. Nature-as-thing then is something “that is not fully known and gestures towards the unknowability of larger chains of events” (Potkay 2008, 394). Isaac describes his relationship with nature in this way:

So, I think I would say that my relationship with nature, or generalized nature, consists in the relationship for the relationship’s sake, like for nature’s sake itself. I am not interested in extraction, or pure pleasure, it’s more like a feeling of connection, and then there’s some sort of, once you have that, it’s like a friendship – you come to know the other person, but you can never like, fully know them.

He experiences nature as a friendship, as a being with whom he can enter into relation. He clarifies that nature is “not like a stapler, you can come to fully know a stapler, it’s like an object and it sits there, and you know what it does, and that’s it.” Isaac echoes what Govindrajan argues about relatedness which “must always be understood as constituting a partial connection between beings who come to their relationship as unpredictable, unknowable, and unequal entities” (2018, 25). She writes further that “the proclivities, emotions, and desires of different animals are dissimilar and can never be fully reconciled” (Govindrajan 2018, 25). This then, is one of the main differences in attending to other-than-human beings and ‘nature’ as individuals with agency instead of fully knowable objects. Therefore, by viewing his relationship to nature as a friendship, Isaac acknowledges that things that hurt the natural world hurt him as well. His relationship to nature is similar to the ‘field of care’ described by Evernden. The self may be a contained unit, but it is impacted by the condition and actions of those around them.

However, while participants expressed that before the pandemic, they felt that they had to go to nature, the pandemic made them, as Chloe says “seize local opportunities” to be outside more, or even to come to the realization that nature is in fact close to home and can even be found in one’s home. David stated that the Environmental Education course in the MES program in conjunction with the movement restrictions of the pandemic, greatly influenced their relationship with nature. Because he was unable to go to the places that he considered nature, he had to look closer to home. As part of the Environmental Education course students had to keep an indoor nature journal, where students had to document the nature and other-than-human beings they encountered within the walls of their homes or their balconies/backyards. Due to these circumstances, David began to pay attention to the other beings in his apartment that he would not have otherwise noticed or even intentionally ignored, such as insects. On this he stated, “also, nature is, for me, everywhere that we live, it’s not just specifically when I go among the trees, but even when I spend time in my balcony, or even inside my apartment when I am close to the plants I grow, that is part of nature time for me I guess.” The nature-culture boundary was traversed, and David stated that he felt that he was “in nature” by taking care of the plants in his home. Perhaps in seeing ‘nature’ in more places and beings, participants can move away from the easily exploited nature-as-object into the more meaningful nature-as-friendship. The ways in which participants define and relate to ‘nature’ generally colors the interactions that they have with other-than-human beings in their lives with whom they share space, which was often seen in the ways that participants relayed their interactions with other-than-human beings during their interviews.

Ways of (Dis)Engagement with the Nonhuman World

Our bodies have formed themselves in delicate reciprocity with the manifold textures, sounds, and shapes of an animate earth—our eyes have evolved in subtle interaction with

other eyes, as our ears are attuned by their very structure to the howling of wolves and honking of geese. To shut ourselves off from these other voices, to continue by our lifestyles to condemn these other sensibilities to the oblivion of extinction, is to rob our own senses of their integrity, and to rob our minds of their coherence. We are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human. (David Abrams 1997, 22)

A main tenet of this research was founded on Tsing's argument that "familiar places are the beginning of appreciation for multi-species interactions" (2012, 142). In her descriptions on how a place may become familiar Tsing describes: "Delight makes an impression: an impression of place. The very excitement of my senses commits to memory the suite of colors and smells..." (2012, 142). This section similarly details the ways in which participants become familiar (or do not become familiar) with other-than-human beings and their environments. However, while Tsing focused on foraging, participants discussed a range of activities/mindsets that help them to (dis)engage with the world. Participants were asked about their daily/weekly interactions with other-than-human beings. They described a large variety of animal and plant interactions including daily interactions with pets, bird watching, plant/garden interactions, trail/walking interactions, and other animal sightings like deer, raccoons, squirrels, possums, etc. These interactions generally took place in/around/near the participants' homes. This includes places such as inside the home and backyard/balcony, as well as city streets, forest trails, parks and stormwater management ponds close to the participants' homes. Participants were then asked to describe their different physical, emotional and sensuous engagements with other-than-human beings during their interactions. The types and amount of engagement was found to be important for the strength and kinds of bonds that were formed with other-than-human beings.

Physical Engagement

Most physical engagement recounted by participants was either between humans and their pets which often consisted of things like physical affection and play, or a form of physical exercise that was occurring during the interactions such as running or riding a bike. In terms of physical exercise, this type of physical engagement did not seem to positively impact relationships with other beings, especially when participants wanted to “shut everything out” or “tune out the world” during the activity through music or podcasts. Additionally, participants seemed more likely to want to listen to music and therefore disengage with the world around them when describing the activity as exercise specifically. However, when the engagement was with their surroundings, for example if the trail was icy and thus required physical *and* mental engagement in order not to fall (i.e., participants were unable to tune out the world due to precarious conditions), this combination seemed to help improve relationships between participants and other-than-human beings, very similar to the way that foraging necessitates engagement with one’s surroundings. Thus, the place and therefore the terrain where the engagements were occurring, as well as intentions of participants, can be considered important for the formation of bonds. Physical affection and play with pets had positive impacts on participant relationships, including increased positive emotional engagement. Most participants did not engage with ‘wild’ or non-domestic animals. In fact, many went out of their way to avoid physical engagement, meaning touch, although they could be physically engaged in the same space (for example, walking next to a flying bird).

Emotional Engagement

Many participants stated that they had positive emotional engagement with the other-than-human being during their interactions. This includes emotions like love, comfort, happiness/joy, awe, and curiosity. This positive emotional engagement seemed to spark more and/or continuous

positive emotional engagement and had participants consistently coming back for more. Participants also described how their sensuous engagement impacted their emotional engagement. Mia stated that through new sensuous interactions in her backyard, which she described as “you can feel the wind on your skin, you can feel the grass on your skin, you can feel, or you can smell like fresh-cut grass, you can smell the earth,” she was able to have new emotional engagement which she described as “spiritual” as well. She stated: “Yeah, I think so, at least like new experiences to feel at home. Cause I usually feel that way when I travel somewhere, usually somewhere warm. But it’s just, I think it’s an emotion that I’ve associated with like being out of country, being in a tropical place. And to be able to experience that literally in my own backyard was pretty new.” The combination of this emotional and sensuous engagement seems to have combated the idea that Mia had to “go to” someplace else in order to engage with her surroundings in a positive way.

Two participants, Sophie and Isabella also included self-reflection as part of their emotional engagement. Isabella that her self-reflection was on how small she is in comparison to the rest of the world. She stated: “And so, for instance, there are moments where you can walk through a trail system and kind of like look upwards and have a huge realization that you are very small. That was a big one for me. In relation to things like trees and the like greater forest systems, but not necessarily in a negative way, just sort of in an awareness of like oh I’m small, they’re big but we’re both here kind of a thing.” This type of self-reflecting on one’s place in the world, or even in the universe is helpful in seeing nature in terms of the bigger picture and seeing possible connection and meaning in the lives of others.

James reported different emotional engagement between birds that he had seen and heard multiple times, Carolina wrens, and new birds that he engaged with. He described the engagement with the Carolina wrens as “comforting” and “familiar.” He stated:

There’s just something about that, it makes you feel a little more...I don’t know if welcome to the space is the right word because I don’t think that’s true but like more one I guess with the area, less of an intruder and more of like, yeah I don’t—belong, belonging is not the word, but something to that affect.

These feelings are very similar to those reported by people who have pets, and the way they describe how their pets make them feel about their homes/shared spaces. Many participants offered variations of “my [pet] is my home” referring to the feeling of belonging that is present when the pets of the household are there, and the feelings of emptiness when they are not. These ideas of kinship and community feelings are interesting because these feelings are often described regarding nonhuman beings (pets) who are considered family, who share intimate/familiar space with humans who consider them family, and for whom humans must perform daily labour and care tasks. James further described learning about the Carolina wrens stating: “With the Carolina wrens, you know you learn their vocalizations—and yeah a big part was learning the different bird vocalizations, who was saying what, that was huge.” Even his language, learning “*who was saying what*” implies that he thinks of these birds not as objects but as subjects, as Persons, in the same way people often think of their pets, and as pets were sometimes described by participants. Perhaps learning about the Carolina wrens – where they nest, what they sound like, and what they look like – is the equivalent of the daily labour tasks relating to pets such as learning which toys your pet enjoys, where they like to sleep, etc. Therefore, getting to know others can be one way to form

bonds, another kind of labour of attention and care that helps to evolve the emotional engagement into a bond of familiarity and kinship.

Sensuous Engagement

The most sensuous engagement described by participants was with sight and sound, and a few participants also mentioned smells. However while being aware of one's senses can be the first step to forming a relationship, of getting to know, it is also repeated exposure to sounds and smells that is imperative to forming relationships and is how beings and places become familiar. On repeated sights Isabella stated:

And then, in terms of sight like because I was there for over a year and a half, the biggest thing that I noticed visually was like shifting through different seasons in the same spot. So, all the trees around me sort of went through their whole process each season, of like changing color, losing leaves, being covered in snow, little buds coming out in the spring – that whole cyclical process.

Similar to the idea of getting to know the Carolina wrens to form bonds with them, seeing how beings change across seasons through repeated interactions is also a form of getting to know. On repeated sounds James stated: “you kind of learn maybe new sounds of an area that you don’t necessarily always hear if you’re just passing by quickly.” Therefore, it is not just sensuous engagement that is important to form bonds, but also getting to know those sounds over time. Hearing something once may pique interest, but it will not form a strong bond.

Disengagement

Three participants, Lucas, Sophie and Isabella, stated that sometimes there is little sensuous engagement during interactions. This is often facilitated by putting headphones on and playing music/podcasts/ audiobooks which effectively “shut[s] everything out.” Unsurprisingly, Lucas

also stated that there was no change to his relationship with nature during the pandemic. Conversely, Isabella did say that there was a change to her relationship with nature over the pandemic. She states that while sometimes going on walks for exercise purposes and listening to music at the same time, she also tried to go for more “intentional” walks about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the time, about one to two times a week. These “intentional” walks consisted of “trying to increase [her] presence and awareness in the space that [she] was in, music wouldn’t be a part of that as much. Because [she] would want to be listening to sort of all the elements that were around [her], rather than listening to whatever the song of the week was.” While it seems obvious, one’s presence and resulting awareness of other beings leads to more frequent and more meaningful interactions. If the goal is to shut the world out, then that may well be the end result, and at the very least may close off possibilities. In general, participants who were involved in daily care or labor, or even just active attention, had more meaningful connection to those beings. This is possibly because they were able to make a choice to engage. The activity and its mode of engagement seems to be important for the type of presence and awareness of the space, as well as the intentions of the participants. If the intention is to be present or curious often participants recount more meaningful interactions.

Two other participants, Mia and Isaac, remarked on how what one is feeling bodily (hungry, thirsty, tired) can often disengage or disconnect them from the interactions or activity that they are partaking in. Mia stated: “Depending on how long of a hike it is or like where I am, sometimes I’m very, very aware of everything. And then you know, you continue for like an hour and a half, you’re kind of thirsty, kind of hungry, you hurt a little bit—I kind of disconnect, right.” When participants feel physical discomforts, their awareness shifts from what is happening around them to what is happening internally. Even if the goal is to be focused on something else, physical

sensations, most notably different types of discomfort, can be very distracting resulting in less frequent and meaningful interactions, and perhaps even negative experiences.

Participants were also asked whether they had any reservations about human-animal interactions especially considering Covid-19 and possible transmission to/from nonhuman animals. No participants expressed reservations related to Covid-19, although some of them did specify that they like to maintain their distance from animals to be respectful of their space. All participants were also quick to assign blame to humans for Covid-19, and to reassure me that they do not blame any of the nonhuman animals implicated by the media/stories in the spread of Covid-19. Monica argued that she,

think[s] it's interesting when we think of like what animals can do for us, and like how animals can endanger us. But like we destroy animals all the time, we destroy habitat, we destroy the lives of animals. So, like to say that you know a global pandemic was because of a bat is to be wholly inaccurate; like urbanization, huge cause, global trade networks, intensive animal agriculture, like these are all things that contributed that are human caused...

This sentiment was echoed by most of the participants with many participants citing animal agriculture and human encroachment/urbanization. Furthermore, participants seemed more wary of ticks and Lyme disease than they were of catching Covid-19 from other animals. Engagement or disengagement did not seem to be influenced directly by fear of the Covid-19 virus. Instead, it was participants intentions and attention that seemed to be the greatest factor in whether they engaged meaningfully with other-than-human beings. This perhaps demonstrates the futility of certain technical efforts to “govern spillover.” These efforts to learn and contain “dangerous intimacies” between humans and animals deserve scrutiny because they are often based “on the

fantasy that spillover from animals to humans can be contained, despite the porous nature of bodies and boundaries” (Lunstrum et al. 2021, 1510). This porous nature became evident to many during the pandemic, but still participants fear spreading the virus to/from non-human animals.

Place and Beings

[C]onnectivity is potentially empowering. It enables a becoming that calls us to take care of the places and people with whom we are connected. It offers an expanded concept of self, and thus an expanded concept of self-interest. (Deborah Bird Rose 2002, 322)

Participants were asked whether their relationship with/to the other-than-human beings they interacted with affected the way they felt about the places in which the interactions occurred. Similar to the way in which participants thought about time to connect them to place, participants also described the ways in which their connection to beings helped them form relationships with place, with Isaac going so far as to say: “how can you separate the place from the living beings? I think the place largely is the living beings.” This sentiment was echoed by other participants, with just over half indicating that they often cannot separate beings and place once interactions with both have occurred, their connection to one or the other (place or beings) opened them up for further connection, familiarity and thus potentially widening fields of care. This is echoed in a comment made by David, who started going to a park closer to his home during the pandemic to listen to birds in the morning. He had known about this park before the pandemic but had not taken the time to explore it. However, once he had interactions with birds at the park, it positively impacted the way he felt about it. He stated: “I love the park more than I used to like it, I guess. Like I absolutely like it now that I know there are spots that I can listen to birds more.” For many participants, the interaction, and the medium through which (i.e., the place) the interaction occur,

are inseparable. As such, getting to know and caring about beings often lead to getting to know and caring about place, and vice versa.

However, there can also be a negative impact to this connection/assumption between beings and places. Liam made an interesting observation that some other-than-human beings' presence is accepted in certain places and not in others. He used the example of seagulls at the beach, arguing that "you see seagulls everywhere but like you probably enjoy them most at the beach right. You know you probably have the most sort of like interesting interactions with them at the beach, even though they more than different places." The beach is also an 'expected' place to see seagulls. In this way perhaps the connection between beings and places continues the work of the nature-culture binary. What happens once we see animals in 'unexpected' places? Does the field of care that is established in a particular place extend to the same beings in new places?

Connection between place and beings was very apparent when participants discussed their homes. Tsing argues that by the late 19th century, as one of the consequences of European colonial expansion "the boundaries of the home became the expected boundaries of love," and that "within the family, other species can be accepted; pets are models for family devotion" (2012, 150). Half of the participants stated that the interactions that take place in their homes with pets, insects, or plants, affected the way they felt about their homes. Of these participants, six of them reported feeling that the beings with whom they interacted positively affected the feelings they had for their home, and if the being was not there then their home would feel as if something (or someone) was missing. Many participants stated that their pets "create the home environment" or that their pets "are their home." This indicates some kinship bonds between the human and nonhuman beings. Chloe stated about her dog and her backyard:

And so it's just kind of like seeing how she like just finds so much enjoyment in these really small things, and like in this really tiny backyard, I feel like it makes me love it more and makes me love – I'm going to speak specifically about my backyard and like walks in my neighborhood – it just makes me enjoy them so much more.

Olive mentioned that her relationship with her three family dogs and her houseplants changed the ways in which she looked at her home. She said that “it changed the way I observed the space. Once I started focusing on their needs, the family apartment transformed on a place of opportunities for these beings (where the plants would like to grow better, how the arrangement of some furniture didn't make room for more plants, etc.).” She noted that once she started focusing on the needs of these other beings, she started to observe the apartment as a place of opportunity for mutual flourishing.

Similarly, other participants reported that it makes them happy to think that they are sharing mutual space with the other beings, like insects, that they are aware of, this of course, falls outside of the regular family-pet dynamics. These participants indicated feelings of belonging that are similar to what is expressed by participants about their pets. David mentioned, “but when I paid more attention to the insects, again as I mentioned I felt okay there are more people living with me in this building. So, they are like my family, we're like those big family with lots of kids and people around.” However, his relationship to the insects was very different than the one he had with his cat. He admits he does not seek out interactions with these insects and would be happy not to see some of them. This relationship is not love, but more of an acceptance of the existence of others. Likewise, Lucas discussed his indifference to small moths he found in his pantry – he does not go out of his way to kill them, but he also would be fine if they disappeared. Scholar Lauren Berlant reminds us that love is not the only or even the most important aspect of

relationality, but that “the [aspects] involving proximity, solidarity, collegiality, friendship... and then the hatreds, aversions and not caring” (201, 687) are important too. Ambivalence or avoidance then are important sides of relatedness. Pretending to care for all beings in the same way, and to the same extent would be to create a “false veneer of equality” (Govindrajan 2018, 25).

Additionally, participants spoke about similar feelings, extending them to places outside of the home. ‘Home’ then becomes an extension to places that one feels they belong, i.e., places in which they are familiar and comfortable. James discussed how hearing the same birds when returning back to the same space and how

there’s just something about that, it makes you feel a little more...I don’t know if welcome to the space is the right word because I don’t think that’s true but like more one I guess with the area, less of an intruder and more of like, yeah I don’t—belong, belonging is not the word, but something to that affect.

From the relationships they formed with the beings who live in the forest trails and creek and stormwater management ponds near their houses, two participants, James and Noah, stated that these relationships affected the way they felt about the space. James remarked that

before like I learned those species and learned to know who was passing through versus who was like this was their home for the season...I viewed it more as like an exercise trail where you’d see a random thing and I—yeah the more I got to know them the more I realized this was like home for so many different species.

In this way, James went from viewing nature as something to be in, as a space where one can exercise to viewing it as part of a relation, as a space where beings in which they have entered into relation with live. A new kind of ‘home’ if you will; or, if the home is to be regarded as a ‘field of care,’ i.e., the phenomenological extension of self, perhaps it is simply the extension of the

boundaries of what one considers home. Noah voiced a similar sentiment when referring to stormwater management ponds:

But, now that I you know experienced these interactions, and what the space is actually used for by nonhuman beings, it definitely made me feel a lot better about them and *understand their importance that goes beyond what we perceive it as*, or what even the city perceives it as right. (emphasis added)

Through interacting with nonhuman others, these participants have realized that even though a place may be viewed as one thing for humans, other-than-human beings may use that space as well for entirely different reasons. This may cause a clash between competing conceptions of place. Noah stated further,

And that, like I said, this experience has had me change that perspective, truly understand and appreciate that these are ecosystems and homes for nonhuman beings, so that's what I would say changed about it. And now, I'll never look at them the same, and they're definitely more important to me.

In acknowledging that and how other-than-human beings share space, this perhaps helps to combat two things specifically, namely the exploitation of our environment, and speciesism understood as (white) human supremacy. Humans exploit the environment because they believe it is inherently theirs to exploit (i.e., that they have God-given "dominion over the earth") which is the main sentiment of speciesism. By acknowledging other beings home/use of space we also perhaps better see/understand that ours is not the only way/right way of using space. It could be easy to see certain animals as 'unwanted' in particular places, or to think of them as pests. But I think that by understanding nonhuman uses of space, it helps combat speciesism at least a little bit; to realize

spaces are used beyond human uses and are important beyond what humans believe it is important for is helpful in realizing that we are, in fact, *not* the pinnacle of evolution.

Similar to the ways in which participants discussed access to nature and greenspaces, place-based care brings up problems of “a consideration of power relationships—whose place is made better, whose worse, and what patterns can be discerned” (Plumwood 2008, n.p.). “Who” can be thought of as both human and other-than-human places. Only a few participants brought up and thought about the colonial project which allowed them to be where they are today, and the consequences of colonization on the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. Sophie described going out of her way to “[learn] about the people who came before [her], because [she] actually took the time go research and understand who was there.” Likewise, Sarah speaks about “making sure to like stop and acknowledge the Mi’kmaw influence on this land [what settlers now call Nova Scotia].” Although, neither of these participants specifically referenced the land dispossession and genocide that Indigenous nations have been and are undergoing in order for them to be standing there. A few participants also discussed local development and its impact on other-than-human beings in the area, relaying their care for both their special place and their worry and care for the other-than-human beings who share it. For example, James shared that “when a new housing development finished [he] remember[s] being pretty disappointed and like a little worried about what would happen to the animals there, right, because they have these backyards now right up against where the ground starts to decline.”

Additionally, Val Plumwood (2008) argues that in place-based ethics and care considerations, people often forget about the “dematerialised,” “shadow places” that sustain them. However, the pandemic also seemed to bring these shadow places into stark relief through the disruption of supply lines caused by worker shortages and other problems related to the pandemic.

Plumwood argues that “a critical sense of place based on knowledge and care for multiple places could be the form of place consciousness most appropriate to contemporary planetary ecological consciousness” (2008, n.p.). I believe this critical sense of place was beginning to be achieved due to the conditions surrounding the pandemic and will hopefully continue into the future. Plumwood asks us to consider further, “think what it would mean to acknowledge and honour all the places that support you, at all levels of reconceptualization, from spiritual to economic, and to honour not just this more fully-conceived ‘own place’ but the places of others too” (2008, n.p.). This similar sentiment is shared by participants who care for migratory species – they want them to have homes both in the participant’s ‘special place’ and in the faraway places that support the beings, a different kind of ‘shadow place.’ Perhaps this even ties into participants acknowledgement of ‘own place’ being a place for nonhuman others as well. In addition to extending care to multiple places, including ‘shadow places,’ perhaps a critical sense of place should also extend care to others who are sustained by the same place.

Pandemic Mode of Living

To inhabit a pause involves a sense of being in the middle of things, at a turning point, in a moment (or series of moments) of uncertainty...between past and future. (Searle et al. 2021, 71)

Participants were asked if the interactions they described during the pandemic were new, as well as what they learned about the other-than-human beings if the interactions were new, or if and how their relationships to the other beings changed if they had interacted with them before. Many participants discussed new interactions and ways in which their relationships changed, while also discussing how the pandemic brought about a new way of living that was obviously different from our previous normal. Isaac said, “So, I don’t know when I would say it ended, like that mode of

me living like it's the pandemic, but I still kind of am because we are on zoom right now." Many participants remarked that before the pandemic the pace of their lives was very different to what it was during lockdowns, describing their lives as "fast-paced" and daily routines as "mechanized," often feeling like there was information overload. However, the conditions around the pandemic, namely lockdowns, social distancing, and remote work/learning, caused the pace of participant's lives to slow down. Isaac described this as a "generalized slowness." He stated, "capital had to stop for a little bit there, or at least slow down, and I think that in the slow down you sort of, you come to notice things more, and come to live better in a certain way." With less social events and commuting, participants found that time they would have spent on other things was suddenly free. For example, many participants stated that interactions during the pandemic, especially with pets, were not necessarily new but instead more frequent due to the amount of time spent together. Furthermore, for participants who were having new interactions during the pandemic, many of them explained that they were able to experience these things due to an increase in the amount of free time they had to do them.

Additionally, with students working/commuting less due to the restrictions of the pandemic, some participants found that less social stimulation but increased free time allowed them to notice things that would not necessarily have caught their attention before the pandemic. For example, Charlotte had a new routine for the first few weeks at the height of the pandemic stay-at-home orders, where she would sit outside in her backyard with her morning coffee and watch the birds who would come every morning. Through this routine she developed a relationship with two mourning doves who came to her backyard. This routine was only possible because of the pandemic. She stated: "The sitting out in the backyard with coffee in the morning was completely new thing. Cause normally I would go to work, or I would be out doing something so

I wouldn't really be taking time to like sit in the backyard." A faster-paced life means that beings that would not immediately draw notice or attention are just that—unnoticed. Whereas pandemic lockdowns forced a slower pace, resulting in participants' wandering attention to fill time. Furthermore, with the anxiety caused by the pandemic, many participants reported that they retreated to focusing more on their surroundings as a coping technique, or as a distraction. On this, Charlotte said "I became very intent on watching the birds out there. Especially at the first two or three weeks of the pandemic because everything felt so strange, so it was nice to kind of focus on something that wasn't really affected by the pandemic." When the world paused humans needed other distractions; and the feelings of isolation and loneliness brought about by the pandemic may have been a motivating factor in opening oneself up for connection to other-than-human beings. These types of interactions occurred across participants, with many discussing increased presence and attention, and as a result increased 'noticing' of other-than-human beings.

Those participants who did experience new interactions were often still local. Participants found themselves with more time, but with movement restrictions – this resulted in many exploring the places close to home. David and Noah, mentioned exploring the parks close to their homes and developing relationships with the beings there, where before the pandemic they would travel farther to go "experience nature." These two participants mentioned how the pandemic influenced their interactions due to the increased amounts of free time they had, both in terms of things like working from home and in terms of feeling like there was less happening in their lives. For example, Noah stated that: "Whereas, like I said at the pandemic, during the stay-at-home orders I was more restricted to my neighborhood and that's kind of why I explored these spaces, stormwater management pond, specifically." Noah was able to develop a relationship to the stormwater management ponds and the other-than-human beings who lived there, an area near his home that

he had never taken the time to explore before because of the conditions of the pandemic. He states that before the pandemic he just thought of it as a city pond and he had “never thought much of them.” But once he began exploring (and therefore ‘getting to know’ the pond) he “realized like kind of how beautiful they are, they are kind of like an ecosystem themselves.” Similarly, Emma remarked that: “And especially like with the pandemic there was so much less going on in our lives in terms of like social distractions and stuff like that, so I think it made it easier for us to notice, or for me to notice, like the stuff that was going on around me.” This slowing of pace, much like having more free time, allowed for this participant’s awareness to go beyond what she normally may have noticed or thought about. In doing so, she was able to notice more other-than-human beings and perhaps to have more of an emotional connection than she would have otherwise had.

About half of the participants who had had interactions before and during the pandemic remarked on how the pandemic caused them to often spend more time and do more activities with the other-than-human beings in question. From this increased time spent together, participants stated that their relationships or connections with these beings became “better” or “stronger.” Noah, who had walked the same trails before and during the pandemic, started to spend more time there. On this he stated: “And I became more familiar [with the trails] and as I became more familiar, again I became more curious and I kind of just gained momentum, and I kind of just... and you know if I wanted, if I had more time on my hands okay let’s see if there’s more trails I can see right?” Noah had more time to explore the stormwater management ponds near his home; however, it was also the fact that he returned to the ponds again and again that his relationship was able to grow. Emma remarked on how the pandemic was the first time she was not working multiple jobs and so she was able to be in her own neighborhood a lot more. She spoke about

noticing the local hawks and woodpeckers more, and about these interactions as spiritual, stating: “in the sense of feeling connected... [and] of being present as well, like when you’re noticing different species and you’re having these interactions.” Therefore, it is not just the amount of time one has in a place that is important for relationships to flourish but also the frequency with which one interacts with those beings/places.

Participants were also asked if they sought out interactions intentionally and continually, i.e., what the frequency of their interactions were and if these interactions were specifically sought out. Isaac stated that he did intentionally go to specific places because of the interactions he had there and hoped to continue to have interactions there. He said:

The longer you are in a place, the deeper relationship you can form to it and the more you can come to know it, I think. And the more stuff occurs; I’ve seen some wild things that you wouldn’t necessarily see if you go there just one day, you have to kind of be there over a long period of time.

Similarly, two participants describe continually seeking out interactions with the same other-than-human beings, as part of their friendship with these beings. Isaac stated: “And it’s kind of cool, to see the heron one time, okay you see it one time, but to see it every single day catching fish, it sort of like you come to know the heron. You’re like ‘oh hey, there’s my heron friend over there.’” Emma said about visiting the same tree: “...you know, it’s like visiting an old pal. Yeah, like saying hi to each other.” These descriptions of seeing their other-than-human friends reveals the deep relationship between participants and the other beings that only comes with familiarity.

Additionally, James and Olive also described how these intentional and prolonged interactions changed their relationships with the other-than-human beings with whom they were interacting. James explained how his relationship with the birds he sees has changed over time,

and how “getting to know more about them and their sort of daily lives and stuff like that made me appreciate them more, and the space that they call home.” This appreciation and care also caused him to

[grow] more concerned about what’s going on elsewhere in our environment, definitely.

Because like if there was no, migratory bird species are declining, and a huge reason is habitat loss. And so, like getting to know them a bit better, I appreciate sort of the direness of it, and I don’t want them to not have homes. And be able to pass through so I can see them and stuff like that.

Meeting and getting to know each other is the first step in any relationship and takes time and effort. Once James got to know more about the other-than-human beings, their wants and their needs, what is important to them became important to him as well. Caring about beings means caring about the things that affect them for better or worse. This sentiment, of getting to know and then expanding fields of care, was echoed across participant interviews.

Olive described interactions that she had with her three family dogs that she had started interacting with again once she moved back home at the beginning of the pandemic. She explained how she began to see and understand her dogs as individuals with their own wants and needs. She describes the change in her relationships:

at the beginning it was more like you know me looking at them and saying oh look at how cute you are, you know, was more like emotional... but then I started paying attention more to how they engage with the environment and then how they engage with me, therefore their agency right.

She said that this realization “made me reflect on my way of interacting with them, like I learned to, from them, to be better with them, you know, by acknowledging their own individual needs

and their own individual strategies to get their needs satisfied.” Olive had known her dogs for years before she started paying attention to how her dogs engage with each other and their environment. She demonstrates the fluid nature of relationships and how they take constant effort and work – change does not happen in one day, but if the proper attention and care is there it can happen. Moreover, this also increased her field of care – she began to look at her other relationships with nonhuman beings and tried to better understand their needs. She reflected that “when something would not work at the beginning, I was really frustrated, I was like ugh, this is not that easy... But then I would ask myself am I putting enough hours, am I putting enough of my experience, am I giving it enough for them to respond.” Many participants also reported an increase in “awareness,” “presence,” and “appreciation” that helped improve their own relationships in the same way increased attention improved this participants relationship with her dogs, and then with more other-than-human beings.

Before the pandemic, as previously noted, participants stated that they often felt that they had to “go to” nature, or that the experiences that they had in ‘nature’ were only possible on vacations or far from their day-to-day lives. Why is this the case? Perhaps because when on vacation or on a break from their work/daily lives, people are able to slow down both mentally and physically and to take time for themselves since they don’t have to go into work or worry about day-to-day things. Although this speaks to the privilege of who gets to take a break in the first place, especially in non-pandemic circumstances. As Searle et al. state, “This anthropause multiplicity raises political and ethical questions about *who* and *what* has the ability to pause or be paused, according to what authority, and with what consequences” (2021, 71). David spoke about his cat and how they both needed to get used to being around each other 24/7. While the pandemic did seem to improve companion relationships it was still a shock for many pets and may even have

negatively impacted some pets who came to rely on their human companion and now have separation anxiety. Furthermore, in considering some of the other consequences of the ‘anthropause’ it is clear that only some humans were afforded the pause, and the resultant slowdown had negative effects on both humans and other-than-human beings. For example, many ‘agricultural animals’ such as chickens and cows had to be ‘culled’ due to the lower demand and slower processing times at meat plants. As Lunstrum et al. state despite the “unimaginable levels of animal suffering [...] these losses are measured in terms of profit, revenues and implications for human health” (2021, 1514). And this is not even mentioning the ways in which (mostly poor and BIPOC) humans in meat processing plants were continuously exposed to Covid-19 and unable to pause themselves. Thus, the pandemic, through movement restrictions, forced people to slow down since participants were not allowed to leave their homes or had no reason to do so. This freedom from what was normally a faster-paced life, allowed people to get to know their homes and the other-than-human beings who share space with them.

Changing Relationships

Participants were asked if their relationship to nature changed during the Covid-19 pandemic, many of whom stated yes, although what this meant for their relationships varied across participants. For example, Olive characterized the change as being “more aware of all the participants in the interactions right, not just myself being the observer of everything, but just like as simply a participant in all this, that it’s already exchanging and happening. Yeah, for sure that has changed.” Half of the participants characterized their changed relationship as a greater “appreciation” for and often “awareness” of nature. Six of these participants attribute the greater appreciation and awareness to the pandemic, or to the circumstances produced from the pandemic. David stated: “[The] pandemic helped me to appreciate nature wherever I am and showed me that

nature can be found anywhere, and animals are everywhere even inside your apartment.” Noah similarly explained that “I was always passionate about the environment and nature in itself and always wanting to learn more, but I would say through the pandemic not only have I depended more on nature, but I’ve learned how nonhuman beings depend on these natural areas as well, and that increased my appreciation for it 100%.” Mia stated that:

And not just like, I think a big thing for me is like looking at the nature in my own backyard, literally and figuratively. Instead of wanting to travel to tropical places or wanting to travel like ecotourism style stuff right, so finding importance in protecting what’s here as well, and that kind of stuff... So, yeah, I guess it has changed a little bit.

Becoming aware of and beginning to understand that other-than-human beings share local spaces with them was a large reason so many participants felt a greater appreciation for nature.

Participants also felt a stronger connection to nature once they understood that nature can be found close to home, and literally in their homes. This realization that many participants had demonstrates the real harm of the nature-society binary. Participants report feeling more positive emotions once they understand that they are part of nature. When participants feel connection to their greater surroundings, they feel more welcomed, happier and calmer. Some participants, like Mia and Liam felt it necessary to state that the changes to their relationship were what they characterize as not necessarily “revolutionized,” or that their relationship has changed a bit in some ways and in some ways not at all, such as Mia, who said that appreciating local nature was changing “a little bit.”

Although some participants made clear that the change in their relationships was not necessarily due to the pandemic itself, but more so the natural progression of their relationship. Isaac said that

I think my relationship to nature has got stronger, but I don't know if it's because of the pandemic. I think it's for a few reasons: I think one was working at the Brickworks; one was coming into this program; I also think just generally, like I think I've been on a steady trajectory in my life of moving in this direction, which I think would have occurred without the pandemic.

Interestingly, Isaac, Emma and David also noted how the pandemic allowed them to have more time for interactions, and to be in their neighborhoods, but they remained firm that this did not necessarily influence their relationships. Others, such as Chloe, Noah, Charlotte, Mia, and Olive, credited the pandemic specifically for their changed relationship, noting things like having more time for interactions/to explore and movement restrictions encouraging them to take advantage of local opportunities. Chloe stated: "Again, [the pandemic has] motivated [me] to seek local exploration of natural areas, and even to learn more about natural processes and how to further protect natural areas."

A few of the participants, including Lucas, Monica, and Howard, stated that there was no change to their relationship. Howard noted that he felt that his access to nature had been hindered through closures of provincial parks, and so on, and thus there was no change to his relationship. Lucas stated that nothing had changed, meaning that "I just don't do anything differently than I did before." But he then stated that

I think I may think about nature a little bit differently, just because of the MES degree and learning more about Indigenous perspectives and what could actually be considered nature, what not/isn't, and how just kind of my thought on that, my thoughts on parks and if parks are really nature and things like that. Just kind of... I guess it's evolving but my relationship with it, no I don't think so.

Similarly, David stated their relationship to nature has always been good, and that the pandemic did not really change anything. However, what is interesting is that he also states that the “pandemic was helping me to appreciate nature in a smaller context, like I didn’t need to spend time beside the big lake or somewhere far away from my place.” Therefore, does thinking about and appreciating nature differently than one did before, connote a change in relationship? What does it mean for a relationship to change? Are small shifts, incremental fluctuations in awareness part of a changing relationship? Is the first step to changing a relationship thinking about the other beings in the relationship differently? Is that not a change in itself?

Possibilities: Pasts and Futures

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it. (Arundhati Roy 2020, n.p.)

Aside from the ‘pandemic mode,’ that slowing down of fast paced lives brought about by more free time and less activity, participants also utilized the connecting ability of time, as it stretches from past to future, in order to form relationships to place. Roy’s idea of the pandemic as a portal was echoed by participants, whose pandemic experiences also seemed to bring past and future into focus, through reflections on the past conditions that had brought about the Covid-19 pandemic, and all the future possibilities for mutual flourishing (or demise) moving forward. However, unlike a slowing down or a pause, which implies a return to normal, a portal instead “embraces the political potential of disruption, transition, and affirmative world-building” (Searle et al. 2021, 74).

Additionally, some of the participants described trying to form a connection to place by imagining the past and futures for that place.

Conditions for a Pandemic

Many participants ruminated on the conditions in the past that have led to the current present – a global pandemic. Searle et al. also reflect on how government responses to the factors which led to the pandemic were not promising. The authors state, “emerging policy responses to the causal drivers of viral emergence and spread – be they deforestation, intensive agriculture, or factory farming – are decidedly underwhelming” (Searle et al. 2021, 75). This is also echoed by scholar Samantha King who states that “nothing close to the systemic reckoning” has occurred that would help check pandemic-causing conditions (2022, 302). Reflecting on how the Covid-19 pandemic came to be, participants spoke about the unsustainable Westernized animal agriculture and deforesting practices that lead us to this ‘unprecedented moment.’ Of course, this moment is unprecedented only for a certain few of the world, who have *not* “long struggled against threats to their status and future as humans,” (King 2022, 303) as many BIPOC have. Charlotte argued that

I do think that if we are you know deforesting things and stuff, we are probably coming into more contact with animals that have diseases that we haven’t been exposed too, but I don’t think that’s a reason to fear the animals. I think it’s more of a reason to fear deforestation and that kind of thinking.

This thought was echoed by many other participants, who also expressed sadness that so much of the world was not focused on addressing the cause of the pandemic, but band aid solutions like massacring minks who caught Covid-19. Olive stated:

And the whole thing about you knows the bats, and what I keep on [hearing], now I’m here, but what I keep [hearing] on the news, you know like they find like twenty animals, like

twenty hamsters that have Covid and kill them to prevent infections... It makes me sad because I feel like we are not really addressing the root cause of the pandemic.

Participants also remarked on things like how climate change is impacting the behaviour of animals and ice, and how this too might bring about future pandemics, and really how it is the movement of *humans* not bats, that is the true cause of the pandemic. Participants all made it very clear that to them, nonhuman animals are blameless. For example, Monica stated: “we destroy animals all the time, we destroy habitat, we destroy the lives of animals. So, like to say that you know a global pandemic was because of a bat is to be wholly inaccurate...” Liam stated: “with the pandemic it’s like the biggest sort of flash point in modern history of how that’s blowback against humanity, of what we’ve done to more-than-human environments and species and the way we treat them.” For participants, it is clear that the continual destruction of animal habitat and animal agriculture that has been going on for the past hundreds of years is the true cause of this pandemic.

Imagining the Past

Aside from reflecting on conditions that led to the pandemic, Chloe and Sophie also remarked on their imagination of the past, thinking about what a place might have looked like before their house stood there, and what and who wandered the land where major intersections are now crossed by cars, pedestrians, and the occasional coyote in order to try to connect to the land on which they live and the place it has become. On this Chloe said: “my house is so close to those conservation areas, it’s like I can imagine where there was a time that where my house was, like where this neighborhood was, was all like trees and a forest that was like cut down. And it wasn’t that long ago, like my house isn’t that old. I would say it’s like maybe 30 years old, so it’s not that, that long ago.” Noah, who is a student in urban planning, when thinking about the past realized the impact his decisions can have. He stated that he thinks differently about human-caused

environmental changes saying: “well definitely in a sense of being more sensitive towards nature and again just understanding that before all these buildings and all these highways and all this infrastructure, you know this was all forest.” Sophie, in conjunction with imagining the past, also discussed trying to learn and understand the history of the place she was in. Additionally, Sarah, a self-identified white settler participant, intentionally tried to hold space and acknowledge Mi’kmaw influence on the land in an “intentional way” during her walks in Nova Scotia, and in doing so, stated that she was trying to make space for an anti-colonial future. Noah explained how learning about the past through photos helped him to realize the falsity of the nature-society binary:

Like just looking at aerial photos of Toronto in like the 1900s, where I live it was all forest—not even the 1900s like the 1990s, the 2000s, like where I live right now was all forest. So just understanding that this is you know their home, and were living, not—it’s not just our space, like it’s, we share you know where we live with nature and nonhuman beings.

Learning and thinking about the past and future of a place brings many things into perspective: who used to be there, why they may not be anymore, and hopes for the future.

Possible Futures

Other participants spoke about the stories they heard about lower emissions or about animals coming closer/back to urban areas and how they found these things encouraging and hopeful for possible flourishing. James stated: “I mean maybe like in terms of opinion maybe realizing what’s possible maybe? If we like give other animals more space, you know [be] more considerate of them.” In connecting past and present, and realizing that the places where we live are shared spaces with other-than-human beings, people become more open to new ways of living and thinking. James stated further that “[these stories] maybe, maybe gave me more hope about

like a brighter future. Again, kind of, like what's, well yeah one if we slow down a bit, what's going to be possible." The pandemic turned the world on its head and in this upset new potentials for ways of living emerged and proved what was or may be possible.

Additionally, Liam spoke about the history of pandemics, and the trends people were seeing and talking about, such as people trying to flee urban areas to avoid the virus. He stated:

But the history of pandemics right, it's a very natural thing, people wanting to get outside of urban areas, and escape sort of the perceived sort of epicenters of the pandemic. And I think that's historically that's been a really longstanding pattern around the world, and so it didn't really like shock me, like people were like so offended but I think it actually really sort of predictable sort of reaction in some ways.

Interestingly, Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, written in the 14th century, is a collection of tales framed as being told by a group of young men and women fleeing the Black Plague from the city of Florence to the countryside where they passed the time by telling each other stories. The New York Times Magazine even referenced this shared past in their series called "The Decameron Project," a collection of short stories by various authors inspired by the contemporary pandemic moment. In comparing trends related to pandemics, what starts to emerge is an idea of what people prioritize during times of crisis. Emma similarly stated, "I feel like a lot of people have been asking themselves a lot more serious questions about the nature of leisure and what it means to spend one-third of your life or more than one-third of your life just at work. And how many hours you spend commuting and all these things. So, I think it more just raises these larger questions of time and priority." Through questioning priorities and learning about past, people become more open to connection and to what other ways of living and being may be possible for the future.

However, in thinking about who and what gets to pause or flee and with what consequences, it is important to think about those that get left behind and were not lucky enough to be able to consider questions of leisure. This of course brings up problems of privilege – who has the financial ability and means of transportation to be able to relocate outside of the city during a time when we were all under movement restrictions and many people were losing jobs. Additionally, aside from relocation, but accessing ‘nature’ outside of the cities is often expensive due to transportation, equipment and other costs. Participants discussed their access to greenspace, and how privileged many of them felt to have greenspaces so easily accessible to them during the pandemic. However, David commented that to get to the place he normally went to in order to experience nature he would have to take the Toronto Transit Commission (Toronto’s public transit system); but with the pandemic, he was afraid to take public transit due to increased risk of infection. Furthermore, many of the participants identified themselves as white, and thus may have felt more welcome, comfortable and safe in places of ‘nature’ than people of color do, and thus have greater access.⁷ Additionally, when parks were closed, access to greenspace was cut off for many people except for those privileged to have a front/backyard.

Lastly, especially considering pasts and futures, it is important to consider for whom this may not have been such an ‘unprecedented moment.’ As previously stated at the beginning of this section, “the Covid-19 crisis is historically unprecedented for groups of people who have long struggled against threats to their status and future as humans” (King 2022, 303). One of these groups is the multitude of Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, who have already “endured one or *many more* apocalypses—perhaps some of these apocalypses happened before European

⁷ For example, there was viral story about a confrontation between a Black man birdwatching and a white female walking her dog in Central Park, where the white female called the police claiming he ‘threatened her life.’ See: Sarah Nir, “How 2 Lives Collided in Central Park, Rattling the Nation,” *The New York Times*, June 14, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/14/nyregion/central-park-amy-cooper-christian-racism.html>.

colonialism” (Whyte 2018, 236). Thus, to speak of the moment as ‘unprecedented’ erases the struggle and horrors that many others have suffered and are even continuing to suffer under systems that those of us who consider this moment ‘unprecedented’ have flourished under. For this reason, “understanding how more-than-human worlds emerge with and through exploitation, care, and liberation – while centering power and history – is thus crucial to the development of a critical multispecies sensibility and to a vision of a more just pandemic future” (King 2022, 303). If the pandemic is a portal and not a pause, then there is no ‘return to normal,’ but instead a world-building disruption through which many futures are possible.

Implications for Environmental Place-Based Education

Slow Pedagogy of Place

While it did seem that familiar places were sites for multispecies interaction, in hindsight there were other factors besides the pandemic at work. The largest of which aside from the pandemic was the MES program which was mentioned throughout the course of the interviews by many participants. They brought up the MES program and some specific classes that they took that influenced the ways in which they thought about ‘nature.’ Two specific activities and classes that participants brought up were the indoor nature journal for Environmental Education and the land acknowledgement for Reshaping Research with Indigenous Peoples. Both assignments required students to actively pay attention and participate or engage with beings and things that often (intentionally) go unnoticed such as insects inside the home for the former, and contemporary Indigenous presence for the latter. These assignments, much like the pandemic, made students slow down and take notice of the beings around them, and how these beings made them feel. It should also be noted that the nature journal assignment was adapted for the pandemic – pre-pandemic students would normally have gone somewhere outside of their homes for this

assignment. However, pandemic students found that this assignment made them more critically question boundaries of inside/outside as well as what they consider ‘nature,’ and what is worth their attention in their homes.

This ‘slow pedagogy of place’ is what environmental educators Philip Payne and Brian Wattchow describe as an “ecopedagogy” that “allows us to pause or dwell in spaces for more than a fleeting moment and, therefore, encourages us to attach and receive meaning from that place” (2009, 16). Payne and Wattchow discuss how they developed a pedagogy that focuses on “re-engaging the active, perceiving, and sensuous corporeality of the body with other bodies... in making meaning in, about, and for the various environments and places in which [we] interact” (2009, 16). Therefore, this pedagogy was somewhat replicated by pandemic caused slow-downs in conjunction with taking MES classes; participants discussed the ways in which slowing-down caused them to notice more of their surroundings, and to engage with the. Furthermore, the authors argue that slow pedagogy “encourages meaning-makers to experientially and reflexively access and address their corporeality, intercorporeality, sensations and perceptions of time, space and... place” (Payne and Wattchow 2009, 30). Likewise, the pandemic brought about very similar encouragements that helped to enhance the replication of the ‘slow pedagogy of place.’ Attention to both one’s own body and to others’ bodies was brought to the forefront of many minds when outside their homes due to physical distancing. Moreover, as previously stated, participants were drawn to examine their perceptions of time, both in terms of being in ‘pandemic mode’ and in terms of thinking about past and future.

Critical Place-Based and Land Education

Furthermore, participants credit the MES program for teaching them non-western perspectives on nature and what the human-nature relationship could be, specifically referencing

the class Reshaping Research with Indigenous Peoples as well as unnamed others. Lucas stated: "...but I guess as somebody who grew up in the 20th and 21st centuries it's like, I mean how can we, I think often times the association of people touching nature is bad. Whereas, oftentimes from the Indigenous perspective it's kind of that nurturing, that caring..." As settler Canadians, learning that there are other ways to be in the world, other ways of relating and living, that one could arguably say our ancestors practiced if one traced oneself back to their origins, is a vital step in improving one's relationship to both other-than-human beings and with Indigenous peoples. Many environmental education scholars have criticized place-based education for its tendency to reproduce settler colonial and white supremacist narratives and excluding or appropriating Indigenous history or knowledge (Gruenewald 2003; Seawright 2014; Tuck et al. 2014). David Gruenewald offers the idea of a 'critical pedagogy of place' which aims to "identify, recover, and create material spaces and places that teach us how to live well in our total environments," and to "identify and change the ways of thinking that injure and exploit other people and places" (2003, 9). In this way, learning about one's place is coupled with learning about how one's place is implicated in colonialism and exploitation.

Conversely, Tuck et al. advocate for 'Land education' which "de-centers settlers and settler futurity as the primary referents for possibility. Land education seeks decolonization, not settler emplacement. Land education is accountable to an Indigenous futurity" (2014, 18). Unlike place-based education whose relations, aims, and goals are often transferable between places, Land education "draw[s] on long and vibrant trajectories of Indigenous practice and theory" wherein "among Indigenous peoples, relationships to land and place are diverse, specific, and un-generalizable" (Tuck et al. 2014, 8). It is not enough to just try to change harmful thinking, as place-based education works to do, but to try to learn and understand other ways of being and

thinking in the world. The authors also caution against “emplacement and replacement discourses” (Tuck et al. 2014, 16) that are often prevalent in place-based education. Land education then de-centers the settler and counters the hegemonic Eurocentric universalism that can sometimes be found within environmental education while focusing on Indigenous futurity.⁸

Conclusions

These topics are of concern to environmental educators, especially those concerned with the Anthropocene and the need for other-than-human stories. Environmental education scholar Affrica Taylor argues that “Anthropocene debates have prompted calls for a paradigm shift in thinking about what it means to be human, what we mean by the natural environment, and about our place and agency in the world” (2017, 1448-1449). Taylor claims that “most environmental pedagogies still pivot around resolutely humanist understandings of agency and position learners as potential environmental stewards,” where instead what is needed is a movement “beyond humanist stewardship frameworks and their implicit exceptionalist assumptions” (2017, 1449). The environmental education movement therefore calls for rethinking and restorying human-nonhuman relationships which means that stories that are told in/through multispecies scholarship can help to grow the field of environmental education.

Based on the answers given by MES student participants, who are active and willing contributors in environmental education broadly, there are both helpful/enriching experiences and gaps in education that can be filled. One of the most beneficial experiences recounted was the way in which the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns/movement restrictions forced a kind of slow pedagogy of place that occurred inside the home. Through this experience, participants were more

⁸ I am defining the word “futurity” as “more than the future, it is how human narratives and perceptions of the past, future, and present inform current practices and framings in a way that (over)determines what registers as the (possible) future” (Tuck et al. 2014, 16).

easily able to disregard the nature-culture binary, which was reflected in their answers (see for example Olive and David in *Place and Beings*). It seems that by limiting ‘nature experience’ to the outdoors, environmental educators are encouraging or at the very least implicitly demonstrating the nature-culture binary. Furthermore, active engagement from participants, whether it is physical, emotional, or sensuous, was also deemed an important factor by participants for supporting relations with other-than-human beings. Environmental educators should therefore try to organise activities that take place inside the home that encourage attentive engagement, as opposed to just the more classic nature journal or outdoor excursions which promote a more traditional stewardship-like attitude. Additionally, what has become evident from gaps in answers from MES students is that environmental educators and students must bring more attention to past and especially *contemporary* Indigenous presence to gain a more critical understanding of place, what the place may mean to different peoples, and to de-center settler futurity and focus on Indigenous futurity. However, educators must be careful not to relegate Indigenous presence to the past, nor to play into romanticised stereotypes when recounting history or speaking about Indigenous presences. In this way, environmental educators will better help students to think about what may be possible, and to understand that there are many ways of being in the world. The Covid-19 pandemic has therefore revealed what works to encourage positive relations with other-than-human beings and what gaps still need to be filled within environmental place-based education.

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Attending to Place in the Covid-19 Pandemic: An Autoethnography

Today, the world outside my window is grey. The hazy fog is courtesy of whatever has brought this warm December weather, cold air mixing with warm creating a soft grey blanket. I can hear the drops of water falling off the eavestrough outside of my window, as the snow on the roof melts.

Plop.

Plop.

Plop.

Plop.

Plop.

Droplets falling in steady succession, a lovely staccato rhythm. My partner and I have slacked off a bit preparing for this winter – water is definitely *not* supposed to be falling off the side of our eavestroughs. It is an unusually warm day for December; my phone's weather app tells me it is 8°C outside. This information was confirmed by the warmth of the air on my face when I let my dog, Naima, out this morning. She did her business and ran straight down to the lake, to investigate its new status as half-frozen-quickly-melting. Yesterday, she was able to go out on the solid ice, but she knew today was different. She sniffed along the water's edge, perhaps sensing the slow dissolution of ice, and the different feeling of today's water seeping up through the snow.

Yesterday felt like a typical day for winter in Ontario: bitter cold and snowy. This morning, on the other hand, I have awoken to an entirely new world. A world of H₂O in all its forms: frozen-but-melting ice and snow, dripping water, and a rising grey fog. It is interesting that colors are often closely associated with seasons and the worlds they bring, especially in the northern hemisphere's four-season climate: snow white and icy blue sky for winter, budding green and

brown mud for spring, lush greens and bright pinks, blues, purples for summer and a blazing fire of reds, oranges, yellows and eventually crumbling browns for fall. This grey world of water feels out of place, or perhaps out of time, with the cyclical colors of the seasons, with the cyclical smells and sounds. Today's world is punctuated by the steady dropping of water outside my window, the smells of the earth muffled by the blanket of snow on the ground. Not like the damp earth and bird-cries of spring, nor the sweet smell of flowers and buzzing insects of summer, nor the decaying leaves of fall. Today is winter-but-not-winter; the quiet-but-not-silent drip of water. A world of water not quite formed, still mutable. According to the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg peoples of the Great Lakes area of Turtle Island, not to mention in the creation story of my own people found in the Torah, this land on which I now reside was first a world of water. Maybe that is why this grey day feels out of time – or like it is reaching back toward the primordial state of the world.

When reflecting on the stories that are important to this place, located in Killworthy, Ontario just south of Gravenhurst, I first turn to the creation stories of the original people who inhabited this land, the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg. Anishinaabe writer and scholar Thomas King states, “you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told,”⁹ in his explanation on the importance and danger, the *power*, of stories. Creation stories especially are powerful. These stories often impart a specific order to the world and tell us about our place within it. This ordering is essential for determining the types of relationships that we have with the world. Therefore, one of the creation stories of Turtle Island, and often the Judeo-Christian Genesis, are also where other scholars start when thinking about the world and our relationships to it and to each other. King recounts creation stories for the lands

⁹ Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Inc., 2003), 10.

located in the Great Lakes area and compares them to the creation story of the Judeo-Christian tradition, Genesis. The stories of Skywoman, and Adam and Eve. Similarly, in their own works, Robin Wall Kimmerer and Daniel Coleman begin with the stories of the Woman Who Fell from The Sky, and the Fall of Adam and Eve. The stories of the original people of Turtle Island, and the colonizers who tried to erase them. These two stories are also where I will begin in considering what has shaped and what may shape my relationship to this place. One story, that of Adam and Eve, I had heard since I was small; the other story, I had not heard until I entered my Master's program – a similar, although probably rare, progression I think for some settler Canadians.

Skywoman's story begins with the world of the Sky People, curiosity and a long fall with a handful of seeds into a world of water, where she is caught by birds who lower her onto the back of a turtle. Working with water animals like loon, otter, beaver, and muskrat, each takes a turn diving into the deep waters to try to retrieve a clump of mud. Eventually, muskrat surfaces with a small fist full of muddy earth, and with the help of the other animals, Skywoman sings and dances the world into existence.¹⁰ The second story also begins with a formless world of water. The world began as a chaotic void that was formed by God into the sky, earth, and waters. God then created the plants, animals, and humankind, although the accounts (Genesis 1 and 2) conflict over who gets created first. Regardless, God gives dominion over the earth and all its inhabitants to the first man and woman. But the man and woman, named Adam and Eve, eat from the forbidden tree and so are cast out into the wilderness to sweat and toil for the rest of their, and their descendants, days.¹¹ Each of these stories teaches a way of being in the world: Skywoman's story is one of

¹⁰ This story is an approximation of the Anishinaabe version of the story of the Woman Who Fell from The Sky, that I have read in the works of Anishinaabe writers Robin Wall Kimmerer (*Braiding Sweetgrass*) and Thomas King (*The Truth About Stories*). Please take my summarized version with a grain of salt, as I have never heard the story told in person, nor in Anishinaabemowin (the Anishinaabe language).

¹¹ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 4th ed. NRSV, ed. Michael Coogan (New York: OUP, 2010) Gen. 1:1-3:24. All subsequent citations refer to this edition.

cooperation, of learning and working with other-than-human beings to bring about a world of mutual flourishing. Not only that, but the story is populated with beings whom the Anishinaabeg would encounter and interact with. Whereas Adam and Eve's story is one of control over other beings, where they have been kicked out of a heavenly paradise and are cursed to a life of labour on the earth. Moreover, this story, unlike that of Skywoman for the Anishinaabeg, is dis-placed. Those who hear the story do not identify the beings and places within it as themselves and their homes. Instead, it is an amorphous world that could be transferred anywhere,¹² apparent in the way the story has been interpreted. Two very different worldviews emerge from these stories, from these distinct worlds of water.

When considering the current ecological crisis, it is important to turn toward our creation stories to give us context. These stories tell us about what our relationships should be with the world. They give us instructions on how to live and conduct our lives. Since a large percentage of the world follows the instructions of the story of Genesis, of domination and toil, no wonder we have found ourselves in the current ecological crisis. Adam and Eve were cursed to live here, and many believers in the story see the earth as a pit stop to a heavenly paradise. As Kimmerer notes, the result is one where the descendants of Adam and Eve, "don't have both feet on the shore. One is still on the boat."¹³ If you believe that your people have been given dominion over the earth, and that there is a better paradise awaiting you, then you will care less about how your actions harm the earth and the other beings on it: this is the worldview of many Western societies. While creation stories give us context and instructions, but they are not the only stories at play.

¹² Deborah Bird Rose, "Dialogue with Place: Toward an Ecological Body," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 32, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 319-321.

¹³ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 207.

Let me add in a third story, told by Western philosophy and science. This story is an amalgamation of stories and theories such as biologist Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution, philosopher Georg Hegel's Philosophy of History, even chemist Paul Crutzen's Anthropocene. Darwin's evolutionary theory has been bastardized in popular culture to 'survival of the fittest,' in its crudest sense. Where corporations and the people who run them seem to truly believe that the exploitation of all the other beings on the earth, including the earth itself, is justified through this perverse idea of evolution. Likewise, Hegel argued that history is rational and teleological in its progression, and that it is through human action that the rational progress of history unfolds. Therefore, what he calls the "slaughter bench of history," can be considered good insofar as those actions drove the progress of history forward.¹⁴ These ideas of the rational progression of evolution, and of the history of the world, can be seen reflected in the way Crutzen describes the new epoch he calls the Anthropocene.¹⁵ In his article describing this new age-of-man (sic), he quotes geologist V. I. Vernadsky who states, "the direction in which the processes of evolution must proceed, namely towards increasing consciousness and thought, and forms having greater and greater influence on their surroundings."¹⁶ In this story, the history of the world, or its evolution, is seen as rationally progressing toward a teleological end, which works to justify historical and ongoing colonialism and exploitation by white humans. Consequently, most other beings, both human and not, are seen as less-than, more easily exploitable, and more easily killable by virtue of being 'evolutionarily weaker.' Moreover, by describing actions and history as

¹⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. Leo Rauch (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1988), 35.

¹⁵ There are other critiques of Crutzen's Anthropocene outside the scope of this paper. See for example: Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg (2014), Donna Haraway (2016), Heather Davis and Zoe Todd (2017).

¹⁶ Paul Crutzen, "Geology of Mankind," *Nature* 415 (2002): 23.

teleological progress, his story adds an element of inevitability to the ecological crisis, that also works to exclude other ways of being-in-the-world.

If we, those of us whose western education and cultural inheritance are the stories of Adam and Eve, Hegel, and Darwinian logics, understand our creation story as one of domination and understand the progression of the world as amounting to the inevitable ‘survival of the fittest,’ it is no wonder that today’s humans feel free to rip open the earth, poison waters and exploit and kill each other and other-than-human beings. We do not believe that other beings are important – we do not see the relationships that connect us to each other, or how interconnected our lives are, nor do we see that there are other possibilities for ways of living. So what do those of us who have grown up with these other stories, who have never heard of Skywoman, or who are just discovering her, do? How do we combat this ecological crisis, these ecocidal logics? Let us return to a grey, watery day, to a place two hours north of what is now called Toronto. It is windier now and the water is falling faster,

Plink,

Plink,

Plink,

Plink,

Plink.

King asks, “do the stories we tell reflect the world as it truly is, or did we simply start off with the wrong story?”¹⁷ Maybe the world is about to be drowned in another flood (epic, biblical or otherwise), a new watery world. Reminding us that it is time to turn away from the story of Adam and Eve and toward Skywoman and others like her. Reminding us that there are other ways of

¹⁷ King, *The Truth About Stories*, 26.

living, of being-in-the-world. Skywoman was first rescued by birds and had to work with the other water animals to create a world for all of them to thrive in, contributing her seeds to muskrat's mud. She understands that humans and nonhumans must work together in our own capacities to care for each other. Kimmerer states that "images of Skywoman speak not just of where we come from, but also of how we can go forward."¹⁸ For the Anishinaabeg, and many other Indigenous nations, time is understood as cyclical instead of linear. Therefore, the stories of the past are also prophecies of the future, an alternative movement forward into the world.

Now is the time to imagine a new world. Daniel Coleman argues that "telling [a place's] stories is a way of reanimating the way we imagine place – this place, any place... What needs reanimating is our ability to see, to perceive what's already going on, to hear what's already being said."¹⁹ But imaging a new world is difficult, especially when we are entrenched in this one. Coleman maintains that "it's hard to care about abstractions, about something I haven't seen for myself, something far away and long ago or light years into the future."²⁰ How then, can we begin to imagine or reanimate this world anew? Perhaps by turning to what Coleman describes as "yardwork" or "the labour of attending."²¹ This labour of attending, of care, of listening, is hard work. But as Coleman notes "once I know about that one life intimately, I have a better chance of caring about others like it."²² This is similar to the work of Indian anthropologist Radhika Govindrajan who asks, "What does it mean to live a life that is knotted with other lives for better or worse?"²³ Comparably, anthropologist Anna Tsing, likens mushroom picking/foraging to a dance stating that "a dance forms a trajectory a kind of line. Mushroom foraging can be imagined

¹⁸ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 5.

¹⁹ Daniel Coleman, *Yardwork: A Biography of an Urban Place* (Hamilton: Wolsak & Wynn, 2017), 237.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 236.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²² *Ibid.*, 236.

²³ Radhika Govindrajan, *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 3.

as a set of looping, meandering lines through the forest.”²⁴ She contends that human and nonhuman lines intersect, and that mushroom foraging opens one up to awareness of others’ lines and life performances. How can we, the children of Adam and Eve, of Darwin and Hegel, come to see the ways in which our lives are knotted together with others? How can we open ourselves to other lines, knots, dances, and stories of life?

Let me return to this place, not what it could be, but what it is now. David Greenwood argues that “to really know a place is to understand how environment, culture, and politics have worked to shape it, and to appreciate that any particular place may have diverse and competing meaning for different groups of individuals.”²⁵ Creation stories and social imaginaries are huge and play a large part in the cultural and political practices that have and are continuing to shape this place, but there are also other stories and events which have made this place what it is today.

Settler Canadians have been greatly influenced by the colonizer stories of *terra nullius* and the ‘wilderness frontier.’ The European colonizers who arrived here believed strongly in the notion of *terra nullius* – that the land was empty of ‘humans,’ predicated on the assumption that anyone who was not a white, Christian European, i.e., that the Indigenous nations that were living on this land since time immemorial, were less-than-human, a notion that still persists today.²⁶ Likewise, the concept of a ‘wilderness frontier’ as pristine nature that exists for taming and enjoyment by settlers, necessitated the removal of Indigenous bodies to make way for an ‘uninhabited nature.’²⁷ These ideas are reinforced by the particular ways that settler Canadians currently conceptualize Ontario ‘cottage country,’ another name for this place where I live. For many people who come

²⁴ Anna Tsing, “Dancing the Mushroom Forest.” *PAN: Philosophy, Activism, Nature* 10 (2013): 16.

²⁵ Greenwood in Gardener Seawright, “Settler Traditions of Place: Making Explicit the Epistemological Legacy of White Supremacy and Settler Colonialism for Place-Based Education,” *Educational Studies* 50 (2014): 562.

²⁶ Seawright, “Settler Traditions of Place,” 559.

²⁷ William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (1996): 15-16.

here, cottage country is *terra nullius*, an unexplored wilderness just waiting to be experienced by tourists. This is what Seawright describes as “a violent remaking of place” that has imposed new social norms “with its own rules and regulations.”²⁸ When colonizers, and cottagers came, they threw Skywoman out the window and brought in the dominating, erasing logics of Adam and Eve.

The lake where I reside also flows into the Severn River, which is part of the Trent-Severn Waterway (TSW). The creation of the TSW was part of the “violent remaking of place” that Seawright describes. To build the TSW, land and lakes had to be flooded, creating deeper lakes in some areas and newer shallower lakes in others. This flooding disrupted the multispecies kinship relationships and governance practices of the Indigenous nations living here, including the Anishinaabeg and Huron-Wendat. The disruption of these kinship relations is just one of the many types of violence done to Indigenous peoples of this land. These peoples were removed from this land to make way for the ‘pristine wilderness’ that cottage country prizes.

These issues are coming to a head in cottage country a few hours downstream of here, north of what is now called Peterborough. An Anishinaabe man from Curve Lake First Nation, named James Whetung is currently trying to repair the kinship relationships and governance practices that were first disrupted with the colonization of the area and the creation of the TSW. He is planting the sacred plant known to the Anishinaabeg as *manoomin*, or wild rice, in the lakes around Curve Lake First Nation, which are also a part of the TSW. However, the cottagers in one of the lakes, called Pigeon Lake, are fighting with Whetung, because they claim that the *manoomin* plants are impeding their ability to engage in recreational activities on the lake.²⁹ The wilderness frontier and Indigenous bodies once again coming into conflict, and settlers are once again on the wrong side.

²⁸ Seawright, “Settler Traditions of Place,” 563.

²⁹ Paul Kemp, Kurt Spenrath, and Drew Hayden Taylor, *Cottagers and Indians* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2020), 45 min.

The current tensions on Pigeon Lake remind me that the process of reanimation is not a metaphor, and that the issues surrounding differences in worldview are real, with real consequences.

This place I live is shaped by violent histories and hopeful resurgences and repairing past wrongdoing. Understanding the histories, the *stories* that shape this place are vital to locating my own relationship here. Seawright argues “an effective place-based education not only reshapes abstract understandings of nature and land but provides a pathway for the tearing down and reconstruction of oppressive ontological relationships with the natural world.”³⁰ Learning about my/our/their histories helps work toward tearing down the white supremacy and settler colonial logics that have shaped this place.

Yardwork is a way to further work toward reshaping abstract understandings of nature to one that is individual. It means attending personally to the particularities of place, and cannot just involve learning stories or histories, but must be *lived* and *embodied*. What embodied relationships have emerged between me and where I live? Small ones. I do not mow the lawn in the spring to promote biodiversity and to let the pollinators thrive, nor in the fall so that the insects who also live here have a place to hunker down for the winter. Greater biodiversity means different food sources for birds and small animals; maybe it means that both hummingbirds and robins will visit us this summer. I know that in the summer someone – perhaps a mole or other type of rodent – digs tunnels underneath the path leading down from the lawn, the churned soil aerating the dirt path that squishes beneath my feet as I follow my dog around. Small expansions of awareness. Small acknowledgements of others living their lives. Small lived experiences. Caring about this place, means listening for the voices that often go unheard. Like Coleman reasoned, what truly needs reanimating is not the place itself, but the way we see, understand, and relate to it.³¹ Listening

³⁰ Seawright, “Settler Traditions of Place,” 569-570.

³¹ Coleman, *Yardwork*, 236.

to and learning about appropriate responses to the presence of the beings often ignored is one way to help reanimate our connection to place.

But how to be a good neighbor to these other-than-human beings? When taking wood inside from our wood pile this fall, as I was closing the door behind me, I saw a chipmunk pop up from between two logs and look around at the parts of his home I had taken. This summer, my dog found a snake hiding between two cinder blocks near our wood pile – we tried to gently pick it up with long sticks to move it away, as we knew that there are venomous Massasauga rattlesnakes in the area. Turns out it was a harmless hognose snake, although its hissing and flattened head and neck in imitation of a cobra was quite impressive. I am still learning how to be a good neighbor, how to recognize who someone is and what the appropriate response to their presence should be. In the spring I walked around the property with my partner to remove the invasive gypsy moth eggs and in the summer the mature caterpillars, who can defoliate a tree in a matter of days. This in turn, invites a question about what it means to be invasive. Who and what counts as invasive and what is the suitable reaction to their presence? Govindrajan reminds us, “mutuality and connection do not imply an erasure of difference of hierarchy.”³² Yardwork then, is also the work of attending to the differences and individualities of each being I encounter.

Questions of good-neighborship are complicated. How to be a good neighbor to both human and nonhuman beings and communities complicates it even more. The lake on which I live, is generally very shallow, however during the spring and fall when water levels are often high, the other cottagers on the lake become concerned for their shorelines. There are two main instances that seem to cause the cottagers’ distress: when recreational motorboats create large wakes on the lake, thus working to erode shorelines, and when the cottagers think that the beaver dam

³² Govindrajan, *Animal Intimacies*, 4.

downstream is halting the flow of water creating highwater levels. The solution: a watch your wake campaign, and the manual busting of beaver dams. Speaking to one of my neighbors about the latter, when my partner and I first learned about the practice and were asking his advice on how to get our other neighbors to stop, he said that he tries not to get involved because he wants to be a ‘good neighbor.’ This interaction has stayed with me, and made me consider who, exactly, I want to be a good neighbor to. Being a good neighbor to the trees that surround me means removing those invasive gypsy moths. Does being a good neighbor to the humans around me mean allowing them to remove those pesky beaver dams? Or does being a good neighbor to the local beavers mean rebuking those invasive cottagers? How should we balance the different, often competing, communities that we are a part of? Where does your ‘private property’ end when the shoreline seasonally moves up and down? It is the large wakes of boaters enjoying the lake recreationally that causes the true upheaval between cottagers, not the beavers biodiversity increasing abilities. But the cottagers want to be good neighbors – and so, instead of asking others to slow down and ‘decrease’ their enjoyment of the lake, instead they try to lower the water levels.

To the cottagers, the shoreline is not a shared space in itself but rather where the end of their ‘private property’ meets the shared space of lake. But beavers do not recognize the idea of ‘private property’ – just last week I found a tree that had been mostly chewed through by a beaver, and a few days later it was gone: the beaver if not seen, is felt. Anishinaabe scholar Madeline Whetung offers the concept of shoreline law as “embodied in our relationship to the shoreline through practices and in our relationships to one another, human and nonhuman. Shorelines bring to life relational politics because they form the liminal space between worlds (water and land).”³³ She details how colonial laws and the building of the TSW disrupted Anishinaabeg relationships

³³ Madeline Whetung, “(En)gendering Shoreline Law: Nishnaabeg Relational Politics Along the Trent Severn Waterway,” *Global Environmental Politics* 19, no. 3 (August 2019): 19.

and responsibilities, through the “bracketing out of relationships to land and water from one another in colonial law.”³⁴ This bracketing is echoed in the cottagers thinking; there is some invisible line that demarcates what is ‘theirs’ and what is ‘shared,’ and the field of care does not go much beyond what is ‘theirs.’ If cottagers instead thought of shorelines as a liminal shared space, they would approach conflict with beavers and high-water levels differently. Instead of trying to lower water levels by busting a beaver dam and in doing so only considering their own property, if cottagers considered *all* shorelines as shared spaces, then the wakes of motorboats would be much more heavily scrutinised as it affects not only cottage property shorelines but also nesting loons and other waterfowl around the lake. Cottagers would also instead consider planting trees and vegetation on their shoreline to help with erosion, filter runoff and increase lake biodiversity.³⁵

While I can’t necessarily choose my neighbors, I can choose my kin. My dog-kin, Naima, has been very helpful in expanding my awareness of other-than-human beings we encounter and even those that we don’t. Through watching and interacting with her, I am more aware of others. The twitch of her nose or ear often means that something or someone else’s presence is being noted. Through caring for her every day, through attending to her needs and seeing the way she attends to mine, I have learned to appreciate her as a Sovereign Being, as her own person with a personality and agency. In this way, I am working *with* Naima toward dismantling the settler colonial, Adam-and-Eve logics that have governed me and this place. Working toward recognizing my reciprocal relationship with the other beings who inhabit this place. Reanimating my relationship to this place necessitates interactions and learning with other-than-human beings.

³⁴ Whetung, “(En)gendering,” 19.

³⁵ “Natural Shoreline,” Love Your Lake, accessed July 14, 2022, <https://loveyourlake.ca/natural-shoreline/>.

There is silence outside my window. Today is a new day, bright and sunny – yesterday’s flood has ended with an olive branch and a dove, or maybe with a dance. Both new worlds required cooperation between humans and nonhuman beings, even if some of us have forgotten. It is time to remember these stories of cooperation and seek out, and *live* new ones. The current ecological crisis brought on by the descendants of Adam and Eve, and the cultures they have wrought, will not only affect us but everyone – descendants of Skywoman, of other nations, other peoples, other-than-human beings. It will require us to (re)learn how to live together, and to (re)tell more-than-human stories. As Donna Haraway argues: “it matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what knowledges know knowledges. It matters what relations relate relations. It matters what worlds world worlds. *It matters what stories tell stories.*”³⁶ We need to get rid of the stories that no longer serve us, a few of which I have recounted here, and instead turn our attention to the multispecies stories, the more-than-human stories. Let us, human and other-than-human, story and dance ourselves into a reanimated world together.

Coda: Waters and Worlds

Glug.

Glug.

Glug.

I submerge myself into the blue depths one arm raised to release the air from my buoyancy control device (BCD), watching my air bubbles slowly float up toward the sunny surface. I am no longer in my home by the lake, but an ocean, a world, away. Strapped into my life-giving air tank, 60 feet below the surface surrounded by colorful corals and even more colorful fish, I am in awe of what we have to lose. The metaphor of a world drowned in water, a new world taking shape, is

³⁶ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 35, emphasis added.

not really a metaphor at all in this age of climate change, where water is already a major player. While the corals in the ocean world I have come to love are bleaching and warming, as fresh water around the planet dries up, and salt waters rise, scientists and the world's elite are trying to find other worlds of water outside of those existing on this planet (and those Adam-and-Eve logics are with them). Hannah Arendt explains this phenomenon as a new way in which we orient ourselves in the modern world, or as she calls it, the new Archimedean point. She states that with the launching of Sputnik, the first artificial Earth satellite, "we moved the Archimedean point one step farther away from the earth to a point in the universe where neither earth nor sun are centers of a universal system. It means that we no longer feel bound even to the sun, that we move freely in the universe, choosing our point of reference wherever it may be convenient for a specific purpose."³⁷ The consequence of this new point of reference, is that we no longer see ourselves as earth-bound. And in this freedom of movement, we lose our connection to this place, this earth that sustains us. Maintaining the connections to the places that sustain us, both our home places and the 'shadow-places'³⁸ will be essential for our path forward on this planet. Therefore, it is important now more than ever for us to undertake yardwork, the embodied care and labor of attending to the places and beings that will help us remain earth-bound. And we must necessarily ask ourselves what the consequences for so many on this wonderful watery world will be if we do not.

³⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 263.

³⁸ Val Plumwood, "Shadow-Places and the Politics of Dwelling," *Australian Humanities Review* 44 (March 2008), <http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2008/03/01/shadow-places-and-the-politics-of-dwelling/>.

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