

Towards an Entangled Education, An Ethos of Care and Kinship
A Manifesto

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Abstract

My research is focused on de-centering the human in how we educate, and I believe it can allow for new possibilities of what a livable future will look like. Through my research I intend to explore alternatives to Neoliberal models for education, our Western educational model is informed by humanism and promotes the notion that the human is superior to all other things on the planet, this idea underscores the way in which our lived reality functions. This superiority complex has led to Neoliberalism and Capitalism, I propose that Capitalism and Neoliberalism permeate Western society; and is embedded within our educational system, these values and ideals are taught to children at a young age. This system needs an overhaul and urgently, I intend to explore ways in which to de-center the human from education. The boundaries of what we consider human are in fact not what they seem to be, what makes us human is the way in which relationships manifest and entangle our corporeal forms, relationships with power, with the environment, and with each other, thus if we can change our understanding of how these relationships are embodied, we can change what constitutes the human. This can only be achieved through a deconstruction of how we perceive our place in the world. I believe by challenging how Neoliberalism and Capitalisms impacts our educational system is one way to achieve this deconstruction.

Forward

I approach my research with an interdisciplinary perspective that considers the following theoretical frameworks: Eco-feminism, Ecology, Marxism, Anarchism, Eco-criticism, Critical Pedagogy, and attempts to de-center the human. I have devoted my master's degree to exploring the ways in which de-centering the human can impact environmental education and how it can be integrated into dominant educational systems. This portfolio then serves to highlight both theory, and artistic practice. It also serves to suggest how environmental education, can be changed to face the oncoming threats of the accelerated climate crisis of our time. Ultimately, this portfolio should contribute to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to reevaluate our place on this planet. We must challenge how we engage with the world and is a necessary step to successfully surviving the damage of the Capitalocene/Anthropocene, fossil fuel consumption, war, and techno-Capitalism. The MES program and its inter-disciplinary nature provided me with the ability to develop, explore and engage with the ideas found within this portfolio.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
WHAT IS NEOLIBERALISM? NEOLIBERALISM IS A MUTANT.	15
THE CONCEPTION OF THE CHILD	26
AN EDUCATION OF KINSHIP IS STILL POSSIBLE.	30
EXPRESSIONS OF KINSHIP	39
WHAT IS TO BE DONE?	44
CONCLUSION: TOWARDS KINSHIP AND CARE	50
WORKS CITED	54
APPENDIX	58
APPENDIX 1: ZINE- THE ANTHROPOCENE AND REIMAGING PLACE	58
APPENDIX 2: COMIC- FOSSIL FUELS US (<i>WE ARE JUST COMPOST</i>)	63
APPENDIX 3: WHAT IS WATER? LESSON PLAN/WORKSHOP	67

“We stare at the chaotic intricacy of matter, of events, of flows, and seek for a possibility of order, a possible organization of chaotic material. We extract fragments from the magma then try to combine them, in an attempt to reverse entropy: intelligent life is this process of local, provisional reversal of entropy...”

Possible is that which is not impossible. Possible is that which is not necessarily going to exist, and simultaneously is not necessarily going to be non-existing....

If we want to know more, we have to understand what is happening in the empty space of non-impossibility and non-necessity. Let’s look at the evolution of a living organism. The field of possibility of the organism is included in its genetic code, but the code is not the history of the future. It rather opens a range of evolutions, and in this range many different pathways can be taken.¹

- Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi, *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and The Horizon of Possibility*

Introduction

Education is always political. The question is, what politics do we wish to teach? Do we wish to teach a politics that promotes individualism, consumption, and oppression? An education that is the direct result of the narrow doctrine of humanism - and by extension neoliberalism and capitalism? Or do we wish to teach an education that attends to the multiplicity of our lived realities, the interconnectedness of all living and non-living things (see *Appendix 1: Zine - The Anthropocene and Reimagining Place*)? An education of hope, of care, and kindness, an education that foregrounds contamination of both the good and the bad? How would an education that foregrounds our relationships with each other and the planet look and be achieved? That is what I hope to explore with this paper.

To engage in an education of care and kinship is to commit to an education that prioritizes unity, democracy, freedom, care, respect, and understanding. It is to foreground

¹ Franco Berardi, *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility*, Paperback edition (London New York: Verso, 2019). 3-4

imagination of what could be, of a different and more just education. This can be achieved by attending to “otherness”, why “otherness” exists, what underlying perspectives inform “otherness,” and why we need “otherness” (if we even need it at all; I will argue that otherness is a false dichotomy). The goal of this manifesto is to propose ways in which an understanding of entanglement and kinship can be integrated into our educational system and daily lives. To liberate ourselves from neoliberalism and the capitalist world order we must de-center humanism from our lived realities. I believe this must be achieved through “de-neoliberalizing” our educational models. This manifesto demands that we attend to the entanglement of existence, to explore and challenge what is considered the “status quo.” The ways in which we live under capitalism are wrong. This is not how we should exist on the planet, despite what we have been taught and internalized. I do not have an illusion of grandeur that I can shatter the way in which our world functions. However, I do believe there are other ways to do things, other ways for us to exist, and the purpose of my work is to show another way. An education of hope and care is possible – we just need to take the risk. My paper is motivated by a love of all things that inhabit our world, and a hope for a just future.

To begin, I must foreground my positionality. I am a white cisgender male who is queer and semi-disabled (I use the term “semi-disabled” because most of the time I can get by, but sometimes I cannot). What does this all mean? Some would say it means nothing, while others would say that it is extremely important. I do not consider myself to be a product of rationality, nor a product of masculinity for that matter. What are these classifications but abstract diffractions that have been willed into existence to justify conquest, separation, “progress,” and protection from the cosmic nothingness? To be a “man” comes with a suite of preconceived notions about how I **ought** to engage with the world and how the rest of the world **ought** to

engage with me. I intend to trouble these categories and move beyond them. **HuMANism** is wrapped up in arbitrary categories that have very real consequences for the material world. The possibility of a better world lies in our efforts to end systemic othering.

This manifesto serves as a call to embrace vulnerability, love, and the precarity that comes with being human in a world where humanity has unsuccessfully strived to segregate itself from the more-than-human. I believe the time has come for humanity to embrace the chaos of this entangled world (see *Appendix 1: Zine - The Anthropocene and Reimagining Place*). We cannot control this chaos no matter how hard we try. Once humanity collectively understands that we are tied to a world of disorder, we can then move towards something better. Chaos entails the destruction of power hierarches and the notion that Man (a category reserved to a certain privileged individuals) is an independent being from all else. I call for chaos in the face of false order inscribed by “Western Enlightenment Humanism” and urge us toward the kinship and care that define the super-connectivity of the 21st century human.

Western Enlightenment humanism is not a single idea or unified discipline but a multi-faceted branching series of events and ideas. What began during the Enlightenment and led to the rise of humanism was a rediscovery of lost and forgotten texts and artifacts from the Hellenistic era of the Greco-Roman civilization. These documents and artifacts served as a guide to move beyond the crude and “barbaric” Middle Ages by revitalizing the values of human potential and “Man’s” creative agency and self-actualization, popular philosophies from Classical Antiquity. A major tenant of Enlightenment humanism can be attributed to the ideas proposed by the Ancient Roman scholar, statesman, academic, and lawyer, Cicero, and his notion that it is Man’s nature to shape the world and to define himself in distinction from the rest of the universe.²

² Cooper, David E. *The Measure of Things: Humanism, Humility and Mystery*. Oxford University Press, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199235988.001.0001>.(34-38)

Humanism can be perceived as a means to supplant God's omniscience with the power of humanity, an effort to govern reality according to the "kingdom of man." Acknowledging that God was not all knowing or in control also served to challenge the power of monarchs and their presumably divine status within the Western Christian tradition. The argument could be made that without humanism, the Western world might still be at the whims of monarchs as opposed to the bourgeoisie.

The principles of humanism have arguably informed the development of modern Western democracy, with the French Revolution and the American Declaration of Independence serving as popular examples of how the values of humanism have informed liberal politics. These values define the world as something that can be understood and controlled, regardless of political status or social standing. Through teaching and learning, existential answers can be teased out of the void through reason. Humanism vouches for a world that can be solved and pieced together.³

I will not be the first to challenge humanism, nor will I be the last. In fact, the Romantics challenged the humanistic notion that existential truths can be objectively determined according to a universal standard. A common facet of Romanticism was the idea that reality lacks structure, is vast and unknowable, and that the universe is in a constant state of self-creation. Humanity may marvel at the world but will never fully understand it. These values fly in the face of Enlightenment rationality and the notion that the world represents a metaphorical jigsaw puzzle to be solved. The Romantics would argue that we will never solve the jigsaw, nor is it our place to do so – only God can see the whole puzzle.⁴ Away from the dirty, dim, industrial streets of urbanity, the Romantics would marvel at *the sublime* aesthetic of the natural world. *The sublime*

³ Berlin, Isaiah, and Henry Hardy. *The Roots of Romanticism*. 2nd ed. A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013. 38-39

⁴Ibid., 111

represented the incalculable godliness of the natural environment; an idea that rose to prominence among the bourgeoisie during the Industrial Revolution as way to escape the conditions of urban environments⁵. If humanism can be seen as a fetishization of rationality and antiquity then Romanticism can be seen as a fetishization of the wilderness, the primitive, and the world outside and away from “the corruption of society” and industrialization.

Humanism has failed -- its egalitarian dreams were false promises from the start. The evidence that Western Enlightenment liberal humanism and democracy have failed surrounds us in all aspects of our daily inter-actions. But what then is the problem with humanism? Before I can engage further with this question, I must reach further back in Western history to the ontological ideas of the Middle Ages, particularly the Christian notion of The Great Chain of Being. The Great Chain of Being (*scala natura*) (nature’s ladder) is an idea originally put forward by Aristotle that ranks all life on the planet in an order from the most important/perfect being to the least important/imperfect being. This ranking system positions God at the top, followed by demi-gods/angels, and then continues to descend to humans, animals, plant life, and lastly minerals.⁶ Under the ontological argument of The Great Chain of Being humanity is ranked closer to God than all other worldly beings. Within each subcategory of The Great Chain there are also internal hierarchies. Within human category alone are divisions based on social rank, for example the feudal systems and different races. The animal and plant categories are divided based on their usefulness to humans, while minerals and elements occupy the lowest rank. The Great Chain of Being represents the foundations of humanism, and particularly highlights the humanistic value for Mankind to “rank-up” or supplant God, through

⁵ Cronon, William. ‘The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature’. *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (January 1996): <https://doi.org/10.2307/3985059>.

⁶ Luis A Vivanco, ‘Great Chain of Being’, in *A Dictionary of Cultural Anthropology: Over 400 Entries*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780191836688.001.0001>.

will and rational thinking. Humanism can therefore be defined as freedom from the shackles of God.

Western Enlightenment humanism has imbued humanity with a false sense of significance and has historically favoured certain humans (Western White Men) over others. The way our education system and much of our world has developed (or has been forced to develop) is based on the idea that “man is made to be the measure of all things” as proposed by Protagoras.⁷ This idea implies that the behaviour of a Western White Rational Man is inherently more valuable than actions committed by those that do not fall into this category. This of course results in a hierarchical structure used to justify the logic of any action, which has implicitly resulted in global capitalism, the Anthropocene, racism, sexism, and speciesism.⁸

With this manifesto I will demonstrate how Western Enlightenment humanism has led to the rise of neoliberalism, and I will further express that another way of being in the world is possible – if we seize the opportunity. Once we begin to unravel these power hierarchies it becomes apparent that every being has agency. Through that acknowledgment we can begin to move towards a livable future.

To support this claim, I will draw on the work of Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi’s *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility* (2017). In Chapter 2, he sets out to challenge Western Enlightenment humanism in direct relation to misogyny. Berardi argues that humanism can be seen as a promethean approach to how Man engages with the world. Humanism seeks to supplant God through technology and artifice, a technological theocracy, where Man’s rank on the Great Chain of Being becomes elevated to a godlike status. Western

⁷ Nathan Snaza and John A Weaver, ‘Introduction’, in *Posthumanism and Educational Research*, 2016, (2).

⁸ Ibid.

Enlightenment humanism expresses that it is the duty of Man to order his kingdom according to categories of use⁹.

To further underscore the humanistic value of becoming God/replacing God among Enlightenment thinkers I will draw on the work of Joanna Zyliniska and her manifesto, *The End of Man: A Feminist Counterapocalypse* (2018). Zyliniska critiques ideas emerging from the “tech world” which have been put forward by Silicon Valley capitalists, in particular the popular techno capitalist concept of *Homo Deus*. *Homo Deus* is a perfect example of Man as a God. Under this framework *Homo Sapiens*/ *Homo Economicus* is no longer a valid state of existence on the planet. Man needs to move beyond his limits because he cannot face the Anthropocene and its associated social, economic, and environmental problems. The “tech world” aims to provide solutions to these problems, but rather than challenge the inherent limitations of this Promethean perspective, the “tech world” sees that solutions can only be achieved through techno-capitalism. Under this perspective it is only a matter of time before the world bends to Man’s will. Zyliniska describes *Homo Deus* as Project Man 2.0, a rebranded human of the tech era, “Project Man 2.0 entails a secular mobilization of religious imagery with singular Man now rebranded as *Homo Deus*, the God species... [A]ny solution to the planet’s problems lie in the conscious planetary management on the part of humans...”¹⁰ This push for *Homo Deus* relies on Man “hacking the planet” so that it serves Man’s will. Re-shaping reality as He sees fit, Man’s dominion of ideology, of knowledge production, of flows of capital is no longer enough, Man must literally re-shape the physicality of the world. She further articulates, “This is the story of creation as rewritten by venture capitalists, asserting unchallenged dominion over all living

⁹ Berardi, *Futurability* 57-59

¹⁰ Joanna Zyliniska, *The End of Man: A Feminist Counterapocalypse*, Forerunners: Ideas First (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

things.”¹¹ *Homo Deus* thus positions the final struggle of humanity as a battle between nature and the domain of Man, a battle steeped in Christian themes, for what is the Anthropocene but a Biblical Apocalypse that must be transcended? The way then to truly achieve *Homo Deus* and conquer nature is through unfettered market freedom and technological investments. The ultimate goal of *Homo Deus* is annihilation of anything out of Man’s control. and operates with the notion that Man (Adam) can look a God (the rest of the planet) in the face and proclaim, **“See what I did. See my Garden of Eden. See how my rationality has conquered you.”**

Under the framework of *Homo Deus* the world bends to humanity and Man is a singular entity of change that is not impacted by the world but positioned above the world.

The inherent misogyny of *Homo Deus* is quite clear. The following quote from Zyglinska powerfully articulates the misogyny inherent to this ideology.

At the end of the day there is just Adam: a White Christian Adam, playing with himself. There is no God, no Serpent – perhaps more significant of all, no Eve...as it has been designed as a safe space in which the White Man can safely rejoice in his own ingeniousness. there is also no conflict, no inherent contradiction...as they are all clones of Man 2.0 [*Homo Deus*]¹²

The misogyny expressed by *Homo Deus* is a legacy of humanism, which Berardi also discusses by referencing Machiavelli’s *The Prince* as a key example of “Western Enlightenment” values.

In *The Prince* Machiavelli argues that to be a good leader, the Prince must direct the forces of the world, and he must order the world to ensure his fortune through domination. This can only be achieved through violence.¹³ Berardi states that Machiavelli clearly expresses the inherent misogyny of humanist thinking, especially when Machiavelli discusses how to achieve fortune: “I assess that it is better to be forceful than respectful. In fact, Fortune is female, and if we want

¹¹ *ibid.*, 21

¹² *ibid.*, 23

¹³ Berardi, *Futurability*, 72

to subjugate her it is required to beat her and to hurt her. Actually, she prefers to be conquered by those who coldly proceed.”¹⁴ The pursuit of fortune is inherently capitalist, which demonstrates that humanism and capitalism are intricately linked, as they are both offer ways in which to order the world. Having demonstrated that the values of misogyny and masculine superiority are inherent to humanism, the next section will serve to demonstrate the inherent racism of humanism, and the reductionist qualities of this ideology.

To discuss the failures of humanism, I will draw on an essay published by feminist philosopher, Julia Kristeva titled, “Ten Principles for Twenty First Century Humanism” in *Passions of Our Time* (2019). Kristeva proposes that we need a renewal of humanism, yet she fails to address the inherent prejudices that are integral to humanism’s foundations. She states, “Child of European culture, humanism is the meeting of cultural differences that globalization and digitalization promote. Humanism respects, translates, and reevaluates the various needs to believe, and desires to know that are universal to all civilizations.”¹⁵ Kristeva universalizes human difference and avoids discussing the socioeconomic and racial differences that define how we engage with world. Her notion that all of humanity is on an equal plane is inherently flawed – all one has to do is open a history textbook and see the long line of atrocities committed by Europeans in the name of Humanity against the Other. She then goes so far as to argue that humanism is feminist.

Humanism is a feminism... [O]nce the Enlightenment philosophers opened the way, women of the French Revolution demanded it... [S]ecularization is still the only civilization that fails to have a discourse on motherhood. The passionate bond between mother and child, this first other, the dawn of love and hominization, this link where biological continuity becomes sense, alterity, and speech, is a reliance.¹⁶

¹⁴ Berardi, *Futurability*, 72

¹⁵ Julia Kristeva, Ten Principles for Twenty First Century Humanism in *Passions of Our Time* (Columbia University Press, 2018), 279–83, <https://doi.org/10.7312/kris17144-023>.

¹⁶ JKristeva, Ten Principles for Twenty First Century Humanism., 282

The irony of this statement is clear – how can something be truly feminist if a man **MUST** do it first? Humanist discourse popularly reveres Men as ultimate rational beings above all others. The Enlightenment philosophers to which Kristeva refers were undoubtedly male, and to claim that they opened the way to more liberal thinking implies that women could not do it of their own accord. Humanism’s conceit is that anything that is not a Man is something to be used, ordered, and exploited.

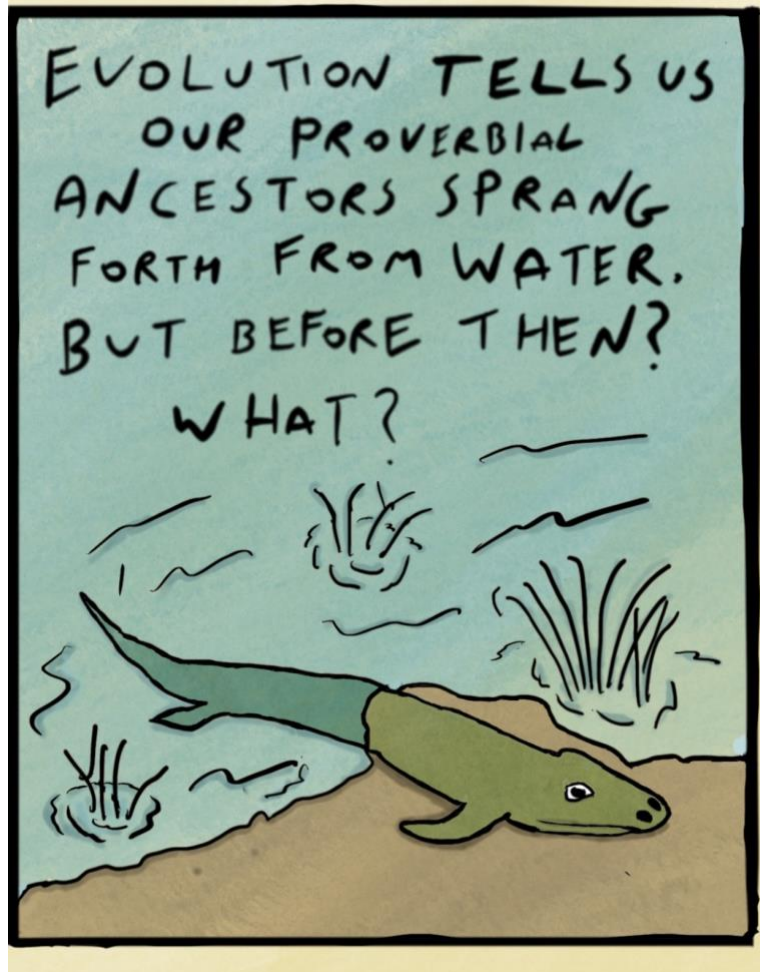
To further underscore the problems of humanism I will draw on Kruse, et al. (2019) and their article titled, “Educating in the Seventh Fire: Debwewin, Mino-Bimaadiziwin, and Ecological Justice” in *Educational Theory*. The authors argue that Eurocentric humanism follows a frame, and to expose this frame enables one to point out its flaws. The authors use the Anishinaabe Seven Fires creation story to deconstruct Western Humanism. They argue that the frame of humanism has four characteristics:

(1) the frame has a tendency to reconceive more-than-human life as brute and available to be owned and used solely for human ends; (2) it demonstrates a willingness to see moral obligations to more-than-human life as irrational; (3) it denies the existence of ethical knowledge that extends beyond the knowledge offered in the current practice of modern natural and social science; and (4) it evinces an implicit or explicit willingness to see civilization as resting on the epistemic and ethical commitments outlined in 1 through 3. ... taken together, these commitments constitute a set of practices rightly described as colonial and alienating, whatever else they might be.¹⁷

They argue that these four characteristics vouch for an implicitly Eurocentric conception of the human as a rational and intellectual man, at the risk of alienating anyone who falls outside of this category. Drawing on prominent Western scholars such as Locke, Hegel, James George Frazer, and Lewis Henry Morgan, they challenge the scholars’ humanistic views. Locke believes that Indigenous Nations are ignorant because they do not respect private property. If they were freed

¹⁷ Marc Kruse, Nicolas Tanchuk, and Robert Hamilton, ‘Educating in the Seventh Fire: Debwewin, Mino-bimaadiziwin, and Ecological Justice’, *Educational Theory* 69, no. 5 (October 2019):587–601, <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12388>.590

from that ignorance, they would be better off. Hegel argues that the world can be categorized into three groups: persons, animals, and things. Like Locke, Hegel argues that animals and things are instruments intended to be used by people and are therefore stationed at a lower level of culture.¹⁸ George Frazer argues that as time unfolds, civilization should progress through three stages: magic, religion, and finally to science. Similarly, to Locke and Hegel, Frazer argues that science dictates how



plants and animals can be used to further human goals.¹⁹ This idea is also reflected in the work of Lewis Henry Morgan who states that society develops, from savagery, to barbarism, and then civilization. He argues each stage is matched by different ways to engage with the more-than-human. Savagery defines hunter-gatherer relations, barbarism is defined by horticulture, and lastly civilization is marked by intensive agriculture. Each of the scholars' ideas are shaped by the notion that life follows a rational path. They imply that to be civilized requires processes of re-educating, dominating, and colonizing "lesser beings."²⁰ These values, as they imbue the

¹⁸ Kruse, Tanchuk, and Hamilton, 'Educating in the Seventh Fire' 592

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 593

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 592

humanistic worldview, have led us to view certain humans as the ultimate life form – rather than an evolutionary accident, which is what we really are.²¹

This concept of the human as an evolutionary and spiritually superior being has its roots in humanism, yet ironically humanism proposes that all humans are inherently equal. If all humanity has an equal capacity for greatness, why are some treated as more human than others? This question highlights an inherent flaw within the humanist worldview; humanism implicitly promotes the notion that a particular type of human (White Western Rational Man) is fundamentally apart from the rest of the planet. This is a false and violent distinction. Humanism is therefore an ideology for the dominant class – the white male bourgeoisie – and a means for this class to order the world as they see fit.

In Sylvia Wynter's *The Ceremony Must be Found: After Humanism* (1984), she states that every human culture seeks to create a form of chaos, and that this chaos takes on the form of a being or thing inherently different than what is commonly perceived as "human." This chaos then justifies any means necessary to order reality. Dichotomies of Order and Chaos are one of the cruxes of how Christian Rationality has developed. The White Christian Western Male is inseparable from order and "civilization." On the other hand, the Other, non-Christian, non-White, non-Western, more-than-human, is a manifestation of chaos. The very existence of otherness represents chaos and a threat to the established order. This tension between order and chaos lies at the foundation of Western humanism.²² In her article, "Human Together: Into the Interior of Auto/Ontopoeisis" Mina Karavanta references Sylvia Wynter by stating the following:

²¹ Stephen Jay Gould, 'The Evolution of Life on the Earth', *Scientific American* 271, no. 4 (October 1994): 84–91, <https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican1094-84>.

²² Sylvia Wynter, 'The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism', *Boundary 2* 12, no. 3 (1984): 19, <https://doi.org/10.2307/302808>. 27-28

[T]he binary between the western bourgeois Man as the dominant idea of the human and his foils, all the liminal beings like the African human, the negro, the native, the subaltern, the stateless, the immigrant without documents, and the Third-World woman, are excluded from the possibility of cultural and historical development.²³

Karavanta cites Wynter's critique of Social Darwinism, particularly how the ideology centers the Western White Christian Human as an evolutionarily superior being. The popularization of this discourse was used to justify all manner of dehumanizing racialized "non-whites" who were seen as "depraved," "savage," and "undeveloped." Through colonization these prejudices were able to spread globally, exporting the notion that the Western White Christian represented the ultimate form of human. Through colonial violence, alternative ways of being in the world were silenced.²⁴ By rejecting "Rational White Supremacy," we embrace chaos.

Chaos of the Times

To further discuss Order and Chaos we can draw on the work of Berardi. In *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility* he states that the crisis of the present is a result of a crisis in subjectivity, particularly the notion that the potency of one's subjectivity has been lost, and the potency of the cycles of finance, global competition, and warfare have become much stronger – so much so that these features of reality appear as the natural order of things.²⁵ The potency capitalism and neoliberalism is so overwhelming that compassion has been replaced with a cold detachment from the plight of others. For instance, some might say "Well, the virus is going to kill a lot of people, that's just the way it is." Or some might say, "X amount of people can starve because they don't work enough, that's just the way it is." The nature of the modern world is in a state of chaos. Information flows are massive, technology is bounding and leaping, outpacing the way we understand it. Up until modern times the world was neatly ordered by the

²³ Mina Karavanta, 'Human Together: Into the Interior of Auto/OntoPoeisis', *Symploke* 23, no.1–2 (2015): 153, <https://doi.org/10.5250/symploke.23.1-2.0153>.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 159

²⁵ Berardi, *Futurability*, 21

bourgeoisie, neatly controlled, but the entropy of capitalism and its ideals of endless consumption have led to a state of depression, of madness, and of self-destruction. As the bourgeoisie order collapses unto itself, the worker suffers, the marginalized suffer. Thus, the goal of the White Male bourgeoisie, the capitalist, and the individuals and institutions that maintain the status quo strive to order that chaos by any means necessary. One such manifestation can be seen as capitalism's efforts to order the world according to profit. Humanism and capitalism have had very real consequences on how the world has been shaped. Jason W Moore explores these effects in *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*:

[O]ne substance, Humanity, does not co-produce historical change with another substance, Nature. Rather, the species-specificity of humans is already co-produced within the web of life. Everything that humans do is a flow of flows, in which the rest of nature is always moving through us. It is a multi-layered relation through which there are no basic units, only webs within webs of relations: worlds within worlds.²⁶ (See *Appendix 1*)

This ordering is collapsing before our very eyes, or as Berardi phrases it, the old order is becoming impotent, and this impotence is revealing the horizon of possibilities. However, rather than embracing that 'chaos' we see a rise in hate, in capitalism, and intensified alienation. The state of the world is currently in a last grasp attempt of the old order trying to exert itself over the chaos for which it is responsible.²⁷

To call for chaos represents challenging this false system of ordering, and I believe the way to do that is to work towards pushing human subjectivity from the I to the We. This We includes our multitude of human and more-than-human relatives that make up the super-community that we call Earth. To embrace the chaos is to push us towards an understanding of

²⁶ Jason W. Moore, 'Introduction', in *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*, 1st Edition (New York: Verso, 2015), 1–33.

²⁷ Berardi, *Futurability*, 30

the world that is relational, that does not position the human (or certain types of humans), as the ultimate being. Calling for chaos demands that we address the violent politics of humanism and question how these politics seek to achieve certain goals and generate profit for some rather than for all. This violent distinction is upheld through the way in which intuitions function, in particular our Western Education model. To challenge the education system is to challenge the ways in which the future can develop. It is to call for new possibilities of what can be. What can an education focused on kinship and care mean for the world?

Before we move into the territory of what can be, we must focus on the present and the problems of now. In order to imagine an education focused on kinship we must address the multiplicities of what an education can look like. But before we reach that stage, we must lay bare the flaws of neoliberalism and its implications for education.

What is neoliberalism? Neoliberalism is a mutant.

An aberration against the fabric of the planet, and it forever changes – it grows and evolves to encompass all that opposes it. The core of neoliberalism is the “will of the free market.” But that isn’t a true definition. According to Plehwe et.al in their book *Nine Lives of Neoliberalism* (2020), neoliberalism is not a one size fits all model, but rather a way in which to approach the world.

[N]eoliberals hold that the market lives by prerequisites it cannot guarantee itself. Rather than operate with a belief in the “magic” of a putatively “natural” market, neoliberals are avowed interventionists of their own kind, rethinking policies according to context and showing both a capacity for improvisation and an attitude of flexible response. If the end goal remains constant—safeguarding what neoliberals call a competitive order and exposing humanity ever more to the compulsions of adjustment according to the price mechanism—the means of arriving at this goal shift with time and place..²⁸

²⁸ Dieter Plehwe, Quinn Slobodian, and Philip Mirowski, eds., ‘Introduction’, in *Nine Lives of Neoliberalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2020), 6

If neoliberalism is another way of ordering the world, then the argument can be made that is an extension of humanism, the ultimate form of world ordering. In a more practical sense as explored by Wendy Brown in her book *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (2017) she argues that despite the diffractions and mutating nature of neoliberalism it holds the truth that all aspects of life must be “economized.”

Neoliberalism is most commonly understood as enacting an ensemble of economic policies in accord with its root principle of affirming free markets. These include deregulation of industries and capital flows; radical reduction in welfare state provisions and protections for the vulnerable; privatized and outsourced public goods, ranging from education, parks, postal services, roads, and social welfare to prisons and militaries; replacement of progressive with regressive tax and tariff schemes; the end of wealth redistribution as an economic or social-political policy; the conversion of every human need or desire into a profitable enterprise, from college admissions preparation to human organ transplants, from baby adoptions to pollution rights, from avoiding lines to securing leg room on an airplane; and, most recently, the financialization of everything and the increasing dominance of finance capital over productive capital in the dynamics of the economy and everyday life.²⁹

Neoliberalism dictates that both states and persons must conduct themselves like businesses – that both the state and individual must maximize their profit output, and if they fail to do so both face drastic consequences. People may experience poverty and a loss of social standing; states will similarly suffer, but these political losses are most tangibly felt by their citizens.³⁰

Neoliberalism is deeply flawed, as evidenced by Garret Hardin's 1974 essay, “Lifeboat Ethics,” subtitled “The Argument Against Helping the Poor.”³¹ Hardin's paper abandons all notion of basic human decency because it is not profitable. That's as far as the analysis needs to go, there is nothing more to talk about. Not only is neoliberalism an economic way of being and being, but it is a mode of reasoning the “truth.” The “truth” of neoliberalism is that the human is

²⁹ Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, First paperback edition, Near Futures (New York: Zone Books, 2017). 28

³⁰ *ibid.*, 21, 22

³¹ Garrett Hardin, ‘Lifeboat Ethics’, *The Hastings Center Report* 5, no. 1 (February 1975): 4,

a unit of capital (*Homo Economicus*), not just for itself but also for the state. Under this “truth” exchange is replaced with competition. Neoliberal “truth” presupposes that all rational decisions I make should relate to my marketization, and that the choices I make are assigned value based on how competitive I am as a product. If the governing principle is that we are all capital, then labour is no longer the main market thrust. This means that market actors become entrepreneurial, and worker solidarity collapses because everyone is just a piece of capital trying to outpace and compete against other capital.³² Neoliberalism thereby turns human subjects into winners and losers who must compete. If market competition is the governing “truth” of reality you either “become better” or get left behind.³³ One of the “fathers of neoliberalism,” Friedrich Hayek, suggests in his final book *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism* (1988) that humans should be ranked on utility and that not all lives are equally important: “Some lives are evidently more important in that they create or preserve other lives. The good hunter or defender of the community, the fertile mother and perhaps even the wise old man may be more important than most babies and most of the aged.”³⁴ Humanism and neoliberalism are expressions of the same problem: an attempt to order the world according to rationalism. Under the neoliberal model, the rational man follows the “truth of the market.” If one does not follow the market truth then one is irrational, and in denial of the reality.³⁵ If one is in denial of reality, then they are perceived as something lesser, something unstable, something chaotic. Thus, *Homo Economicus* is defined by its rejection of all other formulations of what the human can be, a rejection of the political, of the

³² Brown, *Undoing the Demos.*, 65

³³ *ibid.*, 64

³⁴ Friedrich A. von Hayek and William Warren Bartley, ‘The Calculus of Cost Is a Calculus of Lives’, in *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek. 1: The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*. Ed. by W. W. Bartley III, Repr. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), 132

³⁵ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 69

caring, of the loving, of the artistic, of the educational, of the social and moral formulations of what the human can be, unless it is profitable.³⁶

Neoliberal Education

We must cultivate chaos. The “borders of humanity” are crumbling. We can reject chaos and stick to what we know, but that will not only lead to our death, but the death of countless others. The only alternative is to begin to undo the psychosis of humanism, and neoliberalism and capitalism by extension. To undo this psychosis, we must challenge how we educate, for if we accept the truth that neoliberalism has impacted every facet of our existence then we must also accept the truth that it impacts how we educate and how the educational system is formatted. I see education as a tool for people to critically engage and make sense of the social structures and ideologies that constitute reality. Education should be a tool for attending to the multiplicity of being human. I believe that neoliberalism obscures the true purpose of education and entangles children in a state of compliance that serves the interests of corporations and the government, rather than entangling a child in ways that demonstrate that our existence is entirely dependent upon more-than-human actors and each other.

One cannot begin to discuss alternative education without drawing from the work of Paulo Freire and his *Pedagogy of The Oppressed*. Freire proposes that our educational model is “The Banking Model” and a form of oppression.³⁷ As I understand, the term ‘oppression’ refers to enforcing, reinforcing, and promoting unjust treatment of other people and the planet for corporate or individual gain. This can take the form of governmental and social systems that privilege certain groups (rich people and white people) more than others – or in the context of

³⁶ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 81

³⁷ Paulo Freire, ‘Chapter 2’, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 30th anniversary ed* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 71-86.

this paper, educational systems that privilege certain ideologies for the purpose of creating students that serve as “receptacles”³⁸ into which teachers deposit their knowledge. If this knowledge is flawed (as I believe it is) or reinforces immoral ideologies, then the educator does a disservice to both students and the planet. Children and adults alike are constantly submerged into “truths” that serve a purpose: to accept the status quo and subjection. Neoliberalism is defined by maintaining this current hegemonic order; it teaches consumption, entitlement, and human-centric modes of thinking. It is therefore an educator’s responsibility to acknowledge that these forms of subjugation are inherent to how our curriculum functions and to develop ways to subvert the status quo and “common sense” (in the Gramscian sense of the word).³⁹

Our neoliberal western educational model teaches children to contribute to capitalism, which relies on the continual subjugation and exploitation of both humans and the environment.

Snaza et. al (2012) discusses how capitalist ideologies permeate our educational system:

[It] tames our... impulses early on, preparing the way for us to spend long hours in confined spaces, sitting at desks, excreting only in proscribed and gendered facilities during breaks, using technologies of inscription to textualize ideas and manipulate symbols, training our attentions away from the body and toward forms of “rational” thought... [T]his taming [...] is propagated in schools where we learn a whole host of humanist ideas about human exceptionalism (in biology, social studies, languages, etc.) while learning to ignore both the ways some humans are treated as “more human” than others (which then justifies some humans waging all sorts of horrors against other humans) [and the planet].⁴⁰

The neoliberal western model of education perpetrates oppression in many ways, and I argue that these values form the core of our colonial society. A major obstacle to achieving liberation is that those who are oppressed become so absorbed in unequal systems that they cannot break free.⁴¹

³⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* ‘Chapter 2’

³⁹ Dian Marino, ‘6: Re-Framing: Hegemony and Adult Education Practices’, in *Wild Garden: Art, Education, and the Culture of Resistance* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1997), 103–18.

⁴⁰ Nathan Snaza et al., ‘Toward a Posthuman Education’, *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* 30, no. 2 (n.d.): 39–55.(45) <https://journal.jctonline.org/index.php/jct/article/view/501/snaza%20etal.pdf>

⁴¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 51

We become implicated in a cycle of oppression, a social system replicated on a micro scale in the classroom, which then teaches students how to interact in the outside world. The classroom serves to reinforce wider trends of oppression in society and does not further social justice goals, which I believe it should. In the neoliberal classroom the teacher is the absolute authority, and the students are at their whims.

This dynamic functions similarly to the structure of corporate hierarchies that those students will experience later in life. The educational system is “Corporate Jr,” a series of meaningless tasks and quotas assigned to the students (workers) because their manager (teacher) expects them to be completed. The teacher then must report to the general manager (principal) to discuss whether the class is hitting the school’s academic targets. The principal then takes this report to the regional manager (the school board), which goes to the CEO (governmental bodies). If anywhere along the chain of command is a deficit, punishment will be doled out. This can take the form of cutting teachers and funding for “non-essentials” (often the arts and humanities) as well as individual punishment enacted on the manager (teacher), who then take it out on the workers (students). While not all teachers are complicit in supporting this form of education, the model I proposed above highlights the systemic flaws that permeate our educational system under neoliberalism.

To better express how the “Corporate Jr” model functions in real life, I will focus on how neoliberalism has affected the Ontario public school system. I will draw on the work of Sara Carpenter et al. and their article “Views from the Blackboard: Neoliberal Education Reforms and the Practice of Teaching in Ontario, Canada” (2012). The corporatization of curriculum can be traced back to the Mike Harris Conservative government. A reform package was pushed forward titled the “Common Sense Revolution.” This supposed revolution shirked the responsibility of

economic instability onto individuals and brought forth the deregulation, privatisation, and reduction of governmental services, all while promoting entrepreneurship.⁴² This was classic neoliberalism. Carpenter et al. base their analysis on firsthand interviews with teachers. One major change their research noted was the rise in standardization of curriculum and tests, as well as teacher accountability procedures, and the creation of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (which I will expand upon in more detail below).⁴³

To further examine how funding and standardized testing correlate in their impact on the Ontario curriculum I will draw on the article, “The New Articulation of Equity Education in Neoliberal Times: The Changing Conception of Social Justice in Ontario” (2016) by G. Rezai-Rashti et al. This article focuses on the “false crisis of failing boys” in Ontario, which led to the erasure of racialized minorities within Ontario’s educational framework. While this notable crisis unfortunately lies beyond the scope of this paper, I will draw on Rezai-Rashti et al.’s insights into how important statistics are to neoliberal world-making. Under neoliberalism policies are informed by numbers, which work to generalize and either support or destabilize the success of those policies. Neoliberalism is inherently competitive, but these statistical outcomes function to obscure that competition by reducing winners and losers to numbers rather than people. Rather than attending to the systematic inequities that prevail within education and society, neoliberalism focuses on improving test scores because positive results can easily be displayed as statistics. These statistics reduce individuals to mere data in the economy of education.⁴⁴ This problem is most clearly demonstrated by the establishment of EQAO (The Education Quality

⁴² Sara Carpenter, Nadya Weber, and Daniel Schugurensky, ‘Views from the Blackboard: Neoliberal Education Reforms and the Practice of Teaching in Ontario, Canada’, *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 10, no. 2 (June 2012): 145–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2012.647401>.

⁴³ Ibid.,

⁴⁴ G. Rezai-Rashti, A. Segeren, and W. Martino, ‘The New Articulation of Equity Education in Neoliberal Times: The Changing Conception of Social Justice in Ontario’, *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 15, no. 2 (15 March 2017): 160–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2016.1169514.161-163>

and Accountability Office) under the Harris government in 1995. The main purpose of the EQAO was/is to administrate standardized testing to all grade 3's in the Ontario public school system. A more recent iteration was the development of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) in 2009. Both EQAO and LNS serve the Ontario government as bureaucratic processes of data collection and standardisation, which are used as the basis of neoliberal policy production.⁴⁵

We see corporate language and attitudes being applied to education through terms such as “Quality,” “Accountability,” “Productivity,” and “Efficiency.” This is another expression of the neoliberal curriculum. From the interviews conducted by Carpenter et al. they state that teachers expressed disappointment in how the curriculum had become more rigid. One of the new curriculum requirements was for teachers to meet certain goals within certain time periods (checks and balances), creating a curriculum that was described as “teaching an inch deep and a mile wide,” or in other words, to prioritize efficiency and the achievement of specific goals and outcomes.⁴⁶ Due to the standardization of the curriculum and of the standardization of testing, teachers found themselves not teaching, but preparing the students for tests.

Another aspect of the “Common Sense Revolution” was that funding for schools was dependent upon the overall score of the school's academic achievement, as efficiency and productivity had become more important than learning.⁴⁷ The “Common Sense Revolution” also initiated steep budget cuts that manifested in Bill 104, which cut the funding per student to one third of what it was pre-Harris. Any “extras” such as art supplies, physical education equipment, field trips, or textbooks etc. had to be purchased by teachers and students, or through fundraisers or donations. Despite these cuts, the “Common Sense Revolution” began allocating more money

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 163-66

⁴⁶ Rezai-Rashti, Segeren, and Martino, “The New Articulation of Equity Education in Neoliberal Times “ 148

⁴⁷ *ibid.*,

to reading, writing, math, and science. Meanwhile, the Arts, physical education, outdoor education, and social sciences experienced a steep decline in funding.⁴⁸ I argue that this was a strategy designed to make students more competitive and successful within the global capitalist framework. EQAO and LNS serve as vehicles to deliver the market competitive strategy and standardization serves as a metric to determine how productive students are.

Standardization automates education. Neoliberalism automates children. Gert Biesta challenges the role of automation in standardized testing and the one-size-fits-all model of education in *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (2012). He argues that this model of education is one of impatience:

“...that pushes education into a direction where teachers’ salaries and even their jobs are made dependent upon their alleged ability to increase their students’ exam scores. It is this misguided impatience that has resulted in the medicalization of education, where children are being made fit for the educational system, rather than that we ask where the causes of this misfit lie and who, therefore, needs treatment most: the child or the society?”⁴⁹

This automation that is engrained in children from an early age pushes them to unquestionably follow the status quo and contribute to the oppression of themselves, of others, and the environment. The more malleable the child, the “better” they do in school. Through being taught that their worth corresponds to the profitability of their labor, this child will later contribute to corporate success. Creativity and rebelliousness are lost in favor of the pursuit for capitalistic order. Under a neoliberal education the primary focus is efficiency, the reduction of autonomy, and the development of a utilitarian educational process.

This is not just an Ontario problem; it is happening across most of the Western world. To highlight how education has been made utilitarian I will draw on a paper by Lucie Sauvé et al.

⁴⁸ Carpenter, Weber, and Schugurensky, ‘Views from the Blackboard’.153

⁴⁹ Gert Biesta, ‘Prologue On the Weakness of Education’, in *The Beautiful Risk of Education, Interventions: Education, Philosophy, and Culture* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2013).

“Three Decades of International Guidelines for Environment-Related Education: A Critical Hermeneutic of the United Nations Discourse” found in the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* (2007), in this paper the authors look at official documents from the United Nations, which state that the environment should be seen as a tool or instrument for economic development and growth, and that environmental education should focus on monitoring and managing the environment, rather than thinking critically about why our environment is in trouble to begin with.⁵⁰ Under this logic, environmental education is formatted to “[rely] heavily on sciences and more specifically on environmental sciences and technological transfers, coupled with sustained economic growth, as the key solutions to environmental problems and thus as a core learning [strategy] in environment-related education.”⁵¹ Sauvé et al. (2007) argue that the message the United Nations puts forward for environmental education is framed within a utilitarian perspective, wrapped in the notion that education should be used to prepare children to solve environmental problems (that adults have caused) with economic and technological strategies, rather than interrogate why our world is plagued with problems.⁵² Instead of getting to the root, the United Nations advocate band-aid solutions.

I propose that this problem is reflective of the values behind *Homo Deus*, which I explored in the Introduction. The education system then serves as a technology of neoliberal reproduction, automation, and standardization. Once we can push past the one-size-fits-all model (or the automation of the child) we can then approach other aspects of our educational system that need to be changed. For instance, we can encourage children to connect with the world

⁵⁰ Sauvé, Lucie, Tom Berryman, and Renée Brunelle. ‘Three Decades of International Guidelines for Environment-Related Education: A Critical Hermeneutic of the United Nations Discourse’. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* 12 (2007): 33–54, (39)

⁵¹ Lucie, Berryman, and Brunelle. ‘Three Decades of International Guidelines for Environment-Related Education’ 39

⁵² Ibid.

beyond our false human constructs, seek to decenter the primacy of humanity, and move towards an education grounded on kinship; an education that acknowledges that humans are always in a state of becoming and changing, whether we are aware of it or not. We are not evolutionarily superior and rational, as humanism has led us to believe.

If the “truth” of the humanist world order is that “The (hu)**man** is a being of reason,” then we are no longer human. We are marching to our death, as the anthropological machine picks up steam, as climate change accelerates, and as the destruction of other living things is normalized. If selfishness, alienation, and greed are major currents that govern the planet, how can we profess to be rational beings? Do any of these motivators seem like a “reasonable” or “logical” way to engage with the world? No, they do not. We urgently need to challenge the way we educate, why we educate, and the logics that impact our education.



The Conception of the Child

Historically Children's Literature and Education were considered a "civilizing force," a tool for the internalization of moral and model codes of behaviour. "Civilizing" is often predicated on the notion that children and animals are uncontrollable and require authority. This attitude has historically also been extended to Indigenous, Black, and Brown People, who have been described as both animalistic and childlike by white imperialist powers. Erica Burman in Chapter One of *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology* (2017) explores how these prejudices and developmental psychology were weaponized to justify colonial rule – the colonizer as the white male rational being guides the primitive into civilization, and consequently into humanity by any means necessary.⁵³

Before discussing developmental psychology, I will draw on the work of Megan H. Glick in *Infrahumanisms: Science, Culture, and the Making of Modern Non/Personhood* (2018) in which she discusses how children have been viewed as liminal beings, and how this liminality has affected how education has been used to "humanize" the child and the cultural Other. Glick discusses the creation of the jungle gym by Sebastian Hinton in the 1920's, and how the underlying logic of this play structure was to highlight the "monkey nature of the child."⁵⁴ Hinton's logic was informed by this conception of the child as a liminal being, a being less than human who must evolve until they reach the state of "a complete human."⁵⁵ Hinton wasn't the only one who viewed the child as a baser being linked to animality; the rise of pediatric science stressed the notion of the child as a proto-evolutionary creature – a missing link to man's animal

⁵³ Erica Burman, 'Origins: How Animals, Humans, Colonial and Gender Dynamics Structure the Study of Childhood', in *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*, 2nd ed (London; New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁵⁴ Megan H. Glick, 'Brief Histories of Time: Nature, Culture, and the Making of Modern Childhood', in *Infrahumanisms: Science, Culture, and the Making of Modern Non/Personhood*, ANIMA (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 29–55. (30)

⁵⁵ Ibid.

ancestors.⁵⁶ Glick discusses the work of psychologist, G. Stanley Hall, who argued that the child is a being with a primitive soul that embodies one of the keys for mankind (sic) to uncover it's natural history – the other two keys being, “the animal and the savage.”⁵⁷ Glick highlights that under Hall's ontology the child, the savage, and the animal were viewed as the closest links to “natural early man” that the modern rational white man had access to.⁵⁸ Glick points out that Hall also argued that if the child is a transitory and liminal figure it reinforces the zoological hierarches that have been established by humanism, particularly the notion of “man” being above the rest of the planet.⁵⁹

Glick emphasizes that this discourse correlated to conceptions of the child as animal-like. She accounts how in 1874 Henry Bergh, the founder of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) intervened in the welfare of a child in New York who was being badly beaten by her foster family.

[T]he Brooklyn Eagle reported that by rescuing the child under animal cruelty statutes, Bergh had “recognized the human race as animals.” Bergh himself hoped that his actions might redraw the lines of kinship and affinity, declaring, “The child is an animal. If there is no justice for it as a human being, it shall at least have the right of the cur in the street. It shall not be abused.”⁶⁰

This moment challenged the notion that children were lower than animals, which was the general idea beforehand, and elevated the child to the same level as animal (purposefully used to convey that the child was lesser than a “complete western man”), which implied that they would need to be protected. The conflation of children and animals bore ramifications for U.S. foreign policy, particularly its colonial goals. The language used to justify colonial expansion was couched in

⁵⁶ Glick, ‘Brief Histories of Time: Nature, Culture, and the Making of Modern Childhood’ 31

⁵⁷ Ibid, 50

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Glick, ‘Brief Histories of Time: Nature, Culture, and the Making of Modern Childhood’ 55

⁶⁰ Ibid, 31

“humanitarian aid, and welfare goals” and this ideology and strategy are still at play in the present.⁶¹ U.S. imperialism took the shape of, “[Up]-lifting the child races everywhere and became articulated as part of the rational western white mans ‘burden.’”⁶² This mentality was further peddled by employing the same language and ideas regarding child development to the colonial subject as a means to justify colonialism. Wrapped in “benevolent paternalism,” the imperial project was considered a charitable and a moral duty.⁶³ This benevolent paternalism was coupled with the notion that children were a threat to themselves and to society. Because of the child’s animalistic nature, it was believed that they were inherently brutish, aggressive, and predisposed to violence.⁶⁴ (We see how this rhetoric is employed today through the media, in particular the portrayal of Black and Brown people).

This perception of the child as an inherently violent beast led to the illegalization of children on the streets of New York in late 1880s – 1890s, which led to thousands of arrests of children.⁶⁵ This was not exclusive to the U.S.; at around the same time in England the introduction of compulsory education was established. The school served to keep children and youth off the streets, to “uplift” them from “unruly hooliganism.”⁶⁶ They were often taught to read the Bible, which was seen as a tool to make the child a “productive member” of society.⁶⁷ This method of schooling was a way to offset the growing urban poor, and part of the effort to criminalize being poor. Degeneracy was associated with poverty and became increasingly linked to notions of “feeble-mindedness” and the disintegration of society, physically, morally, and

⁶¹ Ibid, 32

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Glick, ‘Brief Histories of Time: Nature, Culture, and the Making of Modern Childhood’ 35

⁶⁵ Ibid.,

⁶⁶ Burman, “Origins: How Animals, Humans, Colonial and Gender Dynamics Structure the Study of Childhood.” 20

⁶⁷ Ibid.

mentally.⁶⁸ This argument was increasingly being applied to the movement of Social Darwinism in relation to poorer populations and “survival of the fittest.”⁶⁹

Arguably, we can still see the legacy of this history in many facets of our society, particularly in stereotypes that correlate class intelligence, as well as the common attitude that poor people are poor because of their own doing rather than based on circumstance – and the divisive nature of capitalism and neoliberalism. This narrative also plays out in relation to how disabled individuals are often seen as a “burden of the state.” The notion that certain humans are better than others based on class and physical ability has come to a head during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have seen how certain segments of the population doubt the validity of the current pandemic (mainly white, middle class, able-bodied, suburban individuals) as they do not have to face the horrors of it first-hand; working-class people, immuno-compromised people, older folks, and disabled people are much more at risk of falling ill. The same populations that doubt the severity of COVID tend to also tote the idea that “X people die from the flu each year and we don’t shut down society, so why should we now?”

Burman’s discussion highlights the fact that “feeble-mindedness” was historically seen as something inevitable and harmful to the whole of society. Discourse surrounding “feeble-mindedness” primarily took on the form that it could not be cured and was a burden on the community. The only way to combat delinquency and “feeble-mindedness” was to “train, segregate and sterilize.”⁷⁰ This training took place through the educational system; however, if it did not work, segregation was considered the alternative (through ghettoization, slums, poor neighbourhoods, and imprisonment).⁷¹ Burman also notes that “feeble-minded women of

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 21

⁷⁰ Ibid., 20

⁷¹ Ibid.

childbearing age” were segregated to prevent them from reproducing “feeble-minded” offspring.⁷²

As kin to the savage, the animal, the woman, the delinquent, and the feeble-minded, the child is seen as lesser than the “White Rational Male.” They are consequently molded into a “rational being” for the greater good and fitness of society. The child represents chaos that should be tamed. This attitude towards childhood is a direct outgrowth of humanism and its obsession with ordering the world. I propose that the related impacts of neoliberalism and capitalism on education reflect society’s efforts to create an ideal “rational being” for the purpose of profit.

An Education of Kinship is Still Possible.

*Would that not be the final humbling of the human condition? That the trees and birds, the fox and the rabbit, the wolf, and the deer... reach a point at which they do not even notice us, as we are transformed - Jeff VanderMeer: Acceptance: Southern Reach Trilogy (Book 3)*⁷³

I call for humanity to move towards an understanding of kinship, to understand and conceive of the chaos in being human. What is kinship? I will discuss it in the following section, but let’s start with a simple guidepost inspired by Leesa Fawcett: Kinship is the understanding of strangers across species, and boundaries of matter connected through the flesh of the world, making kin is a recognition of the differences and similarities.⁷⁴

To understand what I mean by chaos, one should understand that humans are not static in the way that humanism has led us to believe. Rather, the human is always in a state of becoming,

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Jeff VanderMeer, *Acceptance*, First edition, *Southern Reach Trilogy, Book 3* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014).

⁷⁴ Leesa Fawcett, ‘Kinship Imaginaries: Children’s Stories of Wild Friendships, Fear, and Freedom’, in *Routledge Handbook of Human-Animal Studies*, ed. Garry Marvin and Susan McHugh, 2014, 258–74. (268)

changing, and entanglement, whether we are aware of it or not (see *Appendix 1*). This conception of humanity is informed by Stacy Alaimo's work, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010) in which she describes entanglement using the term "trans-corporeality." She defines trans-corporeality as, "Imagining human corporeality [...] in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world[.] [T]his underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from the environment."⁷⁵ Additionally, I am inspired by Anna Hickey-Moody and Tara Page's co-edited work, *Arts, Pedagogy and Cultural Resistance: New Materialisms* (2015). They argue that matter has agency and is constantly forming and reforming in unexpected ways.⁷⁶ Matter becomes, feels, converses, suffers, desires, learns, and remembers. These are the characteristics of human consciousness – but they apply to the rest of the planet as well. Bodies and things are not separate; their inter-relations are vital to how we conceive of ourselves and the world around us. Bodies, knowledge systems, sociability, and matter are co-constructed. If we attend to the movement generated from an encounter between two or more bodies, this encounter (or process) leads to something different. Energy is shared between human subjects and more-than-human objects through processes entanglement.⁷⁷

The first step in foregrounding these processes of entanglement, is discussing the words that we use, as language shapes the construction of truths. We need to challenge the use of the term, "animal." "Animal" is suggestive of the humanist thought patterns and histories that I seek to problematize. The term denotes something inherently other and less than "human," as I have drawn attention to in my discussion of animal/human hierarchies throughout this paper. The

⁷⁵ Stacy Alaimo, 'One: Bodily Natures', in *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 1–26. (3)

⁷⁶ Hickey-Moody, Anna, and Tara Page, eds. 'Introduction: Making Matter and Pedagogy'. In *Arts, Pedagogy and Cultural Resistance: New Materialisms*, 1–21. London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

term, “animal” serves to demean and enact ontological violence. In Jacques Derrida’s 1997 lecture, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” he suggests that we turn away from “animal” towards the more equitable term, “creature.” He states, “There is no animal in the general singular, separated from man by a single indivisible limit. We must envisage the existence of “living creatures” whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity.”⁷⁸ As Derrida suggests, “creature” implies multiplicity and equality to humanity, whereas “animal” has generally been used to define something beyond humanity that is different, savage, and unruly. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “creature” as “[S]omething created either animate or inanimate: a lower animal such as a farm animal or a human being, a being of anomalous or uncertain aspect or nature.”⁷⁹ This is not a perfect definition as it implies some of the hierarchies imposed by humanism, but a useful starting point to shift the language from animal to creature. This is an act of knotting humanity to the planet. It serves to decentre the human and attend to others that inhabit the planet. This definition implies that all things on the planet that are created (whether by more-than-human processes or human actions) can then be categorized as creatures (including the human). Should we not acknowledge that we (everything on the planet living and not-living) are all creatures, and we all deserve respect? This not to argue that we are “all the same,” but that we all deserve respect for the things that make us different.

I have already stated that neoliberalism, humanism, and capitalism are all accepted “truths” that play out in both the material and immaterial world. Embedded in these modes of reasoning is a notion of “progress” – but what is progress? Is it the idea that the human is an

⁷⁸ Jacques Derrida and David Wills, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 2 (2002): 415

⁷⁹ *Creature*, in Merriam-Webster, n.d., <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/creature>.

entirely different being from the rest of the planet? To move forward as something distinct from the rest of the world, as other creatures live day-to-day?⁸⁰ This of course is not true, as we are inexplicitly linked with the more-than-human. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing draws attention to the connections that exist between all species in *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*:

Without the ability to make workable living arrangements, species would die out. In the process, each organism changes everyone's world. Bacteria made our oxygen atmosphere, and plants help maintain it. Plants live on land because fungi made soil by digesting rocks. As these examples suggest, world-making projects can overlap, allowing room for more than one species.⁸¹

We can use Tsing's logic to develop a fourth "truth," a truth of kinship and care. To develop a truth grounded in a dynamic, enlivened planet that contains worlds within worlds that all shape each other. How can this be achieved? One way is through how we educate. Education is a way to story the world, but it is not the only story that is at play. The human is not a singular being, each human is knotted to the more-than-human matter that inhabits our world. The world is not static, it is chaos; matter upon matter interacting, repelling, and joining. Each interaction is a new story.⁸²

Our Stories Need to Change

The ways in which we characterize matter and how "our stories" make sense of the world reflect and operate on assumptions produced by the Cartesian dualistic mode of thinking, primarily the notion that "mind-matter or the subject-object split," as Iovino and Opperman put it.⁸³ This split is seen as one of the governing "truths of reality."⁸⁴ Since our reality is constructed by this split,

⁸⁰ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (New Jersey, Princeton University, 2017) 21

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, (22)

⁸² Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, 'Introduction: Stories Come to Matter', in *Material Ecocriticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), (1-18)

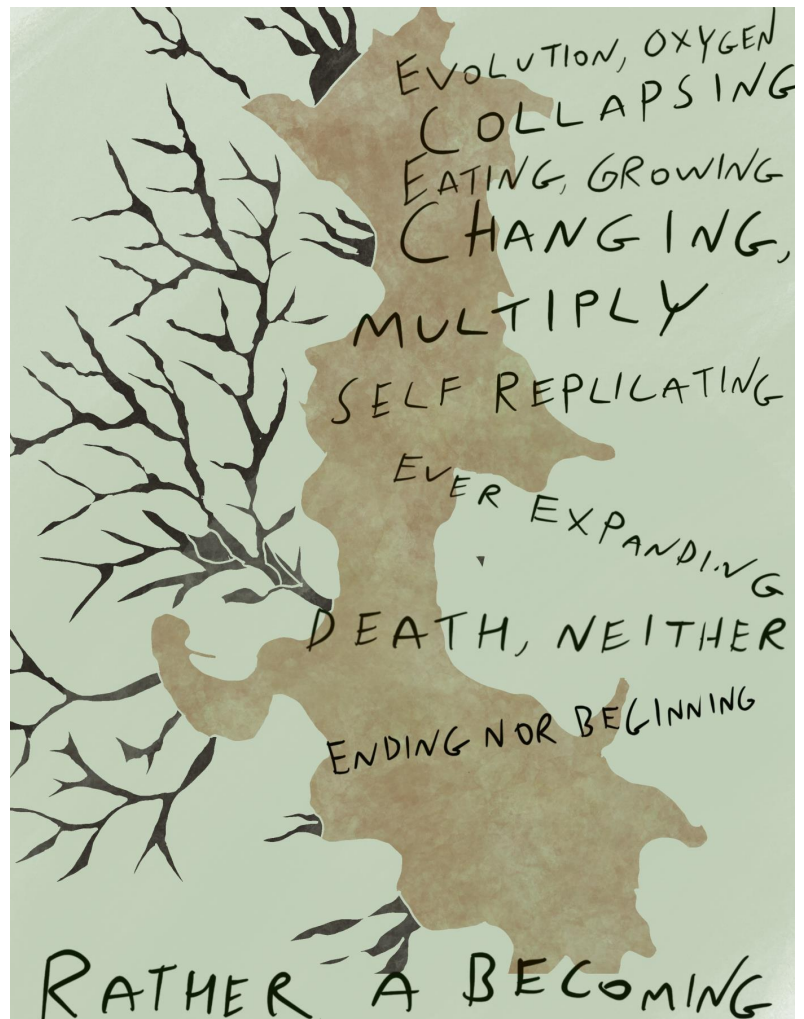
⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

so too are our educational practices.⁸⁵ The major conceit of this mode of thinking is that nature, or the rest of the planet, is perceived as lifeless or as the background of human activity, a major component of the humanist and capitalist ideologies. As Donna Haraway puts it In *Staying with the Trouble* (2016):

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds; what worlds make stories.⁸⁶

To shift out of Cartesian dualism towards an education of kinship and entanglement is no easy task, but we have reached a phase of planetary urgency where the will of the old older can no longer function. Stories that prioritize the human as the sole shaper and teller of the narrative of our reality, and stories that dictate that we must murder each other, and the planet are in abundance. We have too many of them, and we need to shift to stories of care. The old methods of controlling, of making meaning out of the world cannot keep up. False notions of “Providence, History, Science, Progress”



Appendix 2: Fossil Fuels Us (We are Just Compost) page 2

⁸⁵ Taylor, Affrica, Iveta Silova, Veronica Pacini-Katchabaw, Mindy Blaise, and Common Worlds Collective. 'Learning to Become with the World: Education for Future Survival'. *UNESCO Futures of Education (Forth Coming)*, 2020 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374032>. 2

⁸⁶ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). 12

cannot resolve the crisis at hand.⁸⁷ The story needs to change, as our historical narratives no longer hold true. Chaos comes.

The world is not the story of Man, it is story of “the props” of the planet, the beings who inhabit this world as surely as we do, and who have been seen as background characters to human exceptionalism. The story of the planet is that other creatures are enlivened. They have their own stories and we, the Anthropos, must become attuned to these stories and build towards a collective way of being – a common world that acknowledges all actors and builders are not only human, but multifaceted creatures that we share with. To perceive of the human as unique is false; humanity is contaminated and encounters with the more-than-human shift and change what makes a “human.” Being attuned this contamination changes the ways in which we make the world.⁸⁸

Human exceptionalism and utilitarian individualism are the truths of neoliberalism and capitalism. These truths must become unviable to humanity and the rest of planet. To educate in these urgent times is to work to make greed, selfishness, exploitation, and exceptionalism inaccessible modes of thinking – or at the very least to shift them out of the default mode of thinking. To educate in these times is to educate with collaboration, for without collaboration we will surely die.⁸⁹ Collaboration occurs through contamination; the human is not a self-contained individual but a polluted history of encounters. We are entangled with both harmful and beneficial beings. Educating with kinship requires us to notice these processes of entanglement.

⁸⁷ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*. 40

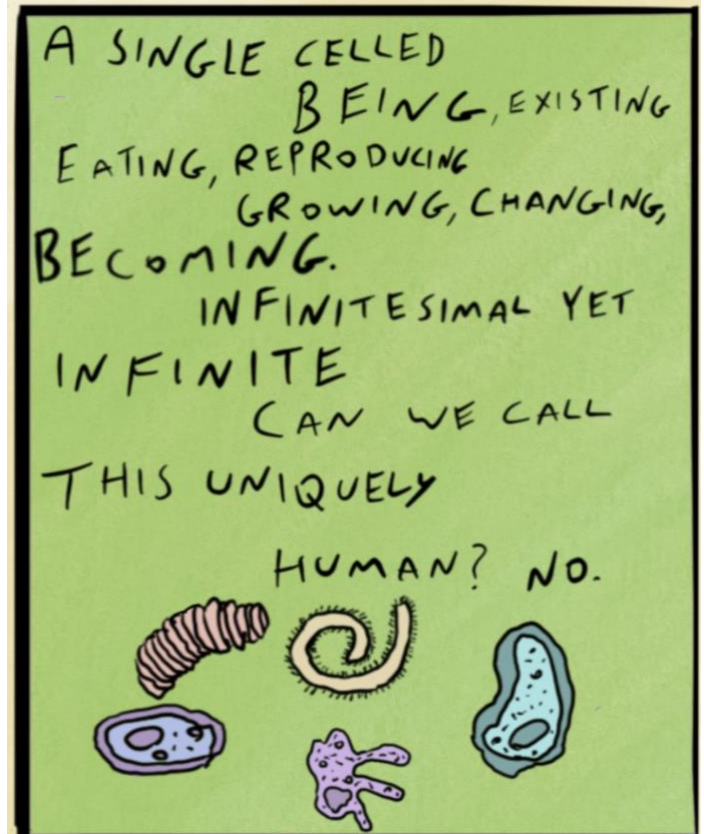
⁸⁸ Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. (27)

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 28

The history of the West has functioned on the notion that Man is rational, that Man is exceptional – but this has blinded us and bound us to incomplete modes of existence. How can we claim to be rational creatures when surely our actions are signs of irrationality? We are beings with a death drive, marching towards climate catastrophe and murder so that “business as usual” can persist. In *Thinking Plant Animal Human* (2020) David Wood proposes the notion that, “I the human animal, has always been we,” referring to the fact that the human body is made up of more bacterial cells than human cells.⁹⁰ We as humans cannot exist without other creatures: from exploitation to companionship, from agriculture to military, from medical research to pollination and the spread of disease, we are entangled. Humanity does not exist without a magnitude of other creatures working behind the scenes, and these relationships are not always fair and just.⁹¹ If we want to work towards just relations, we must work towards kinship. In “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin” (2015) Donna Haraway articulates the importance of making kin with more-than-human species as a form of inter-planetary feminism:

Feminists of our time have been leaders in unraveling the supposed natural necessity of ties between sex and gender, race and sex, race and nation, class and race, gender and morphology, sex and reproduction, and reproduction and composing persons. [...] If there

Appendix 2: Fossil Fuels Us (We are Just Compost) page 1



⁹⁰ David Wood, *Thinking Plant Animal Human: Encounters with Communities of Difference*, Posthumanities 56(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020). (5)

⁹¹ Ibid.

is to be multispecies ecojustice, which can also embrace diverse human people, it is high time that feminists exercise leadership in imagination, theory, and action to unravel the ties of both genealogy and kin, and kin and species.⁹²

Working with kinship in mind is integral to expanding our relationship with the planet to be non-hierarchical and symbiotic. The act of making kin creates chaos in the face of humanistic order. To make kin is to express care across gender, race, and biological boundaries, to expand the human experience in the face of uncertainty and urgency, and to care as an act of resistance to neoliberalism, which thrives on a lack of care. Making kin requires that we form kinships in unexpected ways and to understand humans not as individuals, but rather as a community bound in a human form – a community of organisms within our bodies as well as beyond them. As David Wood states, “[W]e humans live together with other seemingly “distinct” creatures (fleas, cockroaches, pets, children, lovers, neighbours, colleagues [etc.]) [and] we may expect these communities to fan out in complex layering and overlapping ways.”⁹³ Stories upon stories, shaping our daily liveliness. Making kin abandons the illusion of humanity as a singular entity and helps us to see the human as a manifestation of different agencies exerting themselves upon our corporal form.

It is also important for us to understand that our “community self” is not restricted to the living but includes the dead and un-living. In *Anthropocene Poetics* (2019) David Farrier reminds us that even if we do not acknowledge our entanglement, we cannot avoid it.⁹⁴ Our life is not our life; our physicality manifests as knots of deep time, as a life inherited not only from genetics, but from unaccountable others whose bodies and energies have nourished us. An

⁹² Donna Haraway, ‘Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin’, *Environmental Humanities* 6 (2015): 159–65. (3).

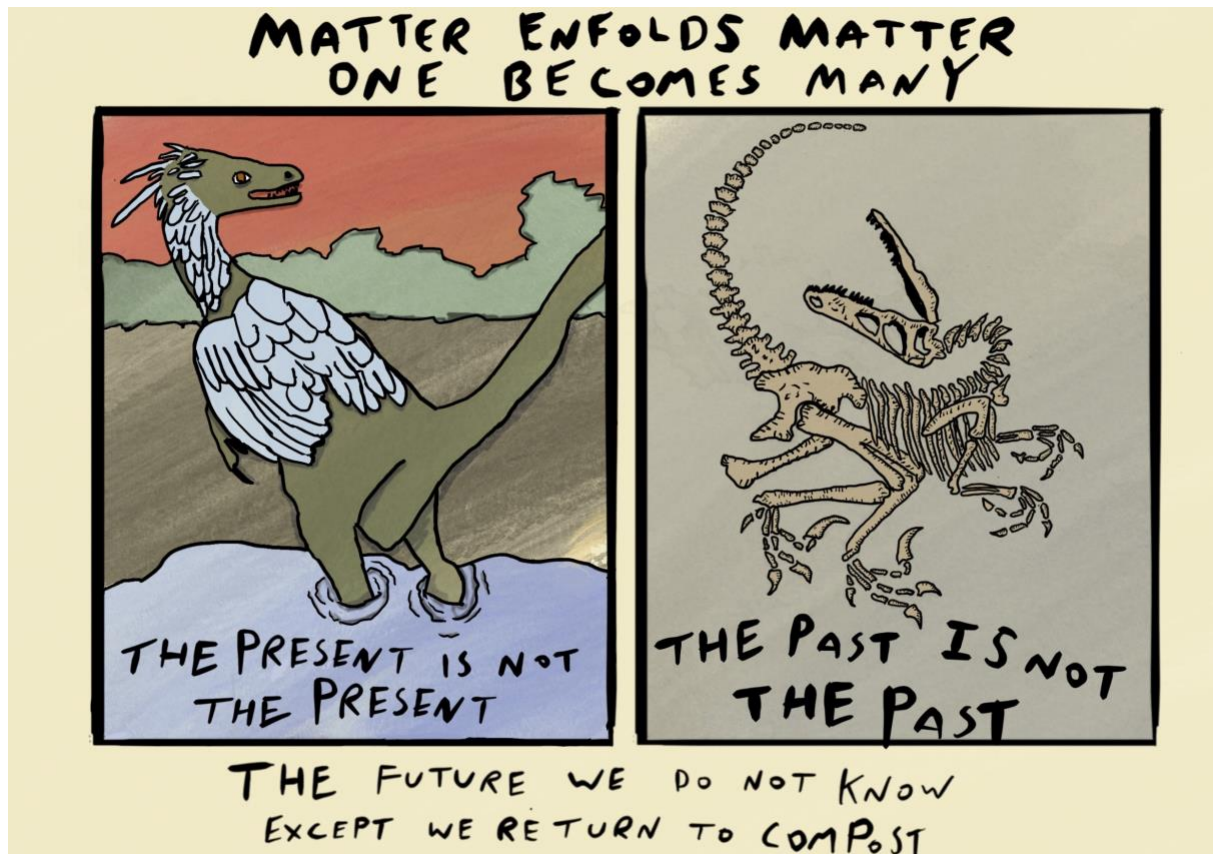
⁹³ Wood, *Thinking Plant Animal Human*. (19)

⁹⁴ David Farrier, *Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones, and Extinction*, Posthumanities 50 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019). (91)

outcome of unfathomable and unknowable more-than-human relatives have affected us over time.⁹⁵

Kinship must be an intentional exercise in reaching out to the Other, a intentional shifting of the “story” from human-centered protagonists to the matter of the world as the hero. To express how one can make kin, I will draw on my own experience with water. I am including a previous piece of writing which I believe was a crucial moment to my understanding of how to make kin, a watery reflection. I have also included a zine titled, *The Anthropocene and Reimagining Place* (Appendix 1) and a short comic titled, *Fossil Fuels Us (We are Just Compost)* (Appendix 2), to express how I view kinship.

Appendix 2: *Fossil Fuels Us (We are Just Compost)* page 3



⁹⁵ Ibid.

Expressions of Kinship

Water Within and Without (originally written August 2019, with minor edits)

To make kin with water is to understand that a phenomenology of water is letting the water be seen for itself, how it exists within the world, not through an anthropocentric lens, but instead through the notion that water is a being unto itself. A phenomenology of water asks us to attend to the water as it inhabits us and the world beyond. There is no life without water. The human body is 60 percent water, and the Earth is made up of 71 percent water. Water is no small feature of our existence, but not all of us relate to water in the same way.

It's apt that I start this piece on a rainy evening. I am at home in Toronto looking at the compact bound earth and water I have around me. The plants my partner and I tend to – 20 in total. I think about the noises from outside. The buzz of traffic and rubber moving through rain on wet concrete. I think about the lost creek. The Garrison Creek. I long for it. I would much rather hear the bubble and flow of the missing creek drinking the water from the sky, and all the sounds which come with healthy water and good dirt. I think of how much more pungent the earth, the sky, and the rain scents would be. I'm fortunate enough that where I live there are parks in abundance. I still get those smells. The smells of the past, the future and the present, all mingling to reveal a multi-storied "now."

This is the first time I haven't lived close to water. When I was growing up, I lived right in the middle of easily accessible parts of the Don River, a 20-ish minute walk from G. Ross Lord Park, 20 minutes to the West Don Parkland. I also lived in Guelph for a year and the Eramosa River/Speed Rivers runs straight through town. I was about an 8-minute walk to the riverbank. Water has always been a part of my life, and a big part; I was a swimmer growing up and took swimming lessons twice a week for most of my childhood. Every summer I was fortunate enough to spend time in provincial parks and the waters within. Water is something I

had taken for granted and thrived in, something I felt safe in because water was always so easily accessible. When someone asks me about my childhood, I always recall immediately the experiences with water. That's the first thing that comes to mind and what I associate with growing up. My childhood protagonist isn't intentional kin or family or friends or pets or me, but water itself.

My relationship with water changed in 2005 with the huge flood that happened in Toronto, the one that drowned Finch Ave. I was 12 at the time. I remember it like yesterday. I was at the grocery store with my dad and sister. We were just checking out as the rain started to get heavy and rapid. I saw the sky darken, a stark contrast to the fluorescent lights reflecting off the linoleum tiles of the grocery store. I remember thinking something like, "Wow... that's a lot of rain, cool." As we were standing looking out the front windows of the store, I began to fidget. I love water, I love swimming. The parking lot was flooded. It was exciting, a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and I wanted to play in it – even if just a little bit. I said excitedly to my dad, "Let's go! The car isn't that far, come on."

My dad replied with concern, "Are you sure?"

"Yeah! It's just water, it looks fun."

We made a run for it. The water was cold and dark and hit me just below my waist. As soon as I stepped into it, I realized we wouldn't be running anymore, no matter how much we tried. I remember thinking it was just like swimming in the lake, just a little bit yuckier. I remember thinking how great it would be to have a lake in the middle of the city for us to play in and use. We were all laughing and having fun. I remember chasing after my sister's flip-flop as it floated away from us. We finally got to the car thoroughly soaked but still in high spirits.

Then suddenly out of nowhere as we were driving home, I froze up. I realize now that I had entered a state of shock. I was shivering, quiet, and completely zoned out, just staring out the window and not really seeing or saying anything. I don't remember the car ride home, I don't remember getting into the house, or ending up on the couch. I do remember the blanket my mom wrapped around me.

I think that this moment was when I truly became aware that the notion of human superiority is inherently flawed. This moment of hubris when I thought the water would yield to me, even though clearly the downpour was a retaliation, a way for the water to try and reclaim its agency over this city. A city that can only exist because of anthropocentric disruption and the changing of the elements and matter around us. I didn't go swimming for a year after that.

This personal anecdote, my reaction to the elemental force of water, highlights why we need to push towards an education that foregrounds our relationship to elements and the more-than-human world. The agency of the water I experienced firsthand was a moment of encounter - an unexpected entanglement that draws me to the work of Larissa Lai. Her article "Saturate-Dissolve" in *Downstream: Reimagining Water* (2017) (a compilation of artists, scientists, scholars, and activists working to reimagine how we engage with water), states that, "The patriarchal culture in which we live tells us we have mastered the elements. Mona Polacca reminds us that in so doing we take them for granted. Taking them for granted paves the way for disrespect – for objectification and fetishization..."⁹⁶ Before my encounter with water behaving in a way that I was unfamiliar with, I believed that I knew water. I understood it and it understood me. This mindset was informed by the idea that water exists to serve us. This is taught to us in school, taught to us through swimming lessons, through socialization, and through

⁹⁶ Larissa Lai, 'Saturate/Dissovolve', in *Downstream: Reimagining Water*, ed. Dorothy Christian and Rita Wong, Environmental Humanities Series (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017), 259–69. (262)

simply turning on the tap. Lee Maracle points out in her article, “Water” (also found in *Downstream: Reimagining Water*), “We do not own the water; the water owns itself...we must take of the water and insure we have a good relationship with it. The relationship based on mutual respect.”⁹⁷ At this moment in my personal history, during the experience with the flood water became a being unto itself. I was shocked. I was scared, as water did not act the way I anticipated. But I am grateful for that experience and now I always remember to “humble myself to water.”⁹⁸ For water is life.

Zine: *The Anthropocene and Reimagining Place*: (see Appendix 1)

This zine was the first one I’ve ever seriously tried to make. The purpose of *The Anthropocene and Reimagining Place* was to draw attention to the multiplicities of our lived realities. I wanted to unravel the idea that the the human home is a space only inhabited by humans. The home is a site of several different interactions, wanted and unwanted. To fundamentally change the world, we must change the ways in which we teach, and perceive reality. We must attend to things beyond our human artifice, beyond our exceptionalism. We must teach not only ***how to exist in the world*** but how to ***exist with the world***, even in our homes. We must teach how to go beyond the confines of the human, to challenge the very core of why we teach and what for. An education that allows us to remember the forgotten relationships we have with the more-than-human entities that we are so deeply entangled with.

Our education must foster a kinship beyond human ties, a kinship with all earthlings, the living and nonliving beings that inhabit our planet. If we move towards developing this early on in life – a deep appreciation for how interconnected, we are with the planet and everything on it

⁹⁷Lee, Maracle. 2017. ‘Water’. In *Downstream: Reimagining Water*, edited by Dorothy Christian and Rita Wong, 33–38. Environmental Humanities Series. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press. 34

⁹⁸ Ibid., 38

– then we may be able to move towards a just future. This can only happen if we break through some of the “hard” facts of how we educate. We must move towards an education that acknowledges that humans are always in a state of becoming and changing, whether we are aware of it or not. We are not evolutionarily superior.

By unravelling the home, I hope to reveal that we are deeply linked to other beings, whether by choice or not.

Fossil Fuels Us (We are Just Compost): (see Appendix 2)

In this same vein the comic *Fossil Fuels Us (We are Just Compost)*, explores the notion that what makes us “uniquely human” is in fact not true.

Fossil Fuels Us (We are Just Compost) explores ideas pertaining to deep time and points out that as much as we shape the world with fossil fuel consumption this consumption is also shaping us. The rate at which we consume the dead of the planet, will lead us to death: to a point where we become fossil fuel ourselves. I conclude the comic by attending to compost and demanding that the reader considers compost as a guide on how to move with the world. I compel the reader to understand that we view compost as a singular entity, but it is not. Rather it a multitude of living and non-living beings

working together: dirt mixing with leaves, with the dead, with the bugs, with the bacteria all working in tandem to be in relationships and to create new life. Compost is not a pure entity but



rather is a multitude of different interactions. Thus, if we begin to attend to our composted-ness it forces us to reckon with our knotted-ness to the planet that has been forgotten or abandoned in the pursuit of “order” and “rationality.”

The purpose of *Water Within and Without, The Anthropocene and Reimagining Place and, Fossil Fuels Us (We are Just Compost)* is to simultaneously challenge human-centrism, dominate modes of knowledge production, appeal to emotions and provoke thought, about what can be. They work as a starting point to intentionally lean into notions of kinship and entanglement.

What is to be Done?

How have we forgotten how entangled we are with the more-than-human beings that inhabit our world and interact with us daily? They are everywhere we look. How have we forgotten their power and agency? In their article, “Introduction: Eleven Principles of the Elements,” Cohen and Duckert implore us to decenter the human and focus on how to reimagine our lived reality through the elements. They pose the question, “How did we cease to know the earth, air, fire, and water move, rebel, ally, crush, desire?”⁹⁹ In “Elemental Love in the Anthropocene,” Stacy argues that, “The elements are restless as the human imagination, seldom content to remain in their allotted places.”¹⁰⁰ As a result of the humanist worldview, we have forgotten our entangled relationship to the elements. Neoliberalism and capitalism have perpetuated that process of forgetting through our educational system.

⁹⁹ Lowell Duckert and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Introduction: Eleven Principles of the Elements,” in *Elemental Ecocriticism*. (S.l.: Univ Of Minnesota Press., 2015). 1-27

¹⁰⁰ Stacy Alaimo, “Elemental Love in the Anthropocene,” in *Elemental Ecocriticism*., ed. Lowell Duckert and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (S.l.: Univ Of Minnesota Press., 2015). 298-309

How can we begin to alter the humanist mentality that strives to disconnect us from each other and the planet? Alaimo believes that we must begin “to cultivate a phenomenological ‘wonder in the face of the world’ and a distance from the mastery of more analytical approaches.”¹⁰¹ This is no easy task. However, I believe that if we begin to reconsider our relationship to the rest of the world, we can aid in creating a world where we step back from our hubris, our “anthropocentric arrogance,”¹⁰² and begin cultivating respect for more-than-human entanglement. After all, we are merely bodies of water enmeshed in flesh.

We exist because of the countless beings that came before us, the countless watery beings that have inhabited the Earth. Our own spongy wateriness is only possible because of the global and local waters we take in. In her article “Embodying Water: Feminist Phenomenology for Posthuman Worlds,” found within *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (2019) Astida Neimanis argues that by being truly aware of our wateriness, we become aware that water does not belong to us, it never has. Water is in everything we do, in everything we consume.¹⁰³ Understanding how water travels through the hydrological cycle tells us that the water we see and experience could be from another part of the world, or from another being or body we do not know. If all water follows the hydrological cycle, then that means that the water inside our bodies could be derived from countless other humans and more-than-humans. Humans are not compact beings enmeshed in flesh, but made up of a multitude of components, including both new and old waters. By accepting that we are all the water of many, we engage in Stacy

¹⁰¹Astrida Neimanis, ‘Embodying Water: Feminist Phenomenology for Posthuman Worlds’, in *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*, Paperback edition, Environmental Cultures Series (London New York Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 27–64.

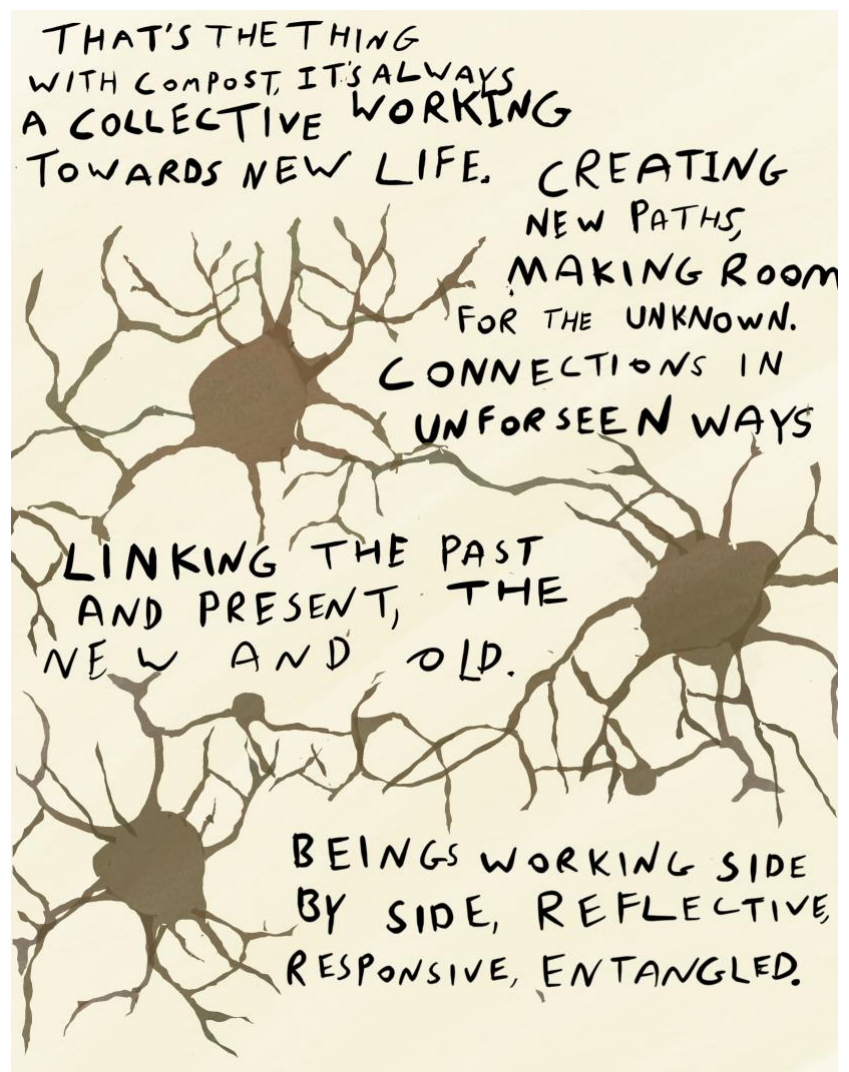
¹⁰² Alaimo, ‘Elemental Love in the Anthropocene’.

¹⁰³ Neimanis, ‘Embodying Water: Feminist Phenomenology for Posthuman Worlds’.

Alaimo's theory of trans-corporeality.¹⁰⁴ Alaimo and Neimanis's approaches to more-than-human entanglement should be integrated into how we teach water.

Water can exist with or without humanity because water is an independent being, while also an amalgamation of many beings that we cannot comprehend. If we keep this in mind we can work towards an entangled, feminist process of making kin.¹⁰⁵ This kinship requires us to understand that our existence is entirely dependent upon more-than-human actors and each other.

With all my work, including my personal story about water, I keep in mind Donna Haraway's claim that "[W]e are all compost..."¹⁰⁶ She implies that all living beings once emerged from compost and will end as compost. Using this framework, I propose the question, "What does it mean to be good compost?" I believe that to be good compost is to attend to our relationships with the more-than-human world. This question and its broader implications guide much of how I think and live. Humans emerge from compost and our "humanity" ends in compost. Composting isn't an end, nor will it ever



Fossil Fuels Us (We are Just Compost) page 4

¹⁰⁴ Alaimo, 'One: Bodily Natures'. (3)

¹⁰⁵ Neimanis "Embodying Water"

¹⁰⁶ Haraway, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin'. 161

be. Serpil Opperman describes compost as a “rescripting of life.”¹⁰⁷ It is the amalgamation of every life form into something new, something that can be used by every other living being.¹⁰⁸

Earth, water, and humanity are all one and the same – just at different stages of being. The bodies we inhabit and know exist in several stages of temporality, and at any given moment we also embody our human and more-than-human ancestors. Ancestors that have been fed by water and earth and in turn feed us when they turn into compost or fossil fuels. The more-than-human, the Other, “nature,” the earth, and water was here before us and will be here after us. They actively shape us and our way of being.

The earth and the water are not passive, they are volatile and ever-changing. They can be knowable, but we need to reorient the way in which we interact with them. Cohen and Duckert state that the elements are, “Smaller than nature, larger than quarks and leptons, the elements are perceivable foundations of which worlds are composed, the animated materiality with and through which life thrives...they are outside and already within, the very stuff of cosmos, home, body and story”¹⁰⁹ We are brought forth from the earth. We will return to the earth. We are bound to the earth. Our existence depends on earth and water working in tandem, and without them what we know to be human would be different.

How does one teach kinship? I believe one way to teach kinship is to teach the “hard sciences” such as water’s passage through the hydrological cycle, but this must be in conjunction with creative and emotional processes of exploration. Environmental science education has been reduced to profit-oriented resource-ism, or in other words, how humans can benefit from the

¹⁰⁷ Serpil Opperman, ‘Compost’, in *Veer Ecology: A Companion for Environmental Thinking*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 136–50.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁹ Duckert and Cohen, ‘Introduction: Eleven Principles of the Elements’

environment. Conservation is framed as being in our best interest, particularly because clean water benefits us. Environmental science education has been removed from place and is instead taught in abstract terms (for instance, through the memorization of scientific processes like the hydrological cycle). This method of teaching prevents students from having a relational understanding of how humans impact the environment and how the environment impacts us. This type of education denies the existence of community among plants, animals, and other more-than-human entities – and ignores the multifaceted problems associated with the destruction of the environment. This denial is predicated upon teaching the environment from a human-centric lens, a lens that reduces the environment into something that generates profit or exists solely to benefit people.

I believe educating with entanglement is a step in the right direction towards creating livable futures. (See *Appendix 3* for a lesson plan/workshop.) Knotted ontology generally suggests that we need to expand our definition of a “social actor,” or something with agency, to include more-than-human beings. An entangled education is a move from human rights to more-than-human rights (the rights of everything to exist, and that to simply exist is enough). This type of education pushes us away from the notion of the human family to a planetary family. The boundaries of what we consider to be human are in fact not entirely truthful because what makes us human is the way in which relationships manifest within our corporeal forms. These relationships can take the form of relationships with power, with the environment, and with each other. To engage with these relationships is to push the boundaries of humanism, and what has historically been considered human. This is how “truth” changes, but that can only be achieved through deconstructing how we perceive our place in the world. Entangled education is one avenue to enact this deconstruction.

I believe that to promote a knotted education comes from a position of care, empathy, dialogue, and fairness. To enact a knotted educational framework, we must push for “practice-based” and “place-based” learning. These types of learning can highlight the “collaborativeness” of the human actor with the rest of our planet. By grounding environmental education in place and practice, it can teach us to challenge the artificial binaries of human/more-than-human, nature/culture, theory/practice, and body/mind.

Place is imbued with historical context and politics. To demand place-based learning without attending to the legacies of colonialism and the displacement of Indigenous Peoples in Canada is contemptable. Place is a contested physicality within which we are all entangled, and to educate with place requires us to understand that place is always shifting. Teaching with place allows for children to engage with their surroundings, to notice the little things, and follow their desire to understand the surrounding world on their own terms.¹¹⁰ Simultaneously, place-based learning demands an understanding that places hold stories, and unfinished entanglements. As educators it is our duty to present as many stories about place as we can, both good and bad, from human stories to more-than-human stories. Giving these stories room to breathe allows us to read the world.¹¹¹ Creating an education based on kinship also requires cultivating a kinship to land. Place is not static; place exists in several temporalities at once. As an educator, and as a human, it is our duty to attend to this.

¹¹⁰ Iorio, Jeanne Marie, Catherine Hamm, Will Parnell, and Elizabeth Quintero. ‘Place, Matters of Concern, and Pedagogy: Making Impactful Connections with Our Planet’. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education* 38, no. 2 (3 April 2017): 121–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2017.1306600>.(126)

¹¹¹ Greenwood, David Addington. ‘Place, Land, and the Decolonization of the Settler Soul’. *The Journal of Environmental Education* 50, no. 4–6 (2 December 2019): 358–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2019.1687412>.

Conclusion: Towards Kinship and Care

The water that makes us is not ours, the compost that we have sprung from is not ours. It never will be. The earth and water we enshrine in our flesh, in our corporal forms, are on loan to us. They will remain as such until we return them; they are a gift. If we accept this gift, if we continue to live, survive, and thrive, then we must acknowledge that what we do to the waters and earth that inhabit us will pass on to the next being that borrows from the planet. Our waters, our dirt, how we treat them will carry on beyond us to beings and life forms that we cannot even comprehend. This transference will continue for as long as the world exists and allows the living to borrow from it. If we remember this, we can begin to change the way we engage with water and the wider world beyond human constructs. We must challenge how we produce knowledge and what types of knowledge are given priority. What forms of knowledge are acceptable?

Precarity is the state of the world.¹¹² Lived reality is in a state of impotence.¹¹³ Chaos reigns, but this state of precarity is not new. It always has been this way. Humanity has erected complex systems to hide the precarious nature of being human, which in turn create new systems that produce chaos for some creatures while favouring others. What if we leaned into the precarity? What if the human mode of reasoning shifted to an understanding of precarity as something to be embraced rather than fought? Precarity allows us to be vulnerable to others, to understand that algorithms and hierarchical structures are illusions of control. Everything is in a state of flux. Embracing vulnerability allows us to embrace the shifting assemblages that make the world work, allows us to make kin, and to create new ways of being. Precarity is vulnerability; it emphasizes that survival depends on collaboration and mutual aid and creates space to build towards a livable future.

¹¹² Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. (20)

¹¹³ Berardi, *Futurability*.

It is impossible to fully escape humanism. Humanism has been and continues to be a dominant discourse that shapes our material reality. The haunting ghosts of humanism – the good, the bad, and the ugly – hang over any effort to decenter the human and attend to our more-than-human assemblages. Dernikos et al. (2020) remind us of that in their article, “The Possibilities for ‘Humanizing’ Posthumanist Inquiries: An intra-active conversation” in which they discuss how humanism’s history is such a potent force that any effort to move beyond it leaves traces and echoes of humanism.¹¹⁴ This is not to make the argument that working to decenter the human is an impossibility; rather, while the ghosts of humanism may haunt us, there is much to learn from that haunting. The title of Donna Haraway’s 2016 ecofeminist text emphasizes the importance of that tension: *Staying with the Trouble*.¹¹⁵

To understand entanglement is to also understand that we are entangled within capitalism and neoliberalism. Capitalism and neoliberalism don’t merely entangle, however – they are machines that serve to disentangle the human from the “web of life.” They function to alienate individuals from our knotted reality, commodify people, and preserve the status quo. If one hopes to highlight the knotting of humanity with the more-than-human world, one must then accept that the living is always tied to the dead. The conditions that make life possible cannot exist without the countless dead that came before. History matters, lives lived matter – human and more-than-human.

This paper serves to act with theory, to understand that if one is to change how the world is made requires complex thinking and doing, shifting of being, and be-ing. The planet is not static. It is not a background character to human stories of conquest and killing, or individual

¹¹⁴ Bessie P. Dernikos, Daniel E. Ferguson, and Marjorie Siegel, “The Possibilities for ‘Humanizing’ Posthumanist Inquiries: An Intra-Active Conversation,” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 20, no. 5 (October 2020): 434–47, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708619829793>. (446)

¹¹⁵ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*.

heroism. As Ursula K Le Guin suggests in “*The Carrier Bag of Fiction*” (2019), a story should function to make meaning, and continuously expand to new possibilities.¹¹⁶ This attitude also informs Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s theory of the rhizome: knowledge is not static, things are always in a state of becoming.¹¹⁷ Too teach with kinship is to disrupt knowledge hierarchies and to challenge how stories are perceived.

We must begin to foster a greater understanding of how humans fit into the world; an ethos of kinship challenges our notions of dominion which are tied to humanist thought and have informed the development of neoliberalism in Western society. The way we educate and engage with children cannot keep up with the innumerable problems that animate our world, no matter how much we pretend our “rationality” and “superiority” will save us and the planet – it won’t. An education of kinship is one avenue to challenge how we define the human, to foster relationships beyond familial ties and beyond human ties, a kinship among all earthlings.¹¹⁸ An education of kinship is not a call to return to pure nature or a pure state of wilderness that never existed in the entire history of humanity and never will exist. To think that it is possible to return to a pristine, pure, naturalized humanness is a legacy of humanism. Instead, I call for us to accept the “contamination” of the wild, of animality, and to develop ways to foreground this “contamination” through our education. An education of kinship challenges the alienation and commodification of our planet by attending to entanglement and rejecting the notion that anything is a singular being.¹¹⁹ An education of kinship emphasizes that the world is entangled, precarious, and in chaos. It teaches us to accept that precarity is to be vulnerable to others. An

¹¹⁶ Ursula K. Le Guin and Donna Haraway, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (London: Ignota, 2019).

¹¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, ‘Introduction: Rhizome’, in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

¹¹⁸ Haraway, ‘Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin’ (161-162)

¹¹⁹ Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. (5)

education of kinship demands that we reckon with the fact that we are not in control, that we are always changing. Everything is in a state of flux – it always has been and always will be.¹²⁰

Through this manifesto I hope to initiate a dialogue around the flawed myth of human superiority and the importance of drastically changing how we engage with the world. This should not serve as an end or be-all guide on how we should face the crises of our times, but one path or possibility to addressing our current epoch.

¹²⁰ Ibid., (20)

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Zine- The Anthropocene and Reimaging Place

letter to the future, the past
and the present.

A thought experiment-

the anthropocene and
reimaging place.



a zine by
aaron lefler

as the days grow long, the sounds in the walls wane. Our strange
neighbours have gone silent.

they burrowed in for the winter, a short stay away from the
harshness, as the weather becomes pleasant, they no longer
need the sanctuary.

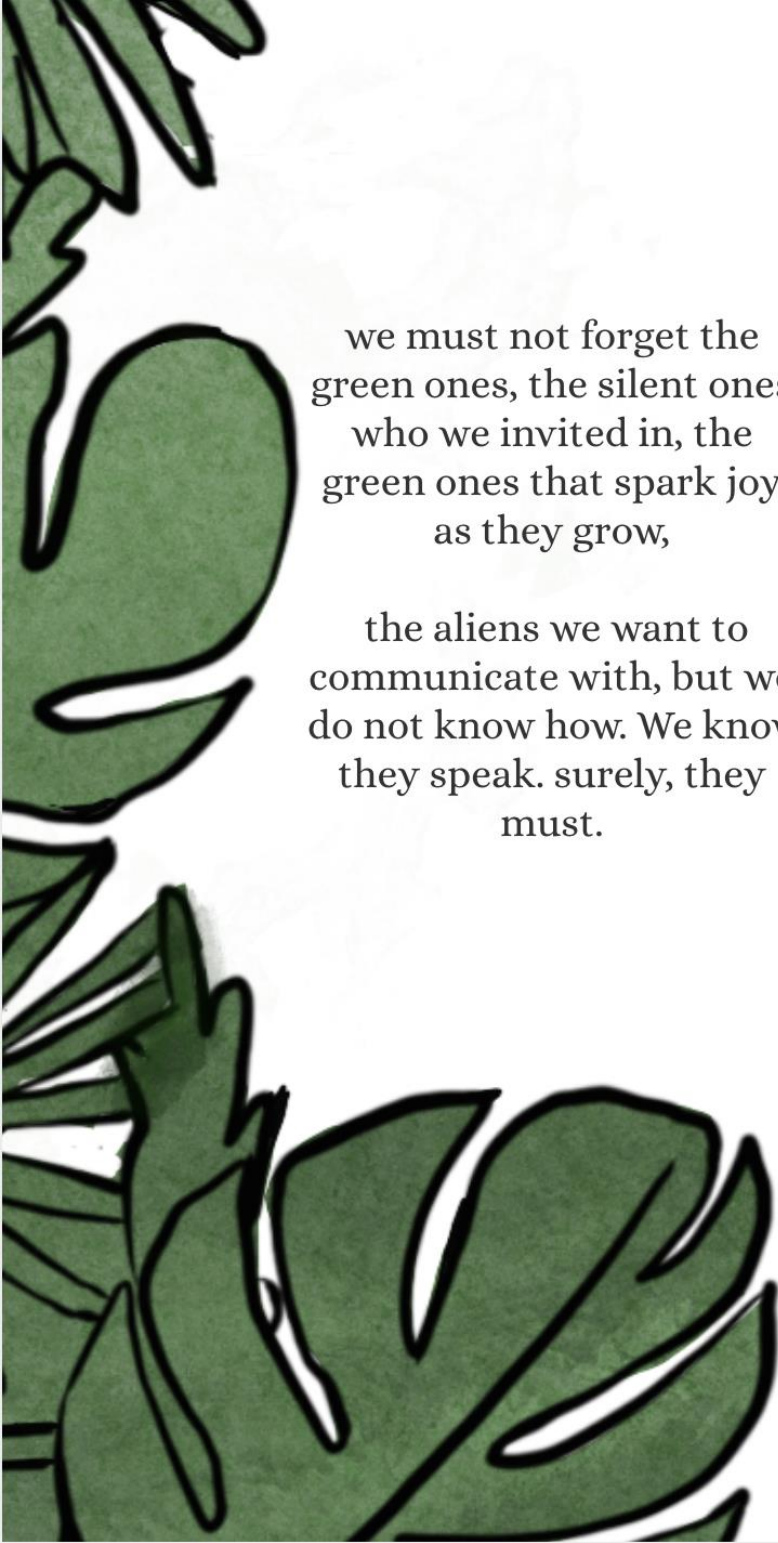
perhaps our home is built on theirs.

scritch- scratch - the cat keeps them away.

the walls are their realm, don't leave any crumbs on the floor,
it's a tempting invitation. they seem to keep to themselves. do
we try and oust them or just let them be?

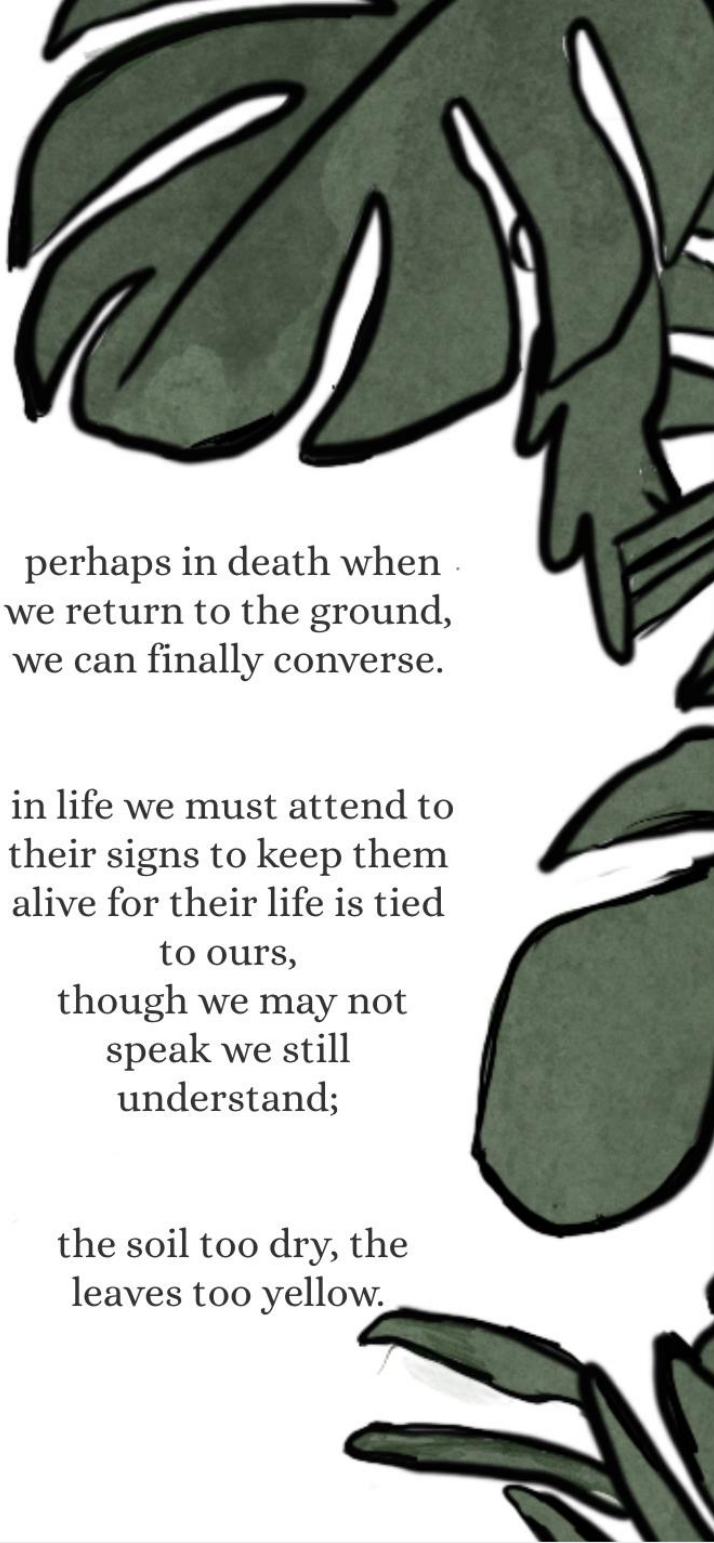
we'll leave the decision to the cat, for this is his domain as much
as ours.





we must not forget the
green ones, the silent ones
who we invited in, the
green ones that spark joy
as they grow,

the aliens we want to
communicate with, but we
do not know how. We know
they speak. surely, they
must.



perhaps in death when
we return to the ground,
we can finally converse.

in life we must attend to
their signs to keep them
alive for their life is tied
to ours,
though we may not
speak we still
understand;

the soil too dry, the
leaves too yellow.

we have attended to
the winged ones, the
warm-blooded ones,
the silent ones.

what of the most
numerous ones, the
ones we often forget
until they are
unignorable:

the ones who inhabit
the uninhabited parts,
the cracks, the
crevices, the forgotten
place



the ones called icky,
creepy,
ugly.

the arthropods, the
arachnids. The
strangest and most
versatile of them all.

just as their
populations are most
numerous, so too are
their functions: givers
of life, spreaders of
diseases, shapers of
the world around
them

perhaps the general
dislike of them comes
from how numerous
and similar they are
to us.

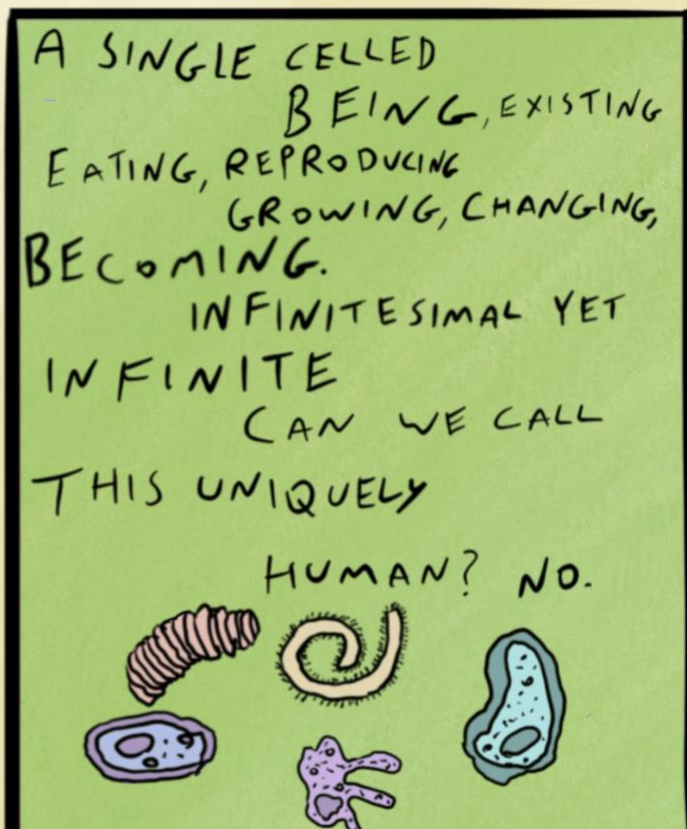
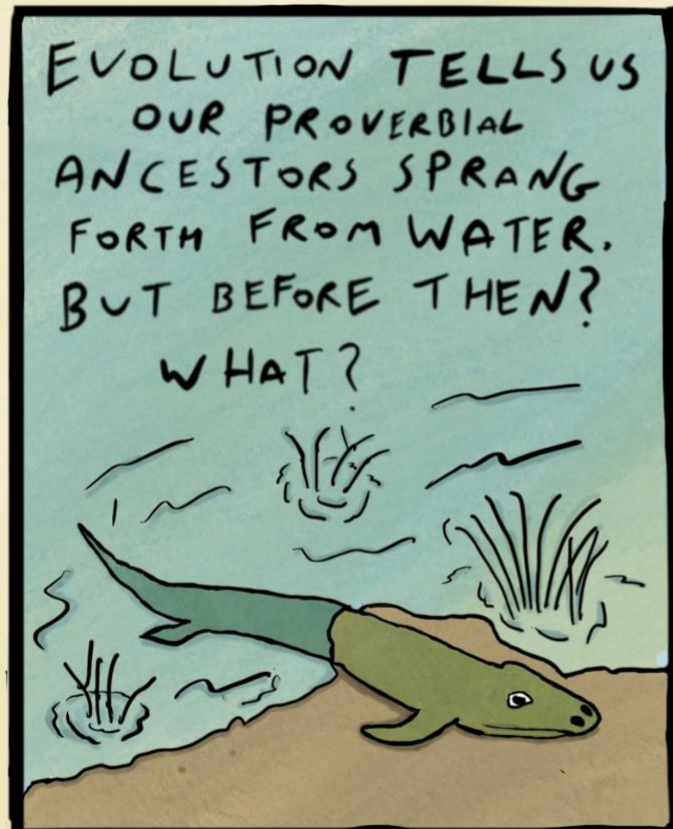
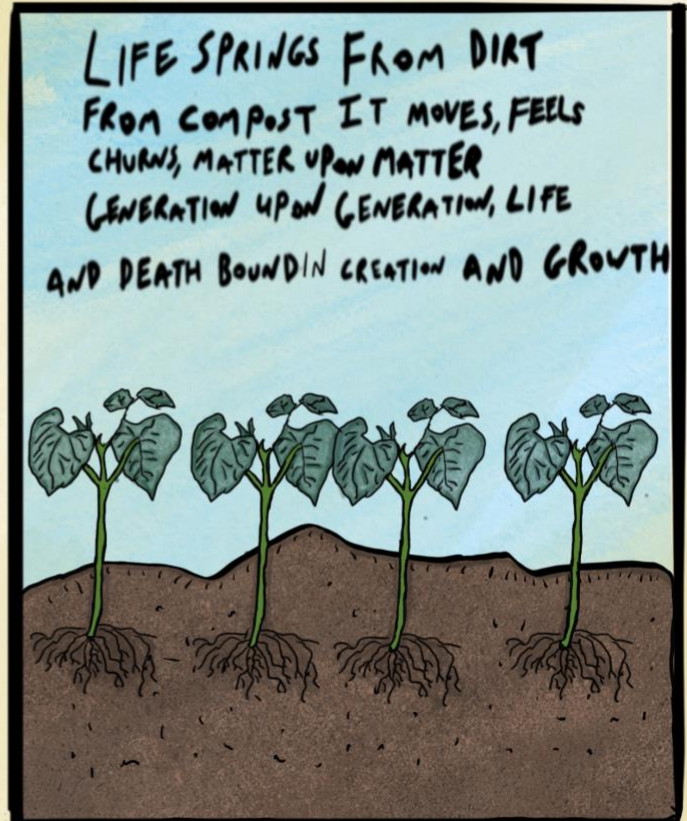


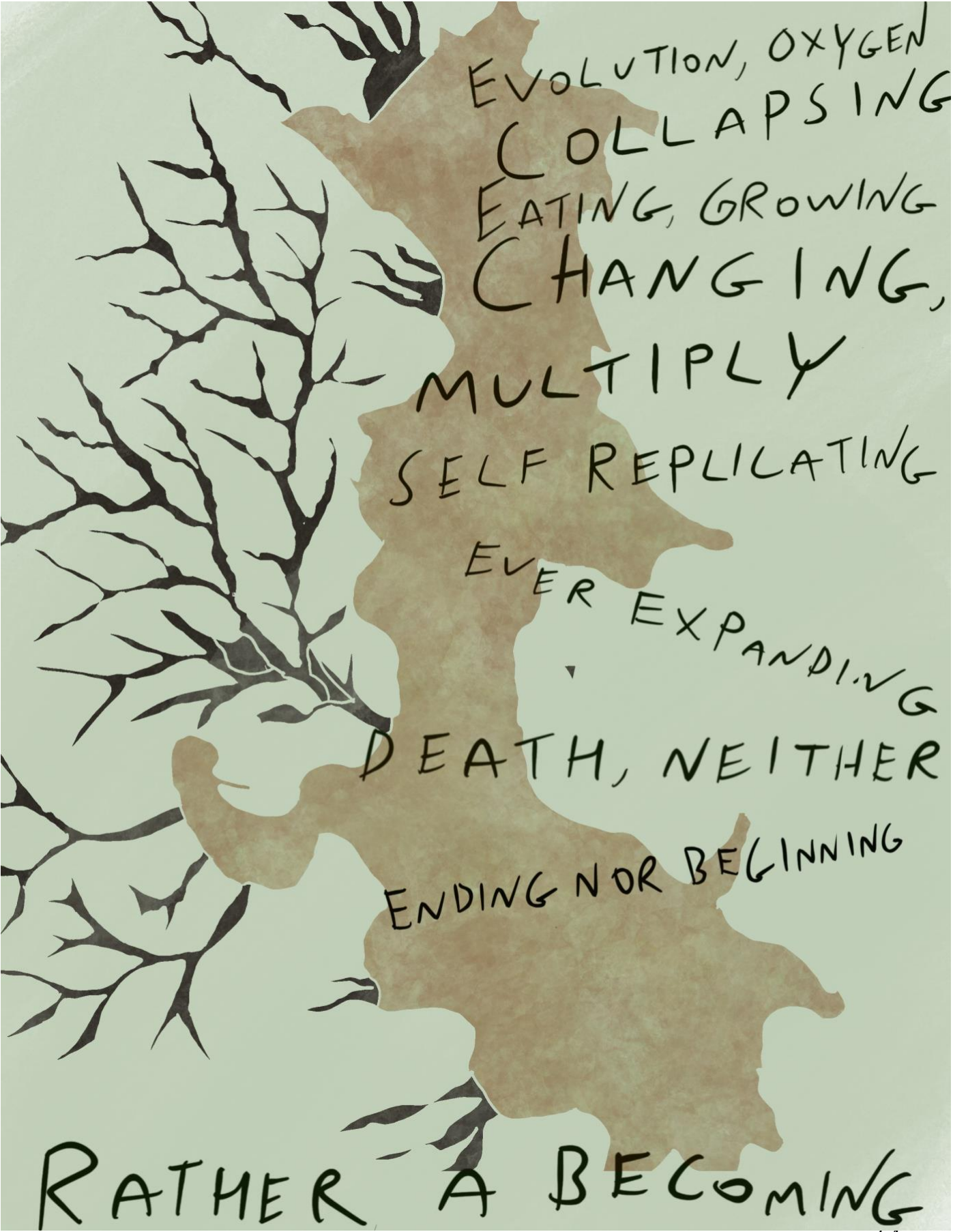
letter to the future, the past
and the present.

A thought experiment-
the anthropocene and
reimagining place.

a zine by
aaron lefler

Appendix 2: Comic- Fossil Fuels Us (We are Just Compost)





EVOLUTION, OXYGEN
(COLLAPSING
EATING, GROWING
(CHANGING,

MULTIPLY
SELF REPLICATING

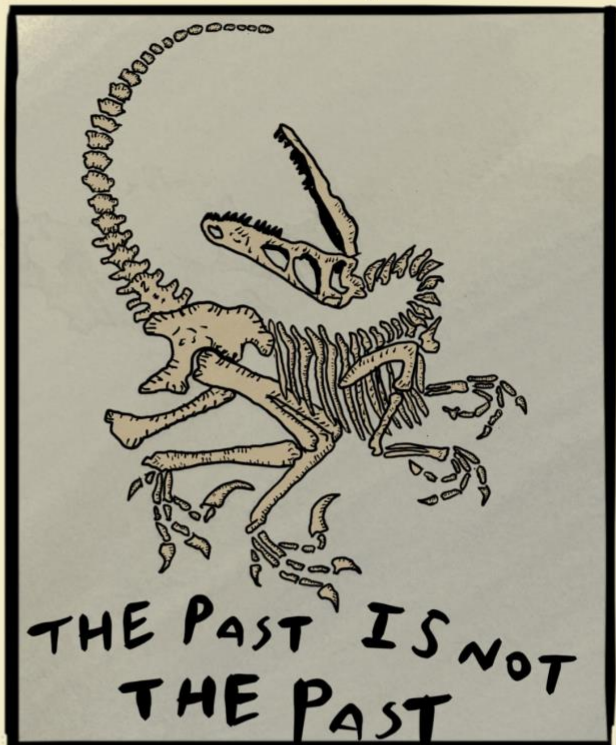
EVER EXPANDING

DEATH, NEITHER

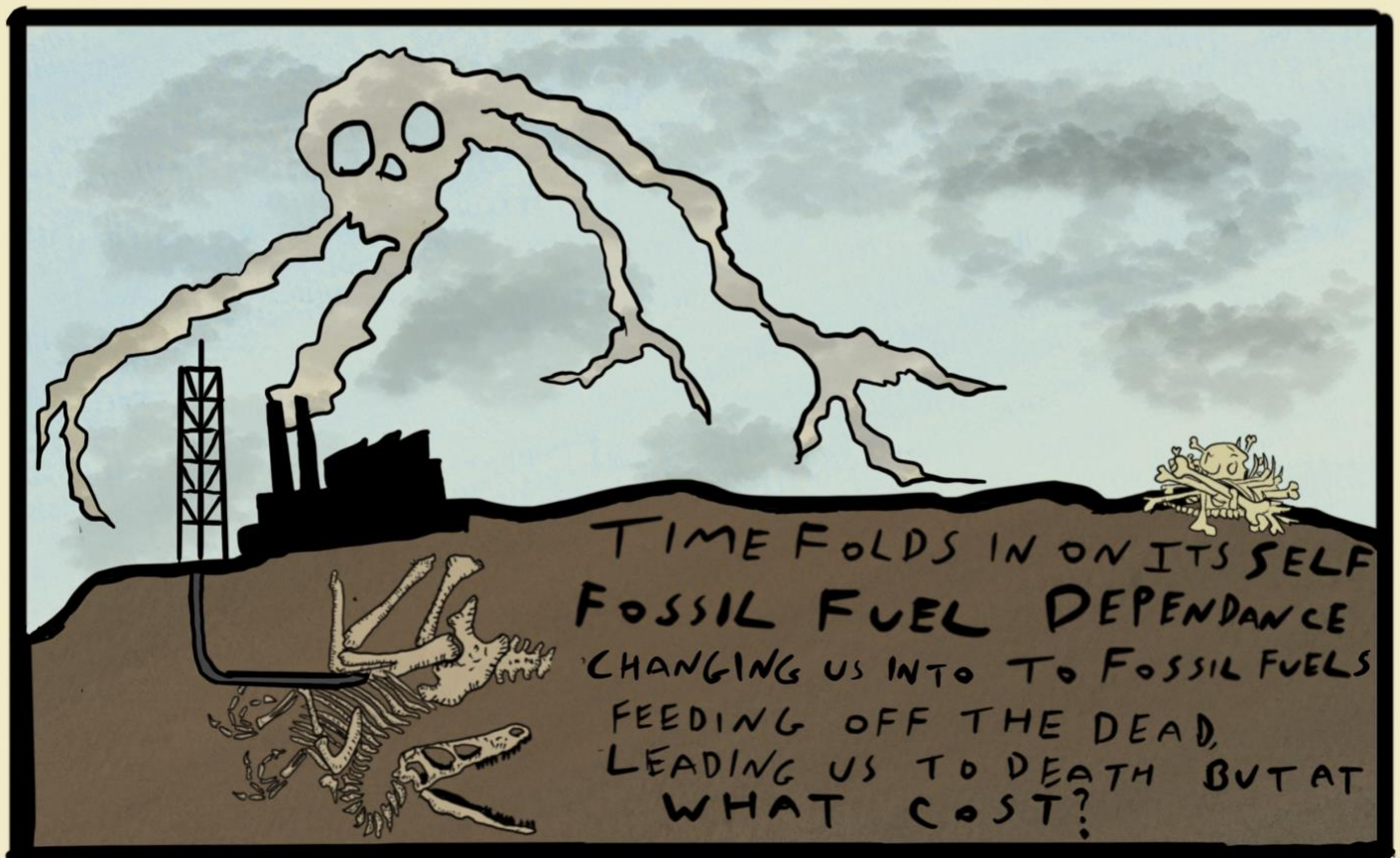
ENDING NOR BEGINNING

RATHER A BECOMING

MATTER ENFOLDS MATTER
ONE BECOMES MANY



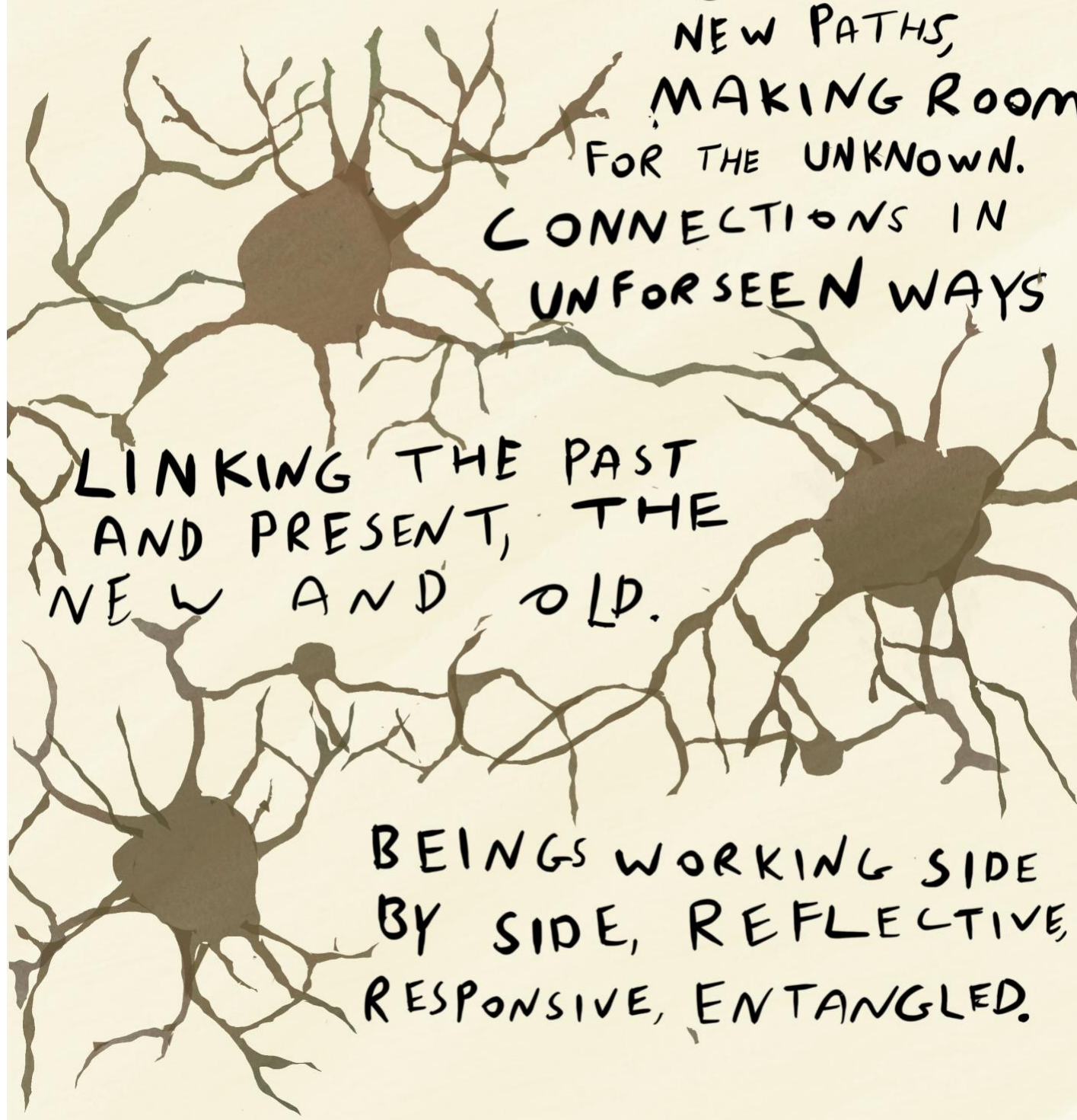
THE FUTURE WE DO NOT KNOW
EXCEPT WE RETURN TO COMPOST



THAT'S THE THING
WITH COMPOST, IT'S ALWAYS
A COLLECTIVE WORKING
TOWARDS NEW LIFE. CREATING
NEW PATHS,
MAKING ROOM
FOR THE UNKNOWN.
CONNECTIONS IN
UNFORSEEN WAYS

LINKING THE PAST
AND PRESENT, THE
NEW AND OLD.

BEINGS WORKING SIDE
BY SIDE, REFLECTIVE,
RESPONSIVE, ENTANGLED.



Appendix 3: What is Water? Lesson Plan/Workshop

To demonstrate one way in which we can begin to foreground our relationship to the other, to the non-human, I have prepared a lesson plan. Ideally, I envision this lesson plan to be taught to school children while they are learning about the hydrological cycle and water systems. I need to acknowledge that this lesson plan would benefit from a field trip to a body of water, which isn't always possible. I included minor adjustments throughout to make it as doable as possible without a field trip. I imagine this plan can be used at different age groups and at different locations but slightly adjusted, hence why at times it seems a bit vague.

Step 1: Onsite: Near Body of Water (NBW)

The facilitator discusses the body of water, what lives in it, the “hard science” (hydrological cycle, ecosystem inhabitants, how the water is used) learned in class but applied to whatever body of water is at the location of the field trip. Participants then engage with the water for 5-10 minutes. This might involve walking around the water, (if the water is clean) sticking one's hands in it or looking at what surrounds the water. If the water is not clean it can be avenue for discussion.

Step 1: Alternative: Body of Water is Unavailable. (BWU)

In groups if there is no body of water, participants begin discussing water and jot down some ideas. Run a video in the background of bodies of water with the sounds as they may help attune the participants to the idea of water.

Step 2: (NBW)

Gather everyone together in a circle. Open a series of questions to the group, participants reflect on the water in a public way- as a collective. Open the floor for participants to ask about water and participants to answer each other. Some examples of questions to ask.

- How did the water make you feel?
- Does it recall any memories?
- What do you think lives in the water? around it?
- Does it have a smell? if so, what do think of the smell?
- What is your relation to water do you think beyond turning the tap on?

Step 2: (BWU)

Gather everyone together in a circle. Open a series of questions to the group. Participants are to reflect on the water in a public way. Open the floor for participants to ask about water and to answer each other. Some examples:

- What do you recall about water?
- Why did you talk about whichever body of water you did? If you didn't talk about a specific waterbody or place, what type of water did you discuss?
- How does water make you feel?
- What is your relation to water? do you think about water beyond turning the tap on?

Step 3: (NWB and BWU)

Read/recite/show something regarding water - a quote, an artistic idea, etc. Participants are to fan out around the space encourage them to start writing or drawing and letting their ideas flow like water. Encourage the free flow of ideas or doodles, or their bodies to manifest what water might feel like – whatever helps the participants relate to water.

For this step have included a brief experimental writing piece as an example that could be used in facilitating in both BWU and NWB settings.

This piece is my reflection on humanities hubris and somewhat an ironic perspective on it, as well as how our hubris has promoted forgetfulness of the earth and the water, and it will lead us and the rest of our planet to death.

The earth, moving, changing, creating

The water, flowing, giving, taking

Remembering what we have forgotten

Reminding us, do we listen

no, no, no

We are the amalgamation of perfection

The embodiment of difference

What does the water know?

The earth even less.

The water takes, swallows, hides

The earth ever silent, accepting

Surely, they exist to serve

no, no, no

What has happened?

We have nothing,

Where is the earth, the water?

Why has it forgotten us?

The embodiment of perfection the amalgamation of difference.

We are lost,

Too late for forgetting

Too late for remembering

What do we do?

Where do we go?

The voice on the wind?

Do we follow?

The call to return, do we heed?

Do we have a choice?

no, no, no

Step 4: (NWB and BWU)

Gather everyone in a circle again. Open the floor for participants to share if no one is keen, share what you (the facilitator) have done don't make what you present fully flushed out, if you keep it loose it encourages others to approach without judgment. Often this gives people the chance to express themselves and get comfortable. Encourage questions and engagement from the group.

Step 5: (NWB and BWU)

Conclude with a remark about the Indigenous Bands that lived with body of water or in the area. Discuss briefly the Bands (Consult Band Elders for this step or if possible, have the Band Elders explain their people's relation and perspective on water.) Discuss how colonization has reshaped the water or altered it. Additionally, remind participants how water makes up our world and ourselves - life can't exist without water. Restate how water relates to participants lives, whether they realize it or not. Include a statement or a remark about how the water will persist without us, and that the water is not ours, it never will be ours.