

Thinking with Forests
Expanding the Ecologies of Agency

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In a world composed of multiple attractions and repulsions that exceed our everyday practices of action-oriented perception, we need to work on ourselves to become more *responsive* to the artistry of whales who compose music as they travel, to the quantum complexity of birds' powers of sonar navigation, to the self-organizing powers of ocean currents, to the complexity of lava flows that issue in unpredictable patterns of granite, to the simple, unconscious intentionality of a bacterium as it adjusts its movement up a glucose gradient, and to yeast as the intense sounds it emits express feelings of pain when alcohol is poured on it.

To speak of a cultural constellation composed of multiple existential tones and subtonalities is to point to a generic feature of contemporary life. It secretes a shifting politics of surge and flow across diverse constituencies. The complex that emerges is not entirely reducible either to traits of individual character or to fixed cultural blocks. The entanglements and movements are too variable and invested in the vicissitudes of political life to succumb entirely to either mode of analysis.

William Connolly - *The Fragility of Things* (2013:169 &177)

Note to the reader: words in **bold** can be found in the **Glossary** section. I have resorted to this format in order to keep the flow of the text more fluid while engaging with certain terms more substantively.

Introduction

This paper is an elaboration of elements that I find necessary in terms of building a vocabulary and a practice—a theory—toward crafting a **morphogenetic** educational project. Tired of the academic processes and methodologies of critique of what are the structural and systemic causes of malfunctioning at multiple levels of contemporary life, I want to set forth an experiment on generative action. This is in response to the urgent need for radical re-orientation that the human species finds itself in today. For long histories of oppression, extraction and submission have led the relationships within the human project and with the more-than-human to provoke imbalances and inequities too close to a threshold of immense cascading losses both in social and 'natural' ecosystems. This provocation instilled to the 'fragile' existence of life on earth (in its quasi-equilibrium dynamics necessary for the flux of life to persevere) is not just a tilt but an exponential speeding up characterized by the last 250 years during which humans have been unleashing great quantities of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere by the burning of fossil fuels (Connolly, 2013; along the 500 years that certain human groups have taken advantage of certain others in what is commonly referred to as colonization Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2016).

This educational project is thus built on a search for vocabularies and practices rooted in frameworks of resistances, refusals, regenerations and reconstructions. It is not a matter of (re)inventing the wheel all over again but of harnessing much needed creativity to engage what there is with what is possible, orienting it one hundred and eighty degrees in a direction of **conviviality** with the planet's capacities for life. This morphogenetic project thus weaves in frames that anchor sorrow, while infusing joy with lightness in order to allow its flight. I find this tension may be a productive one in the sense of generating a paradoxical movement—that of deeply situating meaning and that of engaging courageously in open processes such as '**real creativity**.' (Connolly, 2013; Atkinson, 2017). This, for me, is an educational endeavor's shape-in-formation worth exploring.

Lastly but not least, this paper elaborates on different interpretations of Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy and the possibilities they set forth as a **speculative** paradigm from which to think in collaboration with the more-than-human constituencies that today see their futures imperiled by the billions of human agencies with which each is entangled in uneasy, complex ways.

Glossary

As many of the terms in this turning, shifting and ever-expanding world of knowledges carry in them long inheritances and lineages that may confuse and disorient, I will spend time parsing the meanings of several words I am 'thinking with.' I will do so in this glossary-form style in order to facilitate the reader's ability to access them. I do so here as a way to wager on the importance of building new vocabularies that can sustain the weight of new paradigms to come.

Conviviality: I will refer to anthropologists Joanna Overing and Alan Passes when they further Ivan Illich's conviviality in his seminal 1973 essay *Tools for Conviviality* as "...premised on an Ancient Greek (and Thomist) understanding of friendship and playfulness in personal relations is

borrowed in order to describe, and support a thesis about, the manufacture and control of the social environment through the creative and communal, yet free and individually autonomous, agency of its members.” The authors expand this notion via the inclusion of native peoples’ use of the ethos involved in the convivial. They thus add that, “These features would include peacefulness, high morale and high affectivity, a metaphysics of human and non-human interconnectedness, a stress on kinship, good gifting-sharing, work relations and dialogue, a propensity for the informal and performative as against the formal and institutional, and an intense ethical and aesthetic valuing of sociable sociality.” (Overing and Passes, 2000:xiii-xiv).

More on conviviality and the more-than-human realm comes by way of Norwegian environmental anthropologist Hugo Reinert in his assertion that, “Kin is an idiom of conviviality, but conviviality takes work and—particularly where it is denied, not just absent—it has to start somewhere, with a first move: an opening, a decision, a gesture; an offering.” (Reinert, 2016:114). This is one of the goals of education as I see it having potential, aligned with the ‘adventure of pedagogy’ as understood by British educator Dennis Atkinson that I will touch upon later in this paper (Atkinson, 2017). Not content with limiting the expansion of conviviality to what the above discernments bring, and containing it within the human project as it is enacted in modernisms East and West, I float queer theorist Jasbir Puar’s closer to home understanding of the convivial as immersed in the humanly political, where boundaries are understood as constructions that stem from affects and emotions. Fear is one such generative element that acts against the possibility for conviviality of objects, persons, systems of thought, etc. (Puar, 2008).

Eco-topological: This is a composite word of my own invention. The eco- refers both to an ecology and an economy in their twin derivations from the Greek *oikos*, home, and their cascading, entwined meanings and doings up and against organizational patterns of distribution. The

topological derives from the Greek *topos*, place and references the mathematical field that studies space in an expanded understanding that includes dimension, transformation and relation. Topology is also the study of geometrical objects that undergo continuous deformations. In these senses it is that the eco-topological interests me as the study of the limits of habitats and the possible distributions of actual material spaces as the Earth (inclusive of all inhabitants) is coerced into degradation and lockdown.

Morphogenesis: This process refers to the dynamics in the formation of patterns that take their cues from within a cohesive actualization such as organisms. The British mathematician Alan Turing was one of the first in identifying the process in 1952 when he forwarded the differentiation of six different patterns out of two identical cells via chemical reactions. (Herrero, 2013; Turing, 1952).

The importance of the question of the emergence of form and pattern in life and other dynamic systems is easily understood, whereas its operation in human learning experiences is more opaque. Nonetheless this is what truly interests me, as the question is ever more pressing. Thus, turning to Atkinson makes sense. He positions the term within the influence of Whitehead as "...a process of becoming and change." Atkinson adds that, "...in the diverse actualities of local learning experiences [...] how the content of such learning matters for a learner, that is to say, its local immanence and emerging necessary transcendence, are unpredictable. Here the actualisation of learning takes the form, or the morphology of a necessary transcendence, a transcendence emerging not from external epistemological frameworks but from the intrinsic relations of *how* something matters for a learner in a particular learning encounter." (Atkinson, 2017:145-146; my emphasis). I have extracted Atkinson's exclusive reference to art learning experiences to extrapolate its possibilities to all learning, which in fact is a life-long process. This means that the form of an educational project is dynamic and in constant formation, co-enacting and co-evolving with its

human and more-than-human participants in contribution (Stetsenko, 2008). It is shape-in-formation.

Real Creativity: Historian and philosopher William Connolly states that “Sometimes the idea of *metamorphosis* is the best way to describe the mode of self-organization at play; at others, real *creativity* may be triggered by the excitation of “teleodynamic searching processes” in complex processes, whereby a new formation arises out of a disturbance without being entirely caused by it.” (Connolly, 2013:15, his emphasis). This presses the idea that creativity in the sense of the new that may arise from the existing is not exclusive of the human, that it enacts its force at a cosmic level. It also implies that creativity does not arise *ex nihilo* but that it requires the contingencies of the already there to be able to actualize itself, yet remains mysterious and uncertain (Connolly, 2013).

Speculative philosophies: The speculative is a strand of philosophy that attempts to unmoor the human from the vast expanse of what lies beyond the human. Its attempts are not de-humanizing but aim to overcome the nature-culture dualisms of modern Western thought as well as claim the intrinsic value of the non-human. It is in this sense that it interests me, since thinking about climate, environments and ecologies necessarily implicates both the human and the non-human in complex ways. Here I recur to Belgian chemist and philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers, as a devote student of the British mathematician turned philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, the father of process philosophy and a speculative thinker who has, according to Stengers, “...helped [...] to imagine and to fight against “ready-made” models, and above all, not to despair.” (Stengers, 2011:11). There are several strands, interpretations and updated versions of the speculative since Whitehead himself set the task to think ‘cosmologically.’ Some of these pertain to the affective turn, new materialisms, and speculative realisms. I will engage some of these throughout this paper.

Thinking-feeling (*pensentimiento*): This is Canadian philosopher Brian Massumi’s term for a

perception or feeling of a sense of perception as it happens, in a pre-conscious, affective state. In his words and referring to vision, “It’s a kind of perception *of* the event of perception *in* the perception. We experience a vitality affect of vision itself.” He adds this is, “A kind of direct and immediate self-referentiality of perception. I don’t mean a self-reflexivity, which would be thinking about a perception as from a distance or as mediated by language. This is a thinking of perception in perception, in immediacy of its occurrence, as it is felt—a *thinking-feeling*, in visual form.” (Massumi, 2011:44). Before I knew of this conjunction, I had the intuition that thought and feeling were meant together. This intuition manifested in the performative walk called *pensentimiento* (Calderaro, 2016).

thinking alongside

This project of thinking *with* the more-than-human is an attempt to bypass the limitations and understandings of Western thought (in which certain specimens of the biped species are said to belong to the ‘human’ as unique rational beings, while others are kept outside), in order to contribute in theory and practice with a co-inhabiting that is ecological, economical, **eco-topological**.

I want to begin by positioning my thinking as **speculative**; and also by disclosing my belief that education and economics are absolutely entangled fields of theory and practice, that they go hand in hand and that the time spent in educational endeavors (as learners, teachers, administrators, researchers, etc.) is oriented to facilitating certain very specific organizations of life such that specific economic logics can operate; unless one becomes agentic in doing quite the opposite. In this sense it is that we can understand the current US formal education system as operative within the capitalist economic system; and how this education system and classic and neoliberal economic theories have been co-evolving throughout the last two centuries to perfect both, so that formal education is a reproductive tool of this particular economic logic.

Thinking *with* forests is an experiment in thought that stems out of the recent (Western) academic turn to the sentient and cognitive capacities of non-human entities by which ‘thinking’ abilities have been extended to them, yet where the ‘human’ remains outside, observing. In an attempt to move past this observational mode that characterizes the modern subject, I crack open the duality subject-object of Western thought to ‘think-with’ the more-than-human—an invitation to those who historically self-designate as ~~exclusive carriers of rational/cognitive capacities~~¹ to feel included in the process of this ‘thinking’ now bestowed on the more-than-human². It is also a play with anthropologist Eduardo Kohn’s 2013 *How Forests Think*—itself an expansion of this categorical practice toward relational onto-epistemologies—and with philosopher Isabelle Stenger’s 2011 *Thinking with Whitehead*—her massive undertaking of the British process philosopher’s *oeuvre*.

Here and with the title of this paper as proposition, I am attempting not only a reversal of agency but an opening to the agency of alterity (in being able to be with, and receive from, it). Instead of bestowing the cognitive capacities once exclusive of the human onto trees and forests—how inclusive of Western thought to do this, once and for all, after this same understanding was always already there within myriad indigenous cosmologies—I am inviting Western thought to make a leap in thinking thought and for once, sit with trees and forests—as expanded complex systems—
this requires time spent with forests, opening to listening in different ways that one is used to, and observing minute cues without rushing to accrue meaning from them and think *with* them. After all, it can be said that trees, apples and feathers have already played major roles in our understanding of certain gravitational forces through the thinking activities of such crucial physicists as are Newton and Galileo. In turn, this experiment might induce leaps of imaginative intensities toward expanding the notions, practices and limits of thought and the inherent

¹ My use of the ~~strike through~~ here is to denote a dynamic process of acknowledgement, recognition, and change in differentiating and letting go.

² This perhaps is the problem of segregation—it is not enough to bring playgrounds to ‘others;’ it is important to play in them together with others.

value of what lies beyond the categories of the human. For, once the many turns of the disciplines toward relaxing expectations with their objects of knowledge (Atkinson, 2017) and the expansions of the categories and capacities of the (non) conscious that look to decenter the human come to a standstill of sorts (will they ever?), there still remains the need to inhabit the planet as the humans that we are—this biped species with central *and* distributed cognitive capacities whose hands have been freed long ago (each time after the first year of life) to be extended to the earth as cultivators.

Hence this move to ‘think with’ as aggregate to Kohn’s ‘sylvan thinking’ (Steeermann, 2014), along with a recognition of the complexities involved in what is perceived, acknowledged and identified as ‘forest,’ is a gesture by which it can be said we participate in the planet as co-inhabitants. This means the signs and agencies other beings bring forth, generate, and generally set in motion as possibilities, are contributing factors to the general sense of continuity with life on planet Earth and as such must be taken into account regardless of their standing toward ‘the human.’ Yet, as much as there are a myriad beings playing their cards on this game, and as much as ‘humans’ present capacities to enact and distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ this project begs for an ethics—another practice that has a few thousand years under ‘our’ belts. Ethics here can be understood as a capacity toprehend others (human and non-human beings alike). Despite the humanly limitations of an ethics, this capacity to ‘listen’ to the voices of alterity is precisely the underscoring of equal standing—a right to expressions of lively needs. Although setting the tone of an ethics in the language of rights is a complicated matter, it is important to note that in 2007-2008 Ecuador included a chapter on the rights of nature in its constitution, followed by a ruling in 2017 in which New Zealand granted personhood rights to the Whanganui River (Ecuadorian People, 2008; Freid, 2018). Both of these are manifestations of a humanly ethics toward granting voices to otherwise ‘voiceless’ entities. Another quite different manifestation occurs when Peruvian-

Californian scholar Marisol De La Cadena braves the difficulties inherent in translating these possibilities to scholarly work. In her 2015 book *Earth Beings*, she expands the possibilities of her anthropological practice to include the mediated voices of a mountain whose agency was paramount in the land reforms of the last century in Peru. Multiple mediations occurs in the not-so easy dialogues that she engages with the local inhabitants of a small Andean village.

Along this thinking-with, threads of intuitions orient me to continue thinking about agency (or is it *with* agency?), not just what it is but most importantly how it flares up and whether it can be guided and oriented toward a conviviality.

a stirring of agencies

Via a Whiteheadian current, versions of the speculative from within affect theory, new materialisms and speculative realisms bring agency to an understanding as excess, an intensity that leads to activity, a motivation favoring vitality—in short, an energy. This understanding of agency as a sort of energy necessitates a decoupling of the notion of energy from that of science and economics, with which it has co-evolved since the 1850s when the First and Second Laws of Thermodynamics were stated. Since then, energy has been appropriated by physics to explain it and deploy it as work/productivity/order; and consequently explain its opposite, entropy, as not work/unproductivity/disorder. ‘Coincidentally’ during this same period the steam engine was invented and hence the industrial revolution began as accelerated force of capitalism. Just about the same time, this ‘great acceleration’ intensified even more what has come to be known as the Anthropocene or Capitalocene (Crutzen&Stoermer, 2000; Moore, 2015)—the markedly new geological era in which we find ourselves, defined as the geological changes effected precisely by human agencies (Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2016). Via this decoupling, a decolonization of the notion of energy can be said to occur, by which its former esotericism is transformed into an object of possible

enunciation by different academic disciplines and fields other than physics. It is important to highlight again and again how different scientific paradigms are implicated ideologically (Latour, 2004). It is also important to underscore how the technological apparatuses set forth by a particular scientific paradigm along its economic logic, forward and sustain particular concepts and not others, while they recursively tighten its regime of truth locking out all alternative possibilities. Nonetheless, this acknowledgement of the limits of the current practices that fall under the sciences must not be taken as a disapproval of certain narratives that it proposes. For today more than ever it is important to align with the scientists who relentlessly battle the denial of the object of knowledge ‘Climate Change.’ Whether this alliance can be furthered past this alignment will depend on the sciences opening up to difference, uncertainty and paradox. Regardless, today no force is strong enough to oppose the negligence of certain agents that operate beyond the interests of the vital and continue with economic practices that are detrimental to life in all its instances. This is one of the reasons why this move to think about these topics *with* the speculative is crucial—because it can open up the set of possibilities.

My take on agency under this general movement is that it benefits when it springs from a space of joy. I think with different elaborations of Spinoza’s philosophy, and his early vitalist account of the emotional basis of being and its force as tendency to preserve that life/being. The word Spinoza uses to describe that force in humans is *conatus* and its manifestation as emotional runs within the continuum of joy-sorrow (Malabou, 2012). Given this, the actualization of agency as springing from a space of joy means an exploration of this continuum with regards to locating sorrow, to anchor it in its embodied and material historical situatedness in order to make space for joy, even if in micro doses. It signals to allowing this exploration to be infused with a sense of joy (not necessarily happiness) in the way in which ‘connecting with-’ makes room for fuller instances of living.

Malabou explains how this works, quoting Spinoza in his *Ethics*, “ “The human body can be affected in many ways by which its power of acting is increased or diminished.” This power coincides precisely with “the endeavor [*conatus*] by which each thing strives to persevere in its being.” This “endeavor” is adjustable; it can be tuned like an instrument; joy and sorrow play it like a strange moving keyboard, making it resonate or muffling its tone. Joy affirms. Sorrow diminishes. “Joy and sorrow are passions by which the power, i.e. the endeavor, of each thing to persevere in its being is increased or diminished, helped or hindered.”” (Malabou, 2013:21-22).

This dynamic can be presented under the sign of agency as follows. The time spent collaborating towards conviviality (Reinert, 2016), as assemblages of agencies that build spaces and temporalities for the regeneration of joy, must be confronted in tension with *agony*. Both words, agency and agony, share the Proto Indo-European root *ag-* “to drive, draw out or forth, move.” Both are social affects but whereas agency goes to an entanglement with efficiency and power, agony moves toward struggle or trial³. This is an interesting entwinement of meanings that illuminates what Connolly asserts as being part of today’s human and more-than-human agentic matrix in their conditioned standings with regard to mortality (Connolly, 2013). It is another paradoxical movement that can be generative in the tension, as the drawing out or forth become both the anchor and the release of sorrow and joy, entwined. In working on the similarities and differences of speculative thinkers Whitehead and Nietzsche, Connolly claims that, “We need to cultivate presumptions of care and agonistic generosity to draw on as we respond to new, unexpected situations.” Although unexpected situations have not been absent in past times, it seems the complexities that characterize them have as of late been stirred deeply. Connolly explains them in detail as they manifest today,

It is serious enough to resent, first, human mortality and, second, time’s “it was” in which you cannot reverse past events or actions you regret the most. A third, related dimension is activated when people who have imbibed traditional monotheisms and/or secular or

³ etymonline, accessed 12-15-19

humanist notions of human uniqueness encounter living evidence on behalf of a bumpy, multi-tiered world of becoming. Today such encounters can be resisted but perhaps not easily ignored. They are lodged in the accelerated pace of some dimensions of cultural life in dissonant relation to other slow processes, in the rapid, global, media communication of earth-shaking natural events, in scientific speculations about the evolution of the cosmos as well as solid evidence of species evolution, in renewed intensities of conflict between regionally anchored religions with contending claims to universality in a world of rapid communication, in recent research in neuroscience that makes the human body-brain-culture system look closer to a teleodynamic system oscillating between decoherence and coherence than to either a carrier of free will floating above earthly life or a system of mechanical causes, in impressive evidence of previously unexpected conjunctions between late capitalism and the acceleration of climate change which disturbs the idea of an autonomous nature either sufficient to itself or governed by God, in action-oriented films required to inflate human powers of heroism grotesquely to retain the image of mastery, and in widespread experiments in film and the new media that complicate action-oriented modes of perception with the uncanny complexity of duration. Such experiences can accumulate to cast doubt upon previous assumptions about the place of humanity in the cosmos. They can therefore amplify intensities of existential resentment in many, as those intensities surge *through* the issue of mortality and teeth gnashing over the “it was” *into* anxieties about the shaky place of the human estate in the cosmos.

Connolly, 2013:171

For this reason, and in order to be able to regulate anxieties while opening up to ever more expanding senses of the agentic, it is that education needs to orient its practice toward what Atkinson calls a pedagogy of adventure. Atkinson prescribes a relaxation of methods, claims and expectations, and a playful undertaking of the learning experience as opening the senses to the unknown, as in aesthetics. He explains it thus, “So the pedagogical task is to stand outside of those normalising dream states and their regular affordances or apparatuses, those pedagogising technologies that govern teaching and learning, in order to try to grasp the immanence of a learner’s lived relation in a learning encounter.” He adds that “...the pedagogical imperative of a poetic materialism is to extend our grasp and potential of what it is to be human.” (Atkinson, 2017:146&147).

In the same vein as Atkinson, Connolly claims the idea of **real creativity** as an objective for the human project. This could be recognized as an educational grand goal. Connolly reinforces the

idea by stating that, “With respect to humanity, the goal is neither to deny a degree of species provincialism nor to allow its boundaries to be frozen by transcendental arguments, nor to assume that the objects of our apprehension and prehension are entirely constituted by us: the objective is to *stretch* human subjective capacities by artistic and experimental means so as to *respond more sensitively* to other force fields.” (Connolly, 2013:161; his emphasis). It is here that I want to present the idea of the need for an inversion of the current formal education system as tool for the economic system, and flip it over by granting education a leading role in the way to a new economic organization. This is a project that I will take up in later papers, along thinking with the material organizations known as ‘the commons.’

against seriousness, with-in certain propositions

Educator Anna Stetsenko stretches the limits of thinking with the participatory—that conviviality—and moves to contributing factors, both receiving and emitting. How are these entangled, for what purposes? Contributing factors are those inherent in the object of study and as well those in occurrence during the subject’s intimate relationship with this object. As Stetsenko recently reminded some of her students, “We are not in traffic—we *are* traffic,” (Stetsenko, 2019). And it is then that a paper titled “The Humor of the Problematic: thinking with Stengers,” by British educator Martin Savransky, was brought to my attention to disclose what follows,

My point here is not to deny that there may be some value in this kind of training [the professionalization of knowledge], particularly when the cultivation of such habits succeeds in being performed with enough generosity, and with enough contrasts, to populate our thinking with differences and alternatives, forming a cultural memory in relationship to which, in response to which, one might begin the task of attempting to think. But being let in on this school’s secrets, learning to appreciate its existence and to develop a certain affinity with the problems that animate it—enabling, in other words, the echoes to resonate and reverberate once again (but always differently, as echoes do)—turns “thinking” into an entirely different practice: one of learning to think not from, not against, not just after, but *with*.

Savransky, 2018:30

This preposition *with*, in thinking with Whitehead as per Connolly (in the former's take up of prepositions and conjunctions instead of substantives and predicates) allows one to use it (as in Winnicott's concept of object relations) as a hinge, a portal—as a signal for the potential of conviviality that elevates beyond duality (Connolly, 2013; Winnicott, 1969). Savransky moves this thinking-with against a concept of seriousness that floods all possibility of thought, as per the academy today. This latter 'unthinking' (Savransky, 2018) is the denial of the pleasure of thinking in its entanglement with feeling that allows a pre-conscious state of mutual prehension (as per Massumi's **thinking-feeling**). This thought-feeling (Massumi, 2011) is given in the moment as alertness, as a prehension toward (to~with) others (Stengers, 2011; Connolly, 2023; Roberts, 2015), and one that leaps from the anchoring of sorrow that releases joy. This is, perhaps, the node of my argument, if I still need one to think-with. That *where* an occurrence leaps from, is as important or more than *that* it leaps. This originary point as it were (never original, as it is a becoming) is the crucial argument. That we need an elevated number of such qualities in order that more becomings can claim that they are originarily springing from joy and hence regenerating joy (the joy-momentum is that during which a prehension hovers for a longer period, thus spending more time absorbing the libations that emanate from the joy-giving virtual occurrence). As Connolly has said elsewhere, the resentment that claims a majority of affective forces these days because of the disenchantment from the modern dream—that falling—and the ineptitude or unwillingness of the human estate (Connolly, 2013) to propose an alternative, a hope, an *angelus*, takes advantage of this situated historicity of ours in that it robs joy-agentic affect of the number of probabilities that can become actualized. The pool of virtual reserve from which then agencies are actualized begins with larger amounts of anger, fear and resentment than those of joy. Joy is handicapped from the start, but

it needs not be this way forever.

It is a leap of faith that occurs in such eventful moments of passing where the novel comes into the already there from joy. Faith is a transferential mode of transduction of energies between one singularity and another that cross paths in their becomings (Eigen, 1981). The faith resides in the modulation of these intensities without trespassing from the tender to the sexual (Ferenczi, 1932). The limit of the tender with the sexual without consent becomes the pregnant point from which modernity enacts its great acceleration—that violation of codes by which the others are prey to the one. The vulnerable negated. Faith, on the other hand, relates to a becoming and being with others in difference. There is faith in the idea and enactment of a passing of leap energy that will not burn, impregnate in/with bad faith, maim or kill. More than reinvigorate, such passing will observe the jolt with the agility cradled by agency of this sort—light, funny, irresistible; full of life, tenderness and guidance; calling into being an event as commons in provisional duration, a performance, cosmopolitics⁴.

a commons as event in duration—performance, cosmopolitics

A dialogue with Bergson, Whitehead, Clough, Stengers, Muñoz, indigeneity or whatever one can call it (ecological traditional knowledges?), commoners and Butler among others would make this paper way too serious, a leaning toward theory that necessitates a walk. Yet thinking with these scholars from my humble place of learning would open the set of opportunities to bring some

⁴ I refer to philosopher Bruno Latour's explanation of Stenger's *cosmopolitics* for its clarity: "Stengers intends her use of *cosmopolitics* to alter what it means "to belong" or "to pertain." She has reinvented the word by representing it as a composite of the strongest meaning of *cosmos* and the strongest meaning of *politics* precisely because the usual meaning of the word *cosmopolite* supposed a certain theory of science that is now disputed. For her, the strength of one element checks any dulling in the strength of the other. The presence of *cosmos* in *cosmopolitics* resists the tendency of *politics* to mean the give-and-take in an exclusive human club. The presence of *politics* in *cosmopolitics* resists the tendency of *cosmos* to mean a finite list of entities that must be taken into account. *Cosmos* protects against the premature closure of *politics*, and *politics* against the premature closure of *cosmos*." (Latour, 2004).

‘impossibles’ into actualization, or infuse in them the energy they necessitate to transduce their dormancy into enactments. Because, as Stetsenko likes to remind her audience, one needs to “Be realistic,’ and “demand the impossible,” (commons, 1968) in order to breathe the breath of life into a(n impossible) thought, set it free as enunciation, and activate its qualities of possibility.

Issues of scale are always already at the perimeter of this thinking with the commons, the finite, the regulatory. In order to agonize against scarcity, which is always already individualizing, let us think with the potential of others deserving of inherent value as primordial parameter of thought. As well, let us think with the alertness with which one wants the encounter to occur (the encounter with those others with inherent value)—without words of commiseration yet with gestures of compassion, with respect for the brutal that can, indeed, explode as part of the centuries of non-convivial territorial negotiations known today as nation-states.

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In this regard, I have reached an impasse. I have dealt with energy and esotericism; I have gone to energy the vital, Eros; I have included the more-than-human and expanded the relations by which these go about the categories of the human and the inhuman—regulations, intensities, governmentalities and regimes of truth, more-than-mentalities, etc.—, the events that could have been and have been not, yet, already. And in these passings to opening up to the potentialities of new organizations and different economies of the cosmos—these assemblages to be called eco-cosmic realities—I have left my excess behind such that I feel deflated, adumbrated, tired, un-tidings. I force myself to continue but fall into melancholy—it is the sunset of the Sunday before the end of the first decade of this new century. Nothing really has changed much, except the climate. Things have pretty much accelerated.

All this came about as I was feeling a thought of disarmed potency toward the endeavor of this paper. I forced myself to jolt and become lighter. I introjected a violence that I, as thinker~writer, can own and embody, can offer as lean-to for the thoughts that here accompany you, the reader, in the journey to find out the perfect distance⁵. As I was due for a walk in the woods that did not happen, I thought thinking with my memories could somehow bring this moment closer to the sylvan that I cherish when I enjoy thinking-with forests. Thus I transcribe some old thinking with the sylvan, to remember those thought-feelings in the body. What follows in the next section is thought that appeared to me as I came back from observing Twin Lakes-East near Croton Reservoir, NY; North about 22 miles from New York City where I reside, in mid November, 2019. Prior to reading what follows, please take a moment to see the full 3:23 min. of the attached video that captures a brief moment of a visit I paid to this place. (Calderaro, 2019).

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sylvan thoughts, november 2019

Stability is a funky business—in the delusion of thermodynamic systems thinking, we’ve come to think that stability behaves within a model of scarcity where if you make one thing stable, you are destabilizing something else. Whereas in post-thermodynamic logic stability is a much more complex negotiation between parts that are at play that may not seem obvious in such a way that stability is like an immanent [dynamic] event where things can be stable and de-[un]stable at once but where an overall current of majority stability or majority instability can be the (cor)rector stick of a moment. So that once an ecology is destabilized such (as ours, of this moment) it may take the ontological power or force that lays in dormant potentialities to re-instaurate a stable current, or stable majoritarian current.

Signs might be assigned everywhere around us in the world, that is perhaps the meaning of world; but post-humanisms and ObjectOrientedOntologies, which are tandem discourses that evolved out of frustration with the human, are perhaps indicating that no such thing as ‘world’ exists outside of our heads. That no such thing as signifiers can be attached to objects because in the many years that we’ve been entrenched in thinking about developing our culture, they, the objects themselves, decided to go about their own

⁵ ‘Perfect distance’ is a way of understanding the relationship of subject-object such that it is possible to activate as well as to let rest by way of mutual consent to move or remain relaxed. Perfect distance is always in *difference* as Jacques Derrida would have it.

sovereignty. And so we've become so distanced with the objects that they no longer are capable of reaching us, or better said, that we no longer are able to hear their messages [object as *angelus!*]. Which are distinct from signs and signifiers in the sense that they originate in the object, not in relation to us [with the object].

note: words between [] are recent additions

post-transcript: a conclusion

A thinking-with forests that is also a thinking-feeling with forests today demands of me a base sentiment of grief that is difficult to express in words—perhaps this is the whole point of thinking-with the more-than-human, to develop capacities of communication that go beyond the supremacy of language as verbal (oral and written) tool. Some say unchecked human sadness can take shelter in the lungs, developing an inconspicuous residence there that manifests in irregular symptoms such as asthma and other more serious imbalances. It could be said that this is a thinking-feeling that occurs along the bitterness of forests as they burn, collapse under bulldozers and are otherwise ripped of their complexities, stripped off of comrades with whom they are their homeologies, succumbing to the hand of humans in accelerated greed-mode. Lungs reciprocate this grief in anticipation and *durée*, as prehension and preemption. Just as today there is an urgent need to sequester carbon and sink it back into solid forms, it seems this thinking-with in the nearing second decade of this new millennium may be oriented to the anchoring of deeply historical sorrow which, if let loose in ethereal form, tends to occupy spaces, bodies and organs in the shape of fear, anger, illness.

Thus, in order to anchor these thinkings with- into materializations that may spring from spaces of joy, I believe I might be ready to move on to the next level of implementation, in the body, as endeavor and commitment, as impel-ment and pulsion, as invite and alerting. Hence, I have been working on a contained project along the sides and within the waters of our Hudson River as estuary, to transduce the river's energy into ours and vice versa. I think once again and realize that I am ready

to affirm a thinking-with estuaries. Estuaries are open and dynamic areas where rivers meet an ocean, where waters are brackish and where thought can be elevated as it sparkles and sprinkles from the movement it enjoys as salt water meets fresh water, as the water that I am meets the other that is water. This thinking-with is a project for the spending of quality time with the *Mahicanituck*⁶ River that is us (Freid, 2018). Its participatory-contributive elements (Stetsenko, 2008) would be organized such that a number of diverse people spend two weeks in a multiday journey upstream via kayaks, both to prove that in being alive our agencies comeingle, and to enact modes of decarbonization that are believed to be necessary for the potential to activate climate steadying at fast-forward speeds.

What does it mean to move from thinking-with forests, to thinking-with estuaries? It means to situate these practices here locally, bioregionally and globally near and around New York City by orienting ourselves toward the river—its flows, its connectivity and agency, its excesses in conviviality that have been taken for granted, denigrated, and exploited as the settlers arrived and displacements occurred. [For its ‘spirit’ has not been honored except by the indigenous peoples who reside in the area, and some white, black and brown folk who understand this meaning of thinking-with the more-than-human. Hence the need to always be wary of those traditions that make a point to dominate at no matter what cost, engaging in certain violences set forth by enslavement, extraction, oppression, and its modes of reproduction.]

I attempt to locate this educational endeavor’s shape-in-formation within parameters of the aesthetic (within a decolonialist stance that envisions it as expansive, stemming from the senses), the educational (again within a decolonialist stance, and as an informal endeavor, which in and of itself is a definition that is oppositional to the institution but in itself institutional--so need to look for a better definition) and the healing (in the sense of connecting, opening to flow and learning to

⁶ *Mahicanituck* in Lenape and other Algonquian languages means ‘river that flows two ways.’

regulate the openings). In these three senses, which I see as integrated and entangled, this project can be understood as agentic—such that it generates change at the scale of the procedural/performative (while it is being imagined and materialized). At a regional scale this is a turn to expanded ecologies of agency as organizers of new economies; convening in new ways what there is so that emerging **eco-topologies** might regain a dynamics of quasi-equilibrium. In short, it is a **morphogenetic** endeavor that looks to listen and turn to organizational patterns of joy-sorrow in proposing local economies.

Modular levels of attainment of actuality, along with the aggregates that are passed from the old to the new assemblages, coincide, collapse and collide along the ways of thinking. This is also of importance when thinking who to think with, which is to say, where. It is important to learn to follow the right instructions that might come in the form of utterances, whispers, blows and silences (instead of advertisements, video games and the intractable social media) to bypass the roughnesses inherent in such journey, to be alert and travel with-, in lightness of being as in not wishing to leave more heavy footprints.

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