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PHILOSOPHY AND THEORY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Special Issue on the Anthropocene in the Study of Higher Education
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IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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PHILOSOPHY AND THEORY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Special Issue on the Anthropocene in the Study of Higher Education

Guest Editors
Ryan Evely Gildersleeve and Katie Kleinhesselink, University of Denver

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Dear Colleagues,

Institutions of higher education have always been responding to external forces aiming to shape them. Contemporarily, globalization, neoliberal projects, and rapid changes in technology, among other forces, are influencing both the ways in which colleges and universities operate, as well as the traditional and fundamental purposes of these institutions. Such changes can, of course, be quite positive, as not all the traditional purposes of postsecondary education should be lauded. Yet, each change brings with it the need to consider how such developments are in relation to the goals and purposes of our colleges and universities. For instance, technological advances in the ways that a higher education might be offered may help increase access and reach many people who might otherwise be excluded from its pursuit. Globalization has enabled faculty and students from around the world to teach, research, and learn together in ways that were previously impossible.

Yet, such changes also require us to rethink what constitutes an education or, more specifically, a good education. From one point of view, neoliberalism has reshaped, and continues to do so, the idea of a good education toward more utilitarian ends focused on the pursuit of skills and know-how that allow people to develop into “responsible” citizens. In this vein, traditional notions of education for education’s sake and the ideal of a liberal arts education, rightly or wrongly, take a back seat; fund-able questions drive our research; and the private good takes precedence over the public good of a higher education.

While I certainly cannot name all the pressing matters we must face as scholars in the world of higher education, even these brief points strongly signal the need to engage the philosophical method in higher education. Philosophers of higher education are increasingly needed to sift through these
issues, revealing the contradictions, the pitfalls, and the promises. We must bring to bear also in our work the social theories that inform and provide explanatory power in understanding how higher education functions, how the myriad forces in our contemporary world manifest within and reshape our institutions, and the differential effects of such changes on our diverse populations. We must seek to reimagine higher education in ways that challenge inequitable social conditions that have led to an unrelenting and unforgivable opportunity gap.

The need for such projects is the motivation behind *Philosophy and Theory in Higher Education* (PTHE). As I looked for such work to include in my own courses, I found it across a number of more general philosophy journals. The major journals in the field of Higher Education, arguably, tend toward the more technical aspects of higher education. *Philosophy and Theory in Higher Education* provides a dedicated space for scholars applying philosophy and social theory to concerns of higher education. On the one hand, there is a danger here to the extent that our work can be more easily identified and pushed aside. Perhaps it is better that it has been more diffuse, like light filtering through the trees. On the other hand, maybe a dedicated space helps create a beacon, attracting others to our philosophical place in the forest. Maybe it is there that we can make a difference.

With this, I welcome you to this inaugural issue of PTHE. In this special issue, Ryan Gildersleeve and Katie Kleinhesselink, as guest-editors, have brought together an impressive collection of essays on the increasingly important theme of the Anthropocene. While certainly there has been a lot of writing done about the Anthropocene over the past several years, this may be one of the first collections of essays dedicated to its application to higher education.

On behalf of the renowned, international group of scholars who comprise the editorial board of PTHE and Daniel Saunders, Reviews and Comments Editor, thank you in advance for your interest in the journal. We look forward to reviewing your contributions to our collective project.

John E. Petrovic
Executive Editor
The University of Alabama
Introduction: The Anthropocene as Context and Concept for the Study of Higher Education

RYAN EVELY GILDERSLEEVE
University of Denver

KATIE KLEINHESSELINK
University of Denver

Abstract: The Anthropocene has emerged in philosophy and social science as a geologic condition with radical consequence for humankind, and thus, for the social institutions that support it, such as higher education. This essay introduces the special issue by outlining some of the possibilities made available for social/philosophical research about higher education when the Anthropocene is taken seriously as an analytic tool. We provide a patchwork of discussions that attempt to sketch out different ways to consider the Anthropocene as both context and concept for the study of higher education. We conclude the essay with brief introductory remarks about the articles collected for this special issue dedicated to “The Anthropocene and Higher Education.”

Keywords: Anthropocene, higher education, social research

Welcome to the Anthropocene! Earth’s dominant species, the human, now rules precariously and wrestles with the power to manipulate planetary processes. So, what now? How can we configure the role and relevancy of higher education in such ontologically and epistemologically challenging conditions? What does it mean for higher education that the human is remaking its environment and, consequently, remaking itself? What future/now for the institution that was built to generate, harbor, share, and provide leadership for the knowledge that might support the human condition and its social experiments
at living? These are the abstractions at stake in recognizing the Anthropocene as a reality worth wrestling with in the study and practice of higher education. As an introduction to this special issue, we offer some building blocks upon which others might intersect, challenge, amend, and augment in elaborating the pursuit of knowledge in, through, and about higher education. Specifically, we outline a vague and unstable beginning schema for thinking the Anthropocene as context and as concept in and for the study of higher education. Ours is an incomplete effort, but one that seeks to spark additional ideation and cultivation of a new kind of research agenda into the philosophy and theory of higher education. We follow our brief outline of the context and concept of the Anthropocene with summaries of the articles peer-reviewed and included in this special issue of *Philosophy and Theory in Higher Education*.

**Anthropocene as Context**

For more than a century, scientists have studied with growing unease humankind’s effects on the Earth. The earliest known work on anthropogenic climate change, *Man and Nature*, was published in 1864, over 150 years ago. While various terms for this effect have been proposed over the decades, it was atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen who coined, in 2002, the term *Anthropocene* to describe what he saw as a new geological epoch in which human action has as significant an effect on the Earth and its geology as much or more than “natural” phenomenon. While the Anthropocene has infiltrated geologic literature (and that of numerous disciplines), the Anthropocene has not yet been formalized as a unit of the Geologic Time Scale. For the Anthropocene to be formally codified, a definitive date for its inception, known as Global Standard Stratotype Section and Point or *golden spike*, must be agreed upon by the International Commission on Stratigraphy. This dating process requires the analysis of glacial ice and sedimentary rock layers. The Holocene, for example—the shortest of the geologic epochs and that which we currently formally inhabit—began, according to that analysis, almost 12,000 years ago. Given its comparative brevity, scientists continue to debate whether we can know the moment of the Anthropocene’s arrival and, in some circles, whether it yet exists.

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The Anthropocene, then, does not require formal epoch status to legit-
imize its reality. Regardless of its formal geological codification, biophysical
evidence of humankind’s irrevocable impact on the Earth is irrefutable. The
invention of agriculture, the Industrial Revolution—either might be consid-
ered as the Anthropocene’s genesis in that they necessarily changed the face
of the Earth.\(^3\) So, too, might the explosion of the first atomic bomb in that it
cemented humanity’s ability to destroy the Earth.\(^4\) With the dramatic increase
of the human population\(^5\) and attendant mega-urbanization, humankind has
rerouted natural waterways and deforested the Earth, changing patterns of
sedimentation and erosion.\(^6\) Our industrialization efforts have increased CO\(_2\)
in the atmosphere, changing weather patterns, the Earth’s temperature, and
the ocean’s acidity.

Looking forward, the Anthropocene’s potential consequences grow pro-
gressively distressing. Human-caused climate change is demonstrated through
carbon dioxide levels that are the highest in human recorded history, rising
sea levels, increasingly extreme weather events, melting permafrost. These
happenings necessarily change the habitats of animals and other nonhumans,
compromising their ability to live and thrive. Left unchecked, it is not unrea-
sonable to contemplate that anthropogenic climate change may lead to a sixth
mass extinction—and that we may be in the beginning of that extinction
now.\(^7\) Should that prove to be the case, we will have ushered in the first mass
extinction event caused by a living species.

Anthropogenic changes to the Earth’s biodiversity have already been
documented and will continue on, as Zalasiewicz, Williams, Haywood, and
Ellis note, as the “fossil record of the future.”\(^8\) In this regard, the Anthropo-
cene is fundamentally different from any prior epoch in that it exists in the
present and the future. We imagine it even as we live it. We participate in its
making. At the same time, even as we effect change on Earth systems, we are
affected by those same systems. We have agency with/in Earth, if not over
it. We may inform the creation of earthquakes and hurricanes, but we cannot
control their occurrence or their severity. We can no longer conceive of a

\(^3\) Steffen et al., “The Anthropocene,” 843–44.
\(^5\) The Earth’s population, 6.5 billion, may reach 9 billion by 2050. Jan Zalasiewicz,
Mark Williams, Alan Haywood, and Michael A. Ellis, “The Anthropocene: A New
Epoch in Geologic Time?,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London
\(^6\) Ibid., 836–37.
\(^7\) Wayne Gabardi, *The Next Social Contract: Animals, the Anthropocene, and Biopolitics.*
\(^8\) Ibid., 839.
natural climate. Thus, climate must be understood as an interaction between human and nature.\(^9\) Ironically, this may be one of the important aspects of the Anthropocene. The relationships between/within humanity and its surroundings are changing and defy traditional understandings/dualities. Even as we live as the dominant life form and we collectively constitute a geologic agent, humankind is not the center of the universe. We are, more accurately, bound up within it.

It is the paradox of this final point—the Anthropocene’s challenge to anthropocentrism—that opens the Anthropocene to broader critique among the disciplines. Anthropocentric action may have informed the creation of the Anthropocene, but it will not solve the distressing futures we imagine when we extrapolate the modern effects of humankind’s role in Earth-making. Through philosophical and social science inquiry, we can begin to unpack who humankind as geologic force is, for example. Can we say with any veracity that all humans bear the same responsibility for the Anthropocene? How do we account for and understand the crises and opportunities of the Anthropocene without interrogating the entanglement of ecologies, economics, and politics that feed and inform it? These are the sorts of questions that we must wrestle with and build from if we are to address the real and deleterious consequences of our anthropocentric actions and behaviors.

**Anthropocene as Concept**

As *concept*, anthropocene affords both an overarching conceptual offering and attendant concepts for use in theorizing higher education as an institution. Far from an exhaustive dictionary, we introduce but just a few of these attendant concepts, roughly organized into three broad categories: the new human, power and life, and human geologies and measurement.

**The new human(kind)**

The anthropocene concept forces us to wrestle with new roles for humans. Specifically, the anthropocene context suggests that humans are now responsible creatures. We are not roaming the Earth passively experiencing the ecosystems in which we are emplaced. Rather, we are responsible, in part, for creating, sustaining, sometimes destroying, and sometimes remaking such ecosystems. More importantly, humans have the unique capacity *to take*...
responsibility, which engenders new questions of ethics and ethical frameworks for building and sustaining social institutions. As Willis Jenkins puts it, “The anthropocene is an epoch of ethics because it is an epoch of dominion by a moral species.” Humans are the moral species of the planet. Such an ethics is doubly challenging, however, as we must take responsibility for our dominion of the planet, as part of it, while recognizing that as a species, we have differentiated our morality toward not only Earth, but also each other. The human impact on the planet recursively impacts different humans differently. And humans impact the planet differentially.

Along with this heightened responsibility, human dependence and precarity come into acute focus in the anthropocene. Humankind’s dependence on Earth as a habitat, as an ecosystem, and as a co-constituting ontological reality has never been as clear. As much impact as humans have on the environment, on nature, on Earth, one can no longer separate the human from environment, nature, or Earth. Dichotomies such as human-nature and human-Earth, no longer work or fit. Rather, humans are incredibly and insatiably dependent on the Earth for material, sustenance, and geological support for life (e.g., air, water, food, etc.). In short, humans need Earth to work, and to work well, in order to take responsibility and in order to persist as part of the planet.

Such dependence on making Earth work shines light on the precarity of the human condition. Humankinds are in precarious relation to the world(s) that co-constitutes us. Here, we speak across and through the material/discursive notion of the world(s). Human precarity can be seen in droughts, so-called “natural disasters,” with effects exacerbated by the human designs on the built environment, for example, building in floodplains in Houston or failing to update power lines in Puerto Rico. The human imprint on the environment is felt and seen in our everyday lives’ dependence on the infrastructures we have built, yet these are the very structures that mark us precariously dependent on Earth working our way. When Earth works—with any semblance of disregard for our structure—we suffer.

These concepts of responsibility, dependence, and precarity matter not only for humans, but also with geologic consequence. Human visions and becoming human organizations (i.e., societies) matter for how Earth functions. These concepts matter for the Earth at large, and any of the institutions we make in order to support our earth-making and a working-earth.

A new kind of human

The anthropocene concept suggests a reconceptualization of the human. A number of scholars have theorized different versions of what/who/how this human materializes. Rosi Braidotti asserts a posthuman marked by its intrasections with technology, Earth, and other animals.12 Donna Haraway has theorized multispecies entanglements that emerge as our contemporary and future selves, recognizing the mutual interconnectivity across ecosystem matter, including human matter.13 Alexander Weheliye’s habeas viscus importantly reminds us that this new kind of human is always differentiated across lines of difference, especially race, wherein some bodies become-human more so than others in relation to the anthropocene processes of becoming-technology, becoming-animal, and becoming-earth.14 All of these new kinds of humans share a mutual mediation between humankind and the broader Earth processes, just as we continue dependently and precariously in our responsibilities of/for/with the Earth.

Power and life

The context of the Anthropocene and the new kind of human it engenders begets new theories of power to be pursued. Willis Jenkins writes of a planetary power through which humankind must take responsibility for how its self-organizing decisions exercise dominion over and between Earth ecosystems.15 The ecological and the geological consequence of human decision making matters differently than previously expressed in notions such as Foucault’s sovereign, disciplinary, and biopower configurations.16 Planetary power exercises through humans’ organization of humans and carries differential consequence across the environment, human and nonhuman. This form of power raises new questions around equity, as planetary power is not exercised, nor experienced equally across the globe. Pollution from rich nations has radical implications for poor nations. And technologies designed by rich nations draws from planetary resources in poorer nations. The capitalist

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12 Ibid.
15 Jenkins, The Future of Ethics.
economic system rewards the exploitation of those poorer nations—and the
humans and nonhumans that reside there—in order to support the desires of
wealthier populations. Planetary power does not distribute equitably.

Life takes on different instantiations in the Anthropocene, and diverse
modes of living profuse from such context. As an anthropocene concept,
then, *modes of life* becomes an imperative question with which to wrestle.
Anthropocene “life” becomes mutually mediated, precarious, and code-
dpendent for humans, nonhumans, and inorganic matter alike. What role
do social institutions play in organizing societies for such a rich entangle-
ment of matter (and discourse)? As human populations exercise planetary
power differentially and contribute to complex entanglements, different
modes of life become available. For example, water scarcity in one part of
the globe could beget technological innovation that might transform how
humans and other animals in another part of the globe interrelate. Mining
in one area might bring riches to a select few in faraway lands yet still leave
locals behind, while destroying previously available subsistence strategies.
It behooves any examination of institutions—such as higher education—to
theorize modes of life as an ethics of material practice that entwines with
the broader anthropocene concept, always noting the triple-bind of respon-
sibility, dependence, and precarity produced through the human exercise of
planetary power.

**Human geologies and measurement**

Geologists refer to the anthropocene as a stratigraphic event. Such events
alter the geology of the Earth. They mark transitions or flex points in geo-
logic time. Geologic time operates differently from the social construct of
time that we use in daily life. Geologic time is by definition, a longview of
things and relationships on a planetary scale. As such, the anthropocene may
or may not actually mean a new epoch or era, but it could just as readily serve
as a transition point, and this transition could last longer or shorter in the
human-centered temporal clock. As a stratigraphic event, the anthropocene
might serve as a juncture for the new human, planetary power, and emergent
modes of life.

In the liberal humanist view of the human and its relationship to envi-
ronment, the human became the measure against which all things could be
known. This is anthropocentrism. In the anthropocene, the posthuman,

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Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
subject to and exercising planetary power, measurement against the human
becomes obfuscated. The human species becomes too ubiquitous, too decen-
tralized, too entangled to be of any use as a standard of measurement. We
like to add to this problem of measurement the problem of scalability, as the-
orized by Anna Tsing, who explains, “Scalability … is the ability of a project
to change scales smoothly without any change in project frames.”18 And that
is the kind of change that the becoming-human has become known for, the
kind of change that has become the hallmark of our impact: multinational
corporations, global supply chains, free trade agreements, online social net-
works, Big Data, and Big Democracy are all examples of scalable projects that
have flattened Earth.

In the multispecies entanglements of the anthropocene, smooth changes
seem unlikely, perhaps undesirable. The problem with scalability, according
to Tsing, is that “Scalability requires that project elements be oblivious to
the indeterminacies of encounter; that’s how they allow smooth expansion.
Thus, too, scalability banishes meaningful diversity, that is, diversity that
might change things.”19

Scalability is an effort at expansion, which, as we learned from Thomas
Nail, requires an exercise of kinetic force—expansion via expulsion. The
expulsion emergent in the Anthropocene is expulsion from the kind of human
that begets the riches from scalable projects. Thus, we see the economic dom-
inance of the Global North over the Global South, yet such political relations
inherently produce greater precarity for all humankind, as the Global South
is home to many of the materials needed for the expansion of Global North
projects. Race and gender usually map onto these expulsion projects readily—
again calling into question the kind of Earth we want to be responsible to and
for, while more candidly confronting the kind of humanity within which we
have emplaced Earth as its habitat.

Anthropocene for Higher Education

Perhaps as a diverse and potentially divergent set of concepts, the anthro-
pocene-as-concept might best be described as a concept for examining our
coming-into-being as constitutive of and consequence from the same con-
dition—ourselves. While this might seem like an exacerbated navel-gazing
suggestion, it comes with the caveat that the self/condition we might subject

18 Anna H. Tsing, The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in
19 Ibid.
to scrutiny is far more complex than the indulgent anthropocentrism of the liberal humanist tradition. Rather, treating ourselves as a condition that co-constitutes the self and from which the self is configured as consequence is far less about centering the human in analysis as much as it might become about decentering the human and refocusing attention on the lush mutual mediation of the Anthropocene context.

In the study and practice of higher education, the Anthropocene comes to matter as both context and concept. We situate higher education as an enduring and promising institution of the Earth, inspired by human capacity for learning and knowledge creation, yet mutually mediated by the multispecies entanglements that become-humankind. Raffnsøe is instructive here:

... it has become a matter of life and death how humans teach and instruct each other, not only for humans but also for the globe at large. As a consequence, knowledge has come to hold the utmost importance. Comprehending human behavior, learning new skills and especially gaining knowledge about the human factor and the ways in which it relates to other factors is a paramount concern.20

Knowledge and the knowledge imperative take center stage in declaring and designing an academia worthy of the Anthropocene.21 Indeed, it is the action of designing where we see great promise for exploring the Anthropocene as context and generating anthropocene concepts for the study and practice of higher education.

**Introduction to the Special Issue**

We solicited articles that would speak across, between, and betwixt our theorizing of the anthropocene as context and concept, not as a dichotomy, but more so as a multiplicity. We sought theoretical, philosophical, and empirical explorations of how higher education might be understood and developed into a future for/of the Earth in ways that troubled our current troubling times. Authors took up our charge in some (un)expected ways, exceeding our expectations for the playful sort of precarious speculative analyses we hoped to engender and support. As will be seen, most push on a new ethics in higher education scholarship, whether explicitly or implicitly, trying to break through

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humanist ethics and ways of being/knowing to pull down the tenets of neoliberalism that seemingly have a stranglehold on higher education today.

A strong subset of papers took on inquiry itself—a central constituting multiplicity within the knowledge imperative—tackling the liminal spaces of academe as central spaces for inquiry and activism. Thus, the virtues of resistance and disruption are juxtaposed with the limits of language and a charge to incorporate the material in higher education inquiries emerges across the middle section of the volume. And yet, despite what can seem isolating and distributively separatist within some anthropocene themes, the authors collectively wrestle with creating a new “we,” constituting an academic of collective resistance, entangled subjectivities, and posthuman subjects within and across a transdisciplinarity that holds great promise for supporting higher education in becoming relevant to the conditions of the Anthropocene. In concluding this introductory article for the special issue, “Anthropocene and Higher Education,” we summarize the articles that make up the rest of the issue.

*Higher education and new philosophies of the Anthropocene*

Bengsten and Barnett engage intriguingly with what we experience as Anthropocenic higher education—a neoliberal, humanist institution—and new understandings and futures of higher education that the Anthropocene makes possible. Where we commonly understand higher education as a site of production, a space/place that, through observable and knowable procedures, produces knowledge and, more importantly in our neoliberal moment, the workforce, Bengsten and Barnett have a vision of higher education that is far richer and more complex, a wild, dark space in which production occurs due to forces that are exterior and even unknowable. It is here that Bengsten and Barnett delve into Anthropocenic possibility—that higher education’s ontological existence extends far beyond what we can see and know, that its darkness (denseness) entangles a materiality that encompasses far more than the actors within a campus’s walls to incorporate the lifeworlds of its students, the broader community, culture, politics, forgotten histories, and things we cannot yet discern, futures we have yet to imagine. In many ways, even as this vision of higher education calls up anxiety and uncertainty, it also incites, in our view, a renewed optimism around higher education’s possibilities, that its responsibilities lie beyond its historical charge of knowledge production and its current charge of producing the workforce. Rather, new charge emerges to produce, as an ecology located within an even grander, denser assemblage, new futures.
Method and inquiry in the Anthropocene

Kuntz contemplates practices of inquiry in higher education as a politics of refusal and radical truth-telling within the Anthropocene. Building from Lazzarato\(^\text{22}\) (2015) and Baez\(^\text{23}\), Kuntz pushes back against Cartesian dualities that permeate neoliberal Western humanist tradition, and thus the distinctions made between the Anthropocene as context and as concept. Inquiry, he asserts, entangles the two. Using Foucault’s analysis of the ancient Greek Cynics as a moor, Kuntz challenges education scholars who are committed to social justice aims to consider their own rootedness in a neoliberal ethics that continues to promote a humanist, rational, economic subject. Failing to confront what seems commonsensical can only reinforce the status quo. Here, Kuntz argues that the Anthropocene, manifesting as both crisis and opportunity, necessitates that faculty, in undertaking inquiry, collectively abandon and dismantle the normative plane in which they operate. In so doing, the faculty offer real, material challenge to neoliberal governance in terms of both how they express practice and how they critique it.

Kuntz offers a theoretical frame for how faculty might newly vision inquiry as an act of virtuous refusal, proffering relationality, radical philosophical cartography, truth-telling, and the direct embrace of ontological and epistemological entanglements as signposts and tools. As radical inquirers, the faculty of the Anthropocene must be willing to be comfortable with discomfort and push through the bounds of isolation. Here, Kuntz offers an optimistic if unknowable path forward, that of the faculty citizen.

In her deeply reflective piece, Ulmer offers us a glimpse of the faculty citizen engaged in virtuous inquiry. Melding literary theory, personal reflection, and metaphor, Ulmer takes up the enactment of higher education and faculty work specifically in the Anthropocene. She explores the parallels between those industrial practices that have informed humanity’s reconception as a geologic force—in this case, fracking, strip mining, and extraction—and the practice of research and scholarship in the academy. Ulmer questions critically how education scholars of the Anthropocene adopt, knowingly or not, Anthropocenic practices that exacerbate the neoliberalization of research itself and the ethics undergirding our complicity in this process. How, she asks, might education scholars resist the Anthropocenic trappings that enfold our lives in and outside of the academy, and begin to claim methodologies


that envision pasts and futures that transcend our narrow focus on the now? Ulmer posits—and illustrates through the form and structure of this piece—that shifting our thinking and our approach to research in a way that honors time, spaciousness, compassion, and generativity not only challenges the concept of the Anthropocene but creates conditions in which we can confront the complex problems that the epoch of the Anthropocene has visited upon the Earth.

Smithers illustrates, through both form and method, the power and opportunity inherent in the new materialisms as an approach to the study of higher education. In her use of the concept of the Capitalocene to explore notions of student success in higher education, Smithers explicitly recognizes the problematic nature of the Anthropocene’s conceptualization and its enduring humanist trappings. She questions, rightly, the degree to which the term Anthropocene masks the exclusivity of White Western culpability in Anthropocene’s advent at the expense of marginalized and minoritized populations. Within American higher education, specifically, Smithers demonstrates how the Capitalocene and the governmentality of data-driven control, in their erasure of bodies and promotion of in/dividuation, necessarily privilege white identities and produce racist outcomes. Here, we see another example of inquiry as virtuous refusal and resistance as Smithers boldly shapes an emerging new materialist analytic and queers higher education futures through the possibilities of liberal education.

Maxwell offers us a kind of cartographical rendering of higher education’s historical evolution as a neoliberal institution and its deleterious effects on scholarship, science, and its ultimate contribution to the Anthropocene as geologic epoch. In many ways, Maxwell provides a broader context for the other articles in the journal, reflecting personally and philosophically on his near half-century in higher education, bearing witness to the real effects of the erosion of its public mission on scholars, scholarship, humanity writ large, and the Earth itself. Throughout, Maxwell wrestles with the ways in which scholarship, and what he calls knowledge-inquiry in particular, both produces and is produced by neoliberal governmentality and ultimately the Anthropocene. He identifies a paradox here—that even as inquiry within higher education is implicated in environmental cultural and social destruction, it also holds the potential to contribute to the solution of these same wicked problems. Maxwell puts forward a different strategy for the (re)claiming of scholarship in the Anthropocene than many of the authors in this journal, steadfastly asserting that we may in fact wield what might be construed as neoliberal practice—rational rule-setting and attendant procedures—to dismantle and reconfigure a new scholarship, wisdom-inquiry, for the Anthropocene. Wisdom-inquiry
embraces aim-oriented rationality and eschews notions of static truth to encompass values, politics, and the currency of collective action. Maxwell’s theory of wisdom-inquiry offers us a philosophical bridge to the ways in which knowledge production has been historically realized and possibly courses forward that may be considered productively in concert with new materialist and posthumanist philosophies.

Poulous demonstrates new possibilities for scholarly writing and reading in the Anthropocene, engaging playfully with new materialisms in the structure and form of her essay on American military veterans in higher education. Offering the term Veteragogy to describe the process of the veteran as becoming-student, Poulous invites the reader to co-create with her both veteragogy and their own experience of the essay by employing a “choose-your-own-adventure” format through which the reader might arrive at eight separate conclusions. Poulous confronts the dualities and dividuation inherent in neoliberal humanist knowledge production and consumption through an exciting, experimental format that forces awareness of the entanglement and agency of writer, reader, content, and form to create new knowledges in higher education.

Campus activism in the Anthropocene

In their piece on visual activism in higher education spaces, Guyotte and Flint illustrate through practice how some of the methodological insights provided by Kuntz and Ulmer might be brought to bear. In this case, Guyotte and Flint interrogate the political chalkings that emerged on higher education campuses during the 2016 American presidential election within the context of the Anthropocene. Employing critical posthuman philosophy within their theoretical framework, Guyotte and Flint contemplate what political chalkings do, their enmeshment with space and place, and more broadly how moments of (and research on) activism might be entry points to interrogating how human accountability and responsibility at global and local levels entangle with the material to produce new expressions of subjectivity.

In her piece on undocumented youth activism in higher education spaces, Rodriguez explores how the Anthropocene could be applied as a tool of inquiry to excavate and expose entanglements of space, risk, and othered bodies as a means of reimagining a more inclusive higher education. Rodriguez demonstrates how this might be done by revisiting qualitative data collected in a critical ethnography through the lens of posthumanist conception of identity, agency, and space. In so doing, Rodriguez extends an invitation
to think through how education scholars might play with the new methodologies and values offered by the Anthropocene in concert with existing research to produce new ways of enacting social justice and inclusion in higher education.

Overall, we sought to explore how the anthropocene could be made useful in the study and practice of higher education with a particularly speculative aim at designing higher education futures. To some extent, we set out to fail, intentionally, in that designing higher education futures requires a shared imaginary. And while the anthropocene requires a great deal of sharing, it exists and perpetuates multiple imaginaries of Earth, humankind, and, as we find across this set of papers, higher education. Thus, we offer readers an exciting tour through the Anthropocene—as context and as concept—for excavating and building a higher education for the becoming ….

References


1. Higher Education and Alien Ecologies: Exploring the Dark Ontology of the University

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Abstract: The meaning of Anthropocene rests on the idea that there is a specific rationale behind the university and higher education, which is in itself progressive, educational, and redeeming. Institutions for, and students and teachers within, higher education, are more or less directly linked to the structures and rational of their political surroundings and social and cultural environments. However, just as there is depth to ecologies in the natural environment, and just as there is strangeness and even alien forms hidden within those environments, so it is with universities and higher education. They harbor hidden aspects, and these presences call from the dark, with their deeper and more unknown voices, even alien ones that seem to reach into universities not only from a future but also from a present that we cannot easily see or even understand. In this essay, we shed light on these more alien strands of higher education reality; what we term an “ontological excess” of universities. This darker ontology helps us argue that the foundations of the university go much deeper, and is societally more tangled, than the immediate pillars of the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Anthropocene, alien ecologies, philosophy of higher education, dark ontology, realism

If pre-Anthropocene eras have been dominated by ecologies of the natural environment, the Anthropocene must be dominated by human ecologies. We wish to explore one aspect of those propositions, namely their implications for our understanding of higher education. More than ever, higher education and
universities are dependently connected with external social, political, economic, organizational, and institutional contexts, which, given their own systemic but impaired character, we may term “ecosystems”. The university is called upon to produce, facilitate, and mediate the broader societal changes and fluctuations these external systems project onto the higher education sector. The meaning of Anthropocene here rests on the idea that there is a rationale behind the university and higher education, which is in itself progressive, educational, and redeeming. Also that institutions for, and students and teachers within, higher education are more or less directly linked to the structures and rationale of their political surroundings and social and cultural environments.

Just as there is depth to ecologies in the natural environment, and just as there is strangeness and even alien forms hidden within those environments, so it is with universities and higher education. They harbour hidden aspects, much as the seas contain weird creatures in their depths. These presences call from the dark, with their deeper and more unknown voices, even alien ones that seem to reach into universities not only from a future but also from a present that we cannot easily see or even understand. It is these more hidden and even more alien characteristics of human ecologies on which we shall dwell here.

We argue, further, that it is the role and responsibility of the university to try to discern and to engage with its alien ecologies, with forces of the unknown and their implications for the known ecosystems of society, politics, economy, and culture. Our aim in this paper is to explore the dark and alien underside of higher education ecologies and to discuss the potential and possible dangers which may arise from engaging with alien ecologies in higher education today.

In line with Timothy Morton,\(^1\) we aim critically to reflect on and discuss such intuitions, which are implicit in his concept of “dark ecology”, where the university and its relationships with society are not known, but form “a riddle”.\(^2\) Sensing that an ecology has a dark aspect, awareness itself may become “weird: it has a twisted, looping form”,\(^3\) and we start to grasp that universities and ecologies may be influenced by stranger and wilder forces than those more readily present in culture, society, and politics. In Morton’s perspective, this weirdness means that we live in a “universe of finitude and fragility”, a world in which “objects are suffused with and surrounded by mysterious hermeneutical clouds of unknowing”.\(^4\) This is a dark ecology as the “politics of co-existence are always contingent, brittle, and flawed, so that in the thinking

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2. Ibid., 5.
3. Ibid., 6.
4. Ibid.
of interdependence at least one being must be missing”.

We simply cannot have a comprehensive overview of all active dimensions and actors at the same time—to maintain a belief in a holistic, rational view from nowhere is to assimilate otherness into one, dominating familiar rationale.

To further inform and qualify the concept of a higher education ecology we explore the peripheral and liminal spaces of the ecological dynamics: the places where the domains do not necessarily overlap, and maybe even do not extend to, but are cut off by forces than those for which we have concepts today. We draw from the concepts of darkness found in the philosophies of especially Emmanuel Levinas, of the unknown and nothingness in Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre, and of the alien in Bernard Waldenfels. In our analysis, we argue that higher education ecologies not only present us with new solutions and synergies, but also with riddles and forms of education that are alien and unsettling.

The wider society and its cultural, social, and political contexts and life-worlds are no longer to be seen as passive fields of practice awaiting enlightenment from academics and universities but have become active forces constantly influencing and shaping higher education practice. As Susan Wright observes, we have to understand higher education “as an ‘ecology’ in which universities are embedded in a tissue of social relationships, which all have to be carefully configured to sustain the university’s principled existence”.

To realize a more constructive synergy between universities and the wider society, Wright suggests that we adopt Anna Tsing’s notion of “substantive biology”, where societal, cultural, and political domains “are not just passive backdrops to human action and manipulation, but are ‘liveable’, emerging from complex relationships between multiple species that ‘moot’ and find

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5 Ibid.
ways to coordinate and live together”.¹² This perspective challenges the neoliberal idea of the knowledge economy where individual units are pursuing their own interests. In contrast, Wright argues for a “symbiotic ecology”, in which “organizations sustain their divergent interests and values and try to negotiate ways to make each other work to their advantage—they need each other to make each other”.¹³ Understood as a symbiotic ecology within the Anthropocene, higher education takes place and is co-constituted simultaneously in academic, professional, political, social, cultural, economic, and personal lifeworlds that both flourish and compete together without subsuming or ultimately consuming each other.

Ronald Barnett¹⁴ writes that the idea of the ecological lies in the interconnectedness and draws attention to “the environment and the dynamic character of the entities in the environment and their relationships”.¹⁵ The “ecological university is not a simple but a complex. It works on its multiple planes of being.”¹⁶ This means that the unhelpful dichotomy between universities on the one side and societies on the other side has been dismantled with the coming of the ecological university. In an ecological perspective, higher education has its being in several social, institutional, curricular, and political realities, and thus it has an open and pluralist ontology underlying it. This way understood, the “ecological university recognises its embeddedness in the ecologies of the world”,¹⁷ and it acknowledges that the future of higher education lies in the interconnections between these domains and contexts.

Even though this paper takes the notion of ecology as its generative principle, it challenges understandings of the range and scope of the idea of ecologies and higher education. We can perceive networks and dynamics that constitute higher education ecologies, and the ecologies in themselves are constructive and positive phenomena for the future development of higher education practice. However, there are depths to the university’s embeddedness in the world, such that many of its features are out of immediate sight. The Anthropocene in higher education has come to consist of a layer

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¹² Ibid., 64.
¹³ Ibid., 74.
¹⁵ Barnett, Being a University, 141.
¹⁶ Barnett, Imagining the University, 136.
¹⁷ Ibid., 137.
of discourses and policy agendas such as professionalization, financialization, and digitalization of higher education—which means that universities and higher education are seen through the lenses of job market competences, completion efficiency, and technological infrastructure. Such anthropocentric higher education dimensions hide less manageable and wilder dimensions of universities and student life. We want here to shed light on these more alien strands of higher education reality, what we term an “ontological excess” of universities. This darker ontology helps us argue that the foundations of the university go much deeper, and is societally more tangled, than the immediately pillars of the anthropocene. Moreover, we examine how this may open for a new understanding of alien higher education ecologies.

**Darkness in Higher and Doctoral Education**

We use the notion of the anthropocene to point to the usually identified contexts that influence higher education. Ever important in many ways, these higher education ecologies are often focused on structural levels such as politics and economy, and with a certain flare of determinism inherent in them. The Anthropocene, in relation to higher education, thus has been taken to be the structural operations of socio-political systems, which are in theory at least readily examinable. However, by opening up this understanding to peripheral and liminal learning experiences within the higher education system, we gain insight into the darkness of higher education.

The concept of darkness has been applied especially within research into doctoral education. An exploration of darkness within doctoral education “is to take seriously, as educational challenges and learning potential, situations, encounters, and ways of organizing research work that are otherwise viewed as being ‘outside’ the educational boundaries of the PhD”\(^1\). This may include support from guardian supervisors, not formally assigned, the emotional support from peers and colleagues in professional contexts, and the emotional and financial support from family and friends, without which the PhD would never reach its goal.

This darkness includes courses taken by the doctoral student without direct relevance to the PhD, and hours of efforts yielding both fun and exasperation, and invigorating the work of other researchers and peers not part of

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the PhD project. It includes temptations and intellectual desires, urging on the doctoral student, momentarily, to take on extra work, sometimes paid, outside their own research work. There is a “surplus, an excess, within doctoral education, which can be seen in the doctoral students’ non-formal ways of approaching the PhD and in the grey areas of the ‘between-spaces’ of the cross-level institutional mindset between the different layers of the institutional framework of the Graduate School”. 19 Such creative and idiosyncratic learning spaces are usually hard to fit into the operational systems, and so they become “dark” and troublesome to these systems.

International doctoral students’ journey of academic acculturation goes beyond the academic dimension and “is strongly interconnected with the personal and societal elements of learning”.20 The whole process of becoming familiar with the new national context, the social norms, and cultural values influences their feeling of homeliness and has implications for the quality of their learning and the research undertaken. According to Elliot and her team, this “hidden curriculum” should be recognized in supporting and grounding the formal Graduate School system. Unfortunately, “the obscure and imprecise nature added to the initial negative connotations initially attached to the hidden curriculum are likely culprits for why this subject has remained marginalised, especially in higher education”.21 Our point is that noticing forms of darkness within higher education may lead us to understand other ecologies only marginally connected to political and economic drivers, and which are closely connected to interrelated contexts of everyday socialization, subcultures, personal lifeworlds, culture, and moral dimensions of value and virtue.

When such extracurricular and non-academic learning spaces are translated into the doctoral education context, the notion of “educational darkness epitomises the utility of the potential offered by the learning processes that are customarily overlooked and ignored due to being situated outside what is regarded as the educational boundaries of doctoral education”.22 Furthermore, this “concept of darkness advocates that the formalised procedures within doctoral education, e.g. discipline-related seminars and methods workshops, are merely elements of the entire journey and that there are numerous resources upon which doctoral students can draw

19 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 740.
22 Ibid., 741.
during their journey, beyond their supervisors’ support”. In keeping with the idea of the anthropocene, we see that the surrounding contexts—here, the informal and extracurricular learning spaces—are not just passive actors and networks in a distant hinterland, but instead are active, influential, and highly powerful forces scaffolding and forming the entire doctoral learning journey.

One implication of the notion of darkness within doctoral education is that the traditionally given primacy to doctoral supervision and supervisors as the keystone to good learning experiences during the PhD programme might underestimate the effects of others who also have a direct or indirect effect upon the research, which could include relatives, friends, and critical friends in the broader doctoral learning community who support the research and writing in a positive way, offering critical friendship for psychological, reading, writing, and proofing support, all of which can be celebrated upon completion. However, there is a more disturbing dimension at work here. The work of some totally hidden supporters and enablers could fall into the “dark side” of the doctoral process, like “those who ghost write the PhD, turn vague thoughts into a thesis, whose work could be seen as encouraging deceit and unethical behaviour if passed on as that of the student”. An ecological approach to higher and doctoral education is not without risk, therefore, as different stakeholders and interested parties gain influence on everyday practices.

As soon as we embrace wider ecosystems, we encounter relationships and realms of power and struggle that are too often overlooked—or even suppressed—in this emerging anthropocene era of higher education awareness. Such realms also include ideas and imaginings of historical origin. As Temple points out, understandings of universities and higher education are even imprinted into the mortar and architecture of buildings and campus venues. For example, many campuses, built in periods where the political and institutional contexts were highly different, still influence scholars and students who dwell and study in those same buildings today. These sentiments

23 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 534.
come down from a spiritual hinterland which infuses “higher” learning with metaphysical aspects, and which may still stir as an undercurrent in today’s more “flat” and secular ecologies.

In this way, we see that some universities carry on traditions, mottos, teaching formats, and even curricula that come down in time with a power and naturalness originally designed and forged decades, and sometimes even centuries, ago. This perspective adds to the dark spots of everyday higher education teaching and learning practices, as they open them up not only to societal, economic, and political actors within present-day society, but also to the temporal and historical dimension of universities mostly ignored.

**Dark Ontology**

When looking into the darkness of higher education, we start to recognize that what we take to be meaningful, rational, purposive, and humane is being held up by other and less familiar forces, both within and outside the formalized system. Qualities of strangeness and weirdness become no longer mere epistemological aspects experienced by overworked academics and disillusioned students. The very nature of higher education, and the ontology of the university, is strange. Indeed, the most real is not what is most familiar, but what may be strange and totally other, resulting in the “horror of darkness”. This dark ontology of higher education may even be experienced like the “unreal, inverted city we find after an exhausting trip, [in which] things and beings strike us as though they no longer composed a world, and were swimming in the chaos of their existence”.

When we start to realize that higher education is being influenced, maybe even determined, strongly by forces outside what can be immediately known, thought through, and formalized, we may experience “the rustling of the (...) horror”, where we are being stripped from our personas as “students”, “teachers”, “managers”, “intellectual leaders”, and forced to acknowledge that academic work is not, as such, in our control. This horror may arise when we catch a glimpse into our own institutions’ dependency on government funding which may be diminishing year-on-year, even while enrolment numbers are increasing. Or, we realize that the existence of an entire discipline is jeopardized by the very ecological efforts that intellectual leaders try to

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28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 55.
promote, as we see with many humanities disciplines which, despite their preoccupation with society and culture, have a hard time competing with business and STEM disciplines in the labour market. Sometimes, too, we may become haunted by our own institutional history, as when we discover that the foundations for the very institution we believe to be promoting freedom of mind and speech were, historically, partly secured in existence through political contracts with princes and kings that used the university as a part in their persecution of religious or ethnic minorities.

In Morton (quoted above), we find that a dark ecology consists of missing pieces; it consists in what we do not know. Similarly, Levinas defines darkness “as the presence of absence”, and it is like “a density of the void, like a murmur of silence”, and darkness is “the very play of existence which would play itself out even if there were nothing”. It makes one wonder if universities and higher education may even be a form shaped through a quest for meaning or expression even deeper than the sheer human form we find in our institutions and curricula. Are there missing pieces that we simply cannot detect, and a murmur we simply cannot hear, in the ecologies we characteristically perceive today? Higher education ecologies in the anthropocene rest on the assumption that universities are part of human ecologies that we can understand and define: social, professional, political, economic, and cultural. However, the darkness of higher education reveals that universities and higher education exist, and are being held up, in addition by stranger forces that we may not yet discern or even be willing to accept.

Such strange forces may include, as Heidegger argues, “profound boredom” which, “drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference”. As Heidegger relates, this feeling of boredom overcomes us when we are not busy with things but, for a moment only maybe, when we let ourselves slip away into a realm that lies beneath thinking, learning, writing, and other academic tasks. The boredom may be an invitation to a kind of learning and thinking that we miss out on in today’s efficiency programmes and progress reforms. Relatedly, Levinas points out the nested presence of fatigue within our active and task-oriented being. Fatigue is a “numbness”, like “a hand little by little letting slip what it is trying to hold on to, letting go even while it tightens its grip”, and fatigue is “not just the cause of this letting go, it is the slackening itself”.

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30 Ibid., 59.
31 Heidegger, Heidegger. Basic Writings, 50.
32 Levinas, Existence and Existents, 18.
When letting down our guard, and letting ourselves go, we see that fatigue is not just a psychological phenomenon, but an ontological one. Should we see the feeling of fatigue and exhaustion reported in many contemporary institutions for higher education as an underlying invitation to explore beyond the known ecologies? We realize that universities and higher education rest on ecologies far more complex and terrifying than we can grasp. Drawing again on Levinas, we can say that the being of higher education “is essentially alien and strikes against us” and we “undergo a suffocating embrace like the night, but it does not respond to us”.

Such paradox and fatigue is visible in Burford’s study of the aspiration and persistence of doctoral students in an institutional and socio-economic situation, where positive career trajectories may be slim. Many doctoral students operate in an “organising fantasy” for (…) imaginations of a particular kind of ‘good life’, where such imaginings hang “at least in part, upon normative desires for upward mobility, secure employment, and/or the possibility of retreat from more stressful forms of labour”. To explain this paradoxical behaviour, Burford uses the concept of “cruel optimism”, which is an affective framework that may arise “from the double bind where even if an object of desire is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or too possible, and toxic”. Students still may hang on to this twisted sense of continuity, which may in practice often not be the case.

As we have pointed out, this is not an argument for an educational pessimism, and the term “dark” used to describe such phenomena like “cruel optimism” of educational grey zones does not connote badness or corruption. Darkness in this context is not an opposition to light and understanding, but a form of ontological density. We aim to expand the concept and understanding of higher education ecologies by including fatigue, in contrast to synergy, boredom, in contrast to vitality, and absence, in contrast to what is immediately liveable.

When speaking about higher education ecologies, there is typically an underlying sentiment of well-being, a constructive and optimistic dimension. Certainly, we endorse such perspectives, but—on a deeper ontological level—we should also be open to the fact that there are forces at work pressing and constraining institutions, societies, organizations, students, teachers, and

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33 Ibid., 9.
36 Ibid., 13.
leaders. As Acker and Haque argue, there is something strange in the way that Graduate Schools increase their uptake while at the same time doctoral graduates may “deal with a decade of disappearing jobs”. Acker and Haque foreground the tensions of having a doctoral programme that has research and dissertation writing as its primary driver and at the same time “no one proposes training them for a career in the secondary labour market of temporary and precarious positions”.

Higher education practices sometimes fall “into a grey zone, an area of institutional twilight, in which the normal laws, rules and codes of conduct do not apply and do not seem to work”, and these include “between-spaces where students fall off the radar, and where differences of opinion lead to anger and protests”.

A dark ontology for higher education ecologies includes liminal states and aspects of hiddenness, tension, ambivalence, unknowingness, and even incomprehension. Such higher education reality disturbs and unsettles the anthropocene configuration of the higher sector, where policy, education, and job market interplay. This means that institutional frameworks and pedagogies for higher education teaching and learning, in a dark perspective, have to reflect the fact that the intersecting contexts of any ecology may also wound and hurt people, and make them doubt themselves and their plans for life. In a dark ecology, there is no guarantee that higher education will enable students to come out of the learning process unscathed, and institutional frameworks and pedagogies must work from the premise that students should not merely be managed, but also have room for letting go and becoming lost and returning as different persons and so entering new worlds.

**Dissolving Foundations**

Exploring further the dark undergrowth of higher education ecologies, we find not only darkness, but a still deeper ontological plane of nothingness. Fully embracing a dark ecology means leaving one’s principal foundation in the disciplines, culture, or other paradigmatic understandings of higher education’s

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38 Ibid., 101.
39 Ibid., 112.
past, present, and future. This dismantling of higher education from its foundations started with Bill Readings'\textsuperscript{41} description of the university as a ruined institution. Readings argued that the very foundation of the university has finally dissolved, and that the university is no more. There is no foundation, or put differently, the university has “nothing” as its foundation. In Peters and Besley,\textsuperscript{42} we find similar descriptions of the future of higher education as resting on “anti-foundationalism” and “post-foundationalism”,\textsuperscript{43} and in dark ecologies there are “no foundational certainties that guarantee knowledge, politics, or ethics”.\textsuperscript{44} This point unsettles the anthropocene notion of a politically and ethically meaningful human-centred foundation beneath the university as an institution. More unsettlingly so, we sense that there may be no such thing, and that the university is not itself the foundation but a form we have given it to manage and tame a much wilder life-force within it. This wilder life-force stretches beyond mere human institutions, conceptual forms, and political rationales. However, it calls us to react by applying as such to give it meaning, sense, and structure—and we call such institutional forms “universities”, such conceptual activity “research” and “higher education”, and such political rationales “policy”.

Students experience that universities no longer offer a safe platform, and understandably so since higher education has moved from the social and political periphery into the swirling centre of contemporary societies and policy making, this seems to enhance a sense of homelessness. Beneath higher education ecologies is a sea of supercomplexity where “our very frameworks for making the world intelligible are in dispute”.\textsuperscript{45} The “resulting fragility that confronts us is not that our frameworks are dissolving as such; rather, … for any one framework that appears to be promising, there are any number of rival frameworks which could contend against it and which could legitimately gain our allegiance”.\textsuperscript{46} Within the supercomplexity of dark higher education ecologies “we cannot know with any assuredness who we are” and “there are no secure holds on the world”.\textsuperscript{47} This anti-foundationalism becomes

\textsuperscript{41} Bill Readings, \textit{The University in Ruins} (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1997).
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 190.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} Ronald Barnett, \textit{Realising the University in an Age of Supercomplexity} (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2000), 75.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
visible on an institutional level when universities and other higher education institutions are no longer firm places for truth and knowledge. In post-truth societies, there is nothing that ensures knowledge as a lasting and enduring phenomenon, and there is nothing permanent to anchor knowledge. If there is anything that lies beneath supercomplexity, it must be an even darker force, even a “nothingness”.

Anti-foundationalism becomes visible on an individual level too. Students within higher education are haunted by the uncertainty and insecurity not only of the knowledge foundations within the disciplines but also by the uncertainty of the status and power of higher education institutions as such. Batchelor\(^48\) describes how students’ awareness of the underlying nothingness of higher education bursts forth from time to time in an existential struggle that is inextricably embedded within the curricular and disciplinary struggles, whereby epistemological and ontological layers of the students’ identity become entangled and confused. Similarly, “educational voyages that (...) students embark upon are bound to cause ontological discomfort” and the student’s being is displaced “into not just new, but strange places”.\(^49\) To be a student in anti-foundationalist higher education requires a “preparedness on the part of the student to enter otherness; new understandings, new positions in the world”.\(^50\)

A consequence of not only being aware of and activating Anthropocene ecologies, but also alien ones is that institutions and students and teachers alike must be prepared to leave traditional academic communities behind and to enter “the other”, traditional non-academic contexts and lifeworlds, as we can no longer assume a common human foundation supporting universities and higher education. The notion of the other in this context may include worrying future scenarios in which universities become directly caught in political activism, or even, and more troubling, armed conflicts. However, it may also include the case where universities more actively act as counsels for social and political welfare. In both cases, the notion of academia and academic scholarship will be severely tested.


\(^{49}\) Ronald Barnett, A Will to Learn. Being a Student in an Age of Uncertainty (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2007), 76.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 157.
Nothingness, and the Move Towards Alien Ecologies

Anthropocene notions of universities rest on the assumption that higher education is limited to solving known problems. Hopefully, higher education may inspire and even initiate such problem-solving activities. However, an unsettling thought for the anthropocene paradigm of contemporary policy discourses, when exploring dark and alien ecologies of higher education, is that “the deep structures of the university are basically unknown (not least in their interactions)”, and because “the deep level of higher education transcends our present-day socio-political concerns about the future of the university […] we must also learn and teach for the unknown”.\(^\text{51}\) The knowledge of the world cannot be entirely contained within universities, and higher education does not provide any clear and concise answers about how to help to shape and to assist in improving the world. Instead, such knowledge demands exploring the unknown and entering into the other, e.g. to engage with, and dwell within, traditionally seen non-academic contexts.

When we engage with the deep structures of reality, it implies an ontological risk of “our empirical and actual social selves and realities being disturbed and challenged”.\(^\text{52}\) When moving into the deeper layers of knowledge, beneath visible and understandable ecologies, we may be troubled by this lack of foundation. Also, disturbing knowledge may emerge about our role as nations or societies in history, how our own higher education institutions form awkward alliances, or how we become diverted from other forms of social and political engagement. Rough, lumped-together generalizations that help to maintain common sense understandings of phenomena or events in the world may be initially attractive, but may also turn out to be reductionist and somewhat misleading. This may be experienced as the infamous “lag” when universities and other societal institutions, organizations, and companies try to translate each other’s work and mindset. This lag itself is a dark space as it holds unforeseen and unknown futures. At the heart of a dark ontology is a messiness in the interstices between ecosystems.

A recognition of anti-foundationalism does not mean that higher education responds to a void, a passive emptiness, but on the contrary reacts and responds to an active form of nothingness. This nothingness underlying higher education ecologies “still has a sort of activity and being: ‘nothing


\(^{52}\) Ibid., 131.
nethings’. It does not keep still. It affirms itself in this production of nothingness”. To speak of alien ecologies surrounding higher education, and to challenge ecologies of the anthropocene, is to acknowledge that there are ontological layers of the university that we simply do not understand.

For Heidegger, encountering nothingness is the only way really to enter into communion with strange and alien realities, and only “on the ground of the original revelation of the nothing can human existence approach and penetrate beings”. Higher education ecologies are not only about understanding the socio-cultural and socio-political role of universities in contemporary societies, but also about letting higher education be formed and shaped by alien horizons and forms of thinking that we cannot yet account for. There is a nothing here that “does not merely serve as the counter-concept of beings; rather it originally belongs to their essential unfolding as such”. This means that really to embrace more alien ecologies, we cannot define properly precisely what the ecology consists of. In keeping with the anti-foundationalist view of universities, Guzmán-Valenzuela argues that we should speak of a complex university, which emerges on the background of sometimes obscure and hidden ecologies. For Guzmán-Valenzuela, the complex university “comprehends and accepts the plurality of world visions, which educates for difference”, thereby embracing the idea of the university without a fixed and definite cohesion. The cohesion of the university is not given to us but emerges from the active nothingness embedded in its form of being.

We should keep inquiring into the very nature of ecologies, and be open for answers that do not immediately suit us. Even though we cannot build our ecologies on any secure foundations of knowledge, we have to keep trying to ground them, to make them near us and to enter into contact with them. As Heidegger writes, it is only “because the nothing is manifest in the ground of Dasein can the total strangeness of beings overwhelm us”. For Heidegger, true wonder is aroused only “when the strangeness of beings oppress us”.

53 Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 49.
55 Ibid., 53.
57 Ibid., 14.
59 Ibid.
Becoming overwhelmed by strangeness is exactly what alien ecologies are about. In some proposed higher education ecologies, it seems to be implicit that universities must enter into *known* relationships with *known* partners, whether organizations, companies, or other institutions. This is an ecology of the anthropocene, where the university’s other is known and usually defined by universities themselves. Other ecologies suggest that universities should enter into *unknown* relationships with *known* partners, which would have the effect of moving academic institutions and their practices to both the periphery and to liminal space for their growth and transformation. However, we suggest that alien ecologies prompt the idea that universities might enter into *unknown* relationships with *unknown* partners, or at least have an openness for this. This is not a one-sided proposal to the effect that only alien ecologies should be promoted, but that all three forms of ecologies are relevant and real, but in different ways.

Alien ecologies come “repeatedly into collision with th[e] Unknown, which does indeed exist, but is unknown, and in so far does not exist”. 60 We cannot assume that the university is able to form lasting and constructive bonds with the world, but a university alert to the potential inherent in alien ecologies will strive to form new relationships with the world. Instead of searching for great organizations or collectives to collaborate with, an alien ecology may consist of bonds with small civic groups with no power or capital, or with stray individuals or subcultures even, present and growing in the periphery. Also, thought itself could be characterized as an ecology or ecosystem. The mood of a city or nation, and the faith or lack of faith in the deeper project of the university of an external partner could aspire to be an ecosystem too perhaps. University ecologies are all the time on the move, such that elements that are hidden or even alien may come into the light.

An alien ecology is a higher education future that currently exists on the fringes of being, whereby higher education achieves a more ground-breaking power and becomes “*a being by which nothingness comes to things*”. 61 An alien ecology challenges the cohesion of the present state of things and it even questions the fundamental role and purpose of the university and higher education in contemporary society. In an alien ecology, it “remains [for us] to learn in what delicate, exquisite region of Being we shall encounter that Being which is its own Nothingness”. 62

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60 Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 55.
62 Ibid., 23.
Serious questioning about the world is liable to bring forward undisclosed regions of the world that may initially present themselves in a disquieting way. As Sartre puts it, “in posing a question, a certain negative element is introduced into the world”, but this is an active and surging force and we “see nothingness making the world iridescent, casting a shimmer over things”. The nothingness may wedge itself into the very institution we know and question the ways in which universities remain as educative spaces. Perhaps it is time to “explore the being of the university anew and with a focus on the dimensions of the university that are not linked to higher education and, therefore, only occasionally have overlaps with teachers, students, and a formalized curriculum”. In becoming sensitive to the energy in alien ecologies, it might be feared that higher education might drift away from the societal, cultural, and political domains, but rather to the contrary it gathers, and it brings itself into play in new, surprising, and strange ways.

**Engaging with the Alien**

Universities are not merely involved with knowledge economies, policy makers, and the job market, as foregrounded in some higher education texts. They are entangled and involved with stranger social fields and personal lifeworlds. Universities become battlegrounds for ethnic and tribal conflicts, where the emancipatory potential of higher education turns into powerlessness and societal disillusionment and withdrawal. These institutions are contested territories, in which rival ideologies play out in new culture wars, over universities’ freedom and autonomy, and rights to be heard. Also, universities are infused with the hidden and muffled struggles of single parents, or members of large households that try to juggle professional careers, family life, and higher education learning or teaching. Higher education sometimes becomes a dead end for the marginalized or disabled, the ill and unsupported, and at times a glimpse is possible into the darker and troubling hinterlands of students and teachers and even—sotto voce—of university leaders.

63 Ibid.
Even the geographical and physical dimensions of the university\textsuperscript{66} are interlocked with unsettling and alien forces. Intellectual leaders and board members may struggle for years with land-owners about the possibility to extend the campus, make room, and build housing for students joining the university from other countries and parts of the world. The buildings themselves offer learning spaces or invite new ways of interacting and for making the university a place homely or unhomely.\textsuperscript{67} If students cannot find the welcoming atmosphere and homeliness of the institutions, they find them sometimes in “third spaces”\textsuperscript{68} outside the institutional spaces; perhaps in public houses, cafes, or the private homes of fellow students or tolerant and friendly academics. Besides space and place, race, gender, and income, time should be considered in any higher ecology as well. As Paul Gibbs and his colleagues\textsuperscript{69} have pointed out, the phenomenon of time may become worrisome to academics, either struggling to find more time in their busy daily worklife or trying to lose time and get rid of time, when becoming entangled with painful episodes of student stress and anxiety, or going through a rough patch themselves.

Higher education ecologies extend far and in unforeseeable ways into the structures of time and place and the fibres of personal lifeworlds and private lives. Gina Wisker\textsuperscript{70} confronts us “with the dangers of representing as waste anything and anyone who does not fit a reductive version of what it means to be human and of ‘value’”, whereby we may “imagine forward to a denuded future and engage our imaginations with troublesome thinking and knowledge, then prompt constructive, creative dialogue leading to imagining

\textsuperscript{66} Temple, \textit{The Physical University}.


alternative diverse ways of behaving, and so encourage critical, creative agency”. According to Wisker, the “ecological metaphor ... is central”, as it is “local and global, ethical and active in ideas, leading to action; engaged with the world, intent on shaping ideas, and contributing to values”. For Wisker, a higher education ecology should focus strongly on thresholds into unknown and alien domains, and she argues “that the thresholds that students cross engage their critical, conceptual and creative faculties” and that “engaging with issues of values, education, of social justice nudges that kind of learning leap—enabling and empowering those learning to produce knowledge which is characterised by agency and informed by values in action”.

The alien features of the university and of higher education—that is, of both institution and educational process—reveal their presence intermittently, and especially, as with creatures in the deep, when disturbed. And such presences are present in both the micro-aspects of the university and higher education and large ideological movements. The ecological university, if it is to be fully ecological, cannot ignore these presences but has to work out responses that do justice to the dimensions of concern and care within the idea of ecology itself. The ecological university has responsibilities towards all of the ecosystems with which it is inter-connected, tasks now made more complex when the hiddenness of so much of its environment is revealed—or reveals itself. This is hard work, not least because those alien features often come with their own awkwardness and even hostile force. The ecological university moves in choppy waters.

**Alien Ecologies and the Future of Higher Education**

We are pressing for an understanding of higher education ecologies that is not limited to the immediate disciplinary, institutional, curricular, social, political, cultural, and economic planes, but extends into strange or even alien territory. Of course, there is no sharp break between the familiar and the strange. At “the limits of every order, the alien emerges in the shape of something extraordinary that cannot find its place in the respective order, and, at the same time, as what is being excluded, it is not nothing”.  

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71 Ibid., 304.
72 Ibid., 305.
73 Ibid., 306.
The main question, as Waldenfels points out, is how can we engage the alien “without already neutralizing or denying its effects, its challenges and demands in and through the way of dealing with the alien?”

For example, higher education, besides providing expert knowledge and disciplinary mastery, engages students and teaching in the intangible matters of identity formation and personal growth. Also, we wish to think the higher education enables people to lead a better life, more prosperous and balanced, financially and socially. We hope that higher education institutions may mediate between financial and strategic policy drivers and the history, culture, and values of a given community or society. However, sometimes we are struck with more alien notions of higher education, where students and teachers do attain a more advantageous social situation, or come to master the discipline or sub-discipline as expected due to, for example, idiosyncratic and troublesome learning and teaching strategies. Sometimes, higher education seems to hold a deeper transformative power, difficult to understand, wield, and manage for students and teachers alike.

This academic idiosyncrasy is alien as it makes for anomalous and incomprehensible situations within what is familiar and known. The radical “character of the alien does not mean that the alien is something entirely different from the own and the familiar; however, it does mean that it can neither be deduced from the own nor subsumed under the general”.

The alien characterizes an overlap with a stranger force that we cannot control or fully see or comprehend, and we find ourselves in hybrid worlds. Such an in-between sphere cannot be reduced to a coherent homogeneity or integrated into a whole. These disruptive spaces and situations constitute a no-man’s land and, what Waldenfels calls, a liminal landscape which simultaneously connects and separates—and is in a constant ontological flux and unevenness.

To include alien and dark ontologies in the concept of higher education ecology transforms how we see and understand universities. Reading’s ruined university becomes an institution that may be worn out in its present form, but at the same time holds promises of strange and even alien futures. The university may suffer when entering the other, and establishing contact with alien presences, but at the same time it becomes aware of its deeper responsibility towards its deep ontology. Engaging with the alien, then, can help to

75 Ibid., 4–5.
76 Ibid., 35.
77 Readings, The University in Ruins.
The student propels herself into a new space and grows, taking on the world not just with a new cognitive perspective but a new ontological perspective, standing in a new space. Correspondingly, in engaging with the alien dimensions of its situation, the university propels itself into new spaces.

In engaging with the dominant ideologies of the age—alien to its values—the university forges new publics for its work and is understood anew. The rise of digital publics may be of relevance here too, and how universities see themselves as belonging to national and regional contexts in contrast to the more diffuse global agendas and communities (if such exist). When universities do not identify themselves with local and even national communities, they need to find new spaces to anchor themselves to, being virtual realities and communities. Encountering and then engaging with the strange and the alien, whether in the interstices of university life or in its larger worldly projects, the ecology university creates new futures for itself.

**Conclusion**

Talk of the Anthropocene usually comes with health warnings, literally. In an age in which the natural world has been overtaken by the human world, life has become even more precarious than it always has been. Human ecologies are buffeted not merely by those of the natural world but now by those of the human world too. Here, we have added to this story. Deep within human ecosystems are dark territories, with strange presences, often exerting considerable force, and this world of the deep, the dark, and the strange forms the character of much of the university and higher education, which has been our focus here. But this is a story not of un-redeeming darkness and precariousness. The dark and hidden features of the university and higher education sometimes show themselves and can sometimes, too, be brought to the surface. And in those encounters, enlightening and worthwhile processes can take place. The pedagogical relationship can take on a new, bright aspect, as the student moves into a new space of her own accord. She comes through an enclosed and confined darkness, to emerge into the light, seeing the world anew and with new confidence. The university, too, addresses the large ideologies of the age, perhaps even gaining new powers in the process but certainly a new sense of itself, its powers and possibilities in the world. Encountering and engaging (with) the alien can be beneficial for the university.
This university would be a university that is willing to delve beneath the surface of the immediate world that confronts it, and comprises it, to discern its own hidden depths. It would be fully an ecological university.

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2. Inquiry, Refusal, and Virtuous Resistance in the Anthropocene

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Abstract: In this essay, I consider practices of inquiry as strategies of refusal and intervention amidst the Anthropocene. I argue that characteristics of the Anthropocene create unique opportunities for employments of inquiry as a politics of refusal even as they manufacture additional mechanisms for governance in our contemporary era. I situate inquiry as necessarily located in a liminal space, operating at the limits of convention, with the aim of creating that which normative logics of governance cannot anticipate. Inquiry entangles context with concept, drawing from the one to imprint the other. Next, I situate contemporary inquiry practices as necessarily entangled with the experimental methods employed by the Cynics, whom Foucault interpreted as living experimental critiques of the status quo through a position of radical exteriority. Lastly, I call for a repositioning of inquiry as a practice of virtuous refusal, an ethically-engaged form of resistance within the contemporary moment of the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Anthropocene; refusal; virtue; cynicism; inquiry; ethics

In this article, I consider practices of inquiry as strategies of refusal and intervention amidst the Anthropocene. As Lazzarato notes, refusal is an “ethico-political” position that disrupts the knowledge imperative that so dominates the landscape of higher education.¹ For Benjamin Baez, one such strategy of refusal is to “miscalculate ourselves”—to refuse the ordered sequencing of work that promotes our dividuation and offer a deformed, insecure position in

¹ Maurizio Lazzarato, Governing by Debt (New York: Semiotext(e), 2015).
its place. This miscalculation derives from a politics of experimentation and is, in many ways, to follow Foucault’s analysis of the Cynics, those philosophers of Ancient Greece who refused to be counted or recognized by traditional forms of governance and lived, instead, an experimental life of truth-telling. Such experimentation, such deliberate miscalculation, is, indeed, political action: the capacity to create new possibilities and escape the categories, identities, and roles of normative order. I argue that such practices necessarily take on new formation within the conceptual and materially contextual circumstances of the Anthropocene and are productively provoked through the work of inquiry. The characteristics of the Anthropocene create unique opportunities for employments of inquiry as a politics of refusal even as they manufacture additional mechanisms for governance in our contemporary era.

Organizationally, I begin by reminding the reader of the contextual and conceptual distinctions of the Anthropocene, pointing to the inherent challenges and possibilities extending from our contemporary moment. I then establish inquiry as practiced effects extending from this distinction, enabling both systems of governance and possibilities for intervention. In other words, practices of inquiry are necessarily situated in a liminal space, operating at the limits of convention, with the aim of creating that which normative logics of governance cannot anticipate. Inquiry entangles context with concept, drawing from the one to imprint the other. Next, I consider experimental inquiry practices as imbued with strategies of refusal and creative enactments of political action. I situate contemporary inquiry practices as necessarily entangled with the experimental methods employed by the Cynics, whom Foucault interpreted as living experimental critiques of the status quo through a position of radical exteriority. Lastly, I call for a repositioning of inquiry as a practice of virtuous refusal, an ethically engaged form of resistance within the contemporary moment of the Anthropocene.

**Inquiry amidst the Anthropocene**

Notions of the Anthropocene call to question traditional understandings of the world with which we live even as they signal an historical context marked

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3 Maurizio Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity* (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2014).

by an irreversible human impact on the earth. In this sense, the Anthropocene signals both conceptual and contextual meaning. Yet, separating the former from the latter remains an unnecessarily reductive move that most often signals a desire to retreat to the relative stasis of convention. Further, it remains important to think the Anthropocene beyond anthropocentric values, disrupting the notion that humans remain the central cause of unique effects within our contemporary time. Instead, the Anthropocene calls forth new relations, new formative collectives that endure with our world, causing J. K. Gibson-Graham to ask, “what is the collective that acts” within the Anthropocene?5 This question regarding possibilities for coming together within our present circumstance remains strikingly important for projects seeking some form of material change to historically exploitative institutions, such as higher education. Such circumstances also contest conventional approaches to research. In response to the contemporary challenges confronting social science research, Delanty and Mota note that the Anthropocene calls into crisis traditional cultural assumptions of knowing and living such as: “(1) the question of temporality; (2) the nature of subjectivity and agency; (3) the problem of knowledge; and, (4) ultimately, a new understanding of governance.”6 Thus, the crisis of the Anthropocene necessarily challenges conventional approaches to inquiry specifically, and the work of faculty in institutions of higher education more specifically.

As a challenge to conventional forms of knowing and doing, the Anthropocene issues an ontological crisis to our modern institutions, requiring differently generated ethical frames for living in our contemporary moment. As Ruddick writes, the Anthropocene calls forth “the need to rethink the ontological presupposition that guides our ethics: the human-nature divide dominating the western concept of the subject.”7 Importantly, Ruddick here notes the dynamic link of the ontological and the ethical—assumptions of the former orient the possible practices of the latter. Assume a clear-cut separation of human and natural worlds and one’s ethical claims will inevitably follow similar logic. Yet, the Anthropocene does not allow for clear distinctions of the human–nonhuman (or their corresponding effects). As a consequence, conventional hierarchies built on such division fail to hold; newly devised claims regarding knowing and living are thus necessary. As

such, while the Anthropocene challenges normative values, it also presents a conceptual opportunity to reconfigure daily practices of living in excess of conventional norms and values. The contextual and conceptual crises invoked by the Anthropocene mandate a reconfiguration of enacted habit on ontological and epistemological levels.

In this way, the challenge of the Anthropocene corresponds with contemporary formations of the “materialist turn” in contemporary theory (perhaps seen most prominently in education through the work of critical materialism and posthumanism) that issue a simultaneous challenge to Cartesian duality, humanism, and logocentrism as the dominant mechanisms for inquiry. Though a thorough review of the effects of this materialist critique is beyond the scope of this article, a condensed mapping of how the approach refuses these three previously dominant assumptions of conventional research practices is necessary to better understand the implications of the Anthropocene for political resistance and inquiry practices examined further below.

To begin, much conventional work within the field of educational inquiry operates according to the assumptions of Cartesian duality—that there exists a mind–body divide and a subsequently causal relation between the immaterial mind and material body. Because the mind is assumed as the locus of existence, the goal of inquiry manifests as the effective and efficient access to both what is known (the product of the mind) and how such knowledge comes to be (the means by which the mind creates the knowledge-product). As such, epistemological assumptions remain the focus of “resistive” research practices situated within Cartesian duality: changes to the assumptions by which we come to know are assumed to cause alterations to how we live our lives. In short, Cartesian duality has led to a limited and one-dimensional epistemological focus for much conventional research. This, in turn, has limited the types of change such research might produce. Inquiry projects that remain bound by the implicit hierarchies of Cartesian duality must operate according to such division—they can never challenge or operate outside of them.

The causal focus inherent in the Cartesian split lends itself to the proceduralization of method—steps prescribed to separate cause from effect. Research thus becomes the technical mechanism for accessing (immaterial) thought. Further, as this orientation assumes the mind has province over the body (through rational thought), so are humans assumed to dominate the material world (through the refinement of rationality). There thus exists an anticipated anthro-centric hierarchy, ordered through the privileging of rationality over all else (existence itself a manifestation of the rational). Entities without rational expression, it is claimed, are rightfully governed by those with the ability to reason. Thus it is that inquiry practices aimed at some
element of social change often reinscribe the very dualities that make inequity possible in the first place.

As an example, consider methodological approaches that extend from a critique of institutions that marginalize or otherwise silence select voices from some underrepresented group. These approaches perhaps enact a research design that seeks to “give voice” to those who are presumed to have none within the context of the normalizing institution. Through the enclosure of methodological technique, voice becomes disembodied, a marker of humanity, and the object of inquiry. Though perhaps well-intentioned, this approach to change never alters the normative system that created the unjust context to begin with (those exploitive systems that collude to grant some groups voices and exclude other). Further still, by operating according to the implicit values of the governing system (that voice, as a commodity, might be “given” or taken away) this approach might well reinscribe the very systems the researcher seeks to displace. Such approaches to research are decidedly reformist in order: possible change remains at the level of technique; the logic that informs such methodological practice (that which makes it visible) is never challenged. Additionally, any element of change from this reformist scenario most likely resides at the micro- or individual level—systemic change is never possible. As alluded to by the example of voice, an outgrowth of Cartesian duality is the dominance of humanism, an orientation to knowing and being that contemporarily draws explanatory power from the governing economic rationality of neoliberalism. In many ways, humanism extends from the privileged hierarchy of Cartesian duality (of mind over body) and manifests in conventional educational research through a methodological fixation on techniques for securing a complete and consistent subject with the autonomy presented by traditionally liberal values. Returning to the example of voice for a moment, the desire to “give” or “return” voice to some individual or group often extends from the humanistic values ascribed to the concept—those of secure individuality, holistic conceptions of self, and clear boundaries of autonomy.

While much has been made of a need for methodological work to extend beyond the confines of humanism (see, for example, St. Pierre’s early call to escape the “mother tongue” of humanism⁹), the ontological and

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8 Traditional Marxists might deem this the difference between reformation (staying within exploitive systems) and revolution (changing the system that makes exploitation possible).

epistemological assumptions that dominate this perspective remain remarkably seductive, especially in research projects seeking political change. In part, humanism retains its high level of cultural resiliency due to the many ways in which it aligns with governing principals of neoliberalism. That is, the humanist subject articulates as a type of romantic individualism that coincides with neoliberal claims of the necessarily entrepreneurial Self and individual-level assertions of responsibility (to name but two intersections). Thus, it is that the humanist Subject develops within a dominant neoliberal political rationality as a type of *homo economicus* (human as a rationally economic subject). Further, the humanist values of the individual self-governing agent take on unique definition when set within the dominant assertions of neoliberalism.

As I have noted elsewhere, neoliberalism extends

as a particular form of governmentality that privileges (1) *hyper-individualism* (that individuals “stand on their own two feet” regardless of social standing or need); (2) *hyper-surveillance* (that individuals should always make themselves visible or known through quantifiable determinations of value); (3) *economic determinations of productivity* (an individual’s social worth is determined by his/her contributions to the economic sphere); and (4) *competitive entrepreneurialism* (successful individuals are those who can exploit market conditions in order to advance their social standing). Notice within this definition the debt neoliberalism has to the ideals of the humanist Subject: agency is held within and articulates at the level of the individual; agents are the preeminent causes of their own effects; one’s worth is based on the degree of measurable impact beyond oneself; value extends from a comparison of the Self to others. Of course, while humanism developed out of multiple assumptions regarding one’s worth and value as an extension of reason, within neoliberalism these claims take on the heavy burden of economic rationality. The moral claims that initially marked humanism thus become subsumed by the governing rationality of neoliberalism, resulting in a particularly seductive framework that is difficult to shed given our cultural adherence to capitalism in this day and age. Further, the intersection of neoliberalism and

10 Throughout this article, I capitalize “Self” and “Subject” when referring to the unified, coherent, and self-governing sense of a human agent. References to such terms in the lower case do not aim for such contextual specificity.
12 Pun intended.
13 This is, of course, the shift of liberal humanism to neoliberal humanism. All too often, this transition is noted as one that moves from a morally inscribed pronouncement of individual rights to one that is absent moral claims. This is an overly simplistic
humanism makes manifest particular mechanisms of governance—the ways in which neoliberal humanist Subjects are claimed (or not) as citizens within a particular locale, as well as their own participation in that claiming. 

Lastly, both the assumptions of Cartesian duality and neoliberal humanism come to privilege the role of language as an expression of the rational, humanist Self, all the while situating economically driven points of data as direct extensions of that Self. That is, the humanist Self (represented via language) coincides with what Deleuze termed the dividual, a mass of data, conjoined through a confected code that unlocks statistical meanings of worth. 14 Holding the humanist Self and dividual in productive tension makes possible select legitimated practices while excluding others. This scenario should strike one as decidedly contradictory, without the possibility for resolution through synthesis (how could the coherent Self coexist with the fragmented data points that mark the dividual?). And yet, it is a hallmark of our contemporary moment that such oppositions productively coexist, resulting in a host of material practices and affective responses felt individually and collectively. Engagements with the Anthropocene might usefully disrupt this tension, refusing both the synthesis of these contradictory norms and their assumed value to practices of knowing and living. As context, the Anthropocene demonstrates the impossibility for maintaining the human–nature divide that has been the foundation of both Cartesian duality and the humanist Subject over time. As concept, the Anthropocene points to systems of exploitation that extend beyond neoliberal values of individuality as economic determinants of value. And yet, the foundations of Cartesian duality, humanism, and logocentrism are so ingrained in our daily practices of living that they subsist even in contradictory relation. Thus, newly formed inquiry practices are necessary given our contemporary moment. A first step toward such change would seem to be necessarily cartographic in order. We might thus begin by mapping out such tensions and those practices employed to maintain seemingly contradictory ontological and epistemological orientations.

On the one hand, language serves as the necessary means through which reason and the refined humanist Subject are known (think here of the ease with which judgments about others are made based on their capacity for speech—intelligence, background, wealth, worth, etc., are all claimed as recognizable through one’s linguistic expression). As a consequence, those methodological mechanisms for ascertaining the Self inevitably privilege linguistic practices of rendering that makes absent the moral claims inherent in the economic rationality of neoliberalism.

interpretation. Thus it is that newly configured materialist criticisms question an historical overreliance on language as a means through which to understand and change the world.15

As a practical example of how contemporary research practices employ a methodological logocentrism, consider the prominence given to the interview within conventional qualitative research. Interview-as-method most often entails an audio recording, transcription of that recording, coding of the transcript, and narrative rendering of findings. Notice here how such conventional practices center the spoken/written word—all else falls away. Indeed, methodologists often work to limit nonlinguistic occurrences (read as distractions) from disrupting the interview itself (thus it is that such traditional interviews are to be held in a familiar, comfortable setting, out of the way of any disruptions: noises, smells, sights are limited so that the individual voice might be heard and rendered as appropriate—and isolated—language). In this scenario, language reigns supreme over all other forms of expression, a positioning that both conceptualizations of the Anthropocene and theorizations of posthuman materialisms critique as unnecessarily limiting and built upon problematic assumptions regarding knowing and doing. To intersect this methodological example with that of voice (examined above), one might recognize how the value of/for voice coincides with a methodological privileging of the interview. Thus, the conventional embrace of the standard interview finds its rationale: interview methods produce voice; voice needs a methodological apparatus to make it legible to the governing order.

On the other hand, however, given the economic ethos extended by neoliberalism, one might recognize a contemporary overlay of this romanticized logocentrism (that one’s Subject is represented through language) with an economically motivated calculation of worth (that one’s worth is demonstrated through positive contributions of data to legitimated databases). Thus it is that a series of databases and statistical calculations, through their arrangement, stand in for the agential self—marking as they do the effects of one’s economic production and legitimacy as a viable citizen in the neoliberal world order. In this instance, consider the number of databases to which one submits in order to be defined as a productive citizen: voting roles come under scrutiny with each election cycle; credit scores are examined with extreme intensity, often surrounded by practices of rehabilitation or protection; faculty

15 As an aside, this charge has been leveled as a critique of poststructuralism, a theoretical orientation that is often simplistically rendered as mere wordplay. Poststructural theorists have, in turn, refuted such critical assessments by pointing out the material implications of language—that language is never absent material circumstance.
become their H-index or citation count; etc. These data are read as effects of our living-production and situated as an indication of future production based on past practices (one’s H-index or citation count assumed to predict future practices of scholarship, a progressive model that directly links past to future). The dividual is thus created through these conglomerations of data, coalescing at multiple points to produce a claimed sequence of practices, interpreted as productive (or not) acts of citizenship. Within the database, one is one’s data. Further one’s realities—even possibilities for living—are changed based on the alignment of such data: H-index and citation counts become merit raises or promotion decisions, granting one the identity-marker of tenurable or promotable (or given the current landscape of higher education, contract-worthy). Thus it is that the dividual comes into complementary governing relation with the neoliberal humanist Subject; together they manufacture a unique form of representationalism with significant effect given our contemporary moment. The harmonized tension of the dividual with the neoliberal humanist Subject is a relation unique to the Anthropocene.

Importantly, it is through the coming-together of statistical and linguistic conglomerations of the self that the neoliberal humanist Subject is born and governed within the Anthropocene. Thus it is that one is extended the normalizing gift of citizenship through being simultaneously legible and statistically relevant (want to be seen as a productive, responsible person? Improve your credit score. Want recognition as a self-determined subject? Show your progression as a unified, coherent Self). Of course, the contrary here also holds true: become illegible or outside statistical norms and your citizenship is called to question. Thus it is that the represented, dividualized subject is “known” both individually and collectively—and, this knowing is simultaneous to the very production of representative and dividualized data; cause and effect relations lose the buffer of time and space as subjection is enacted. This element of citizenship through the entanglement of representation


17 As a methodological aside, this entanglement of representation and calculation is rendered in neat and tidy ways through simplistic renditions of “mixed methods.” In this case, methodological procedure is invoked to produce clear distinctions between represented Subjects (demonstrated via conventional qualitative methods) and calculated dividuals (produced through traditionally quantitative methods), the results of which bear no imprint of the contradictory epistemological assumptions that inform each approach. The end result is a smooth coming together of findings without question; compromise without consequence. Examples of this abound within the methodological literature but might be perhaps seen most strikingly in Creswell (2010).
and calculation remains significant as we turn to possibilities for resistances: the potential to refuse the governing claims associated with citizenry in the Anthropocene. Renewed political acts aimed at social change must necessarily disrupt both levels of governance—the Subject and the dividual, the represented and the calculated—through rejecting the basic assumptions that make them possible. Through our acts of resistance, we must live differently in the Anthropocene.

Given claims on/of the entangled neoliberal Subject-dividual notions of the Anthropocene as simultaneous context and concept put such normalized orientations into extreme crisis. Indeed, how does one simultaneously attend to the neoliberal humanist Subject-dividual (and the attendant values that follow) and participate in the entanglement (of human with natural worlds, of subjects with objects, etc.) required by the Anthropocene? Indeed, it perhaps makes good sense to turn our critical gaze to interrogate those practices invoked to overcome this seemingly contradictory position not through synthesis (the merging of the one with the other) but through maintaining them in such a way that they coexist\textsuperscript{18}: the subject existing in two places at once.\textsuperscript{19}

In short, while there certainly exists a philosophical disconnect between the governing assumptions of the recognizable citizen and the emergent requirements of the Anthropocene, this does not mean that the latter cancels out the former. Rather, it remains a marker of citizenship within our contemporary time that one strives to manage the (contradictory) assumptions of both, without missing a beat (such is the extent of our own governance). As a means to consider the implications of this (contradictory) governance, I now turn more directly to the field of higher education, specifically enactments of the knowledge imperative as an ethico-political practice of living that has the potential to challenge these governing orientations toward citizenship.

\textit{Higher Education’s Knowledge Imperative and Social Change}

Institutions of higher education play an increasingly visible role in the maintenance of, and challenge to, systems of governance. Though historically slow to change, tertiary education is not immune to the material tensions that


\textsuperscript{19} Such quandaries perhaps point to the necessary development of the DeleuzoGuattarian schizoid, striving to maintain order in an increasingly erratic and chaotic world order (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). This is the schizoid as a bifurcated subject-citizen, holding multiple and contradictory traits in productive tension all the while continuing to uphold normalizing machines that generate such definition.
dominate our contemporary era. Much of these tensions play out (or are most visible) in research practices that inform the knowledge imperative of higher education. That is, if the knowledge imperative grants higher education its raison d’être (colleges and universities existing as they do to produce knowledge), inquiry practices are enacted in response to this imperative. This is what makes methodological work so interesting—and important—to interrogate: the work of inquiry within higher education, in many ways, constitutes and affirms the knowledge imperative that grants colleges and universities their very social charter, the rationale upon which such systems are built and sustained.

The knowledge imperative of higher education extends as a social contract enacted by tertiary education to produce and maintain knowledge in spaces ostensibly free from political interests and influence. In many ways, it is through the construction and maintenance of the knowledge imperative that colleges and universities demonstrate their relevance within the social order. Of course, as a social construct, the knowledge imperative bears the imprint of the sociohistorical contexts through which it articulates. As Gildersleeve aptly notes, the neoliberal world order has reconfigured the knowledge imperative along economic lines, dramatically altering faculty work practices.20 As the knowledge imperative takes on the interpretive baggage of the economic sphere, so too are faculty activities measured against an economic square. To borrow from the terms previously offered, faculty remain decidedly defined through processes of dividuation, even as they perhaps cling to the hope expressed by the humanist Subject.21 For Gildersleeve, the ontological crisis brought upon by the Anthropocene creates the opportunity for faculty to “imagine anew the knowledge imperative for democratic purposes and emancipatory regimes of pluralistic


21 Though many faculty, myself included, promote the importance of tenure as it relates to principles of academic freedom, receiving tenure and promotion also seems to serve as recognition of one’s subject-position; a marker of the unified progression of a successful academic career. Thus, as faculty are governed by, say, expectations of hyperproductivity extending from neoliberal assertions of value, they also must construct a verifiable subject position that delineates their role within the academy. Through such work, managing these seemingly contradictory positions of dividuation and subjecthood, faculty manifest their enactments of citizenship within the academy.
truths.” The Anthropocene, then, provides opportunities to enact a knowledge imperative not bound by neoliberal values or the Subject-dividual tension that haunts our contemporary times. As noted earlier, the Anthropocene thus manifests as simultaneously crisis and opportunity on both contextual and conceptual levels. Certainly, I concur with Gildersleeve’s assessment and want to further consider the possibilities for intervening in economically based productions of the knowledge imperative through enactments of inquiry as philosophical truth-telling, experimental practices of citizenship for change.

At the same time, the Anthropocene is not, by itself, inherently freeing: as both concept and context it also provides for the possibilities of a different type of governance—one no less dangerous than neoliberal models (though certainly differently enacted). What, then, must faculty do to “imagine anew”—a key element Gildersleeve recognizes as important for alternative engagements with the knowledge imperative of the Anthropocene? How might faculty enact new practices of citizenship that, in turn, establish the conditions for such imaginative activities? Thus, faculty intent on instigating progressive change within the Anthropocene would do well to consider the ethical claims that orient their imaginative work within the knowledge imperative. After all, if faculty remain bound by the normalizing ethics that form and sustain the neoliberal humanist Self, even ostensibly new practices will lead to similarly binding contexts of governance. Hence the need to bring the work of philosophy to bear on practices of higher education generally and inquiry-work more specifically. Through philosophy the norms of convention are made visible and challenged to change.

An important element of my argument, then, is that the knowledge imperative implies a collective orientation of the professoriate that is, itself, an enactment. The knowledge imperative might thus be read as a potential space for relational resistances, a coming-together refusal to bend to governance (that of being defined by/subject of and ordered through/subjected to the governing norm). And it is through methodological practices that this knowledge imperative might be produced and known. Thus it is that the study of inquiry in higher education is itself a political project, interrogating as it does the norms, values, and resistive practices enacted when the professoriate comes together.

In some ways, my claims on the importance of inquiry work as creating spaces for refusal—relations of/for resistance—align with Butler’s assertion that “none of us acts without the conditions to act, even though sometimes

we must act to install and preserve those very conditions.”23 Given our contemporary moment, perhaps the work of inquiry is to confect the conditions for acts of refusal; challenges and interventions to the status quo that are necessarily driven by a decidedly relational ethical claim that we must make a new future possible. Further, perhaps resistive work within higher education articulates as interventions into the conventional knowledge imperative: imaginatively new enactments of faculty work. In this work there thus exists a politics of refusal: refusing the normative conditions of the present in order to make possible conditions for previously unimaginable future practices. Similarly, such work necessarily refutes the assumptions of duality, humanism, and logocentrism that I earlier noted as driving forces in the legitimization of conventional research. Yet, how might such collectively resistive practices manifest in our contemporary moment?

First and foremost, conceptualizations of the Anthropocene require a relational orientation to interactions within the world, one that disputes the individualized self–other bifurcation that remains endemic to Cartesian duality. In addition, operating within a relational frame provocatively disrupts the normalizing claims of humanism, casting agency not as held within a Subject, but as an expression of events among forces and flows that blur the edges of the non/human. Further still, the linguistic loses its normative hold on research practices as the Anthropocene requires inquirers to consider the material entanglements implicit in knowing, coming-to-know, and daily practices of living. Lastly, these entanglements produce an ontological density not compatible with the statistical rendering of dividualization.

Despite such philosophical reconceptualization, the neoliberal humanist Subject exists— it is alive and well within the Anthropocene. That is, such a subject formation is easily found within the context of the Anthropocene. However, utilizing the concepts inherent in the Anthropocene might make such formations no longer easy or desirable. Certainly, contemporary enactments of the knowledge imperative of higher education play a key role in this maintenance, serving as the institutionalization of neoliberal values within an Anthropocentric world. Thus it is that the work of inquiry might enact the important practice of disrupting the façade of coherency that the neoliberal Subject requires for its continuation.

Governance refers to a condition in which those governed are embroiled in the apparatus that exercises political control to an extent that they are not outside it, but the means through which it is exercised. It can be seen as both an order of governance and at the same time a mode of knowledge in which the political subject is constituted.

This notion of governance situates the political subject as both subjected to and a subject of the very machines that exercise governing power. Given the, at times, contradictory citizenship presented in the previous section (manifestations of the knowledge imperative), faculty certainly exemplify the subject-to-subject of relation that remains a marker of governmentality. The doubled sense of governance as simultaneously “an order of governance” and “a mode of knowledge” remains important to any project intending productive alterations to the status quo. As Delanty and Mota allude, we perhaps know ourselves most directly through our governance. As such, one is never fully outside the governing apparatus as one exists as the very means through which governance occurs. Perhaps, then, productive effects might extend from positioning oneself on the exterior of the norm—the threshold to the not-yet. In order to achieve such a location, one must play the role of cartographer, mapping the effects of these knowledges that grant contemporary practices of living their visibility and commonsensical status. In the case of the faculty citizen, this work perhaps extends from mapping enactments of the knowledge imperative within our contemporary moment. In what ways is one implicated by—and an extension of—the governing apparatus that grants one’s citizenship within the academy? Methodologically this, then, grants promise to inquiry practices which serve to map our relational circumstance—the inquirer as radical cartographer.

One area for examination may well include those spaces where the Subject-dividual fragments, releasing its hold on the conventional imagination. As Delanty and Mota note, “the challenge of governing the Anthropocene—or transforming it into a positive political project—is also about overcoming the limits of modernity.”

24 Delanty and Mota, “Governing the Anthropocene,” 24 (emphasis mine).
25 Here I invoke the notion of the Deleuzian machine, defined by Youngblood Jackson as “a productive force that functions immanently in its becoming,” 114.
26 Delanty and Mota, “Governing the Anthropocene,” 17.
where modern subjects and institutions can no longer contain that which exceeds normalizing definition. This is an opening-up of knowledge-producing machines that were seemingly designed to contain and nail down. Of course, this productive excess cannot be usefully engaged with conventional research methods (those aiming to produce static, economically rational, and linguistically configured Subjects). New modes of experimentation are necessary if we are to intervene in the Anthropocene and instigate necessarily radical changes to higher education and the work of the faculty-citizen. Further, such experimental practices must be oriented by ethical determinations not defined by the status quo. Such alterations are, of course, easier said than done as our contemporary moment effects ontological experiences within the world—the Subjective-dividual condition certainly extends a series of affective responses, themselves implicated in the process of governance.

This resistive stance, a politics of refusal, extends from a relational logic invoked to produce change through the enduring potential of excess—those lines of flight that exceed the effects prescribed by convention. I suppose that I might rightly be critiqued for having undo faith in the possibilities made manifest when we come to act together (even in concert) to enact the concept of the Anthropocene. At the same time, I believe we need to ask, as Butler does, “What does it mean to act together when the conditions for acting together are devastated or falling away?”27 This, I fear, is the moment in which we find ourselves—culturally we seem to have lost the bulk of those spaces where collective resistance might be enacted. The public spaces for democratic activity have become regimentally governed. While higher education perhaps relied on enactments of the knowledge imperative in order to distinguish its role from other governing institutions, the dividuation of faculty identity calls to question possibilities for collective action among the professoriate. Thus, to Butler’s concern, I might add, “how are we to create the conditions for relational action and what publics are necessary for this possibility to manifest?” Might faculty work, particularly through experimental practices of inquiry, help to create new conditions, new possibilities for citizenship? Perhaps it is toward this creative capacity that we should now turn our creative energies.

Of course, collective enactments need not be read as reductive conformity (we do not all align our steps in some music video of prescribed action to a prearranged beat). As Butler articulates, resistance entails “not one act, but a convergence of actions different from one another, a form of political sociality irreducible to conformity.”28 It is thus the differences held within

28 Ibid., 178.
collectively enacted resistance that hold the most promise for change. Not synthesis but a proliferation of differing actions toward the common cause of change remains the goal for material change within the relational contexts of the Anthropocene.

And yet, there remains the rather disconcerting impossibility of prescription that binds posthuman calls for social change. We know not what the future holds for that possibility is to be governed by sets of logics and practices that have yet to manifest. Indeed, Foucault is clear that philosophical work extends as a radical critique of political action even as it does not prescribe a political future (what politics has to do) but instead situates truth-telling in relation to political action of the immediate now.\(^{29}\) In short, philosophical truth-telling proclaims what political action—actions of governance—does and the effects of such practice. Following this, it is perhaps up to the philosopher to create the conditions necessary for newly imaginative practices, through engaging in decidedly open-ended ethical deliberation and forcing disruption within the public sphere.

The problem, of course, is that democracy does not, by itself, ensure justice and equality—hence the need for democratic resistance to be oriented by ethical differentiation. As Foucault notes, “in democracy one cannot distinguish between good and bad speakers, between discourse which speaks the truth and is useful to the city, and discourse which utters lies, flatters, and is harmful.”\(^{30}\) Thus it is that reimagining the knowledge imperative must coincide with an equally important interrogation of the ethico-onto-epistemological assumptions that sustain that experimental work. More simply, any intervention into the normative patternings of the Anthropocene must be accompanied by an emancipatory ethic, one built on a refusal of what is, in the interest of presenting renewed possibilities of what might yet be. This is virtuous inquiry, made possible by the very entanglement of the Anthropocene as concept-context, a point to which I return at the conclusion of this article.

So, given all of this, what is to be done? Thus far I have mapped the terrain of our present moment, one motivated by the seductions of the neoliberal humanist subject, an ontological crisis brought upon by the Anthropocene, and normalizing practices of citizenship that necessitate a schizoid-subject for legitimacy within the status quo. I have also pointed to the simultaneously resistive and governing possibilities of the knowledge imperative within higher education—enactments of academic citizenship that manifest in

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\(^{29}\) Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*.

important ways through inquiry practice. Perhaps we might look to strategies for materially resistive acts of citizenship that align political practice with acts of living—ethically motivated politics of experimentation that begin with affective engagements of refusal. Given Lazzarato’s ethical political position of refusal, what experiments in living might guide our inquiry? And, how might refusal inform enactments of the knowledge imperative within higher education?

**Becoming Cynical**

Given our contemporary context, a useful example of the intersection between the work of philosophy and the practice of politics might be found in Foucault’s analysis of the Cynics. Part of the work of the Cynic is to conflate the conventional bifurcation of the epistemic and the ontic—that of knowing with living. As Foucault articulates, with the Cynics “one risks one’s life, not just by telling the truth, and in order to tell it, but by the very way in which one lives.” Thus it is that the Cynics operate from the question, “what can the form of life be such that it practices truth-telling?” Through merging the previously bifurcated space of epistemology and ontology, the Cynics materially enact a politics of refusal and do so through generating creatively new affective responses to contemporary practices of governing (using direct challenge, anger, and force to mark their intervention within normalizing processes).

Through a strategy of aggressive confrontation, the Cynics demonstrated “a mode of philosophical truth-telling to political action which takes place in the form of exteriority, challenge, and derision.” This notion of *exteriority* seems especially poignant given contemporary challenges to the Subject-individual and those newly developed political subjectivities that dynamically emerge through creative engagements with the knowledge imperative. Unique among the philosophies of Ancient Greece, the Cynics sought to operate deliberately in the excessive spaces of the political conventions and laws of their time. Because, as noted earlier, one can never exist fully outside the governing apparatus, the Cynics sought a position on the exterior—not fully absent but managing a presence that, itself, disrupts the governing

31 Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines*.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., 287.
norm. Thus, philosophical cynicism articulates as a simultaneous refutation of contemporary norms (a refusal to be governed “like that”) and critique of political practice (refusal making visible that which would otherwise remain hidden behind the veil of commonsense). Hence Foucault’s comment that the Cynics perform their critique through their continued placement on the exteriority of convention; they are never fully subsumed by the norms they register and critique.

Further, as Foucault notes, the Cynics established their critique through existing entirely within the public sphere—they rejected the public–private binary and lived a form of philosophical citizenship quite literally out in the open. Thus it is that the Cynics existed on the margins and, at the same time, within the very public they sought to critique. This refusal to inhabit the material margins of the public sphere affords the Cynics a critical space—a radical exterior to convention that remains within the immediate locus of democratic practices of citizenship. Thus the Cynics issue their challenge to the governing norm through the very relations that constitute public subjects as objects of governance and knowledge. The result is both a radical refusal (to be subsumed by the normative interior of governance) and critique (a challenge to the very values that guide and make manifest the governing center of the public sphere). In this way, the Cynic constitutes a type of fold, bending the political systems back upon itself—a lived enactment of the critical space within democracy.

Lastly, Foucault presents philosophical cynicism as a “broken mirror” that presents the philosopher a “reflection of what [philosophy] is and should be, and of what [the philosopher] is and would like to be.” Here there exists both the mapped terrain of philosophical work (what it is) and the exterior of convention (what it should be). At the same time, this image of practice reveals philosophical subjectivity (what one is) and how one might operate beyond the trappings of the political realm (what one would like to be). Further, the overlap of what one is and would like to be (or, what one’s work is or should be) presents an ethical claim on the future (a possibility not yet known) that articulates as a virtuous positioning. Mapping the present affords one the ability to look toward a potential not-yet and remain oriented by a

36 Foucault, The Government of Self and Others.
37 Notice here how philosophical cynicism disrupts the traditional geographical claims of the marginalized outside who exists materially on the periphery of the public—outcasts pushed to the edges of the city. Instead, the Cynics generate their critique from within (the marginalized center, as it were).
virtuous claim for necessary change. The effect of this fractured, discontinuous image is “a grimace, a violent, ugly, unsightly deformation in which there is no way in which [the philosopher] could recognize either himself or philosophy.” Cynical philosophy, then, collapses the practices of the now with the virtuous truth of what should be, thereby disfiguring the reflected image so as to be scandalously unrecognizable. This, then, is a radical refusal steeped in virtuous practice. Through their own scandalous acts, the Cynics employ a violent refusal of the governing norm, one that aims to make conventional practices of living no longer legible.

What remains remarkable in cynical philosophy is its intentional engagement with the violent affect of living a conventional life. This, according to Foucault presents a cynical determination to truth-tell with the aim of “getting people to condemn, reject, despise, and insult the very manifestation of what they accept, or claim to accept at the level of principals. It involves facing up to their anger when presenting them with the image of what they accept and value in thought, and at the same time reject and despise in their life.” Cynical philosophy, then, entails an overt affective engagement with refusal, one that seeks to rip subjects from the governing fabric of connection. Normative function becomes a violent reenactment of the status quo, one to be challenged through affective responses of anger and passion. The Cynic seeks to manifest change through employing the collective relations of citizenry, unbound by the normalized procedures that govern citizens into docility. Cynical philosophy cannot, then, be enacted in isolation—it is a relationally bound practice of truth-telling: a collectivizing politics of refusal driven by an ethical determination to be other than we are. Further, because the Cynics strove to enact their material critique of the contemporary moment, they embarked on a necessarily experimental practice of living—one that entangled previously distinct areas of the political, ethical, and philosophical.

Lest the reader mistake my overview of cynical philosophy, political refusal, and experimental change for an implicit claim for replicating such an orientation in our present time, let me be clear: the goal is to learn from previous enactments of refusal in order to create the contemporary conditions necessary for newly practiced formations of resistive citizenship. As Colebrook notes, pulling from the “milieu” of another philosophy makes possible “another sense, another said.” Thus, I now turn from this overview of the

39 Ibid.
Cynics to concluding considerations for how a cynical approach to inquiry might productively impact enactments of the knowledge imperative in higher education.

**Virtuous Refusal**

In his own critique of methodological work within the contemporary academy, Pickup asserts that we exist in a moment wherein “methodologists have only the ability to speak truth through method and technique, not within the material relations of social and political contexts.”42 The assertion of methodological procedure-ism as the means through which truths might be known binds the researcher to the values inherent in conventional inquiry techniques even as it separates him/her from the contexts requiring change. Thus the researcher articulates in much the same way as those methods invoked in the research project: outside the contexts under study, unmarked by the sociopolitical enactments of relational living. In this conventional scenario, there is no promise for change—repetition and modification reign supreme. Specific to the challenges of the knowledge imperative, working through method and technique ensures that no real change will occur to the philosophical assumptions that govern higher education; only procedural alterations to the status quo are possible. As a consequence, the knowledge imperative loses its critical possibilities for affecting material change. In response, Pickup calls for a renewed understanding of inquiry as a practiced commitment to truth-as-intervention, one sustained by an orientation of inquiry as a virtuous act. By way of this conclusion, I thus want to extend Pickup’s important intersection of truth, intervention, virtue, and inquiry through considering methodological work as ethical acts of refusal built on the radical exteriority of truth-telling.

In order to refuse, one must necessarily believe that normative processes are not definitive, nor descriptive, and that there exist alternative practices of living that have yet to come—a simultaneous critique of the now and opening to future possibility. This is, in a literal sense, to lose faith in our present world, our contemporary condition. As Colebrook writes, “We can only begin to think and live when we lose faith in the world, when we no longer expect a world to answer to and mirror ourselves and our already constituted desires.”43 These refusals are, in short, experimental acts of resistance enabled by virtuous inquiry.

Part of the work of refusal would seem to necessarily include a questioning of how select practices are induced to manage historically defined problems. Consequently, as Butler notes, “certain kinds of practices which are designed to handle certain kinds of problems produce, over time, a settled domain of ontology as their consequence, and this ontological domain, in turn, constrains our understanding of what is possible.”

Thus, part of the problem that plagues critical practices of resistance is that we perhaps encounter those habitual ways in which we have come to reenact “a settled domain of ontology” through critical practices that simply point to contradiction or falsities without making space for an unknown future that exists in excess of normative ontologies. Thus it is that virtuous work is to engage in practices that challenge existing circumstance to produce previously unthought ways of living, yet-to-be defined ontological existences. Indeed, as Butler succinctly states, “liberty emerges at the limits of what one can know.”

New ontological possibilities manifest at the limits of epistemological and ontological practice: the threshold of knowing into becoming.

As noted earlier, the Anthropocene affects both crisis and possibility. Within the field of higher education, the simultaneity of this challenge to and potential for manifests most dynamically through enactments of the knowledge imperative that give form and definition to faculty work practices. Through the dominant discourses and practices of globalized neoliberalism, the economic and knowledge imperatives of higher education have dangerously coincided—the values of the former determining pronouncements of the latter. And yet, despite this, the Anthropocene puts the easy conflation of economically determined values with formations of knowledge into necessary crisis. Quite simply, the Anthropocene demonstrates the incompatibility of neoliberal values with elements of living that extend beyond the normalizing patterns of anthrop-centrism. To return to Gildersleeve’s pronouncement of the potential inherent in the Anthropocene, the ontological crisis invoked by our times necessarily makes possible renewed imaginations for the knowledge imperative and, consequently, daily practices of inquiry as resistance. And, of course, such possibility extends to both the potential to live otherwise and be governed in dramatically new ways (yet, governed nevertheless). As such, this crisis can only be productively enacted if activated by an affective rejection of contemporary norms, the violence of which makes possible futures yet to be assumed by the logic of the present. In this way, we can

46 Gildersleeve, “The Neoliberal Academy of the Anthropocene”.

learn from the Cynics—their positioning on the radical exterior of society and their affective rejection of being governed—and become different sorts of inquirers: oriented toward a similar ethical determination to be other than we currently are (and governed by different notions of citizenship). We can enact newly virtuous acts of inquiry, imaginatively reorienting the knowledge imperative of higher education toward a radical democratic possibility.

Employing the future-orientation of virtue (what one should be, what one should do) positions one on the exterior of the immediate moment—a threshold made possible by an ethical stance of refusal. Inquiry might then be understood as a form of virtuous resistance. This refusal challenges contemporary governing norms and envisions, instead, an alternative future not defined by the claims of convention (a refusal of the status quo). In this way, such philosophical formations of inquiry develop a threshold, the exteriority where the known meets the not-yet pronounced.

Further, because virtue is engaged with exposing the epistemological limits of a field or milieu (such as the knowledge imperative), it is also an ontological sense of becoming—one that shifts modes of identity (what one is) to more open-ended possibilities (what one might be or has yet to fully become). Indeed, virtue itself resists closure, opening as it does to considerations for ethical enactments not yet determined.

Virtuous inquiry thus might be understood as imbued within a radical form of citizenship—becoming what one is not-yet in order to refuse governmental assumptions of what one might necessarily be. Thus it is that virtue, citizenship, and critique share a refusal of the status quo. Though we perhaps align the last of this triumvirate with a challenge to what is, both virtue and citizenship seem to have lost that disruptive edge in their contemporary formation. It is my sense that practices of virtuous inquiry might return such practices to the radical place of mapping new lines of flight toward productive change. As a consequence, inquiry work might be productively understood as new formations of citizenship, beginning from a political stance of refusal.

This, then, points to the productive intersection offered by practices of cartography (of what did happen, or what effects led to our present—mapping the relations that govern our present) and imaginative resistance (how we might otherwise be, governed in different ways). This movement of the past with present into an ambiguous future prompts virtuous claims (what we should be, how we should act). From the “what” to the “should” remains an important element of truth-telling. Thus, virtue is created, cultivated, toward an end that never resolves (can never be synthesized)—a destination left undone. Through virtuous inquiry we might strive toward different formations of governance, different ways of becoming that are not dependent
on a reformation of how we were, but a revolution to what we might further become. And, this moment might well present a challenge to conventional forms of recognition as that which is not-yet remains never fully formed—the “grimace” and “unsightly deformation” that Foucault registers as philosophy looking back at itself in its own broken mirror.

Perhaps this is our task—to run the risk of being deformed subjects, monsters even. Perhaps our bemused status calls forth a strategic refusal that stands at the epistemological limits in order to imagine new ontological formations. Indeed, we can no longer operate within structures of logical order—the rules have bent in absurd patterns. Virtue, then, extends as a stance of bemused criticality—Laughing at the absurdity of truth aligned with truth even as we locate the interstices where new formations might begin—Virtuous inquiry as a miscalculation of what matters, and what has yet to matter. As Butler claims, virtue extends as a practice of desubjugation, wherein a subject “risks its deformation as a subject, occupying [an] ontologically insecure position.”

Risking ourselves as monsters, engaging in virtuous inquiry.

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47 Butler, Notes Toward a Performative Theory, 12.


Abstract: Though the Anthropocene potentially is many things, a strategic plan is not one of them. Rather, it offers a warning, an important concept, an opening to rethink research methodology, and an opportunity for higher education to work toward better futures for (and with) the planet. The Anthropocene also asks difficult questions of how we might do differently, live differently, and go about research through more generative and sustaining processes. Simultaneously, it can replicate some of the same habits that may have brought the Anthropocene to bear. To illustrate, I consider how research is produced both in and about the Anthropocene. I then caution against turning the Anthropocene into an industry before suggesting that—in the midst of its enormity—we might foster little practices that work differently for tomorrow, beginning with today.

Keywords: Anthropocene; educational philosophy; generative practices

At best, the future of the planet remains an open question in the Anthropocene. This perhaps is an optimistic view. Some have raised the alarm about a new age of mass extinctions, while others suggest that we are in the midst of an epoch in which humankind has become a geological force that continues to damage the planet in various ways. In response, a rare convergence of interests across scholarly disciplines has begun to occur: researchers are designing overlapping sets of scientific investigations, artistic endeavors, and philosophical theories for this current moment. The emphasis on shared concerns is significant, as the Anthropocene may have the potential to affect nearly everything, everywhere on Earth. The Anthropocene does not need to be acknowledged in order for it to be able to affect us all.
To illustrate, I consider how the Anthropocene potentially influences the daily work of those of us who have the privilege of being in higher education. Although postsecondary education may seem like an unconventional place to turn attention, this focus may not be as counterintuitive as it initially seems. In part, this is because the challenges of the Anthropocene remain beyond the reach of any one particular sector or discipline; transdisciplinary perspectives will be necessary in responding to issues involving injustice and inequity in both human and more-than-human realms. Being that higher education is uniquely positioned to respond to some of the most urgent and pressing issues facing the planet, I remain interested in how it can serve to catalyze, rather than inhibit, its awesome potential.

I suggest throughout that tapping into the potential of higher education extends into the day-to-day workings of academia. In so doing, I examine what can be of most value in higher education and how, through the aid of research, these same priorities have the capacity to further Anthropocenic tendencies. I gently suggest that even scholars of the Anthropocene may not be immune, and that the ways in which the Anthropocene and its ilk can be taken up can, at times, perhaps be more Anthropocenic than might be anticipated. Though the Anthropocene is an important concept with much to offer, it is also imperfect and worth approaching with caution, particularly given that it is surrounded by an increasing number of complementary and competing terms. In referring to these as the “Anthropocene et al.,” I suggest that these terms can range from serving as trendy fashion labels to encouraging profoundly different ways of living, with a host of possibilities in between. It is then up to us to determine how and why (and also why not) we choose to engage, for making reference to the Anthropocene simply is not enough in and of itself. Instead—through actions within the enormity of the Anthropocene that may seem so small as to be inconsequential—scholars might work toward different possibilities in both research and life. Although this paper engages philosophical and theoretical challenges that are not easy (or perhaps not even possible) to resolve, I close with the hope that dwelling within the challenges, questions, possibilities, and urgencies of the Anthropocene might spark something generative in ways that help us all—humans, nonhumans, and inhumans alike. Ultimately, the Anthropocene is a warning and question, not a solution or strategic plan.

**Naming the Anthropocene**

It perhaps is helpful to begin with a reminder from Latour that the Anthropocene “gives another definition of time,” one that is framed by the appreciably

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1 Bruno Latour, “On Some of the Affects of Capitalism” (lecture, Royal Academy, Copenhagen, February 2014), 16.
large measure of the geological epoch. Geologists have proposed that, in the last 300 years, humanity may have impacted the Earth so much that we have ushered in a new epoch; as such, there is discussion of adding the Anthropocene the official Geological Time Scale. If this were to happen, as Malabou writes, it would be “obvious that such an epoch will determine the historical representation as well as the social and political meaning of the events occurring in it.”² The implications for research—and the world which it claims to explore—are profound.

The Anthropocene continues to be an influential, albeit contested term, even among those who champion its cause. In addressing its defenders’ unusual mix of passion and reluctance, Haraway suggests that Anthropocene may be flawed, but that it is necessary because “the word is already well entrenched and seems less controversial to many important players.”³ Moreover, she suggests that the term has gained traction in academic and public discourse because it points to shared issues “of fact, concern, and care.”⁴ The Anthropocene, then, is a different indicator of sorts—a geological and societal marker that Haraway encourages us to keep as brief as possible as we “cultivate with each other in every way imaginable epochs to come that can replenish refuge.”⁵ Yet, however useful the term may be, not everyone is content to simply call this epoch the Anthropocene and leave it at that. There also have been suggestions of a Post-Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene, and Ecocene. The Gynocene and Homogenocene also have received occasional mention.

It is conceivable that all these different namings are a good thing. For Haraway, different namings do important work toward acknowledging the worlds that currently exist while creating openings for new and different possibilities. She takes great care to emphasize that as we imagine multiple futures at once, we should simultaneously “stay with the troubles” of today and the histories from which those troubles emerged. The past, present, and future are not separate affairs, and the importance of concepts that have the potential to capture the public imagination should not be underestimated. As Stengers observes, the Anthropocene “may well be ‘just a name’, but names have a power of their own.”⁶ Language matters.

⁴ Ibid., 184.
Although debates over what to call this epoch have occurred over the last 20 years, I would reiterate that the Anthropocene and its substitutes are at least 300 years in the making. Three-hundred years might be but a single breath in Earth’s history, but it is a breath that has seen a global expansion of industrialization, mega-farming, colonization, and capitalism. It is a breath that has also seen the rise of the modern research university and the invention of research methodology. It even could be argued, therefore, that many research methodologies have been influenced by the same forces that produced the Anthropocene: capitalistic forces that produce more, faster, with greater rates of standardization and efficiency. Emphases on bigger can strong-arm considerations of better. It is no wonder that Ryan Gildersleeve writes about the “Neoliberal Academy of the Anthropocene” and urges scholars to reclaim the knowledge imperative in Academe by attending to “higher education’s role as the arbiter, producer, and disseminator of academic knowledge.” As he suggests, the promises and potentials of higher education can be distant from its own day-to-day realities. This takes on particular importance given the state of affairs in the world, which do not foster long-term sustainability, renewal, and care, but immediate exhaustion, depletion, and violence.

Is Academia Anthropocenic?

There are certain texts that stay with you long after you have read them—that linger in the back of your mind and continue to animate your thoughts. Along with Gildersleeve’s article, Aaron Kuntz’s The Responsible Methodologist: Inquiry, Truth-Telling, and Social Justice is one of those texts for me, even if there are times when I wish I could forget the ideas in both. After encountered Kuntz’s logics of extraction, for example, it is impossible to approach methodology in the same ways as before. Being uneasy about something is not quite the same as understanding why (or recognizing the ways in which I potentially bear responsibility). As Kuntz explains, logics of extraction underpin a system that “assumes that the most efficient and productive means for accessing knowledge is to make something ‘knowable’ through extracting it from the immediate context through which it manifests. Thus, the best

7 Claire Colebrook, “We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene” (lecture, Anthropocene Feminism Conference, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, WI, April 2014), 3.
‘methods’ are those that expedite the extractive process.” This is problematic, he contends, in an interrelated set of arguments that connect extraction with consumerism, violence, and efficiency. For Kuntz,

... ours is a time of violence of multiple scales and intensities. Thought I do not pretend that reconsiderations regarding inquiry and responsibility will immediately change any of these ongoing tragedies, I also refuse to believe they are completely divorced from them. We have, for example, long treated the environment as a commodity—something to be parcelled out, owned, bought, and sold for individual profit.... [E]xtending this logic of consumerism to our research approaches—that, for example, research produces data that might be interpreted within an academic market—has a decidedly negative effect on what research can do and, importantly, how we might come to know and be differently. This is all to say that, for me anyway, there is not much distance at all between how we live, who we claim to be, and how we come to know.

There is a violence of extraction that traditionally goes unnoticed in the proceduralization of the inquiry process. In our fixation on method we perhaps miss the underlying assumptions that make such extractions possible. And I am not convinced that this process, codified and organizationally pleasing though it may be, is the best way to go about meaning-making. There are consequences for such efficiency.

Since reading Kuntz’s book, I have become all too aware of how the “violence of extraction” manifests. Like the “consequences for such efficiency,” it no longer goes unnoticed. I have come to believe that we are surrounded by such consequences, and that it is not only the forces of the Anthropocene that drive “the underlying assumptions that make such extractions possible,” but also what Gildersleeve refers to as the “Neoliberal Academy of the Anthropocene” itself.

Consequently, I often contemplate how the ways in which research methodologies extract knowledge can resemble the ways in which machines extract elemental matter from the earth. What some refer to as “natural resources” may serve as a harbinger for knowledge in this regard, especially within research frames that aim to separate cultural understandings from natural life. Through such lenses, both resources and knowledge can be viewed as available for the taking without concern for the long-term implications thereof. Accordingly, I am now haunted by wonderings that connect the extraction

10 Ibid., 13.
11 Ibid., 46.
of resources with the production of scholarly knowledge, particularly with regard to what I imagine as academic forms of fracking and strip mining.

*Academic fracking*

When scholars describe being under great amounts of pressure to produce, as well as the forces and pressures that bear down upon their day-to-day work, for example, I think of fracking. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines fracking as “the injection of fluid into shale beds at high pressure in order to free up petroleum resources (such as oil or natural gas).”\(^{12}\) And while this begins to get at what I imagine when I think about the compressions of academia, it is the expanded term of hydraulic fracturing (from which the term fracking derives) that is perhaps more accurate. More specifically, hydraulic fracturing is “a technique in which a liquid is injected under high pressure into a well in order to create tiny fissures in the rock deep beneath the earth which then allow gas and oil to flow into the well.”\(^{13}\) There may be parallels here that can be drawn with the processes of academic production. For instance, it may not be a stretch for some researchers to imagine tiny fissures extending outward in their own minds, bodies, and spirits as external forces summon scholarly ideas to the surface. Ideas then are extracted, processed, and refined, where they reemerge in the forms of writings that are sent to, and exported by, the publishing industry. And, before the well runs dry, metrics rhythmically are pumped into the academic machine—again, again, and again.

It could be argued that fracking is a shortcut designed to produce immediate gain. “Natural resources” such as gas and oil have remained unperturbed for millions of years beneath the surface of the earth. But now that the more obvious sites of extraction have been exhausted and new sites have been identified, energy industries are experimenting with different methods of extraction. To be fair, there is a large market of global energy consumers, of which I am one; I would be remiss to pretend that I live off the grid and do not contribute to energy demands. I do, and recognize how my own complicity can intersect with complex decisions in energy debates. When I plug in my laptop computer to the nearest outlet and begin working, for instance, I rarely pause to consider how that energy is generated. Nonetheless, I am concerned (and also should be more concerned) that fracking practices

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13 Ibid.
demonstrate little care for future generations and disturb the earth. For example, some scientists suggest that fracking potentially destabilizes the earth by inducing earthquakes in areas that have not historically been prone to earthquakes. In other places, fracking seems to have affected local water supplies. As the documentary Gasland vividly illustrates, some residents appear able to set fire to potable water. The potential long-term effects thereof are not yet clear. What is perhaps becoming more clear, however, is that fracking may be destabilizing long-term structures while taking as much as possible in this particular moment for the sake of immediate market-based consumption and short-term gain. Profits can generate deferred costs in moves toward immediate gain.

Strip mining knowledge

Strip mining seems to operate on similar principles of speed. By “removing the surface of a large piece of land one section at a time,” strip-mining depletes surface layer after surface layer. In these regards, it is a fast approach to extraction—starting with what is already at the surface, moving down one layer at a time, and moving sideways into neighboring plots. When I look down at the earth from the vantage of airplane windows, scars from strip-mining illustrate how the earth is being scraped apart in layers. These distinctive patterns interrupt aerial views, as do giant landfill mounds that are long overgrown with grass. Both are hiding in plain sight. As I look out aircraft windows and think about how Luce Irigaray no longer travels in planes because they disturb the air we breathe, I contemplate my own impact upon the planet, both in everyday life and research. And I think about what I do and how it often involves “data,” one of the most visible markers regarding not only the quality of information and knowledge, but the perceived value of scholars themselves.

For instance, the processes of collecting “data” sometimes resemble those of strip mining: data also can be scraped, mined, extracted, harvested, cleaned, saturated, exhausted, and dumped. Furthermore, the aim of an emerging class of rapid research methods is to collect data as speedily and as efficiently as possible: faster is seen as better, and researchers are in and out of sites

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15 Merriam-Webster, 2017.
16 Luce Irigaray and Michael Marder, Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 23.
quickly, if—in the proliferation of digital methods—sites are even entered at all. Consequently, “the contemporary, effective, and profitable generation of data dominates the market of higher education… [as] neoliberalism creates an all-invasive governmentality associated with big-data that governs all small form, mundane, and minor data and knowledge production in the margins.”17 This extends far beyond higher education into the broader industry of “Big Data,” which begs the question of whether the interests of “Big Data” are substantively different from that of “Big Oil” or “Big Tobacco.” The language of research methods, at times, seems to tip its hand.

It is conceivable, therefore, that research methods are a by-product of the Anthropocene. Some emerge from forces that aim to produce more, faster, with constantly increasing rates of standardization and efficiency. Approaches to methods then can be branded and franchised, repeated and replicated across a series of international exchanges in the “research marketplace.”18 Such moves can encourage methods and methodologies to serve specific industries, academic and otherwise. Taken together, the modern tools of extracting natural resources may not be that different from the ways in which research can extract, produce, and disseminate knowledge. Consequently, some days it is difficult to tell whether I am the one extracting or I am the one being extracted.

Extracting researchers

Questions of extraction have been exacerbated by online media sites that aim to connect scholars and promote their work. Productivity now is something that can be displayed in hours, if not minutes. Whereas productivity was something that previously might have been measured annually in annual reports that account for the number of articles published, books written, or grants received, for example, social media sites for academics now offer instant windows into impact. At the time of this writing, some sites now make weekly showings of which researcher in a given department received the most views of their work, or which article in that department was the most read. Moves toward recognizing researchers of the week on one site are paralleled


by trophy icons on another that note when specific publications and scholars accumulate a certain percentage of views. Such sites even design formulae to assign overall scores and percentages to researchers that easily can be misunderstood as important; it is not difficult to imagine how such metrics could be used to influence or inform personnel decisions. Though I do not take these metrics seriously, I elect to participate because I am concerned that there are entities who do. I could, and perhaps should, decline to be involved—yet, I am complicit once again. Although making work available can benefit scholars and members of the general public, I am wary of the increasingly open displays that manufacture social capital, academic hierarchies, and popularity contests in real time.

Such exhibitions are neither uncommon nor limited to networking sites for academics. Nowadays, scholars also are encouraged to reproduce (or extract) themselves through school and personal websites, links in e-mail signatures, accountability platforms designed to count citations, social media posts, and other supposed metrics of “success.” Personal social media accounts are not exempt from the pressures of extraction. And, given that there are nearly two million new journal articles each year, there is a never-ending stream of work to promote. Feminist thinkers have long claimed that the personal is political; within the technologies of the Anthropocene, the personal is professional now, too. In global contexts in which shifting time zones mean that someone, somewhere is always working, it perhaps is no wonder that information about productivity flows nonstop.

Yet, all is not lost in the Anthropocene. This epoch has the capacity to call attention to unhealthy practices within large-scale contexts that challenge how and why we go about research. These may be unsettling times indeed, but they are not without considered alternatives. By way of illustration, Van Cleave suggests reconsidering our respective charges in academia by finding value in that which initially appears to be useless. This is particularly important, she writes, “in a historical and political moment in which there is an ethical imperative to rethink everything.” This includes how and why we frame our work. For, if the focus is on producing good-looking metrics, then it is very easy to be distracted from what matters in the Anthropocene, thereby limiting the potential of higher education to effectuate positive change. This is neither to suggest that all metrics should be eliminated or that all research


should focus on the Anthropocene. Instead, it is to suggest that in the day-
to-day grind to do all the things that scholars are supposed to be doing all
the time excellently—which can become all-consuming—the larger picture
of what actually matters can be lost, and we as scholars can be lost within it.
When it comes to the Anthropocene, the more productive we are, the more
complacent we can inadvertently become. The Anthropocene is everywhere
indeed.

Is the Anthropocene Anthropocenic?

As such, the Anthropocene perhaps has become its own industry. However
necessary the concept of the Anthropocene may be, it seems to receive a
considerable, if not inordinate, amount of attention. The sudden explosion of
scholarship alongside the proliferation of namings can be curious. There are
times when some labels seem to emerge as start-ups and spin-offs from the
Anthropocene: it is in such instances that phrases such as the “Anthropocene
et al.,” the “Anthropocene & Co.,” and the “Anthropocene Inc.” can come
to mind.

Thus, I am conflicted about the popularity of the Anthropocene. On
the one hand, it may be the most important issue on the planet and, as such,
likely deserves as much attention as possible; yet, on the other hand, I have
reservations regarding the speed with which the term came to be. Perhaps
others share the feeling that the Anthropocene seemed to appear on the scene
overnight. Although I know this is not the case, overall, it does seem to have
been adopted rather quickly and unproblematically. To try and understand, I
even wrote a review article about inquiry in the Anthropocene. It was a good
faith effort to highlight trends in Anthropocenic scholarship in educational
research methodology—one that, as most review articles tend to be despite
attempts to the contrary, was incomplete. Yet, since writing it, it seems as
though every day I come across a new publication that could have either been
in that version of the article or, if such a thing were to exist, in a constantly
updated, living version of the document. In brief, there has been a lot of writ-
ing on the Anthropocene. I find this sort of consciousness-raising on a global
scale to be significant and reassuring; at the same time, I also find it to be a bit
alarming. This causes a discarded thought—one long forgotten but perhaps
worth remembering—to return.

It was on the edge of the Irish Sea—on an afternoon in which the
winds battled the waters and both roared through muted tones of gray—
that I first began to consider academic industries. Before the concept of the
Anthropocene had fully entered academic discourse, shortly after the millennium had turned, and close to the sliver of time in which airplanes took rest from the skies, I made a pilgrimage to Howth Head, or Ceann Bhinn Éadair. James Joyce had included the peninsula in many short stories and novels, including *Dubliners*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegan’s Wake*. As an undergraduate student of literature abroad, I had wanted to experience the connections between the land and his writings. From the vantage of a lighthouse window, I looked out over the sea and wondered what he would have thought about the impacts of, and industries that have been built around, his work. I thought about how his postcolonial perspective brought attention to the ways in which Ireland experienced and resisted oppression, and how Bloomsday—an annual revelry that marks protagonist Leopold Bloom’s day-long travels through Dublin in *Ulysses*—might offer a wonderful and lasting celebration every 16th of June. But I also wondered what he might think of the future scholars who would become “Joyceans.” After all, it has been noted that Joyce often “appeared impatient of literary egotism.”

So, as I turned my back to the sea and moved down the winding pale stone pathway away from the lighthouse along the shoreline, I chose to walk away from one academic industry that engulfs writing. I preferred to encounter his many writings—to think with them and hold them and carry them yet not reduce them into personal gain. I realized, for me, this kind of consumption simply felt wrong.

When I think about the surge of scholarship about the Anthropocene, this feeling returns. I once again find myself at the water’s edge, treading carefully against the forces of the wind, wondering about academic industries and the extent to which I produce and consume. Except that now I apologize to James Joyce for having invoked him, and then I pause, reconsider, and apologize to him for not have invoked him enough if that is what he instead would have wanted, recognizing fully well that he regularly questioned apologies themselves. Meanwhile, I wonder what kind of scholar I have become, why I seemed to understand academia better in my teens than I do today, and whether I have simply become a Joycean scholar of a different sort. The field of education may have swept me out to sea, but the sea has since washed me back. The sea has returned me to a not-so-distant shore. And I wonder if, once again, I am complicit.

It is difficult to know what to do in, much less do about, the Anthropocene. Though I now live along different bodies of water in which the waves lap more gently, I still am bothered by the question that has followed me

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from Howth and continues to reshape itself anew. Whereas I used to ask what Joyce might think of Joyceans, I now have an uneasy feeling about whether, at times, the Anthropocene is being taken up in ways that can be Anthropocenic. If the rush to produce and promote scholarship on the Anthropocene can be another, albeit well-intentioned, manifestation of this epoch. If this is a different form of production and consumption in which the label can be taken up as a statement of high fashion or display of heightened consciousness. If the sudden and seemingly overwhelming urge to write about the Anthropocene sometimes is motivated by an attempt to absolve one’s responsibility in it, or to it, or both. If these writings are confessions of a different sort that are being made by humans, about humans, for humans. If it is possible for anything to be pure in the Anthropocene. These are dark wonderings in dark times and are not meant to criticize scholars who have taken up, and will take, the Anthropocene in efforts to contribute to better present and future worlds; this work is as much appreciated as it is needed, particularly in the face of current challenges in higher education.

As the coastlines of higher education erode and the waters continue to rise, therefore, I remain uncertain as to whether I should swim outward, plot a course inland, or stay put. What I am more certain of, however, is Gildersleeve and Kleinhesselink’s assertion that “Research about how to organize, govern, and lead the educational endeavors commanded by such challenging times... must review and perhaps reconfigure its fundamental assumptions about knowledge, being, purpose, and reality.”²² Such reckonings will not be easy or immediate, and nor should they be. After all, this is how humans brought the Anthropocene to bear in the first place. Ease and immediacy already have played too great a role in shaping the planet, and we live the consequences of our haste every day.

**Non-Anthropocentric Timeframes**

the wall between human and natural history has been breached. We may not experience ourselves as a geological agent, but we appear to have become one at the level of the species. And without that knowledge that defies historical understanding there is no making sense of the current crisis that affects us all.²³

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The Anthropocene does raise the rather uncomfortable question of what to do next. However much it might be desired, waving a magic wand and reversing the damaging effects of humanity on the planet is not a viable option. If it were, many would have already done just that. Being seduced by fantasies of technofixes in futures yet to come perhaps is as dangerous a game as embracing fatalism and doing nothing. The Anthropocene is a Big Scary Idea that will not go away; as such, it can spark imaginative responses situated in optimisms and pessimisms at opposite extremes. In other words, it can be tempting to conjure up responses that are as big as the Anthropocene itself—that are similarly proportionate in size, scope, and scale. This can make the Anthropocene feel like an all-or-nothing affair, and potentially it is.

I wonder, though, if these responses are situated in what De Bruyn describes as the “‘shallow time’ of humanity.” The Anthropocene perhaps has the capacity to fix our focus on the present and immediately foreseeable future (both of which, admittedly, can be terrifying). Hence, I wonder if the Anthropocene has trained us to think in the now on behalf of the now, for even the futures we imagine are often the ones in which our children will live. The planet has a much longer history, and perhaps a much longer future, than humans have either been willing or able to imagine.

Take, for instance, notions of when it is that research happens to occur. Until recently, questions of when primarily have remained a matter of logistical rather than theoretical concern in research. Studies often report time in terms of speed, duration, and calendar dates. Though important, these considerations tend to emphasize how fast, how long, and between which markers a particular project took place. These are not unfamiliar conceptualizations of time in daily life: even the home screen on my phone alerts me to the given minute, hour, date, month, and year. It does not go so far as to mention that we are in the epoch of the Anthropocene, although I wonder how we might live differently if our phones did include such a reminder.

If we want to move beyond the Anthropocene, then we have to be willing to reexamine the ways in which our habits (as both scholars and everyday people) can be Anthropocenic. Literary studies, which largely examine how human authors have written human experiences, have begun to illustrate how this might occur. In particular, De Bruyn calls for non-anthropocentric approaches to time, or approaches to time which move beyond the consistent

gravitations toward the immediate past, present, and future contexts of humanity. This is acknowledged as a difficult task, especially given that “the universe as a whole and even our own planet is operating on a time frame grossly asymmetrical to the human life span.” Through geology, the question of time is set to a more inclusive and comprehensive scale. By way of illustration, De Bruyn opens with the question of what might happen if “we radically changed the scale of our imagination as literary readers and cultural historians.” My wonderings are similar, albeit methodological. I wonder: What might happen if methodology accounted for time on a different scale—the scale of geological epochs? How might temporal methodologies generate differently than atemporal research?

Literary theory also points to what might become possible through a sense of deep time. In describing how, Dimock writes that what deep time “highlights a set of longitudinal frames, at once projective and recessional, with input going both ways, and binding other continents and millennia into many loops of relations, a densely interactive fabric.” This is a more-than-human approach to time that insists on connecting plants, animals, objects, elements, and other assemblages of in/nonhuman matter. In these ways, deep time involves “scope,” “tangled antecedents,” and an “ability to record far-flung and mediated times.” And, by necessity, it adopts deep historical perspectives that extend before and after immediate human experiences. This is important because deeper time frames may possibly be needed to think within, and potentially think our way out of, the Anthropocene.

Whether methodologies are of the literary or qualitative variety, then, it could be argued that we have been conducting research within unambiguously human timeframes. Research most often begins within the shallow, immediate time of humanity as compared to the deep time of the Earth. Consequently, research practices are situated in the moment that is now. If we were to begin thinking how we read and write through deep time, we might do research differently, which might include geological frames as context. Without zooming out and rethinking accepted mindsets, timeframes, and

26 De Bruyn, “Earlier is Impossible,” 68.
27 Dimock, Through Other Continents, 3–4.
28 Ibid., 28.
existing processes of research, it perhaps is harder to have the scholarly and societal impacts that are possible for higher education to achieve.

**And the Potential of Little Things, Too**

The Anthropocene is serious business. This is why scholars use it as a way to signal that we may be living in an epoch in which humans not only have become a force with planetary impact, but an epoch in which humanity faces extinction alongside so many other forms of life. I shudder to think about how many species of flora and fauna went extinct, acres of rainforest disappeared, and billions of tons of carbon dioxide were released into the atmosphere in even the time that it took to write this article. And what exactly I have been doing about any of this? The short version of the answer is, “not enough.” The longer version involves “writing about it.”

It is my hope that scholarship in (and on) the Anthropocene will move beyond writing into consistently deeper perspectives on inquiry and life. That, when we choose theories that want to be used in research as much as they want to be lived across everyday material realities, we approach and engage those theories on their own terms. That we live them in ways that are generative and affirmative. That we avoid negative critiques that can extend and accelerate the Anthropocene by attending to our own discourses. That we ask who speaks for the future of the planet, how posthumanist imaginaries might be decolonized, and how the Anthropocene might move beyond “surface bias” into subterranean realms. Asking these sorts of questions is important, particularly in generative ways that gently prompt us to reconsider and reconceptualize our practices. As Connell observes, “There is always a workforce involved in the production of social-scientific knowledge.” That workforce would be us.

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33 Maria de Lourdes Melo Zurita, Paul George Munro, and Donna Houston, “Un-Earthing the Subterranean Anthropocene,” *Area* 50 no. 3 (2017): 298.
To live the Anthropocene, then—in it—through it—with anticipations beyond it—is a deeply ethical undertaking. This can be as much personal as much as it is professional, for moving with and against feelings of complacency, complicity, and desires for absolution potentially involves making many shifts, including in how we as scholars

live teach read write act repurpose eat breathe share help engage encounter think imagine consider reimagine reconsider reciprocate give accept respond support generate regenerate restore return sustain nourish thank create affect effect impact affirm contribute become wonder question inquire philosophize.

To facilitate these types of shifts in how we move through the world, higher education is needed as much as, if not more than, ever. How we treat other humans and our in- and nonhuman companions conceivably has become something that is now much more than a moral imperative, but is necessary for existence on a planetary scale. Planetary survival is a tall order, and looking for opportunities to foster this within higher education is no small thing. Nevertheless, within higher education, there exist myriad opportunities to take up little practices that have the potential to effectuate such shifts. It can be the very smallest of actions—those that seem too humble or insignificant to matter—that perhaps end up mattering the most.

Within higher education, then, it is perhaps little, everyday kindnesses and gestures that might begin to shift the balance against academic frack- ing, strip mining, and other forms of scholarly extraction. Though few of us may be in an immediate position to fully escape complicity in terms of how we consume food, energy, and other gifts from the planet, we can choose to respond to the world in other ways by listening, paying attention, and uplifting those around us. All are actions we can bring to fruition in the spaces in which we already are, including within higher education. Our classrooms involve more than the teaching of content and the teaching of people: pedagogy also offers opportunities to teach and model sustaining ways of not only how we understand and exist in the world, but how we interact with others in it.

We can share kind words with academic friends, colleagues, students, and strangers, for example, just as we can be a thought partner to someone working out an idea, polishing a manuscript, or crafting a new argument. These sorts of small acts would not need to be complicated, overly involved, or even restricted to scholarly matters. Little things also might involve recycling empty water bottles abandoned in parking lots, picking up trash in the hallway or stairs to prevent others from slipping, cutting the
plastic rings on six-packs of beverages to lessen the danger to sea birds and other ocean wildlife, scattering wildflower seeds across patches of dirt in the spring, planting trees, expressing appreciation, paying for the next person in line, or forming underground and alternative economies of generativity, friendship, and joy. They also could be as simple as smiling, saying hello, or pausing to be completely present. There are times when small amounts of care can be immeasurable for humans and nonhumans alike, particularly in a world that has the capacity to entangle everything whether it seems related or not. Actions do not have to be visible in order for them to be meaningful or to “count.”

What may seem small when done alone can grow in size and scope when done together. Within the grand scheme of humanity and the even grander scheme of the planet as a whole, little things are, in fact, not so little at all. If every human were to pick up an empty water bottle off the ground and recycle it (or, if possible, forgo consuming that bottle of water altogether), then one bottle quickly could become more than seven billion bottles that were recycled or had never been used at all. Perhaps little bits of kindness might spread in similar ways and provide a form of alternative energy to continue moving forward in generative ways amidst difficult times. And while these would not be enough by itself, little collective actions could offer openings for ongoing works of all sizes, scales, rhythms, speeds, and magnitudes. For in the Anthropocene, we will continue to need both the little things and the big things at once. Given the state of the planet, this may be a time when we already need everything and even that may not be enough.

In closing, I am reminded of a slogan that often appears in many state and national parks: *Take nothing but pictures. Leave nothing but footprints.* It needs rethinking in the Anthropocene. We now leave footprints everywhere. We leave behind digital footprints, carbon footprints, and material footprints; we even have left footprints on the Moon. As the Anthropocene warns us, what seems small can quickly accumulate into something much larger. Yet, this warning also comes with urgent questions. Knowing what we know now, how will we produce and consume? What will we give, take, receive, and leave behind in our wake? Will we choose to commoditize the end of the world in our writings, or will we—through little practices that expand outward—move toward sustaining ways of being, living, and thinking in the world? The choices we make will be told through our writings, photographs, and footprints to the generations left to come (Figure 3.1).
Figure 3.1. Taking Pictures, Leaving Footprints (Credit: J. Ulmer, 2017, Belle Isle State Park, Michigan)

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4. Liberal Education and the Capitalocene in American Higher Education

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Abstract: Data-driven control is remaking American higher education as the Capitalocene is remaking environment around us. In higher education, how might we orientate the queer potential of liberal education to produce the conditions of possibility of an Earth beyond the Capitalocene and data-driven control, an Earth that produces expansive notions of student success and racially just futures? I take up this inquiry in three sections. First, I establish relations between the orientation of the Capitalocene and the apparatus of data-driven control to develop a critical new materialisms analytic. I then diffract the practices of a student success initiative at a west coast university through this analytic. I end with an exploration of the potential of liberal education, as understood to queer the surface between the determinate and the indeterminate, to create the conditions of anti-instrumentalist, anti-racist change.

Keywords: data-driven control, queer, liberal education. capitalocene, critical materialism

World War III trends on Twitter, the words of a sitting U.S. Senator to describe the foreseeable consequences of the actions of his own party’s president. American citizens struggle to survive weeks after a second major hurricane strikes, while an administration throws towels and snack packs to this island with big water around it, brown people on it, and flows of debt through it. Fires rage in the West, imminent re/constructions of snowmelt, sun, sprawl, teenage ennui, winds, trails, Instagram, the outdoor recreation industry, devastation, loss of life, rebirth. The local paper details a public university’s plan to replace its current 50% plus one in-state enrollment strategy to a plurality

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out-of-state and international enrollment strategy, another remaking of an educational institution through capital flows. The problems of our current moment share relations. Knowing our world through these indeterminate and determinate relations as its primary ontological unit gives us tools for collective change.

The particular assemblage of indeterminate and determinate relations in this moment of the Capitalocene, societies of control, amplifies the division between humans and nature, creating determinate individuals of each to be consumed as data and capital. The entanglement of the Capitalocene and control has the power to devastate higher education as it devastates the environment around us. In the Capitalocene, determinate individual freedom realized through relations of capital is the orientation of the radical reshaping of the human and more-than-human Earth, a reshaping whose effects demonstrate the fiction of the individual and highlight the escape of individual actions into the ground, atmosphere, humans, “markets,” future, built and yet-to-be-built environment, and hierarchies within and among these, an indeterminacy so potent as to shift geologic time.

This paper focuses on the impacts of knowing undergraduate student success through the orientation of the Capitalocene and the apparatus of control. Specifically, I explore the orientation of the Capitalocene as it manifests in the practices of a student success initiative at a west coast AAU university (hereafter referred to as Great State University or GSU), an initiative which equates student success with “on-time” graduation and also includes contemporaneous campus commitments to equity and liberal education. Through this particular site, I explore the reality the Capitalocene and control produces in undergraduate education, and ask how might we hold futures of undergraduate education radically open.

Under the current organization of heterogeneous elements particular to higher education, data-driven control, the centering of students and of

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5 Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway.
diversity are the primary justifications for, instead, embracing flows of data, capital, training, credentials, student academic risk, and other areas of undergraduate education rendered determinate and exchangeable. Areas outside of the capture of data-driven control, here liberal education as conceived of as a process irreducible to outcomes and systemic racism as irreducible to any determinate actor or action, fade to the background even as actions in their name are valorized. Adapting Sara Ahmed’s work, how might we use the queer concepts of indeterminacy and liberal education to enact change? In American higher education (AHE), how might we orientate the indeterminacy of liberal education to produce the conditions of possibility of an Earth beyond the Capitalocene and control, an Earth that produces students with radically open (to include racially just) futures?

Critical new materialisms offer a potential theoretical intervention that takes immanent formations of power, governmentality, and capitalism as its orientation. The named literature in this area of the new materialisms is less developed, so here I place a wide variety of concepts, authors, and orientations into relation to forward what a critical materialism might be. This promiscuous reading, or perhaps a critical new materialism in formation, offers a theoretical intervention on the particularities of this site, as orientated by the Capitalocene and the apparatus of control. It centers its analysis on the enmeshment of environments, capital, humans, matter, and life, as well as the indeterminate and radically open new. In what follows, I use this information-critical new materialism as the relational space through which the orientation of the Capitalocene, the apparatus of control, and the empirical context of Great State University’s student success initiative takes shape.


7 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology. Ahmed discusses the potentials of queer objects in this work of phenomenology. Here, I shift queer objects to queer concepts to adapt Ahmed’s insights for the critical new materialisms, where objects are themselves in need of explanation. See next paragraph for more on this style of promiscuous reading.

8 Ibid.


This promiscuous diffraction\textsuperscript{13} explores the entanglement of capitalism, racial injustice, and an instrumentalized education, as well as the queer re/orientations that might come from embracing indeterminacy.

\textbf{Naming and Worldmaking: Creating This (Aionic) Epoch}

The \textit{Capitalocene} names the work of indeterminate relations acting with and through capital to bring about the epoch of the Anthropocene; it is “an ugly word for an ugly system.”\textsuperscript{14} The Capitalocene centers capitalism not as a static economic or social system, but as “a way of organizing nature.”\textsuperscript{15} If the Anthropocene is the designation for a new epoch of geological time marked by human influence on the Earth, following Jason Moore, I use Capitalocene here to shift our orientation ever so slightly to center the indeterminate relations which constitute the Anthropocene as our current state of determination.\textsuperscript{16} Moore turns to the Capitalocene as a naming and concept in part because he reads the literature of the Anthropocene as saturated with a determinate Green Arithmetic: Nature plus Society equals Anthropocene.\textsuperscript{17} However, scholars who read in different literatures call upon conceptions of the anthropocene in excess of the geological Anthropocene steeped in relationality and indeterminacy. Claire Colebrook uses the term “Anthropocene” to argue \textit{against} the formulation of Green Arithmetic, and in favor of a posthumanist introspection into the indeterminate, or indifferent possibilities of the world as it is and as it might have been.\textsuperscript{18} Stacy Alaimo and many others also capture the anthropocene firmly within posthumanism and the new materialisms, contra Moore’s claim.\textsuperscript{19} There are also questions as to the existence

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{13} Barad, \textit{Meeting the Universe Halfway}.
\bibitem{15} Ibid., 2, italics in the original.
\bibitem{16} Moore does not use the language of indeterminate; instead, he describes “an open conception of life-making, one that views the boundaries of the organic and inorganic as ever-shifting. It is a multi-layered relation through which there are no basic units, only webs within webs of relations....” Ibid., 7–8.
\bibitem{17} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
of either, the politics of an anthropocene that implicates all humans in the destructive actions of the White West, *anthropos* enacting another nature–culture divide, the naming of the Capitalocene as enacting a limiting focus on capitalism, and namings of this era that bypass messy human and capital reference altogether.\(^{20}\) I use the naming of the Capitalocene throughout advisedly to both signal the entangled relations of this historical–geological epoch and as an act of citational promiscuity, a means to include a web of capital relations as an experimentation in forming a critical new materialism.

The problem of American higher education shares relational terms with the problem of our Earth: a “capitalization and appropriation”\(^{21}\) of the university, or the deterritorializing of the university into flows of capital.\(^{22}\) These relations have sidelined a rich conception of liberal education\(^{23}\) as the production of radically open futures in favor of a measurement science of student success in which desired outcomes can be determined in advance, placed within predictive algorithms, and impacted by variations of inputs and environments.\(^{24}\) Undergraduate education has been capitalized and appropriated, and the university has been remade by flows of indivuals, including

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21 Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 214.


capital. This is a problem of the determination of the world we take as real and measurable, of the making-determinate of forms and substances into particular orientated flows. What follows explores the possibilities rendered by problematizing the determinate, inquiring not at the level of the real and measurable, but the relations within the apparatus that actualize the real and measurable as such. In order to create radically open spaces, we must examine indeterminacy, the real that exists prior to and alongside the cuts that determine the words and things of our fractured times.

**Entanglement, indeterminacy, capitalocene**

The Capitalocene is marked by the orientation and movement of human and other-than-human actants in particular enmeshed and entangled preindividual flows that organize value relations. Relations of capital orientate, as do relations of race, and sexuality, and gender, and nationality, and, and, and… in a multilayered web of relations, there is no privileged, agential, disentangled unity to hold singularly responsible. The central problem of the Capitalocene is not a search for a responsible unit for our destruction (and thus our salvation), but rather the particular formation of the apparatus organizing the preindividual flows that mark the Capitalocene. Moore, through Marx, names this historical apparatus the “law of value,” dates it to the development of capitalism, and marks it as a quasi-cause of the determinations that come. Deleuze and Foucault name several apparatuses of power during this time as precursors to our current apparatuses of control—biopolitics—biopower, modern instantiations of the law of value.

These assemblages organize heterogeneous elements through rendering matter of all levels of animacy determinate and of exchangeable value. Forms of matter and meaning are made discrete, then set in exchange with other forms of dividuated matter. These are colonizing assemblages, they seek to “maintain control not only over the measured and measurable territories, but also to penetrate into uncontrolled realms not previously desired and to

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25 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.
26 Ibid., 216.
measure them as exactly and comprehensively as possible.”

In doing so, they individuate the Earth into (Cheap) Nature and (capitalizing) Society. These are racializing assemblages, they individuate humanity not only as separable from nature, but give a “hieroglyphics of the flesh,” individuating White humanity in distinction to black and brown “exploitable nonhumans, literal legal no-bodies.” In societies of control, the promise of equity becomes a dividuated diversity. If equity carries the promise of inclusion in acts and in spirit, or a determinate and indeterminate inclusion, dividuated diversity is its “skim milk” version. Diversity gives a determinate and exchangeable inclusion in place of full equity. Diversity, rather than producing multiplicities of connections and possibilities, becomes a nonperformatively, an “appearance of valuing” that allows racializing assemblages to continue producing its dualities unimpeded. The Capitalocene, control, and biopolitics, beyond being nonparticular to AHE, elide sustained discussion of their colonizing and racializing productions. The particular formation of these relations and orientations of heterogeneous elements in this moment in AHE is what I term data-driven control.

**Disentangled relations, determined dividuals, data-driven control**

Data-driven control marks the organization of the heterogeneous elements of American higher education into data, dollars, Pell eligibility, term credits carried, and other discrete and measurable actants, or dividuals. AHE provides stark examples of dividuation, as many administrators, faculty, and staff no longer primarily interact with students but on dividuals such as participation counts in high-impact practices, GPA, race, ethnicity, student identification numbers, predictive analytics, first-year credit accumulation, primary major, four-year graduation rates, and, and, and…. These dividual flows come into relation with their exchangeability through common units of value and are

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29 Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*.


31 Hortense Spillers, as cited in Ibid., 39.

32 Ibid., 135.


35 Ibid., 59.

36 Deleuze, “Postscript”; Raunig, *Dividuum*. 
placed in continuous variation in search of desired outcomes such as four-year graduation. The university has transformed its space to make natural these orientations of flows\textsuperscript{37}; in doing so, concepts involving indeterminacy such as liberal education\textsuperscript{38} and systemic racism are unintelligible, as they cannot be known through determinate, molar dividuum. AHE takes as its subject the in/dividual student: student-centered in spoken commitment and dividual-centered in practice.

Financially instrumentalist AHE is a creation of the agential cuts of data-driven control. Dividuals in AHE come in the above-listed forms, as well as in the form of grant money, assets (traditional forms of capital and as a synonym for students), debts, risk levels (financial aid and academic performance), and so on. Data-driven control is marked by deterritorialization and dividuation on a broad scale, and the relation and interchangeability of dividuum make possible huge flows of dividuals placed in variation. Outside of AHE, these flows have proven so massive as to produce the Capitalocene. Within AHE, we now have a conception of success that is calculable by the cost in lost wages and additional tuition of extra terms of schooling, or “extra” credits past the minimum to earn a degree, a placing-in-variation of terms, credits, wages, and tuition. Time, money, and success are disentangled through data-driven control, and that which resists dividuation (e.g., liberal education, systemic racism, and other webs of entangled relations) are rendered invisible to this agential system of determinate relations and flows.

Data-driven control also produces racist outcomes. The apparatus of data-driven control in undergraduate student success assigns as much matter as possible to content; it produces a science in which all representations of student visible to the institution are assigned to categories of success or failure.\textsuperscript{39} When institutions know students as dividuals, the push comes to target students deemed failing to attain checklists of dividuum determined to correspond with institutionally visible success. Approaches to undergraduate education that center the production of a dividual student success create the boundaries of failure and position those producing data-driven research as the link to solutions that never materialize.\textsuperscript{40} Data-driven control sets students up to fail, gives data-driven reformers a “problem” to fix, and gives

\textsuperscript{37} Slaughter and Rhoades, Academic Capitalism and the New Economy.
\textsuperscript{38} AAC&U, “What Is 21st Century Liberal Education.”
\textsuperscript{39} See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 369.
corporations a “solution” to sell.\textsuperscript{41} This structure produces structural failures of students of color alongside the success of White students; through data-driven dividuations, measurements of student success are racializing assemblages.\textsuperscript{42} Student success under data-driven control produces a “sovereign, hierarchical, and exclusionary subject,”\textsuperscript{43} that of the disproportionately White successful student.

In AHE, universities increasingly define student success as four-year graduation, name this on-time graduation, and undertake data-driven steps such as the promotion of 15 credits carried per term, clear degree plans and major benchmarks, and metamajors to “normalize” first-year exploration, among other innovations.\textsuperscript{44} And still, with each new data-driven practice, we have the same racialized pattern of data-determined success. Four-year graduation is in part justified as a valid way to measure success through capital: additional time in college past four years is time in which a student gives money to their institution rather than time they earn money from an employer.\textsuperscript{45} Even when considering only the subset of students deemed successful, when we send graduates to the workforce, White graduates are more likely to get a job and get better paying jobs than comparably qualified graduates of color, rendering the postcollege justification behind the category of success as racialized as determinations of success within the college years.\textsuperscript{46} There is a racial component to success as four-year graduation that is not only illegible within data-driven control, but also perpetuated through its naturalizing of the category of success alongside its conception of a measurable, discrete, Whitewashed student. The apparatus of data-driven control produces racist


\textsuperscript{42} Weheliye, \textit{Habeas Viscus}.


success in a perverse way, as the disparate racial outcomes these success measurements generate serve as evidence that more data-driven studies, as well as data-driven, or evidence-based, practices, are needed to resolve these disparate racial outcomes. Systemic racism is produced and sustained through data-driven control.

Working the problem of undergraduate student success through data-driven control generates options for critique and change. The determinate–indeterminate are one of several dualisms that describe the tension between student success practices that produce and sustain instrumentalized and racist success in the name of data science, and student success practices of radically open futures. AHE’s commitments to socially just and student-centered practice through data machines the in/dividual student as AHE’s subject, the instrumentalized, racialized student produced by institutions that pair non-performative commitments to indeterminacy with performed commitments to individuals.

**The Undergraduate Student Success Movement Comes to Great State University: The Particulars of This Epoch**

Below are three diffractions from the first year of Great State’s student success initiative. Data sources are observation field notes and site documents from a year-long study of this student success initiative. In all, hundreds of hours of observations and informal interviews took place. Groups and persons involved include committees, councils, professional staff, students, faculty, and senior administrators. One is a narration of the flow of packets of student success within a local Great State University apparatus of data-driven control. This narration, in performing its movement, is structured as a fractured narrative of direct quotations (*in italics*) from field notes. One is focused on the role of capital in structuring this control context and the packets it places into variation. One foregrounds the role of race lurking in the background of the first two diffractions; or, one highlights the Whiteness starkly apparent in the first two diffractions. These are three of many possible diffractions that together map the particulars of data-driven control.

**Diffraction: Packets of student success—already, we’ll all float on, okay**

Our new advising software is *intended to use predictive analytics to facilitate more targeted advising.* / So are you using data to determine…? So what’s the…? / It’s hard, because I see some students’ registration and see that they’re
exploring, look undeclared—and I want to pass that student off...? / We could say students who enter as freshmen, leave transfers out—transfers don’t matter—well it’s good they graduate—but they don’t count towards our graduation rate. / We need to bind the students together so they come together and leave together. / We need cohort branding. / It feels a little bit like cohort-building follows from infrastructure building. / Posters distributed by the institution: We want YOU... to graduate in four years with the school mascot in place of Uncle Sam. / Regarding the freshman class photo: It looks like Nazi propaganda.

We need an articulation of the moon shot that isn’t just about a metric—this is the issue with many big campus talks/messages—need aspirational, mission/vision content. / To the Faculty Senate: And this is again, part of a broader conversation about undergraduate educational experience. I’ve been working with [administrator] on our Student Success Initiative. That, in terms of graduation rates, is about raising our four-year graduation rates. But it’s also about the undergraduate educational experience. How do we make sure that students not only get out in four years, but that they have a really rich experience while they’re here? / Post-conference update: Everyone is saying the stuff we’re saying – is everyone doing it? No. / What does it mean to say student success is a priority if we don’t fund it?

We have a public mission as a public university. / We’ve got a system now that provides too much choice to students. / In my mind, as we’re moving toward a bit more constrained curriculum, we’ll be limiting exploration. / Our culture is to tell students to explore, but times have changed. / We have a student working on gathering four year plans from campus websites—[the] work there is in milestones—imagine the most common path... say to students this can be done in four years, [and] this is the most common way to do this. / We need to stop managing for the exceptions and manage for the majority.

Diffraction: The Shape of the River, Brought to you by Capitalism™

Tucked into this student success initiative is a little-spoken motivation: promoting four-year graduation is a way to blunt the per-student impact of rising tuition rates. At Great State University, this state-centered and institution-centered motivation was mentioned once in the major campus rollout address, but has since receded into the background. In its place, we have the rhetoric of a student-centered capitalistic valuing of purchasing a bachelor’s degree in as little time as possible, with an overall credit accumulation as close to the minimum number of credits required to graduate as possible. In this student-centeredness lies a rhetoric of care, equity, and proper prioritization. However, the university no longer deals with students. The constituents of
the university are individuals. The university admits combinations of individuals within admission applications. It grants financial aid to combinations of packets within the FAFSA. It grants degrees to combinations of individuals within student information systems (SISs). In many large-enrollment classes, professors deliver an education to individuals within learning management systems (LMSs). Advisors may see individual students face to face, and when they do, it is increasingly likely that the students they see are the result of outreach campaigns that gather combinations of individuals together from SISs and LMSs that are thought to determine individual students who are at risk. When these individuals become the interlocutor between the institution and its students, it becomes easier to see how time, money, and education have become fungible university outputs orientated by the Capitalocene, fashioned by data-driven control.

**Diffraction: Molar melanin**

Race is present at and around this site in myriad ways. Donald Trump is in the process of winning the electoral college on the strength of White grievance politics. Black students on this campus presented a list of demands the year before, all coming due during this year, and upper-level administrators feel the pressure to do something. The lack of black and brown representation in the student body, faculty, and administration ranks is obvious enough to be a constant casual target of scorn among administrators and practitioners: “There are only two of us… one… two,” followed by a painful laugh and a well-meaning resolve to do right by minoritized racial and ethnic groups. Data-driven control is a racializing assemblage, an arrangement of race that involves good feelings about non-White folks disproportionate to the amount of seats for non-White folks at the table.

The spoken commitment to racial equity and justice is pervasive. I do not doubt the sincerity of my participants’ commitments. How can they produce racial justice? In the charge of a group devoted to writing a best-practices-for-advising report for campus:

> Research targeted initiatives for specific populations (underrepresented students by race, gender, transfer, international, first-gen, lower income, abilities...)… Form recommendations for student centered service, practices, and expectations that support student retention while being in [sic] degree completion…. These strategies should include specific elements for serving targeted populations.

A sincere commitment to racial justice from the administrator developing these charges to the advisors who gave of their time to participate. By what criteria would targeted initiatives make the list of recommendations?
1. Existing research in the field (NACADA)
2. Internal audit (retention rates/satisfaction), compare with advising models across units, factor in unique considerations of each unit
3. Review comparable institution data (student pop, majors, advising models, retention)
4. What resources are needed to facilitate successful advising (space, training, professional development), including adhering to FERPA requirements.

Racially just action can be known through a heterogeneous arrangement of individuals placed in variation, the same procedure for knowing best practices writ large: “Retention rates-satisfaction-advising models-unique considerations-comparable institutions/student population-comparable institutions/majors-comparable institutions/advising models-comparable institutions/retention-advising space-advisor training-advisor PD.” Find the right notes, the right lengths, the right layerings and chord progressions, and place in variation. Yet this refrain lacks the indeterminacies found in performance. This is a continuous algorithmic variation, a flow of determinacy. GSU harbors and produces a racializing assemblage, an arrangement of race that involves race as molar melanin, “statistical and gregarious.”

Racism is a problem that far exceeds the capacity of collections of individuals to solve, no matter how gregarious, no matter in what combination or variation. And yet, this excess gives reason for its molarized study.

Race here is individual; race is a multiplicity found as a field in the institutional SIS, or as a field in a survey like the NSSE administered by the institution, and through its inclusion becomes a method of disaggregation of a gregarious arrangement of individuals. Diversity is a metric, is a individual within institutional plans for student success, is a individual within institutional budget metrics to incentivize the three named institutional priorities, including student success (We’re number 2! We’re number 2!).

Administrator 1 [A1]: “[Administrator 3, A3] has completely changed his third goal to diversity... I told you [A3] did it with the accreditors, now [A3] just did it with the Senate.”
<Room explodes in amazement.>
Administrator 2: “What was the third one?”
A1: “Experience, student experience—now it’s diversity.”

47 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus.
48 Ibid., 283.
Welcome to the top three, diversity. The institution plans to pursue their top priorities through the then-currently-being-drafted new campus budget metrics. One late draft includes a set of diversity metrics, all determined categories placed in variation, including

- Breakdown in asterisked performance categories by demographics: residency status; race/ethnicity; gender; first-gen; Pell eligibility – Faculty participating in inclusive teaching initiatives – # Courses satisfying Multicultural Requirement [don’t want to incentivize more courses] – learning objectives at the department level that tend toward diversity, equity and inclusion – % of courses that align to those objectives… – [National survey] climate data –

Race is a deeply held commitment; race is indivial. GSU is student-centered and evidence-based.

**Indeterminacy and Open Futures**

Indetermination eschews discrete and measurable individuals produced by the apparatus of data-driven control in favor of the incorporeal, virtual relations as experienced within Events. Orientating racism not as a property of an individual, but as “the inseparability of a finite number of heterogeneous components traversed by a point of absolute survey at infinite speed”\(^{49}\) allows for the inclusion of actants both determinate and indeterminate. The indeterminate character of systemic racism—racism that is real and escapes determination within data-driven control—is not opposed to currently legible overt indivial racism. To take seriously the claim that indeterminacy is every bit as real as the determinate is simply to acknowledge that “experience is made up of more than what actually takes form.”\(^{50}\) To claim that systemic racism is every bit as real as individualized racism is to acknowledge that the experience of racism “is made up of more than what actually takes form”; to claim that education irreducible to measurable outcomes is every bit as real as education made legible through measurable outcomes is to acknowledge that education “is made up of more than what actually takes form.”\(^{51}\) Thus, an embrace of indeterminacy gives us insight into pre-in/dividual, pre-in/dividuated racism as well as a pre-in/dividual, pre-in/dividuated student success.

To be clear, an embrace of indeterminacy—a queer dis/orientation to the interstices of data-driven control—is not the answer to data-driven control

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50 Ibid., 30.
51 Ibid.
nor the Capitalocene. Indeterminacy does not produce a state of liberation from data-driven control. A disorientation from the Capitalocene will bring some bodies into crisis more than others. Even still, we owe each other these leaps of faith in order “to give the lie to our own determination. We owe each other the indeterminate. We owe each other everything.” Our current student success apparatus has two faces, one of which gives us the racialized and instrumentalized categories of successful and unsuccessful. The first step to any practice which seeks to address systemic racism and the instrumentalization of undergraduate education is to turn our attention to the other face of the assemblage to break those categories apart. Instead of reforming flows of individuals to produce a racially just student success, student success as liberal education, a solution to the Anthropocene through Green Arithmetic, or otherwise confining our actions to data-driven deformings and reformings of flows, practice that tips toward indeterminacy asks us to turn our attention to the other face, to dis/orientate ourselves, and in doing so hold these individualizations and flows radically open and subject to immanent formation and reformation. Through resisting cycles of deforming and reforming individuals, this disorientation leaves maximum space for encounters with the indeterminate, the real but not-yet-determined.

**The Queer Possibilities of Liberal Education**

An embrace of indeterminacy is a disorientation from our current production of in/dividualized persons and an orientation toward the production of “open-ended, interconnected entit[ies].” Liberal education queers the surface connecting determinacy and indeterminacy, and its potential to tip the apparatus of data-driven control from determinacy toward the face of indeterminacy foregrounds practices in an acknowledgment that experience “is alive with the more-than, the more-than as real as anything else directly experienced.” Data-driven control denies the more-than by assigning all contents to categories, here assigning all in/dividuated students to racialized categories of successful or unsuccessful. Indeterminacy as practiced through

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52 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus.*
53 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology.*
54 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Brooklyn, NY: Minor Compositions, 2013), 20.
55 Complete College America, *Four-year Myth.*
56 Kuh and Schneider, *High-Impact Practices.*
57 Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects,* 150.
liberal education affirms the more-than by individuating through “by following the border, by skirting the surface [to pass] from bodies to the incorporeal.”\textsuperscript{59} Liberal education, as a practice that queers the surface of determinacy and indeterminacy, is a dividual-buster. Instead of an orientation toward the ordering of words and things through dividuals, liberal education is orientated toward practices that create new and shifting understandings of words and things. In doing so, liberal education can individuate and address instrumentalization and systemic racism that, as the more-than of a traditionally in/dividuated data-driven research, remains naturalized, Whitewashed, and denied.

The work of anti-instrumentalist and antiracist student success research and practice in the Capitalocene is not to reimagine student success only under conditions of indeterminacy, but to map student success under both determinate and indeterminate conditions. In doing so, we tip the assemblage toward an entangled science of student success, giving researchers and practitioners a language to discuss real social events that are not instantiated in in/dividuated human actors—it gives the field the language of the indeterminate. Liberal education is this mechanism, it is the surface, it is the little machine that is ready when needed for researchers looking to tip the research assemblage away from data-driven student success measurements that render systemic racism and other indeterminacies as an invisible excess, and toward practices that acknowledge the more-than of liberal education and systemic racism as real.

Promiscuous proliferations of concepts and practices placed in relation queerly re/orientates American higher education toward liberal education in the Capitalocene. We need a proliferation of student success practices that perform commitments to a trans-corporeal liberal education and other expansive notions of success.\textsuperscript{60} We need a politics of the dividual that produces a proliferation of student success practices with performed commitments to diversity, social justice, and antiracism that lead to racially just education—a justice that is and is not capturable within measurement.\textsuperscript{61} We need a molecular revolution, a proliferation of pedagogies and relations that removes undergraduate education from calculations of time and money and produces outcome that is and is not capturable in such systems.\textsuperscript{62} A proliferation of practices queering

\textsuperscript{60} Stacy Alaimo, \textit{Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self} (Blooming- ton, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010).
\textsuperscript{62} Raunig, \textit{Dividuum}.
the surface disorientates the Capitalocene. We are in the middle of the orientation of the Capitalocene and data-driven control; our task is to tip its orientation through a queer commitment	extsuperscript{63} to liberal education.

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\textsuperscript{63} Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology.


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5. The Scandal of the Irrationality of Academia

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Abstract: Academic inquiry, in devoting itself primarily to the pursuit of knowledge, is profoundly and damagingly irrational, in a wholesale, structural fashion, when judged from the standpoint of helping to promote human welfare. Judged from this standpoint, academic inquiry devoted to the pursuit of knowledge violates three of the four most elementary rules of rational problem-solving conceivable. Above all, it fails to give intellectual priority to the tasks of (1) articulating problems of living, including global problems, and (2) proposing and critically assessing possible solutions—possible social actions. This gross, structural irrationality of academic inquiry stems from blunders of the 18th century French Enlightenment. The philosophes had the brilliant idea of learning from scientific progress how to achieve social progress towards an enlightened world, but in implementing this idea they made three disastrous blunders. They got the nature of the progress-achieving methods of science wrong; they failed to generalize these methods properly; and most disastrously, they applied these methods to acquiring knowledge about society, and not directly to solving social problems. These blunders are still inherent in academia today, with dire consequences for the state of the world. All this has been pointed out prominently many times since 1976, but has been ignored.

Keywords: irrationality of academia; the Enlightenment; global problems; scientific method; academic reform; social progress

For over 40 years I have argued that academic inquiry, as at present conducted by universities around the world, is profoundly and damagingly irrational when judged from the standpoint of helping to promote human welfare. In
book after book, paper after paper, lecture after lecture,¹ I have spelled out what is wrong, what needs to be done to put matters right, and why it is a matter of such supreme importance that this be done.²

My 45-year campaign to get a hearing for my argument has been met with almost universal indifference. My books receive glowing reviews.³ My

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¹ Twelve books, 27 chapters contributed to other books, 71 papers published in scientific and scholarly journals, and lectures given at universities and conferences all over the UK, Europe, and North America. See http://www.ucl.ac.uk/from-knowledge-to-wisdom.


lectures are acclaimed. A scattering of scientists and scholars around the world support my claim. But in general what I have to say is ignored—by my fellow philosophers, by academics generally, by educationalists, by those in charge of universities, by the media, and by the public.

And yet the structural irrationality that I have identified in academia as at present conducted has vast and very seriously damaging consequences. It puts the very future of humanity at risk. It is this unacknowledged structural irrationality in our institutions of inquiry, more than any other factor, that undermines our efforts to solve the grave global problems of the Anthropocene—this new geological period we find ourselves in, in which we human beings have such a profound and detrimental impact on our world. There could hardly be anything more important, as far as the long-term welfare of humanity is concerned, than to get clear what the intellectual defects of academic inquiry are, and then to put them right. Despite that, my attempts to raise the issue for discussion have, so far, been greeted with little more interest than a universal yawn.

Academics, confined within their specialities, are not prepared to look at academic inquiry as a whole; if they do, they tend to take the view that nothing can be done about it. There is no such thing as “the philosophy of inquiry”, concerned with the question of what the basic aims and methods of academic inquiry ought to be. Vice chancellors and ministers of education look at universities from a bureaucratic and narrowly political and economic standpoint. The general public tends to interpret “academic” to mean “irrelevant”, and would not dream of thinking that the structural irrationality of academia is a serious issue. The gross structural irrationality of academia threatens our future—and no one is interested.4

4 Lack of interest might, of course, be due to the hopeless invalidity of my argument, or its inapplicability, somehow, to the real world. But how can this be known if the

These days of the Anthropocene it is quite widely appreciated that we face grave global problems—problems which threaten our future if not soon resolved effectively and responsibly. These problems include: rapid population growth; the spread of modern armaments, conventional, chemical, and nuclear; the lethal character of modern war and terrorism; destruction of natural habitats and rapid extinction of species; gross inequalities of wealth and power around the globe; threats to democracy helped along by the internet; pollution of Earth, sea, and air; and perhaps most serious of all, the impending disasters of climate change.

What is not so widely appreciated is that all these problems have been made possible by modern science and technology. Science and technology have, of course, been of great benefit to humanity in a multitude of ways. They have made the modern world possible. But in making possible modern industry and agriculture, modern armaments, modern medicine and hygiene, they have also led to the global problems so characteristic of our Anthropocene age: population growth, habitat destruction, species extinction, lethal warfare, pollution, and global warming.

Some blame science for our problems, but that misses the point. What has gone wrong is the pursuit of science and technology in a way that is *dissociated from a more fundamental concern with our problems of living, including our global problems, and how best to solve them*. We have failed to develop a kind of academic inquiry centrally and fundamentally concerned to help humanity learn how to resolve conflicts and problems of living in increasingly cooperatively rational ways, science being an important but *subordinate* part of such an academic enterprise. Academia as it exists today, with its emphasis on the pursuit of specialized scientific knowledge is, as I have said, irrational in a structural and profoundly damaging way. It is hardly too much to say that all the bad features of our Anthropocene age have been created by the astonishing intellectual successes of modern science and technology combined with the failure to develop academic inquiry in such a way that it is primarily rationally devoted to helping humanity solve problems of living, including global problems.

Argument is not noticed, and subjected to serious scrutiny? In any case, many of those who have read my work are not at all inclined to dismiss it as invalid, irrelevant, or impracticable: see note 3. When my *From Knowledge to Wisdom* was first published it received many glowing reviews: the one in *Nature* declared “Maxwell is advocating nothing less than a revolution (based on reason, not on religious or Marxist doctrine) in our intellectual goals and methods of inquiry … There are altogether too many symptoms of malaise in our science-based society for Nicholas Maxwell’s diagnosis to be ignored” (Longuet-Higgins 1984). Unfortunately, my diagnosis and, more important, my proposed prescription have been ignored. If they had not, the world might not be in quite the mess that it is in today.
The global problems that confront us, engendered by unprecedented powers to act bequeathed to some of us by modern science and technology, are extraordinarily complex, relatively new, and global in their scope. We have to learn how to resolve them. Politics, economics, industry, societies and cultures, individuals, nations, and international bodies, all have to learn how best to go about tackling these immense, intractable problems, integrated as so many are into our whole way of life today on the planet. That in turn requires that we have institutions of learning rationally designed and devoted to the task. It is just that we do not at present have. Instead, what we do have is academic inquiry devoted primarily, and in the first instance, to the pursuit of specialized scientific knowledge. And that, if anything, promises to intensify our problems—for it is the immensely successful pursuit of scientific knowledge dissociated from a more fundamental concern with learning how to tackle problems of living that has led to the creation of our global problems in the first place, and to the persistence of our inability to resolve them.

From the past we have inherited the idea that the proper way for academia to proceed, in order to help promote human welfare, is, first, to acquire knowledge and then apply it to help solve social problems. For this to work, science must acquire authentic, reliable, objective factual knowledge. That in turn requires, so it is held, that science attends only to factors relevant for the assessment of claims to knowledge: evidence, valid argument, logic. Everything else must be excluded from the intellectual domain of science: values, politics, human aspirations, cries of distress, expressions of human suffering, proposals for action—everything required to articulate problems of living and propose and critically assess possible solutions—possible actions. If such matters were allowed to influence science—so it is held—scientific knowledge would degenerate into mere propaganda or ideology, and its human value would be lost. According to this orthodox view, in short, discussion of problems of living and how to solve them must be ruthlessly excluded from science so that science may deliver authentic knowledge, and thus provide genuine help with solving problems of living. In order to solve problems of living, in other words, science must ignore them!

In my work I call this orthodox view, this paradigm for academic inquiry, knowledge-inquiry. As I have just formulated it, it had greater influence in

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the 1950s, perhaps, than it does today. Nevertheless, the influence of this orthodox paradigm of knowledge-inquiry lingers on. Academia does discuss problems of living, including global problems, and does discuss what can be done to solve them; nevertheless such discussion tends to be pushed to the periphery, and sidelined; it is not central and fundamental to academic inquiry as a whole just because it does not contribute to knowledge. Knowledge-inquiry has not been repudiated in the thoroughgoing way that is required, so that a more rigorous view can be adopted and implemented in its stead.

What is not generally appreciated is that knowledge-inquiry—the basic prescription “first acquire knowledge; then apply it to solve social problems”—violates the most elementary and uncontroversial rules of reason conceivable; it is today this elementary irrationality of science, and of academia more generally, that is so profoundly damaging, stultifying as it does our capacity to anticipate the emergence of global problems, and learn how to tackle them effectively, intelligently, and humanely when they do emerge.

What ought we to mean by “reason” in the current context? The notion we require stipulates that there is a set of general rules, methods, or strategies which, if put into practice, give us, other things being equal, our best chances of solving our problems, achieving our aims. These rules of reason do not guarantee success. They indicate what we should attempt, and do not specify precisely what we should do. They are meta-methods, in that they assume that there is much that we can already do successfully, implementing a multitude of methods in our actions, and they suggest how we can best marshal these already solved problems in order successfully to solve new, as-yet unsolved problems.  

Why proceed rationally whatever we may be doing? Because, other things being equal, that gives us our best chance of solving our problems, achieving our aims. The more we depart from reason, the more we undermine our chance of success—of achieving what is genuinely of value.

Four elementary, wholly uncontroversial rules of rational problem solving are:

(1) Articulate and seek to improve the articulation of the basic problem(s) to be solved.

(2) Propose and critically assess alternative possible solutions.

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(3) When necessary, break up the basic problem to be solved into a number of specialized problems—preliminary, simpler, analogous, subordinate problems—[to be tackled in accordance with rules (1) and (2)], in an attempt to work gradually towards a solution to the basic problem to be solved.

(4) Inter-connect attempts to solve the basic problem and specialized problems, so that basic problem solving may guide, and be guided by, specialized problem solving.

Any problem-solving enterprise which persistently violates just one of these rules must be seriously irrational, and its capacity to solve problems will be adversely affected as a consequence. Academic inquiry today, as a result of the lingering, pervasive influence of knowledge-inquiry, violates three of these four rules of reason, when viewed from the standpoint of helping to promote human welfare by intellectual and educational means. The irrationality of academia is as serious as that.\(^7\)

To begin with, modern academia puts rule (3) into practice to splendid effect. This is indeed the most striking feature of academia today—the extent to which it is compounded of more and more increasingly specialized disciplines devoted to tackling ever more specialized problems.

Rules (1), (2), and (4) are, however, violated. Granted the basic task is to help promote human welfare, the problems that need to be solved, fundamentally, are invariably problems of living, problems of action. Even where new knowledge and technology are required, as they are in medicine and agriculture, for example, it is always what this knowledge enables us to do (or refrain from doing) that solves the problem of living, not the knowledge or technology per se. Therefore, in order to put rules (1) and (2) into academic practice we need to:

\(^7\) There are those, of course, who celebrate irrationality and deplore reason. Almost always it is not reason that is opposed, but some version of irrationality masquerading as reason. Thus proponents of irrationality may uphold the value of wild imaginative exploration of possibilities under the impression that such an activity is irrational. It is, on the contrary, a vital component to rational problem solving, as depicted here; only an untenable, irrational conception of reason—one which, for example, holds that rational thinking proceeds strictly in accordance with rules—would hold that wild imaginative exploration of possibilities is irrational. Opposition to reason is almost always based on misconceptions as to what reason really is. Indeed, so widespread are misconceptions concerning the nature of reason that most proponents of rationality are actually proponents of some species of irrationality dressed up as reason: see note 15.
(1*) Articulate our problems of living, and improve the articulation of these problems;
(2*) Propose and critically assess possible solutions—possible actions, policies, political programmes, ways of living, new or modified institutions, philosophies of life.

But (1*) and (2*) cannot proceed within the framework of knowledge-inquiry, certainly not as the central, fundamental intellectual tasks of inquiry, because in implementing these rules in this way, no contribution is made to knowledge. In proposing a policy, in advocating a political, economic, or legal action (a new piece of legislation, a new institutional arrangement) one is not contributing to factual knowledge.

Once rules (1) and (2) are not implemented, rule (4) cannot be implemented either. Three of the four most basic rules of reason are violated.

Academia today, because of the lingering influence of knowledge-inquiry, persistently violates three of the four most elementary, basic rules of reason conceivable in a wholesale, structural fashion. And as a direct consequence, academia cannot do what it most needs to do. It cannot help humanity anticipate new global problems, work out what needs to be done to resolve them in an effective way before they become too serious, and help humanity develop the political muscle needed for this to be done. In so far as academia continues to be affected by the lingering influence of knowledge-inquiry, these vital intellectual activities cannot be engaged in as the central and fundamental intellectual tasks. That is indeed the case of academia today. The long-standing irrationality of our institutions of learning, world-wide, has a large measure of responsibility, in other words, for our inability to anticipate new global problems and deal with them before they become too serious—and rapidly increase our capacity to deal with the problems effectively if they do become serious. The result is the world as it is today.8

8 The damaging humanitarian repercussions of the gross structural irrationality of knowledge-inquiry (or the philosophy of knowledge) are discussed in detail in Maxwell, From Knowledge to Wisdom; Is Science Neurotic?; From Knowledge to Wisdom (2nd ed.); How Universities Can Help Create a Wiser World; Two Great Problems of Learning; In Praise of Natural Philosophy. See also Maxwell, “Science, Reason, Knowledge and Wisdom”; “What Kind of Inquiry Can Best Help Us Create a Good World?”; “Can Humanity Learn to become Civilized?”; “From Knowledge to Wisdom”; “Arguing for Wisdom in the University”; “Can Universities Save Us from Disaster?”.
Those wedded to knowledge-inquiry may object that knowledge must first be acquired before problems of living can be tackled rationally. There are a number of things wrong with this objection. First, many conflicts and problems of living require new deeds, new policies, new ideas for action, for their resolution, not new knowledge. Second, we cannot know what kind of new knowledge we need to try to develop unless we have at least a preliminary idea as to what our problems are, and what we propose to do about them. A slight change in the way we formulate a problem can change dramatically the kind of knowledge we need to try to acquire. Construe the basic problem of medicine to be to *cure* disease, and the kind of knowledge we need to try to acquire is very different from that needed if we modify the basic problem slightly so that it becomes to *prevent* disease. Third, even when new knowledge is required, it must always be vital to assess human *actions* that employ the knowledge from the standpoint of their capacity to solve the problem of living.

What needs to be done to cure academia of its damaging irrationality? The answer is straightforward: academia needs to be changed just enough to ensure that all four basic rules of reason are put into academic practice. The outcome would be a new kind of academic enterprise that I call *wisdom-inquiry*. Within the context of this new kind of inquiry, social science and the humanities cease to be, fundamentally, devoted to the pursuit of knowledge, and instead take up the fundamental intellectual tasks of articulating problems of living, and proposing and critically assessing possible solutions—possible actions, policies, etc. Their basic task is to promote the cooperatively rational tackling of problems of living in the diverse contexts of the social world.\(^9\) Below I give a more detailed account of what needs to be changed to transform irrational *knowledge-inquiry* into rigorous *wisdom-inquiry*.

When, how, and why did academic inquiry, as it exists today, come to be so profoundly and damagingly irrational in this structural fashion? The answer to this question provides us with a second argument for the urgent need to transform academia, an argument which strengthens and deepens the one just given.

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\(^9\) For more detailed expositions of, and arguments for, wisdom-inquiry (or “the philosophy of wisdom”) see Maxwell, *From Knowledge to Wisdom*, especially chs. 4 and 5. See also Maxwell, *Is Science Neurotic?; From Knowledge to Wisdom* (2nd ed.); *How Universities Can Help Create a Wiser World; Two Great Problems of Learning; “From Knowledge to Wisdom”*; “Arguing for Wisdom in the University”; “Can Universities Save Us from Disaster?”.
The answer to the question takes us back to the 18th-century Enlightenment. The *philosophes* of the French Enlightenment, Voltaire, Diderot, and the rest, had the magnificent idea that it might be possible to learn from scientific progress how to achieve social progress towards an enlightened world. They did what they could to put this idea into practice in their lives, and had an immense impact on subsequent history as a result. But in developing the idea intellectually, they made a series of blunders, and it is these blunders, still built into academia, that we suffer from today.

In order to develop the Enlightenment idea, three steps need to be got right.

(I) The progress-achieving methods of natural science must be correctly characterized.

(II) These methods must be appropriately generalized so that they become potentially fruitfully applicable to any worthwhile, problematic human endeavour, and not just to science.

(III) These generalized, progress-achieving methods must then be got into the fabric of personal and social life, into our other social endeavours besides science, and above all into the endeavour to make progress towards as good a world as possible.

The *philosophes* got all three steps wrong. First, they mistakenly held that the methods of natural science consist in assessing claims to knowledge impartially and exclusively by means of evidence. Secondly, they failed to generalize these methods to become a conception of rationality fruitfully applicable to any worthwhile, problematic human endeavour, and not just applicable to the pursuit of knowledge. And thirdly, and most disastrously, they applied rationality, derived from the progress-achieving methods of natural science, not directly to social life, to the endeavour to make social progress towards a good, enlightened world, but instead to the task merely of improving knowledge about the social world. It is this third, monumental blunder that led to the development of knowledge-inquiry, from which we now suffer. It led the *philosophes* to set about creating the social sciences: economics, psychology, sociology, and the rest. These were developed throughout the 19th century, often outside universities, by J. S. Mill, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and others, and were built into universities with the creation of departments of social science in the early 20th century. The outcome is what we have today: academic

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inquiry devoted intellectually to the pursuit of knowledge, as far as both the natural and the social worlds are concerned.\textsuperscript{11}

It is not perhaps such a scandal that the \textit{philosophes} made their three blunders in developing the profoundly important basic Enlightenment idea of learning from scientific progress how to make social progress towards an enlightened world. The dreadful scandal is, rather, that these three blunders are still with us today, still built into science, and into academia more generally, nearly three centuries later—and hardly anyone notices. Even worse, perhaps, when the scandal is noticed, hardly anyone shows any interest.

Despite its intellectual and humanitarian failings, academic inquiry as it exists today arose out of the attempt to create a kind of inquiry which would embody the great Enlightenment idea—a kind of inquiry rationally devoted to helping humanity make progress towards a good world. It fails in this task because it embodies the three Enlightenment blunders. All this ought to be regarded as very good news. In order to create institutions of learning that really can help humanity make progress towards a better world, there is no need to begin from scratch as it were. All we need to do is transform the academic status quo just sufficiently to ensure that all three Enlightenment blunders are put right. Let us take the three steps of the basic Enlightenment idea in turn.

Step (I): the progress-achieving methods of science. The scientific community today still upholds the Enlightenment view that the basic aim of science is truth, the basic method being to assess claims to knowledge by means of evidence alone. This orthodox view of \textit{standard empiricism} (as I have called it) is, however, untenable. In physics, a new theory, in order to be accepted, must be (a) sufficiently empirically successful and (b) sufficiently \textit{unified}.\textsuperscript{12} Endlessly many disunified rival theories can always be concocted to fit the evidence even better than the accepted theory, but these never get considered for a moment. This persistent rejection of empirically more successful, disunified rivals means that physics accepts implicitly a metaphysical (i.e. untestable) thesis about the world, independent of (or even


\textsuperscript{12} A physical theory is \textit{unified} if what it asserts about the world is \textit{the same} for all the phenomena to which it applies. If a theory makes \(N\) distinct assertions for \(N\) distinct ranges of phenomena, then the theory is disunified to degree \(N\). For unity, we require that \(N = 1\). For further details see Maxwell, \textit{Understanding Scientific Progress}, ch. 5.
against) the evidence, which asserts at least: the universe is such that no seriously disunified theory is true. There is, in other words, some kind of underlying unity in nature.

This implicit metaphysical presupposition is both influential and problematic. It needs to be made explicit so that it can be critically assessed and, we may hope, improved. In order to facilitate its improvement, we need to represent it in the form of a hierarchy of metaphysical assumptions, and associated methods, these assumptions becoming progressively less and less substantial and so more and more likely to be true, and more nearly such that their truth is required for science to be possible at all, as we go up the hierarchy (see Figure 5.1). The assumption at the top, at level 7, is: the universe is such that we can acquire some knowledge of our immediate circumstances sufficient to make life possible. We will never want to reject that conjectural assumption, even if we have no reason to hold it to be true. From level 6 to level 2, that thesis is accepted which best accords with the thesis above. The thesis at level 3 is chosen to do the best justice to the most empirically progressive research programme of theoretical physics.
All this may be reformulated in terms of aims. The aim of theoretical physics is not truth per se; rather, it is truth presupposed to be explanatory—explanatory truth, in other words. Because this aim is profoundly problematic, we need to represent it in the form of a hierarchy of aims, and associated methods, aims becoming less and less specific and problematic, as we go up the hierarchy.

As physics advances, and knowledge improves, aims and methods, low down in the hierarchy, improve as well. There is something like positive feedback between improving scientific knowledge, and improving aims and methods—improving knowledge about how to improve knowledge. According to this conception of science, which I have called aim-oriented empiricism, this positive feedback feature is the nub of scientific rationality. It helps explain the explosive growth in scientific knowledge and understanding. For, even though most scientists pay at least lip service to the orthodox standard empiricist view that evidence alone decides what theories are accepted and rejected, physics in practice, in a somewhat implicit way, has put something like aim-oriented empiricist view into practice. If it had not done, we would still be stuck with Aristotelian science.\(^\text{13}\)

In addition to metaphysical assumptions, the aims of science have inherent in them profoundly problematic assumptions about values and politics, the social uses of science. Scientific rigour requires that these problematic value and political assumptions be acknowledged within science too, so that they can be critically assessed and, we may hope, improved, within the context of aim-oriented empiricism. Orthodox standard empiricism, however, holds that the basic intellectual aim of science is the fixed one of truth; this does not permit sustained discussion of problematic assumptions concerning metaphysics, values, and politics as an integral part of science itself. In the interests of a misconceived conception of scientific rationality, the rationality of science is undermined.\(^\text{14}\)

Correcting the first step, then, involves rejecting the orthodox standard empiricist conception of science that holds that, in the end, evidence alone decides what theories are accepted; it involves adopting and implementing aim-oriented empiricism instead as constituting the correct progress-achieving methods of science.

\(^{13}\) For more detailed expositions of, and arguments for, aim-oriented empiricism see Maxwell, *From Knowledge to Wisdom*, chs. 5 and 9; *The Comprehensibility of the Universe; Is Science Neurotic?*, chs. 1 and 2 and appendix; *From Knowledge to Wisdom* (2nd ed.), chs. 5, 9 and 14; *Understanding Scientific Progress; In Praise of Natural Philosophy; Karl Popper, Science and Enlightenment*, chs. 2–7.

\(^{14}\) See works referred to in note 13.
Step (II) involves generalizing aim-oriented empiricism to form *aim-oriented rationality*, a conception of rationality especially fruitful when aims are problematic or misrepresented, as they often are. Aim-oriented rationality requires us to represent problematic aims in the form of a hierarchy of aims, and associated methods, on analogy with aim-oriented empiricism, so that we create a framework of relatively unproblematic aims and methods, high up in the hierarchy, within which much more problematic and contested aims, and associated methods, may be improved as we seek to resolve conflicts, and act.\(^{15}\)

Step (III) consists in the vital, momentous, and long-term task of getting aim-oriented rationality adopted and implemented in personal and social life. Progress-achieving methods, which have proved to be so astonishingly successful in natural science, need to be got into all our other worthwhile social and institutional endeavours with problematic aims: government, industry, agriculture, the economy, finance, international relations, the media, the law, education, marriage, personal life. The aim is to get into social and political life something of the progressive success achieved so strikingly by natural science—so that our global society may make progress towards a better, wiser, more enlightened world.

The proper, primary task of social inquiry and the humanities is to work out how this is to be done, in a multitude of social contexts, and help people do it. This means that social inquiry is not primarily social *science*; it is not primarily devoted to the pursuit of *knowledge* of social phenomena: rather, the various branches of social inquiry and the humanities have two basic tasks. First, they need to do what I indicated above, promote increasingly cooperatively rational tackling of problems of living in the social world. Second, they have the task of helping humanity put aim-oriented rationality into practice in personal and social life. Social inquiry needs to be pursued, and conceived of, as *social methodology* or *social philosophy*. What philosophy of science is to science within the framework of aim-oriented empiricism, namely that part of the scientific endeavour which seeks to articulate and improve the aims and methods of science, so social inquiry and the humanities are to the social

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15 Any conception of reason which leads us astray *systematically* cannot be valid. All conceptions of reason which are about *means* only, and contain no help with improving *aims* will lead us astray systematically when aims are problematic (and we pursue aims not in our best interests). Thus, all such conceptions of reason that are about *means* only—as all orthodox conceptions of reason are—are untenable. Aim-oriented rationality is the only candidate for authentic reason because it alone contains within it provision for the improvement of problematic aims.
world. Their task is to articulate and help improve problematic aims and associated methods of diverse social endeavours.\textsuperscript{16}

Aim-oriented rationality is especially relevant when it comes to the task of making progress towards a good, civilized world (see Figure 5.2). The aim of this endeavour is inherently and profoundly problematic for all sorts of more or less obvious reasons. Here, above all, we need to try to improve our aims and methods as we proceed. It is vital to implement aim-oriented rationality. Failure to do so accounts for some of the greatest disasters of the 20th century. Utopian ideals and programmes, whether of the far left or right, have promised heaven on Earth but, pursued in a dictatorial fashion, have led to horrors. Stalin’s and Hitler’s grandiose plans led to the murder of millions. Even saner, more modest, more humane and rational political programmes, based on democratic socialism, liberalism, or free markets and capitalism, but bereft of aim-oriented rationality, seem to have failed us.

The astonishing intellectual success of modern science and technology has made it possible for us to achieve the goals of more people, more industry and agriculture, more wealth, longer lives, more development, housing and roads, more travel, more cars and aeroplanes, more energy production and use, more and more lethal armaments (for defence). These goals have seemed inherently desirable and, in many ways, are desirable. But our successes in achieving these aims have also brought about global warming, war, vast inequalities across the globe, destruction of habitats and extinction of species. All our current global problems are the almost inevitable outcome of our long-term failure to put aim-oriented rationality into practice in life and so actively seek to discover problems associated with our long-term aims, actively explore ways in which problematic aims can be modified in less problematic directions, and at the same time develop the social, the political, economic and industrial \textit{muscle} able to change what we do, how we live, the technology we develop, so that our aims become less problematic, less destructive in both the short and long term. We have failed even to appreciate the fundamental need to improve aims and methods as the decades go by. Because of the dominance of knowledge-inquiry, academia cannot even entertain the idea that it has, as a basic task, to help humanity learn how to put aim-oriented rationality into practice in all the diverse contexts of social life. Even worse, academia does not put aim-oriented empiricism and aim-oriented rationalism into practice itself. As a result, the mere \textit{idea} that it is of fundamental importance to put aim-oriented rationality into practice in personal and social life

\textsuperscript{16} For more detailed expositions of steps (II) and (III) see Maxwell, \textit{From Knowledge to Wisdom}, chs. 5–11; \textit{Is Science Neurotic?}; \textit{From Knowledge to Wisdom} (2nd ed.), chs. 5–13; \textit{Two Great Problems of Learning}; \textit{In Praise of Natural Philosophy}, ch. 8.
is, as yet, all-but unknown. Conventional ideas about rationality are all about *means*, not about *ends*, and are not designed to help us *improve* our ends as we proceed (see note 15). And all this remains true today despite the fact that reasons for adopting and implementing aim-oriented rationality were prominently published at least 34 years ago (Maxwell 1984).

There is another way in which academia dominated by knowledge-inquiry fails humanity. It cannot devote itself to public education about what our problems are, and what we need to do about them. It is vital that we tackle our global problems democratically. But elected governments are not likely to be much more enlightened than electorates. Democracies need electorates to be enlightened about what our problems are, and what we need to do about them; without such enlightenment, democratic governments are unlikely to do what needs to be done to resolve global problems; and there is always the danger that democracies become dysfunctional. Wisdom-inquiry would be actively devoted to acquiring and promoting education about what our problems are, and what we need to do about them; knowledge-inquiry, engaged in the pursuit of specialized knowledge, cannot begin to do what is required.

The outcome of implementing all four rules of reason indicated above and, on top of that, correcting the three blunders of the Enlightenment in the ways just indicated would be fully fledged *wisdom-inquiry*, a kind of academic inquiry very different from what we have at present. The basic task of wisdom-inquiry is to devote *reason* to the enhancement of *wisdom*—wisdom being understood to be the desire, the active endeavour, and the capacity to discover and achieve what is desirable and of value in life, both for oneself and for others. Wisdom includes knowledge and understanding but goes beyond them in also including: the desire and active striving for what is of value, the ability to see what is of value, actually and potentially, in the circumstances of life, the ability to experience value, the capacity to help realize what is of value for oneself and others, the capacity to help solve those problems of living that arise in connection with attempts to realize what is of value, the capacity to use and develop knowledge, technology and understanding as needed for the realization of value. Wisdom, like knowledge, can be conceived of not only in personal terms, but also in institutional or social terms. We can thus interpret the basic task of wisdom-inquiry to be to help us develop wiser ways of living, wiser institutions, customs and social relations, a wiser world. Wisdom-inquiry does better justice than knowledge-inquiry to both aspects of inquiry: inquiry pursued for its own sake to help us see, know, and understand; and inquiry pursued for the sake of other goals of value—health, prosperity, peace, democracy, love.

Wisdom-inquiry is a synthesis of traditional rationalism and romanticism, and a radical improvement over both. It incorporates romantic ideals of integrity, having to do with motivational and emotional honesty, honesty about desires and aims; and at the same time it incorporates traditional rationalist ideals of integrity, having to do with respect for objective fact, knowledge, and valid argument. Traditional rationalism takes its inspiration from science and method, romanticism from art, imagination, and passion. Wisdom-inquiry holds art to have a fundamental rational role in inquiry, in revealing what is of value, and unmasking false values; but science, too, is of fundamental importance. What we need, for wisdom, is an interplay of sceptical rationality and emotion, an interplay of mind and heart, “so that we may acquire heartfelt minds and mindful hearts”.

17 See, for example, Maxwell, “From Knowledge to Wisdom”, 110–12; *Two Great Problems of Learning*; ch. 4, section 3; *In Praise of Natural Philosophy*, especially ch. 5. 
18 Maxwell, *What’s Wrong With Science?*, 5. There is even a religious, a spiritual dimension to wisdom-inquiry, as I have tried to indicate in Nicholas Maxwell, *Cutting God in Half—And Putting the Pieces Together Again: A New Approach to Philosophy* (London: Pentire Press, 2010).
We urgently need an academic revolution, a change of paradigm, from \textit{knowledge-inquiry} to \textit{wisdom-inquiry} (as I have repeatedly argued ever since 1976). We need to put all four basic rules of reason into academic practice. And on top of that, we need to correct the three blunders of the Enlightenment. What, in more detail, would be the consequences of putting these steps towards greater rationality into academic practice? Here is an indication of some of the structural changes involved in transforming \textit{knowledge-inquiry} into \textit{wisdom-inquiry}.

1. There needs to be a radical change in the basic aim of academic inquiry. Knowledge-inquiry has two distinct aims: the intellectual one of acquiring knowledge, and the social or humanitarian one of helping to promote human welfare by intellectual, technological, and educational means. Wisdom-inquiry fuses these two aims into one: the intellectual/humanitarian aim of seeking and promoting personal and social \textit{wisdom} as characterized above.

2. There needs to be a change in the nature of academic \textit{problems}, so that problems of living are included, as well as problems of knowledge—the former being treated as intellectually more fundamental than the latter.

3. There needs to be a change in the nature of academic \textit{ideas}, so that proposals for action are included as well as claims to knowledge—the former, again, being treated as intellectually more fundamental than the latter.

19 In the last two decades or so, some changes have taken place in academia which have taken us away from knowledge-inquiry and towards wisdom-inquiry: see Maxwell, \textit{From Knowledge to Wisdom}, chs. 6, 11 and 12; \textit{How Universities Can Help Create a Wiser World}, ch. 4. However, as I also make clear in these references, these developments have been piecemeal, muddled, and agonizingly slow; there is still no general awareness in academia of just how far-reaching and damaging the structural irrationality of academic inquiry is, how urgent the need is for radical change. Academics who concern themselves with climate change and other global problems may blame governments, industry, and economics, but rarely see responsibility as lying closer to home, in the dysfunctional character of academia itself. And during the last two decades or so, other changes in academia have taken place which have had the effect of taking us further away from wisdom-inquiry: increased specialization, more precarious employment, greater dependence on the market for funding, even creeping scientific corruption as in phenomena such as “ghost-writing”: see http://www.sgr.org.uk/events/universities-sale and Leemon McHenry and Jon Jureidini, “Industry-sponsored Ghostwriting in Clinical Trial Reporting: A Case Study,” \textit{Accountability in Research: Policies and Quality Assurance} 15, no. 3 (2008): 152–67.
4. There needs to be a change in what constitutes intellectual progress, so that progress-in-ideas-relevant-to-achieving-a-more-civilized-world is included as well as progress in knowledge, the former being indeed intellectually fundamental.

5. There needs to be a change in the idea as to where inquiry, at its most fundamental, is located. It is not esoteric theoretical physics, but rather the thinking we engage in as we seek to achieve what is of value in life. Academic thought is a (vital) adjunct to what really matters, personal and social thought active in life.

6. There needs to be a dramatic change in the nature of social inquiry (reflecting points 1 to 5). Economics, politics, sociology, and so on are not, fundamentally, sciences, and do not, fundamentally, have the task of improving knowledge about social phenomena. Instead, their task is threefold. First, it is to articulate problems of living, and propose and critically assess possible solutions, possible actions or policies, from the standpoint of their capacity, if implemented, to promote wiser ways of living. Second, it is to promote such cooperatively rational tackling of problems of living throughout the social world. And third, at a more basic and long-term level, it is to help build the hierarchical structure of aims and methods of aim-oriented rationality into personal, institutional, and global life, thus creating frameworks within which progressive improvement of personal and social life aims-and-methods becomes possible. These three tasks are undertaken in order to promote cooperative tackling of problems of living—but also in order to enhance empathic or “personalistic” understanding between people as something of value in its own right. Acquiring knowledge of social phenomena is a vital but subordinate activity, engaged in to facilitate the above three fundamental pursuits.

7. Natural science needs to change, so that it includes at least three levels of discussion: evidence, theory, and research aims. Discussion of aims needs to bring together scientific, metaphysical, and evaluative consideration in an attempt to discover the most desirable and realizable research aims. It needs to influence, and be influenced by, exploration of problems of living undertaken by social inquiry and the humanities, and the public.

8. There needs to be a dramatic change in the relationship between social inquiry and natural science, so that social inquiry becomes intellectually more fundamental from the standpoint of tackling problems of living, promoting wisdom. Social inquiry influences choice of research aims for the natural and technological sciences,
and is, of course, in turn influenced by the results of such research. (Social inquiry also, of course, conducts empirical research, in order to improve our understanding of what our problems of living are and in order to assess policy ideas whenever possible.)

9. The current emphasis on specialized research needs to change so that sustained discussion and tackling of broad, global problems that cut across academic specialities is included, both influencing and being influenced by specialized research.

10. Academia needs to include sustained imaginative and critical exploration of possible futures, for each country, and for humanity as a whole, policy and research implications being discussed as well.

11. The way in which academic inquiry as a whole is related to the rest of the human world needs to change dramatically. Instead of being intellectually dissociated from the rest of society, academic inquiry needs to be communicating with, learning from, teaching and arguing with the rest of society—in such a way as to promote cooperative rationality and social wisdom. Academia needs to have just sufficient power to retain its independence from the pressures of government, industry, the military, and public opinion, but no more. Academia becomes a kind of civil service for the public, doing openly and independently what actual civil services are supposed to do in secret for governments.

12. There needs to be a change in the role that political and religious ideas, works of art, expressions of feelings, desires and values have within rational inquiry. Instead of being excluded, they need to be explicitly included and critically assessed, as possible indications and revelations of what is of value, and as unmasking of fraudulent values in satire and parody, vital ingredients of wisdom.

13. There need to be changes in education so that, for example, seminars devoted to the cooperative, imaginative, and critical discussion of problems of living are at the heart of all education from five-year-olds onwards. Politics, which cannot be taught by knowledge-inquiry, becomes central to wisdom-inquiry, political creeds and actions being subjected to imaginative and critical scrutiny.

14. There need to be changes in the aims, priorities, and character of pure science and scholarship, so that it is the curiosity, the seeing and searching, the knowing and understanding of individual persons that ultimately matters, the more impersonal, esoteric, purely intellectual aspects of science and scholarship being means to this end. Social
inquiry needs to give intellectual priority to helping empathic understanding between people to flourish (as indicated in 6 above).

15. There need to be changes in the way mathematics is understood, pursued and taught. Mathematics is not a branch of knowledge at all. Rather, it is concerned to explore problematic possibilities, and to develop, systematize, and unify problem-solving methods.20

16. Literature needs to be put close to the heart of rational inquiry, in that it explores imaginatively our most profound problems of living and aids personalistic understanding in life by enhancing our ability to enter imaginatively into the problems and lives of others.

17. Philosophy needs to change so that it ceases to be just another specialized discipline and becomes instead that aspect of inquiry as a whole that is concerned with our most general and fundamental problems—those problems that cut across all disciplinary boundaries. Philosophy needs to become again what it was for Socrates: the attempt to devote reason to the growth of wisdom in life.

18. Academic contributions need to be written in as simple, lucid, jargon-free a way as possible, so that academic work is as accessible as possible across specialities and to non-academics.

19. There needs to be a change in views about what constitute academic contributions, so that publications which promote (or have the potential to promote) public understanding as to what our problems of livings are and what we need to do about them are included, in addition to contributions addressed primarily to the academic community.

20. Every university needs to create a seminar or symposium devoted to the sustained discussion of fundamental problems that cut across all conventional academic boundaries, global problems of living being included as well as global problems of knowledge and understanding.

The above changes all come from my “from knowledge to wisdom” argument spelled out above, and in detail elsewhere. The following three institutional innovations do not follow from that argument but, if implemented, would help wisdom-inquiry to flourish.

21. Natural science needs to create committees, in the public eye, and manned by scientists and nonscientists alike, concerned to highlight and discuss failures of the priorities of research to respond to the interests of those whose needs are the greatest—the poor of the

Earth—as a result of the inevitable tendency of research priorities to reflect the interests of those who pay for science, and the interests of scientists themselves.

22. Every national university system needs to include a national shadow government, seeking to do, virtually, free of the constraints of power, what the actual national government ought to be doing. The hope would be that virtual and actual governments would learn from each other.

23. The world’s universities need to include a virtual world government which seeks to do what an actual elected world government ought to do, if it existed. The virtual world government would also have the task of working out how an actual democratically elected world government might be created.

References


6. Becoming Higher Education with Veterans: A “Post” Introduction to Veteragogy in and with the Anthropocene

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Abstract: Emerging scholarship in posthumanism and new materialism informs the creation of a new paradigm in teaching and learning with veterans, termed veteragogy. Participate to be challenged in a rhizomatic philosophical exploration of the becoming academy within Earth’s Anthropocene. This uniquely structured argument plays on and with the reader as it presents the contextual and conceptual implications of higher education during a destructive man-shaping epoch. This philosophical piece catapults from the theory and methodological works of Rosi Braidotti, Diana Masny, Jasmine Ulmer, and the like, to provide new perspectives and constructions of future academic contributions. Be encouraged to think within and beyond the presented frames through an interaction and intra-action of your personal dynamic future becoming.

Keywords: higher education, Anthropocene, veteragogy, posthumanism, new materialism

The future of tertiary education is one of becoming. The participants cannot idly pander to an anachronistic humanist context, in which the institution for higher education is stagnating from the avoidance of addressing the imminent circumstances of the Anthropocene. The imperative plea comes from the “need to devise new social, ethical and discursive schemes of subject formation to match the profound transformations,” occurring within an inter-


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active epoch.\textsuperscript{2} While not formally accepted by the International Commission of Stratigraphy (ICS), the professional organization that defines Earth’s geological time scale, the term “Anthropocene” is broadly accepted in research and gaining momentum in social sciences as a reference to the dominant planet-shaping force of man.\textsuperscript{3} Likewise, veteran students and national educational policies related to this demographic are part of an unnamed shaping force in higher education.

Attempting to create a namesake for investigation presents the initial steps of identification and introduction, also creating possibly more questions for investigation than recommendations for practice. Participation is not voluntary and avoidance is not maintenance. Despite efforts for simplistic experimentation and neoliberalist capitalism there is no \textit{status quo} in the Anthropocene.\textsuperscript{4} Preservation manifests an interchanging and intrachanging world, “not a process of mere repetition of the same, for [maintenance] entails continual invention.”\textsuperscript{5} In a dynamic, continuous state, \textit{what} is attempting to be preserved? The Earth’s existence? Man’s existence? Neoliberal economic growth? Bennett urges us to reevaluate the decades-old waves of sustainability and environmentalism that are associated with human self-interested capitalistic goals to incorporate the notions that humans need not to live \textit{on} earth but \textit{as} earth.\textsuperscript{6} There are allowances for the proper and necessary incorporation of nonhuman actants in a discourse of the Anthropocene. Critiques of theory and practice can be implemented to unravel the assumptions and possible questions that need to be addressed in our understanding of \textit{being} in the world versus in relationship to the world.\textsuperscript{7} In an onto-epistemological turn, Gildersleeve prepares the field of critical inquiry for the awareness of Braidotti’s \textit{becoming}, using posthumanism and new materialism applied in higher education research.\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{5} Jane Bennett, \textit{Vibrant Matter} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 22.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 111.
The aim of this article is to exemplify the diversity and differences of lines of flight in its content and design. It is constructed for the reader “to try” and “to feel” in the way that Haraway presents a playful exploration of post-Anthropocene.9 This article presents a paradigm for a becoming higher education with the world and specifically with veterans, creating the term *veteragogy*. The aim in introducing a new term is constricted with inquiry and factors for investigation. The reader is encouraged to think within and beyond the presented frame, while, finding (dis)comfort in the beginnings and limitations of a becoming theory. In this discussion there will be a variety of pathways offered, eight to be precise, to allow for the becoming reader. I, as the author, need not invite you, as the reader, because you are already in the process of ceasing who you were and not yet who you will become. In reading this article you are permitting an intersection and allowing this text to participate with you in your future becoming. Article constructions that you may be accustomed to do not apply here, and the tools of theory and frameworks that you may be seeking now are reserved and presented as the central topic. How this interaction will proceed and the magnitude of intra-action is yet to come in the exchange of power that is becoming.

**Power in the Becoming**

Passing through a dying and destructive epoch, commonly referred to as the Anthropocene, is the act of creating the disturbances and disruptions needed to participate. The identity and trajectory of a military veteran student is reflected in the dying and disruptions to their former career and lifestyle in exchange for the education epoch of transitions and disturbances of perspective and practice. Participants in this time period all “demonstrate and perform consequences.”10 This bit of text once was conspiring with an author, who is now existing beyond it while presently a reader is in collaboration with it.11 Feel free to reread that sentence if there is disagreement or confusion. This text is entangled in the mess of an interactive world and it is an active participant, as is its reader(s). Are you ready? Ready for what lies ahead, what may come before you? The encounters you know, the encounters you can reasonably expect, the encounters you have seen before, and those that are new or unanticipated. Are you prepared for the inevitable and the unknown?

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10 Ibid., 2.
A momentary side discussion on power, this article is designed as an experience and an active participant in its contributions to the reader. The now occurring, mirror that of Deleuzean transcendental empiricism, wherein there is a removal on the reliance on ideas and processes as static and inert. This text exists for itself and is always viewed in the middle because there is no “blank slate” from where to observe it. Its exercised power and purpose will extend beyond its physical form. Foucault provides the basis for understanding the exhibited powers currently at work here and now. Power is exercised through actions and relations. Resistance and struggles occur at the point of power exercised, as may already be a part of this experience. Keep in mind that “the exercise of power itself creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information.” Allow its affect to manifest as both power restrictive (potestas) and affirmative (potentia).

Powers exist here to assist you, dear reader, in experiencing a true and basic questioning of the factors influencing veteran students in higher education in, and with, the distressing era of our earthly domicile. This text will interact and intra-act with the practice of reading without giving the selected language authority over the representations. Unfortunately, in academic writing, representationalism is unavoidable. Representation, in Masny’s framing of becoming, limits experience. The dynamics of exchanged and exercised power between reader and text are the actions and relations in development. The trajectory of this text will present its reader with decisions to face. As a reader, despite the generic title, the ensuing activities are not merely reading an article before you. You are in the midst of becoming the person you will be in a world unknown by the time you are done and/or stop. Just as the molar lines of Deleuze and Guattari are fixed with one or more center points, there are molar segments within this text. The first choice is approaching

13 Ibid., 8.
15 Ibid., 51.
16 Braidotti, The Posthuman, 163.
18 Ibid., 812.
19 Diana Masny, “Problematizing Qualitative Research: Reading a Data Analysis with Rhizoanalysis,” Qualitative Inquiry 22, no. 6 (2016): 667.
and will show the format of future “decision time(s)” in this consolidation of text. You, as the reader, will be presented with four to six binary decisions throughout this article, assuming that sections are not repeated. For planning purposes, there are two sets of parallelizable sections ((context/concept) and (teachers/learners)); each of these subsets will only be offered twice. The linearly “next” section will always be an option to choose to read in the provided linear display, however, it is recommended to follow intuition and interest in a playful interaction with the text. Decision time: Exploring the becoming implications of the Anthropocene in a discussion of higher education, select and proceed to: 

Becoming Context—p. 133 OR Becoming Concept—p. 135

**Becoming Context**

There is an overlap in the urge that the Anthropocene is not a mere geographical age to be identified and accepted but a transformational one. The Anthropocene is postured as a co-evolution, co-transformation, and community issue for research addresses. The Anthropocene in this perspective becomes the community, environment, background, setting, and situation in which higher education finds itself with as it is becoming context. Biermann focuses on social interdependence relationships and the focus of Earth System governance to describing and critiquing the necessary transformations in social behavior needed in cognizance of the Anthropocene. The cognizing forces are the context that the Anthropocene is becoming, for this perspective discourse. Five propositions relating Anthropocene events to social interaction provide the contextualizing: (1) jurisdiction lines, (2) function interdependences, (3) intergenerational cause/effects, (4) persistent uncertainty, and (5) extreme variations in well-being.

Using these five propositions, the light of the becoming context of the Anthropocene is shone on higher education. First, the local and national ecosystem jurisdiction lines mirror the globalization and intricate jurisdictions of technological modalities that persist in higher education. The sole state education system no longer exists, but instead a feud-like “rights” battle is required for education opportunities to reach underrepresented populations.

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21 Lovbrand et al., “Who speaks,” 211.
23 Ibid., 58.
Countries seek independence when crises evolve.\textsuperscript{24} Draft is cited by Bess and Dee in noting that organizational designs that account for a highly unstable and uncertain environment will push for more decentralization.\textsuperscript{25} Additionally, “the basic premise of contingency theory is that organizational effectiveness is contingent on a judicious, rational matching of organizational variables to environmental conditions.”\textsuperscript{26} This organizational response reflects the second proposition as well: function interdependences. Biermann reveals the Anthropocene invoking a relationship between strategies and misaligned repercussions.\textsuperscript{27} Institutional theory reflects this contextual response with the phenomenon of isomorphism.\textsuperscript{28} DiMaggio and Powell are credited for the levels of conformity institutions take based on environmental expectations consolidated in the phenomenon. This adoption process realigns potential efficiencies or repercussions.

The third through fifth propositions refer to the temporal separations of “causation and effect of transformations of the Earth System,” “persistent uncertainty,” and “extreme variations in wealth, health, living standards, education and most other indicators that define wellbeing.”\textsuperscript{29} Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital is built from a sociological perspective looking at the social reproduction, otherwise described as the perpetuation of a social class or state of being.\textsuperscript{30} Upper classes owning cultural capital will extend their children into situations allowing the maintenance and growth of more cultural capital. This process causes the legitimizing of the unequal situation between those that start with low cultural capital and those with more, also called social reproduction.\textsuperscript{31} It is exemplified in higher education and further magnified with the Anthropocene as context. In the Anthropocene, costs are not equally dispersed with the benefits, and in higher education benefits are not equally dispersed with the needs.

I believe that an isolated examination of the veteran student’s relationship and responsibilities can be used to explore the applications of broader issues to cultural, social, and political contributions of higher education to the

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 145.
\textsuperscript{27} Biermann, “The Anthropocene,” 58.
\textsuperscript{28} Bess and Dee, \textit{Understanding College}, 142.
\textsuperscript{29} Biermann, “The Anthropocene,” 58.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 492.
future of life on Earth. These are my hopes and interests beyond the borders of this text. As you are here, I may be elsewhere immersed in my theoretical (re)designs, gathering data, and forging a new context. Can you see it? Has it happened already by the moment you are in? Decision time: Further exploring the implications of the Anthropocene with higher education, select and proceed to:

Becoming Concept—p. 135 OR Becoming Theories—p. 136

Becoming Concept

Acknowledging the Anthropocene incorporates a realization that humans are “a single species alongside other species … whose survival is threatened by its own behavior.” An idea forming from its characteristics and functioning as model for innovation is how the Anthropocene is becoming concept. As a becoming concept, the Anthropocene can be utilized and incorporated into critical inquiry of higher education. For Ravitch and Riggan, “the conceptual framework is an argument about why the topic one wishes to study matter, and why the means proposed to study it are appropriate and rigorous.”
As a becoming, the Anthropocene’s complete applications are constructed not found, by an integrative and evolving process to make good decisions to plan an empirical study. For application, higher education incorporates the becoming concept of the Anthropocene as it influences thought and action, while positioning in relation to existing bodies like that of a conversation, already in progress.

The characteristics to consider are the bounded limitations of nature, the pocketed bulging populations, and the disputed effects of the possible and plausible resolutions. Haraway argues that people who “have all the answers” are dangerous. Meanwhile, economist Sachs not only condemns the Western society’s consumerism, but exemplifies academia for systemic workings against a global solution. This world perspective weighs heavily

34 Ibid., 11–13.
35 Ibid., 144.
38 Ibid., 38.
in the perceptions and testimonies of some of our veterans. Higher education needs to include the human and the nonhuman with the urgency of a changing world into new and progressive methodologies. It appears to me that postqualitative inquiry could be used in recognizing the necessity for a social change in higher education with respect to this demographic and perhaps examine the process of “becoming” for veterans in this transition-packed period from military to student to civilian. Decision time: Further exploring the implications of the Anthropocene, how do you care to proceed?

Becoming Context—p. 133 OR Becoming Theories—p. 136

**Becoming Theories**

Welcome to the center of this text. It may not have been obvious or traditional. I believe there to be a philosophical, political, and structural difference between “welcoming” and “fostering” environments. As the reader may feel “welcomed” to this section of text, its construction and formulation will either abandon you or assist in the persistence needed to completely read on. If, as a collective being, higher education is to become a “fostering” environment, it needs to go beyond the opportunity and openness to things and embrace the nurturing and encouraging attributes. The author has prepared this section of text to nurture and encourage the becoming theories in use throughout and exterior to the entire script.

Picture “higher education” as a rhizome with the interactive Anthropocene. “A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*.”40 A rhizomatic analysis of higher education positions it as center that branches out, in both pulling students in through marketing and recruiting and pushing students out into workforce market demands and societal expectations of higher education’s purpose. A theoretical framework with no points or positions, only lines, multiple places for entry and exit, consisting of heterogeneous elements: people, physical place, things, jurisdictions. A higher education rhizome builds characteristics that are detachable, connectable, reversible, and modifiable.

Higher education, “from a rhizomatic perspective...emit[s] lines of flight,” of “becoming in response to what it is not.”41 The transition and becoming of veteran students is both a pull to new and a push from old. This continuous interaction is informed by the concepts of Difference. Not seeking to represent (find meaning) and thus not seeking to interpret (judge

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41 Masny, “Problematizing Qualitative Research,” 667.
with direct experience). Instead, reflecting and incorporating the immanence of becoming lines of flight. Frustrating as it may be, actualization in this moment may not be possible. Galvez points to the “incorrigibility” existing in the ever-present contradictions between the objectively existence and factual existence. The rhizome is made up of plateaus. The multiples that connect within these plateaus are the compositions of people, physical places, and things, for example, students, faculty, physical and virtual classrooms, course material, technology, subject matter, and school programming.

“Deleuze proposed that theory is practice [and] it has to be made to work. The concept of theory is constantly in movement.” In addition to a practice, there is thinking with theory and an ability to create concepts and respond to problems and questions related to the flux of experiences in life. The test of consequences is more exacting than that afforded by fixed general rules. In addition, theory secures constant development, for when new acts are tried, new results are experienced, while the lauded immutability of eternal ideals and norms is in itself a denial of the possibility of development and improvement. Each one coming from different socioeconomic backgrounds and cultural upbringings will approach academia differently.

Thinking of veterans, in contrast to the drafted Vietnam generations who could avoid service within higher education, the most recent generations are not facing an either/or scenario or even the political statements that era faced. In the military, everyone has a role, different but all integral to the whole, trained to survive, to endure, to act. Why is this not the case in higher education? In the neoliberal consumerism of higher education, it has become a commodity that is competitively required versus a societal benefit at personal expense, which, to be honest, is the foundation of a patriotic and selfless servicemember.

The theory and practice of education and how best to teach, pedagogy, refer to the general development of human potential. Why differentiate human, other than to further differentiate the subjectivity of humans? The discourse on specifications of pedagogy hinges on the divergence between an independent scientific disciple and a practical approach as part of the

42 Julian M. Galvez, Our Incorrigible Ontological Relations and Categories of Being (Buenos Aires, 2016), 97.
43 Masny, “Problematising Qualitative Research,” 672.
pedagogical disciplines of Knowles. Postsecondary education in North American advanced an emphasis on individual development, while in Eastern Europe, an emphasis on the social role emerged, leading to the creation of the term for education in adulthood, andragogy, with emphasis on reason. Methodologically, Rendon presents sentipensante as a sensing and thinking pedagogy addressing the shortcomings in practice with underrepresented cultures among young students. With military-connected students, the differences of emphasis should direct and consolidate a new term and subsequent concept in practice. Following the etymological constructions for teaching methods, pedagogy, and using the prefix alteration methods employed in defining teaching methods to adult learns, andragogy (ped- for children, andra- for man). The term veteragogy is intended to try to capture the cultural implicit and life experience explicit nature of a veteran student and the necessity for specific study and development of teaching methodologies for veteran students. Veteran and student identities offer an overlapping amalgamation that has characteristics and experiences. Each creates lines of flights “through” higher education and identity development stage/schema, not then defining what something is but implies its exercised power in becoming. Veteragogy as a becoming term can be exercised as the skills and abilities of teaching and learning through unique personal “lived experience” of veterans that can be useful and applicable to society’s progress. Teaching and Learning as a skills and process should take into account the materialism and nonmaterialism aspects of a veteran in the classroom. The theoretical contributions of the transformative perspectives of new materialism and posthumanism direct the views captured by text, ready and waiting to be experienced.

Decision time: Exploring the perspectives of veteragogy in practice, which viewpoint would you care to envision?

Becoming Teachers—p. 139 OR Becoming Learners—p. 140

46 Ibid., 2.
47 Laura I. Rendon, Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2009), 133.
Becoming Teachers

Teaching is one half of the education interchange. Dewey would argue experience is education and there is a magnifying effect required to make the time, cost, and activity of higher education the means by which experience is obtained. In the application of introducing *veteragogy*, this section focuses on the things that are teachers. For a posthumanist and new materialist approach to this line of critical inquiry within higher education, “things” are both human and nonhuman, all of which exercise power manifesting themselves in teaching. Teachers in this frame are operating within the context of higher education and the Anthropocene. Things that teach veterans are both situational and informed by process. In Iraq, the Anthropocene as becoming context teaches that war has environmental consequences. The weather, wind, and sand are teachers of protection, preparedness, and spatial awareness. The way in which orders and information are disseminated to soldiers teaches of the urgency and hierarchy within each message’s meaning. In a higher education context, veterans are taught by spatial configurations, organization of communications, and projected importance of the material. To teach a veteran is to clearly delineate the subjective and objective boundaries of the method and content. Faculty, administrators, staff, and policymakers need to realize and incorporate the transmission of the functions, process, and material that is teaching. The contextual merging between the Anthropocene and higher education relies on a system that understands its becoming context and the becoming veteran students.

The various modifications that would result from adoption in social and humane subjects of experimental ways of thinking are perhaps summed up in saying that it would place *method and means* upon the level of importance that has, in the past, been imputed exclusively to ends. The “means have been treated as poor relations to be endured, but not inherently welcome,” which can demonstrate in the “so-called ends … not taken seriously.” The good workman in the arts is known by his respect for his tools and by his interest in perfecting his technique.

The problems and subjects that are needed to solve and be understood are changing at an alarming pace, faster than the experience needed to train and teach on this. This is the test to faculty that will not be just about making certain subjects available, it will be offering differing contexts in

52 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 593.
53 Ibid., 593.
which to develop and apply the skills necessary to learn or not to learn, to adapt, to transition. Society is thinking on higher education as entrusted with developing readiness and preparedness by companies, society, and students. But readiness for what? Preparedness for what? Causation is difficult in an intersection of identity, policy, and society. The correlation is worth investigating further to aid in a becoming teacher’s development. Decision time: Would you care to envision veteragogy from another perspective or self-reflect on this experience?

_Becoming Learners_—p. 140 OR _Becoming You_—p. 141

**Becoming Learners**

Learning is one half of the education interchange. In the process of introducing veteragogy, this section focuses on the things that are learners. When the Anthropocene is viewed as a becoming concept, there is reflective value in better understanding the skill and practice of learning in higher education with veterans. For brevity introduction, bluntly put, the veteran student is not the sole learner in the classroom. There are becoming learners that are human, such as faculty, peer students, and support staff, in addition to the nonhuman becoming learners, such as policy, course modalities, and, in some cases, animal companions. Higher education when accepting the Anthropocene as a becoming concept includes it as given and reactive. This variable is included in the becoming and defining of a veteran student learner. Support features, policy directives, and areas of research learn from veteran students in response and inclusion of the Anthropocene to gain and verify knowledge and understanding. Must these policies be reactive? Given and followed, yes, but reactivity to experience is the process of becoming the tool and guidance, rather than a limitation to the evolution. This skill and practice is non-temporal, nonhierarchical, nonlinear, and thus lends itself to a posthumanist methodology. Specializing will no longer be subject oriented but a characteristic of the concept developing. Gov. Owen, speaking to veteran scholars and support staff within higher education, said that it is not as important as what is being learned in as much as how to learn and think and face decision and dilemmas.54 Likewise, Kozulin noted an investigation of Vygotsky’s popularity among educational researchers was in response to answering questions that hadn’t been asked, thinking of things differently, and not treating the

54 Bill Owens (Governor), keynote speaker at Veterans in Higher Education Summit, August 4, 2017.
learners as passive entities who can be filled with knowledge but recognizing the active role that they plan in the education process.\textsuperscript{55}

The variable of the Anthropocene as a becoming concept is a contribution that veterans are accustomed to incorporating in decision making. A practice and skill that should be encouraged not dismissed in the transition from servicemember and soldier to higher education student and civilian citizen. These are factors that can lead to an actualization of the world with a future more than the dismal projections of the Anthropocene. \textit{Decision time: Would you care to envision \textit{veteragogy} from another perspective or self-reflect on this experience?}

\textbf{Becoming You—p. 141}

\textbf{Becoming You}

There is an implicit and explicit need for the discussion to reach the broadest audience, across many fields, to join in the application and acknowledgment of the “change” needed.\textsuperscript{56} More so than this reading, students of higher education are met with numerous transition points.

An integral initiation point is college-readiness or preparedness for the high school to college transition, as was asked of the readers’ readiness, some readers stop there and never reach this point. For some students, this point or transition may contain a gap due to many socioeconomic or access-related issues. Another transition is upon completion, for you, dear reader, there is advice and the next line of flight is up to you.

For students, perhaps there is a selection of career or job placement to create a new line of flight from academia to the workforce. This trajectory is highly desired and one of the main purposes proposed for the molar lines (traditional progression and completion) of higher education. The purpose and impact of becoming on higher education must first be realized as an amalgamation of these intensifying and sometimes overpowering aspects of the student development processes.

Of particular interest in this text are the transitions and transformations related to student veterans. Both the “in” and “out” transitions occur for veterans, but under different circumstances. Veterans transitioning into higher


education are supplemented with support services, credit for military service initiatives (COHB 1004 passed in 2017), and educational funding mechanisms. This entry to higher education transitions also carries military service, training, and experience which imprints on this student demographic and the environments to which they have been accustomed. Veterans who are able to persist to graduation then must transition to a civilian work environment. For veteran students, there are major points of divergence from preexisting trajectories of lifestyle and culture to redefine. As mentioned thus far and in this perspective, the main responsibility is placed on the student, while society and higher education provide support.

The hope of a developing by first acknowledgement and awareness in the naming of *veteragogy* can provide a lens for analysis, if only existing in a frame, currently. I believe there is a paradigm shift that is either occurring or needs to occur. Colleges and institutions need to stop aiming to be veteran-friendly and instead be veteran-ready, just as they need to be Anthropocene-ready (no friendliness and welcoming about it). This principle proposition further applies to all categories and demographics of students. *Veteragogy* is an empowering contribution to the becoming academy. “To be worthy of our times, we need to be pragmatic: we need schemes of thought and figurations that enable us to account in empowering terms for the changes and transformations currently on the way.”\(^{57}\)

The reader’s affiliation to higher education is partly predictable by this author and completely unknown to the text. It is somewhat inconsequential to this text what transformation the reader has undergone or the purpose for which they selected this trajectory, but the exercised power of the reader in relation to the text postreading is completely different. Are you becoming a *rereader*, in which the text continues to participate with you? Are you becoming a *diffuser*, in which the text will find itself in participation with new readers due to its inter-actions with you? Are you becoming a *recycler*, in which the text will be reconfigured into a new existence? Are you all or none of the above? The intra-actions of this text will only be known to you, if at all. As Braidotti describes, “accounting for the affective impact of various items or data upon oneself is the process of remembering.”\(^{58}\)

The rationale of questioning presented applies to the material represented by the text as well. The Anthropocene knows not of the reader’s prior knowledge, altered knowledge, or future knowledge. However, the world will respond to the transition and transforms that have, are, and will occur with


\(^{58}\) Ibid., 167.
the reader. Decision time: Feel free to reread any section, entangle with the entire text again, follow up with a resource from the bibliography, encourage a veteran student learner/teacher, and/or go change the world (remember that it is changing you as well). Good Luck and God Speed!

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7. “Build the Wall”: Posthuman Encounters with Political Chalkings on Higher Education Campuses

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Abstract: During the 2016 U.S. presidential election, political chalkings on university campuses were rampant and displayed pro-Trump messages ranging from mundane to blatantly offensive. Responses to these chalkings focused on simplistic dialogues of freedom of speech, ignoring them as radical sites of visual activism, racial/political difference, and systemic oppression. Locating the chalkings in the contextual backdrop of the Anthropocene, this essay explores the 2016 political campus chalkings as complex sites where race/place/politics/education entangle through enactments of visual activism. Assembling photographs, articles, and postings related to the political campus chalkings on one particular university campus, we used a nomadic analysis and found that the chalkings complicate issues of race, gender, oppression, and equity. Thus, campus chalkings emerge as complex events that deserve complex analyses. Turning to a posthuman methodology allowed us to complicate our questions, attend to the materiality of the chalkings, and explore affirmative possibilities for higher education in the Anthropocene moving forward.

Keywords: nomadic analysis; visual activism; political chalkings; Anthropocene; posthumanism

Walking through university campuses, chalk messages drawn on concrete and brick (henceforth called chalkings) catch the eyes of passersby. These chalkings often nudge students to attend upcoming events, join organizations, and offer facts and statistics to curb dangerous behaviors such as drink-
ing and driving. However, during the U.S. presidential campaign of 2016, campus chalkings shifted from those created by sanctioned organizations in approved spaces to encompass an influx of messages by nonsanctioned groups in nonapproved spaces, showing support for one presidential candidate in particular, Donald Trump. These subversive instances of soft chalk etched onto concrete and bricks displayed pro-Trump messages from the mundane (“Trump 2016”), to the questionable (“Build the Wall”), to the blatantly offensive (“Fuck Mexicans”). Such chalkings occurred nationwide—Emory University, University of Michigan, University of California at San Diego, and at our institution, The University of Alabama (UA) among others—and were eventually known by the moniker #TheChalkening as the isolated incidences became a widespread movement in response to a call for organization via Twitter by pro-Trump students.1 Thus, the content of and subsequent re/actions invoked by these political chalkings spread beyond bounded educational spaces, garnering regional and then national attention through the highly connected thread between news and social media.

The most publicized chalking event occurred at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. After local news gave the story visibility, it was picked up and put in relation to other chalkings by Time magazine, the New York Times, Newsweek, The Atlantic, and even higher education platforms such as Inside-HigherEd.com and The Chronicle of Higher Education. While many of these articles were critical of the student backlash against the Emory pro-Trump chalkings, a student quoted in a New York Times article pointed out that the problem does not solely lie within the messages themselves but becomes more complex when the chalkings are put in relation to space and place.2 For instance, several political chalkings at the UA (“Build a Freaking Wall #yuge,” “Trump 2k16,” “#Feminism is Cancer,” “F*ck Your Feelings”) were positioned in front of the building that houses the Department of Gender and Race Studies and the Department of Religion.3 At Emory, chalkings (“Build a Wall,” “Accept the Inevitable”) appeared near the Black Student Union.4 At the University of California at San Diego, messages (“Build the Wall,”

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4 Rogers, “Pro-Trump Chalk Messages Cause Conflicts on College Campuses.”
“Deport them all,” “Mexico will pay”) were written near the Raza Resource Centro, a center that offers spaces for Latina/o and Chicana/o events and seeks to foster inclusivity. At each of these institutions, the histories and policies related to race create manifold lenses through which these events must be considered. Veiled through the seemingly innocent act of writing with chalk on sidewalk, political chalkings assume a new, powerful rhetoric when text-in-context brings forth complex layers of meaning.

In response to these chalkings, students, faculty, administration, and journalists debated the implications of these messages through a simplistic and largely humanistic lens citing questions of freedom of speech, safety, and racism. Many administrators responded with statements that referenced campus values of diversity and inclusion. As we unpack below, these statements often served to simplify rather than complicate, appease rather than confront. Missing from this dialogue, we believe, is an examination of these chalkings as complex and radical events that shift focus beyond human actants to consider nonhuman and ideological spaces of social and political difference and systemic oppression. In this paper, we use the Anthropocene as a contextual backdrop to the humanistic responses we observed in relation to the 2016 political chalkings. The Anthropocene is our current geological epoch in which the impact of human activities on geological process and ecological inhabitants has accelerated and is expected to linger indefinitely. As context for these events, the Anthropocene grounds our analysis in human accountability and responsibility, even as we move to consider the role of nonhuman and more-than-human forces.

Situating our work in the Anthropocene, we take a critical posthuman approach which assumes an embodied, embedded, and relational perspective as we interrogate these chalkings as events of visual activism. The concept of visual activism was the topic of a 2016 special issue of the *Journal of Visual Culture*, defined as “complex and ever-shifting relationships between visual cultures, artistic practices, and polemical strategies.” In our work, we expand the notion of “artistic practices” to encompass performances by nonartists who use forms of visual expression that infiltrate our visual culture. Mirzoeff


explained that visual culture is defined through the visual event—“the effect of a network in which subjects operate and which in turn conditions their freedom of action.” Visual culture operates in the spaces between events and social/political power, moving in-between visual text and context. In this paper, we are interested in the complexity of the in-between spaces of the 2016 political chalkings that reverberated across and through chalk, students, faculty, administrators, buildings, ideologies, politics, policies, and histories. We are also interested in moving beyond anthropocentric dualist, hierarchical, and human-centric analyses, even while acknowledging the ever-presence of humans in the events and in the analysis.

The complexity inherent in visual activism provides a basis for conceptualizing campus chalkings as fluid and multifaceted events aligned with critical posthumanism. Our analysis seeks to complicate the chalkings-as-visual activism and examine the ways in which such activism shifts relationality and nudges us toward thinking differently about the impact of text in/with our campus spaces. This work undertakes a critical posthuman analysis of campus chalkings using our photographs, online articles, and images and comments posted by students on social media between March and November of 2016. We inquire: What do these chalkings mean for/in higher education? What do chalkings do and how do we respond? How do chalkings, in relation to human and non-human actants, map new connections in/with higher education? And, finally, what does a critical posthuman analysis make possible in the Anthropocene? We begin our inquiry with an overview of the related literature and then further explicate our theoretical framework. We then move to the entanglement of chalkings with events and conclude with the implications for this work.

**Place, Race, and Activism: A Review of Higher Education Literature**

This paper explores the event of campus chalkings in the context of the anthropocentric present, where human and nonhuman life is inextricably intertwined with the fate of the earth. Enacting the intertwining of the Anthropocene, this section weaves in and out of macro- and micro-contexts, beginning with the place of the university campus as a specific set of forces and interactions. Research on the place or climate of universities helps us consider how place is resisted, regulated, and produced through

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10 Steffen et al., “The Anthropocene.”
institutional discourse. It also connects us to the notion of visual activism. These lines ground our understanding of the context and emergence of #TheChalkening as an event that is at once local and global, interacting with the specific contexts of institutions at the same time as it is happening in the Anthropocene.

Higher education research has suggested that campus climate, or the cumulation of institutional history, structural diversity, and psychological and behavioral climate, is a significant factor in student graduation and achievement. In a review of published literature, Harper and Hurtado found that not only do students of color perceive campus climate more negatively than white students, but that whiteness has a pervading and pervasive influence across spaces of higher education. Research in the past decade has emphasized this persistence of hostile climates in higher education while suggesting interventions for improving student experiences ranging from faculty mentorship to informal peer interactions. In addition, a historical overview of climate for LGBTQ students found that improving perceptions of campus climate over the past 70 years tracked with the implementation of more inclusive federal and state policies (such as legislation following the death of Matthew Shepard and the repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell). Research on campus climate, then, illustrates the entangled nature of higher education in the Anthropocene, a becoming that is affected not only by the local experiences in place, but the global space of policies, politics, and media coverage.

The implications for climate in higher education during the period leading up to the 2016 election point to the relational nature of space, where national discussions around rights for LGBTQ+ people, the #BlackLivesMat-

ter movement, and women exploded across national and local headlines. The confluence of these conversations on college campuses and the subsequent actions of students (e.g., chalkings, petitions, protests) suggest the relational and simultaneous production of place and space in the Anthropocene as one where the local and global are always in relation.\textsuperscript{15} The relations of local and global, and the actions they make possible, turn us to the notion of activism. Literature on activism in higher education maps a persistent culture of campus organizing from colonial times to the present\textsuperscript{16} and is often discussed in terms of the potential for student development and growth.\textsuperscript{17} For the purposes of this article, we consider not only what activism has done but what it \textit{does}, and specifically how the visual tactics of \#TheChalkening create the potential for activism to be productive in different ways. Situating visual tactics of activism in the context of Anthropocene makes possible an inquiry into the entangling forces and intensities that shape spaces of higher education. This is a movement away from an analysis of what the chalkings say (as flattened texts that can be read) to how the chalkings, as dynamic visual tactics of activism, interact with and linger on campuses, even as the marks fade away. We wonder how these particular acts of political expression shift our understandings of activism as deriving from making visible the voices of the underrepresented and minoritized to furthering the causes of the majority and even the elite. With these considerations in mind, below we take up the notion of disruption to consider how power and hegemonic structures are changed, maintained, or reinforced through visual tactics.\textsuperscript{18}

Our critical posthuman analysis maps the disruption(s) produced through \#TheChalkening and suggests how visual tactics make possible different disturbances in the Anthropocene through shifting and relational meanings, viewer collusion, and perceptual transformation.\textsuperscript{19} This is what we put forth as visual activism. Ahmed suggested that “the habits of the institutions are not

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Bryan-Wilson et al., “Editors’ Introduction.”
\end{itemize}
revealed unless you come up against them,” and a significant point in our analysis is how chalk-as-medium makes visible institutional habits in particular ways not afforded to other forms of resistance or activism. Cresswell stated that marking or tagging public space transforms the meaning of place, an idea which is furthered by Moreau and Alderman who explained that visual markings are a tactic for challenging both meanings of place, and who belongs or whose ideas count in places. In other words, through marking space with recognizable tags, messages, or images, writers claim and shape places. Chalk markings, then, become “spatial configurations at many levels” as they lay claim to physical space, suggest memories of place (who belongs/has belonged in this place), and disrupt, silence, or reaffirm counternarratives.

The Anthropocene and Critical Posthumanism

Though our interest in chalking events can be temporally situated within the eight months leading to the 2016 presidential election, the broader context for our inquiry falls within the Anthropocene. As Gildersleeve explained, the Anthropocene has forced humans to acknowledge the ways in which they are simultaneously transforming and transformed by the world since our impact is, now, undeniable. In terms of posthuman scholarship, Ulmer indicated: “the concept of the Anthropocene is particularly helpful, as it provides a lens to understand: 1) the pace at which post-industrial humanity has altered the planet, and 2) how bodies are ethically and politically situated within material environments.” Situating our analysis in the Anthropocene, then, centers the responsibility and accountability of human bodies, while creating an entry point for disruption through a heightened awareness of our entanglement with material environments.

Confronting and disrupting the human-centeredness of the Anthropocene, philosopher Rosi Braidotti has articulated a post-anthropocentric philosophy that acknowledges the vitality and generativity of nonhuman, prehuman, and animal life, zoé, in addition to the life on which anthropocentrism focuses, bios, or the social connection between humans. Even as we are living in the Anthropocene, “the historical moment when the Human has become a geologic force capable of affecting all life on this planet,” Braidotti called for attention to the forces of bios/zoé, and a reinscription of “posthuman bodies into radical relationality” as well as a subject position that assumes “political and ethical responsibility.” In other words, bios/zoé creates relational assemblages that work against humanist ideologies and create new understandings for “we” in the Anthropocene. This post-anthropocentric ethico-onto-epistemology considers a posthuman subject as intricately entangled with a complex and shifting world, in which what we know and how we know derives from an “embodied and embedded” accountability. It is important to note that the Anthropocene may involve posthumanism, but posthumanism does not necessarily involve the Anthropocene. Thus, the posthuman subject is entwined with the Anthropocene as the context and relations of becoming and relating in the world, even as posthumanism envisions a future beyond the anthropocentric present where “we” requires a different responsibility, accountability, and material engagement.

Through a relational, embodied, and embedded lens, we understand political campus chalkings as historically situated practices of collectivization and expression rather than isolated and static occurrences. They are also practices of visual activism that enact on and with various human and nonhuman entities. Thus, informing our work is Braidotti’s notion of critical posthumanism. Critical posthumanism assumes a political and processual ontology of embodied materialism that “foregrounds the force of affirmation as the empowering mode for both critical theory and political praxis.” To move into this affirmative mode, Braidotti asserted the need for ethical courage, a push for sustainable solutions, and a desire to combat the dangerous stasis of dominant modes of thinking and representation that accompany the unitary

26 Capitalization of “Human” is kept consistent with Braidotti’s original text.
27 Braidotti, The Posthuman, 5.
29 Ibid.
30 Braidotti, The Posthuman, 49.
subject. She actualizes a nomadic subject that is materially connected to the world, including its process, politics and ideologies, human and nonhuman actants, and its technologies. Posthuman nomadic interventions, then, seek to disrupt structures of power that exclude, disenfranchise, suppress, and marginalize. The nomadic subject operates through a feminist politics of location that requires embodied, embedded, and accountable “cartographies of power” that “illuminate and transform our knowledge of ourselves and of the world.”\textsuperscript{32} In brief, Braidotti asks subjects to consider the present material conditions of the Anthropocene, place themselves in relation to such conditions, and to conceptualize new, creative possibilities for change.

A resolute antihumanist, Braidotti has sought to envision a “posthuman condition [that] urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming.”\textsuperscript{33} The humanist centering of man and subsequent marginalization of not man (extending to a centering of white and marginalization of not white) creates reverberating problems with social, political, technological, and environmental implications. Thus, reenvisioning a nonunitary subject with an attention to the affirmative aspects of difference emerges as an important movement toward critical posthumanism, moving beyond the human-centered ethic of the Anthropocene. Through an acknowledgement of difference, critical posthumanism furthers the project of critical, postcolonial, and race theorists with the transformative disruption of hegemonic, exclusionary, and even violent tendencies toward “Others,” while also broadening the focus to critically consider human interconnection with nonhuman entities. Critical posthumanism urges us to think “from the here and now,”\textsuperscript{34} in the Anthropocentric present into the complexities and multiplicities that constitute the relational and always-already connected subjects of the future.

**Critical Posthuman Analysis**

From the here and now, we interrogate the very presence of chalkings on our and other campuses, and what the chalkings came to do. Our analysis was inspired by Braidotti’s critical posthuman theory, which encompasses five tenets: (1) transdisciplinarity; (2) bringing together critique with new creative representations of the subject; (3) nonlinearity (zigzagging across time


\textsuperscript{33} Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 12.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 194.
zones/identities); (4) defamiliarizing “habits of thought”\textsuperscript{35} by engaging the imagination and memory; and (5) cartographic accuracy of the subject-position entwined with ethical accountability. Methodologically, this theory is process-oriented, seeking to creatively (productively) critique hegemonic, exclusionary, and dominant events and ideologies through material, affective, and relational processes.\textsuperscript{36} Our analysis, then, moved with an attentiveness to these five tenets as we explore the political, social, and ethical entanglements of campus chalkings in the Anthropocene.

An important facet of critical posthuman philosophy—and, therefore, our analysis—is ethics. According to Braidotti, process-oriented thinking requires that “[c]ethically, each researcher […] has to negotiate the often dramatic shifts of perspective and location.”\textsuperscript{37} These ethical shifts of perspective and location include: (1) dislocating ethics from morality, beyond rights and justice toward transformation and becoming; (2) shifting from a rational and linear ontology toward a processual and affirmative ontology of relations; and (3) disengaging the subject from the logics of negative difference, toward affirmative otherness. Within these ethical shifts, critical posthuman analysis requires a politics of location, exploring the configuration of embodied memories and countermemories, political (dis-)identifications, and temporalities that coproduce critical posthuman subjects in the here-and-now.\textsuperscript{38}

Practicing the politics of location and extending from the tenets and ethics of critical posthumanism, we began our process by searching and compiling photographs, articles, and other public postings related to political campus chalkings from the first chalking at Emory University in March 2016 through the U.S. presidential election in November 2016. Even as we explored the sequential temporality of the events through a timeline, we were also attentive to the nonlinearity of the events as zigzagging and enfolding with one another, as well as how they plugged into one another to create new material and relational assemblages. Media articles often inspired us by placing chalkings and events in relation, which were then expanded through our embeddedness, our firsthand knowledge of our experiences as part of our campus. Our locational identities are UA faculty and student, thus it became essential for us to defamiliarize ourselves from habits of thinking as part of a higher education institution.\textsuperscript{39} In this way, we acknowledge the imprints of knowledge that persist in our analysis while remaining

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 169.
\textsuperscript{36} Rosi Braidotti, Nomadic Theory, 229.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Braidotti, The Posthuman.
always open to new understandings, sensations, memories, and the multiple perceptions that a posthuman analysis affords. Our method, then, is an iterative zigzagging between seeing, reading, writing, feeling, connecting, and theorizing. Endeavoring toward a critical posthuman understanding of these events in the Anthropocene, we cannot help but acknowledge our human imprint on this work. *We are in this.*

**Chalking Encounters**

*Have you seen them? The Trump chalkings? I see them every morning as I walk in.*

*Yes, they are at the Ferg [Student Center] as well. Did you hear about the ones this week in front of Gender and Race Studies?*

*I did. (sigh) Utterly divisive and sickening. I can’t believe this is happening on our campus.*

![Image of chalk messages](image1.png)

**Figure 7.1.** “Build It!” (left). “Trump” (right). Source: Authors.

The two of us sat in Kelly’s office in early November 2016 discussing, for the first time, the pro-Trump chalkings we had encountered in recent weeks. Our offices were on different parts of campus but the chalk messages in our locales were nearly identical, as were our embodied responses. Through the context of the Anthropocene, the materiality of politics and chalking vibrated as some chalkings were washed away by faculty or staff, whereas others lingered and affected with political, social, and historical significance. In the midst of a
three-month drought, a posthuman lens led us to also notice the ephemeral nature of chalk taking on a feeling of permanence as certain messages became mainstays in our daily cartographies. These personal encounters were now put in relation to campus and local newspaper articles that informed us of the University’s official statement: “As the University has strongly stated previously, hostile language and statements have no place on our campus community. These chalkings will be removed in accordance with the pre-approved guidelines….“⁴⁰ Students were also sharing their responses through media, blogs, and social media. One student wrote in an online opinion piece that the chalkings were threatening for many students: “The homophobic, sexist, and racist messages written throughout the campus create a very toxic campus climate… I am now afraid to walk alone especially at night around campus. These messages incite violence towards specific groups of students at our school. It’s a shame that on my own campus I feel that my identity is at risk.”⁴¹ Another news article included a quote from a senior undergraduate majoring in Women’s studies stating that the location of the chalkings on campus “feels like a personal affront” and that “the placement was an obvious ploy to be shocking and scary.”⁴²

While some students responded to the chalkings with sadness, fear, or anger in opposition, others responded differently. Posted on the website American Thinker, a blogger expressed: “But they’re only words, expressing opinions [sic] that aren’t allowed at the U of A. Aside from the use of an expletive—which would probably offend even some Trump supporters—the notion that there are certain words that in and of themselves are ‘hostile’ goes against everything the First Amendment stands for. That the U of A and other colleges refuse to recognize that is the tragedy of our time.”⁴³ Media coverage reiterated the freedom of speech angle of the chalkings, debating if the markings qualified as “harassment or [an] incitement of violence that

⁴⁰ Garrison, “Pro-Trump Chalkings Discovered.”
bars a student from gaining access to an educational opportunity.”

This focus shifted the conversation into legalese, deflecting what the chalkings did, and how through the chalkings, supporting a political candidate became hate speech. As visual tactics in the Anthropocene, the chalkings transcended their original meaning (support for a particular candidate), vibrating and resonating with other bodies and spaces, becoming tactics of harassment, racism, and xenophobia.

I’ve been researching instances of chalking on other campuses, and this happened everywhere…

#TheChalkening folds space and time, zigzagging back to March 2016, and protests at Emory around chalk messages that ranged from “Trump” to “Build the Wall,” messages that eerily echoed those on our own campus. In an open letter to campus administrators, Emory students wrote: “Donald Trump is no longer a joke. Supporting him, repeating his catchphrases, and arguing for his plausibility as the leader of the free world has become a threat to our democracy and an implicit attack on the Muslim, Latinx, Black, and other communities… this is not political expression; this is hate speech.” The Emory students’ letter maps the slippages in meaning and affect that legal questions skirt over, as Trump slips from reality TV star to hate speech, from laughable to threatening. Simultaneously, text repeating across concrete on campuses throughout the country connects the national climate and local contexts. Rhetoric repeats, too, as Emory’s administrative response echoes that of our institution that followed eight months later: “… as an academic community, we must value and encourage the expression of ideas, vigorous debate, speech, dissent, and protest. At the same time, our commitment to respect, civility, and inclusion calls us to provide a safe environment that inspires and supports courageous inquiry.”

The text of chalkings and responses collapses across time and geography, mapping the cartography of the Anthropocene. A Twitter account with ties to the South

44 Rogers, “Pro-Trump Chalk Messages Cause Conflicts on College Campuses.”
46 Ibid.
and allusions to “old row” fraternities, @OldRowOfficial, tweeted the week following the Emory chalking and urged for more, offering a gift card to their online store for the “the best campus chalking.” #TheChalkening was born and, two days later, the very first Trump chalkings appeared on our campus on what many considered sacred ground—in front of the football stadium near a Nick Saban statue.

We were pulled down the rabbit hole of #TheChalkening, between Twitter handles, student newspapers, university responses, and lines of chalk dotting the country. Tracing the forces intersecting the Anthropocene was dizzying, and we returned to Braidotti to seek an affirmative response.

Jumping to October and November of 2016, we mapped outward from our particular time and place as ground for political and ethical accountability, asking: what other bodies and materials connected to #TheChalkening and made this event possible?

**Do you remember, there was also the counter-chalking on campus? #ChampionsDontHate?**

Hate speech abounded through the chalkings and beyond. A UA student was suspended the month before #TheChalkening spread to our campus after posting a racist and threatening message on an online student ticket exchange. This event entangled with Bama Sits, a local student movement inspired by actions taken by NFL player Colin Kaepernick who sat during the National Anthem to protest “racial profiling, police brutality and a discriminatory criminal justice system,” and Bama Stands, a counterprotest that aimed to exhibit “respect” and patriotism.

In the Anthropocene, mundane acts like sitting and standing, mundane objects like sidewalk and chalk, as well

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48 Nick Saban is Head Football Coach at the University of Alabama.
50 Braidotti, “Nomadic Ethics.”
as campus spaces for learning (buildings) and entertainment (the stadium) plugged into each other, forming new posthuman connections, assuming new meanings, and arouses new emotions. Amidst the lines of affect zipping through these events and objects, anger and hate infiltrated social media, prompting an opinion piece in the student newspaper that coined the phrase #ChampionsDontHate. The student columnist called upon students to “… work together to change this culture. We are one...one family of peers and one Bama nation. If we focus on the positive things that bind us, our commonality, we will reflect a culture worthy of champions.”

It is difficult to tell if it was disdain for hatred that spurred the #ChampionsDontHate movement, or if it was fear that racialized politics and activism were permeating into spaces that were once safe—spaces that were too visible, too close for comfort. Perhaps, it was both.

To us, the November chalkings just appeared. Absent one day and then present the next. Until our critical posthuman analysis, we were not aware of the #TheChalking or its possible genesis on our campus through tweets by @OldRowOfficial both in April ("Whoever sends in the best campus chalking tomorrow gets a $100 Old Row gift card. Together we can Make Trolling Great Again") and late October of 2016 ("Cover your campus. Our voices will be heard. Leave no safe space unchalked”… “#TheChalking is TONIGHT. Good luck deplorables” … “Free Speech on campus will not be silenced.”).

We had not fully considered the complexity of entanglement of chalk with walls, sidewalks, visual activism, Bama Sits, Bama Stands, #ChampionsDontHate, Gender and Race Studies, media, drought, Presidential candidates, Emory University, students, the stadium, social media, numerous other universities, to name a few. To be sure, there are likely many other bodies (human and nonhuman alike) that were part of these events, that have and will exceed our knowing. We did, however, embody the chalkings through the known history of our university. A history that includes Governor George Wallace’s 1963 stand in the schoolhouse door—an act intended to both symbolically and literally halt institutional integration—as well as one through which persistent practices of sorority segregation made national headlines in 2013.

We moved beyond anthropocentrism into a critical posthuman space through zigzagging across time, space, and bodies, and our mapping opened up new

lines which entangle with the present with an almost prophetic capacity. New connections were/are formed.

**Implications and Conclusion**

As we conclude, we return to Braidotti’s (2006) emphasis on ethics and humbly acknowledge our positionalities.\(^{56}\) We can engage in an analysis of the chalkings and say “here are some ways we can move forward/things we can do.” However, as cis-gender white women, we realize we are privileged because, even as our bodies were/are affected, we often feel safe on our campuses and in our communities. We realize that we can write things, do things, and feel a certain optimism because we move rather easily within a society where we are valued simply because of the color of our skin. We realize, too, that optimism might not be attainable, or even desirable, for others—particularly those who have been historically marginalized. To be sure, events like the 2016 campus political chalkings affect(ed) bodies differently and we can only point to our experiences through *our* politics of location.

Expanding from our bodies outward, our analysis sought to re/attach meanings and histories that were lost in the slippage of political circulation—connecting human, nonhuman, and more than human bodies.\(^{57}\) This work of reattachment in the Anthropocene enacts a posthuman politics of location, activating embedded and embodied memories, resisting dominant humanist representations, and providing the ground for accountability.\(^{58}\) In what follows, we consider implications of these connections and suggest how critical posthumanism might make possible affirmative responses and activism in the context of the Anthropocene.

A simple reading of these chalkings has the potential to paint them as destructive happenings on our, and other, campuses. Indeed, we believe the real danger in conducting critical work is focusing on criticality as linguistic-action-yet-bodily-stasis rather than embracing Braidotti’s invitation toward a new conceptual creativity which inspires critique as active-ism.\(^{59}\) With this in mind, we conclude with an eye toward “putting the active back in activism”\(^{60}\) and look to both real and conceptually creative possibilities for change. As one example, we recently learned about students in an African American Studies class who, in November 2016, became visual activists by

\(^{56}\) Braidotti, *Transpositions.*

\(^{57}\) Ahmed, *On Being Included.*

\(^{58}\) Braidotti, *Transpositions.*

\(^{59}\) Braidotti, *The Posthuman.*

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 11.
creating their own response to the Trump chalkings (with encouragement from their instructor). Armed with chalk, these students directed attention to a relatively unknown and almost hidden spot on our campus—a slave cemetery. A university marker at the site names the slaves as “owned by The University of Alabama and by Faculty” and includes an apology. The students, embodying a critical posthuman ethic, wrote chalk messages and drew lines leading to this place of racial significance, urging acknowledgement of both marginalized places and the historical and continual marginalization of bodies of color on our campus. This form of visual activism serves as one response to the question *What do chalkings do and how do we respond?* As a student told Maureen, when events surrounding the election made the class feel powerless, they felt moved to do *something*. Thus, quite simply, our responses can productively do *something*, even on a small scale.

In addition to micro-level actions like the student chalkings above, we should also hold our institutions accountable for how they publicly respond to events like the 2016 political chalkings. Evident in the two campus statements discussed previously, moments of disruption or disturbance invoked through campus activism reveal gaps in values between institutions and students, even as institutions move to adopt language of diversity and inclusion in institutional messaging. Anderson and Span described the gap between nonperformative diversity language and action as a persistent and embedded “value gap” where “the silence, resistance, and failure…to acknowledge and address the harms [of persistent acts of racism] reinforce the refrain that black lives are not valued as much as white lives.” This point is further emphasized by Moore and Bell who explored an interlocking and reciprocal relationship between overt acts of racism, colorblind racism, and the persistence of white institutional spaces.

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and structures. Thus, the statements by the UA and Emory, which emphasize that the chalking messages “have no place on our campus community,” serve to delink the acts from the culture of the campus, and in doing so reaffirm the persistence of colorblind racist ideologies.

Revisiting our analysis in January 2018, we again witness our institution in the national headlines. This week, on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, a student posted videos to Instagram in which she used a racial slur repeatedly and unabashedly. The video enacted on/with bodies at our institution and beyond, and, once more, the two of us were confronted with the complex relationship between text and context in our visual culture. Within 24 hours, the woman’s sorority and the UA swiftly responded, the woman “no longer enrolled,” and the university’s president sending an e-mail to faculty, staff, and students condemning the act. Beginning by expressing his “personal disgust and disappointment,” President Bell’s statement called the videos “racist and disturbing” and “highly offensive and deeply hurtful.” He also “apologize[d] to everyone who [had] seen the videos and been hurt by this hateful, ignorant and offensive behavior.” Through our analysis of campus statements of the 2016 chalkings—from Emory to UA, and numerous others not mentioned here—we have consistently seen institutional rhetoric as a failure to speak out against both overt racism and colorblind racism. In other words, rhetoric can be a way that institutions continue to not act on issues of inequity. Juxtaposing the chalking statements, our president’s response to the recent videos demonstrated a naming of the act as racist as well as an overt rejection of such behavior. To be sure, neither racism nor sexism are singularly problems of Alabama nor of the South, as we witnessed in the chalkings that appeared nationwide. They are omnipresent. To counter the embeddedness of sexism and racism, statements such as these that overtly reject and name racism are a beginning, yet we must also critically orient ourselves to understand how these systems are produced by institutions, recognizing the pervasiveness of colorblind racism. These orientations are needed now if, as Ahmed cautions, “we are to learn how not to reproduce what we inherit.” Thus, we urge those in higher education to question restrained rhetoric and to demand more thoughtful responses that name the complicated histories and recognize the continued presence of racism (and sexism) in our institutional spaces.

65 Ibid.
67 Ahmed, On Being Included.
68 Ibid., 182.
Zigzagging across time and place as we consider new relationalities, our critical posthuman analysis of the 2016 political campus chalkings reaffirmed the urgent need for higher education, and researchers in the Anthropocene, to explore events and visual activism through a more complex, critical, and active lens. The processes of naming, apparent in President Bell’s e-mail, and making visible, as seen in the cemetery counter-chalkings are, we believe, two affirmative ways to address institutional complexities that also align with a critical posthuman desire for forward-looking conceptual change. As our analysis demonstrates, we are now more entangled with the world than ever before, an entanglement that has implications for human and non-human bodies. A posthuman ethic makes visible the value of reflexive and accountable shifts that are not outlined by best practices or guided by dualistic responses of right or wrong, but are nevertheless integral for moving ethically and affirmatively forward. As we reflect on the past year and a half and look to the future to come, we urge practitioners and researchers in higher education to act from their own politics of location, moving from spaces that are specific, grounded, and accountable while striving for responses to our (often relentless and dizzying) present that are affirmative and ethical. Moving forward, individuals in higher education must do more than release statements indicating they value diversity, equity, and inclusion; instead they must start the long and arduous process of interrogating why such statements are even necessary, as well as what they do to all the bodies involved.

References


Abstract: This essay engages with the notion of Anthropocene as both context and concept, and how it might be useful as a tool of inquiry in the study of higher education, specifically with populations that I argue are deemed by society as less than human/non-human, that is, the undocumented alien bodies dwelling in higher education spaces. The concept of the Anthropocene demands a shift in our thinking about the social world, specifically notions of agency and identity in relation to culture. This primarily conceptual argument connects the Anthropocene as context and concept to the experiences of undocumented youth activists in higher education settings. The essay experiments with thinking about the Anthropocene as context, connecting its features to that of a risk society that impacts the identity formation and fragmented experiences of undocumented youth activists, and as a concept, utilizing the example and data from a current critical qualitative and ethnographic study of undocumented immigrant youth in a university in a southern state. Data suggests that the concept of the Anthropocene renders visible the fragmented dwellings of undocumented youth activists and to read such fragmentation as productive, democratic, and transformative.

Keywords: Anthropocene, risk society, undocumented youth activism, ethnography

With what recently feels like the end of world upon us as hurricanes terrorize various parts of the United States, fires sweep across the California coast, and not to mention a doomsday political situation that constantly promotes racism and xenophobia with grave consequences for economic and emotional well-being of the country, it is fitting to consider social relations in societal...
and educational spaces in the context of uncertainty, fragmentation, and dissonance. Vaughn (2016) contends that there is “compelling evidence to show humanity’s impact on the Earth, oceans, and wildlife,”1 pushing us into a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene. As scientists consider the role of human agency in this ecological and environmental shift, social theorists and social scientists are investigating additional social and political relations and actions in this period. For instance, Laird (2018) frames the Anthropocene as an educational problem. This is a useful entry point for this article’s discussion of the context of the Anthropocene, and implications for the material realities of humans, and how the concept applies to higher education spaces that undocumented students in the current study invisibly inhabit. Laird (2018) posits:

The Anthropocene emphasizes that all of us are collectively responsible for the future of the world. Society will have to legitimize science and technology, focusing in particular on education as one of the most powerful tools for transformation, in order to make the Anthropocene long-lasting, equitable, and worth-living and as a concept, acknowledges educated human agency’s power to change Earth environments for worse and for better, including its consequences for a place’s habitability.2

Noting the role humans have played in the destruction of ecological, social, and political spheres of daily life, this article considers the Anthropocene as context and as a concept that beckons us to rethink higher education spaces and marginalized bodies occupying them such as undocumented college students (hereafter referred to as: undocumented youth). More specifically, this article takes up the specific new materialist aspects of habitability and dwelling to consider undocumented youth activism and how it helps them forge identities that resist their positioning as “aliens”/nonhuman in political rhetoric and state law and policy discourse, exhibit agency, and reconfigure spaces.3 It is their very presence as “aliens” or nonhuman that enables their fragmented realities and actions to dismantle traditional boundaries and aims of neoliberal higher education spaces through their activism.

Other social theorists have long considered the concept of society, though not used the word Anthropocene, to describe the current social, political, and

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3 Sophia Rodriguez and Timothy Monreal, “This State is Racist.”: Policy Problematization and Undocumented Youth Experiences in the New Latino South.” Educational Policy 31, no. 6 (2016): 764–800.
ecological shifts as products and manifestations of modernity. In addition, sociologists discuss “risks” in/to society—what I refer to as the anthropocentric risk-society—and how minoritized working class youth in particular face scarce social resources, limited opportunities, environmental racism, resulting in division and dissonance and disunity in many communities.

The fragmentation and uncertainty that characterizes the era of the Anthropocene is an opportunity to also consider such a context and concept in the space of higher education. As such, this article connects to the higher education space by asserting its current form needs to be decentralized and dismantled of its disciplinary structures. This will make visible the dwellings and inhabitants of such as those individuals and groups considered “alien” to society and school spaces like the undocumented college students in this study. By considering the experiences of minoritized groups, since they tend to disproportionately be impacted by the risk society (defined below), the article considers several questions about this context and concept of the Anthropocene: Who gets to be visible and dwell and inhabit the neoliberal spaces of higher education? How can those subjects deemed aliens in society, that is, undocumented youth activists, reconfigure spaces so that their fragmented activism and sense of self is understood in the sociopolitical contexts of an anthropocentric risk society that faces considerable damage to economic and emotional stability?

**Purpose**

This paper will engage with the notion of Anthropocene as both context and concept, and how it might be useful as a tool of inquiry in the study of higher education, specifically with populations that I argue are deemed by society as less than human/nonhuman, that is, the undocumented alien bodies dwelling in higher education spaces. The concept of the Anthropocene demands a shift in our thinking about the social world, specifically notions of agency and identity in relation to culture. Carstens contends that the “crisis in higher education” brought on by the concept of the Anthropocene demands that we engage with the social world in nuanced ways by thinking about the “uncanny” or things that are not viable within normative conceptions of schooling and learning. This means, scholars need to acknowledge the “onto-epistemology of entangled kinships between humans

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and a multitude of nonhuman others,” requiring that we “come to terms with uncomfortable knowledge about the unhinged world that humans have brought into existence” and critically engage with “the unfamiliar, strange and uncomfortable.”

By crisis, Rousell elucidates that with higher education, with the onset and more recent visibility of the Anthropocene as context, tensions and contradictions emerge. For instance, Rousell explains that today’s higher education spaces are no longer instilling liberal humanist values of democracy and social justice but rather managerial approaches that focus on instrumental outcomes tied to every unit of work in a highly neoliberal environment. This vision of the university, the site of higher education, allegedly embodies democratic knowledge production and practice for a global world. And yet, Gildersleeve argues two important conditions that govern higher education that speak to this tension in serving students in the name of democratic values and social justice: neoliberalism and the Anthropocene. Gildersleeve further argues, “Neoliberalism as a condition of higher education spaces is understood as one of a particularized governmentality of things focused on rendering reality using technologies of hyper-individualism, hyper-surveillance, economic determinants of productivity, and competitive entrepreneurialism” while the Anthropocene is the “recognition of the social consequences for our current geologic period—one in which humans are the primary agents of affect and effect on the planet.” The tensions that emerge from these conditions both expand and restrict higher education spaces, especially for undocumented students navigating contested terrain without legal status and yet with a right to be there. These two conditions force scholars to consider knowledge production and relations in spaces of potential interdisciplinary transformation. And further still, these conditions challenge theorists and researchers to grapple with the philosophical questions related to education, agency, and knowledge cultivation in viable spaces among a nuanced set of relations.

8 Ibid., 143.
10 Ibid., 286.
Considering this, the article experiments with thinking about the Anthropocene as context, connecting its features to that of a risk society,\(^1\) and as a concept, utilizing the example and data from a current critical qualitative and ethnographic study of undocumented Latinx immigrant youth in a university in a southern state to illustrate the “disaster and hope” embedded in the anthropocentric context of higher education.\(^2\) To this end, the article speaks also to the potential conceptualization of a relational space that the Anthropocene offers since it calls attention to normative and neoliberal features of higher education spaces. Within the context and concept of the Anthropocene, this article excavates the “crisis of feelings” in such spaces along with the “anthro” (live/d) and what is considered “obscene” (outside/beyond the norm of what is allowable in normative conceptions of society), particularly by underscoring the experiences of invisible subjects such as undocumented young people in higher education, who are quite literally restricted from higher education institutions in a southern state.\(^3\) Highlighting the ways in which undocumented youth use space calls for new, posthumanist conceptions of identity, agency, and space. While the paper is experimentally conceptual for the most part, it utilizes data from a qualitative, critical ethnography of undocumented youth organizing in higher education settings with data sources such as semi-structured interviews and participant observations of activities involving the youth to illustrate how we might rethink the spaces of learning in an era of the Anthropocene as hierarchical understandings of learning are dismantled, flattened, and reconfigured by such aliens as undocumented youth. Finally, the article argues for reconceptualizing the Anthropocene because it allows us to fruitfully render visible the fragmented dwellings of undocumented youth activism and to read such fragmentation as productive, democratic, and transformative.

**Context**

**Situating the Anthropocene**

As mentioned, this article provides a brief description of the Anthropocene as context and concept. To take the first, the Anthropocene is considered a geologic period in which humanity enters. Rousell, in his study of the Anthropocene thesis and its implications for higher education, explains that this period

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2. Rousell, “Dwelling in the Anthropocene,” 137–53
is characterized by changes in the Earth’s ecosystems, including “sea level rises, global temperature increases, levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide, rates of anthropogenic denudation, and human population growth.”\textsuperscript{14}

Rousell reviews the various scientific explanations of the origin of the Anthropocene, explaining how some scientists urge the first stage dates back to the industrial revolution, which paved the way for the second stage after the atomic bombs in the 1940s. Finally, Rousell ties together scientific and social science research to explain the current third stage of the Anthropocene, which contends that humans are a “geologic force” whose activities impact the “structure and function of the Earth System as a whole” through human consumer choices and other decision-making practices at many levels.\textsuperscript{15} More recently, scientists and social scientists are also considering the historical social inequalities embedded in society that set the conditions for the acceleration of this anthropocentric phase. This is taken up later in the article by examining the ways that the anthropocentric era connects with what social theorist Beck refers to as the risk society.\textsuperscript{16}

Related to humans’ role and decision-making processes, Gildersleeve posits, “We invent nature, with every decision we make socially and politically” and the Anthropocene as context (and concept) urges researchers and theorists to consider new ways of being and potentially “fracture” dominant ways of being and knowing in the humanist traditions.\textsuperscript{17} Thus, in the context of the Anthropocene, identity and agency become critical to understanding human life and how humans inhabit and navigate social and political realities. Further, Gildersleeve argues that identity and agency are linked to “surveillance mechanisms” in this anthropocentric society since such mechanisms are features of political and social life, and what I will liken below to Beck’s risk society.\textsuperscript{18} In both the Anthropocene era and risk society, relations and human conditions are governed and managed by larger political and technological mechanisms that reconfigure human identity and agency. Considering this context, Susan Laird thinks through philosophical and theoretical questions related to education by asking if educators ought to adopt, form, transmit, teach ways of living to maintain, if not enhance, Earth’s habitability, especially its habitability for diverse children.\textsuperscript{19} This article adds to this initial question by thinking about what it means to inhabit [higher education], or what

\textsuperscript{14} Rousell, “Dwelling in the Anthropocene,” 139.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Beck, \textit{Risk Society}.
\textsuperscript{17} Gildersleeve, “The Neoliberal Academy of the Anthropocene,” 286.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 288.
\textsuperscript{19} Laird, “School Lunch Matters,” 17–33.
Rousell likens to “dwelling,” spaces in an anthropocentric risk society. Such a current condition calls attention to the dismantling of traditional binaries and disciplinary traditions, or who should/could be included or excluded from an educative space, or what counts as education or noneducation for students like those in my research deemed illegal/legal and thus excluded from many higher education spaces.

Taking into consideration this notion of habitability and dwelling within an educative space and what counts as educating or being educated within the anthropocentric risk society, Laird argues that the Anthropocene demands new learning from cultural wealth, meaning that humans must learn to live through it—with, despite, after, before, amid, among, away from, and against its myriad harms, possible and actual, especially its harms to children. Laird underscores the challenges of the era of risks and ecological disasters and the confusion about the relationship between nature and culture, specifically the role educators play in preparing young people for a global society.

**What is the risk? The Anthropocene and the risk society**

As scientists uncover features of the Anthropocene society, social theorists have already begun the intellectual digging needed to investigate the material consequences of our consumerist and capitalist mindsets and choices since modernity. Rousell explains, “Black holes, radioactive waste, the gross machinery of capitalism and global warming are examples of hyperobjects that exist in scales of space and time that are too large and diffuse for humans to register. Climate change and nuclear radiation cannot be perceived directly as such, and their effects far exceed the scale of human time. Yet, despite our inability to perceive them directly, hyperobjects have come to define the material conditions of everyday life in the Anthropocene.” The imperceptibility of the consequences, what social theorist Beck calls risks, is a defining feature of the Anthropocene and risk society. While Beck does not utilize the geologic language, his theorizing of a risk society is akin to the features of the anthropocentric era. The imperceptibility of risks in the anthropocentric risk society enables Beck to consider the “surveillance” mechanisms and technologies that then emerge in order to manage said potential risk, despite not knowing what the risk is given that its latent effects are invisible until they are not. Moreover, Beck explains that in Western, capitalistic societies the perception of risk is heightened and perpetuated through mass communication.
and antiscientific technologies as a product of modernity. This means that the notion of progress, initiated by the rationalist, humanist movement of the Enlightenment that became the cornerstone of modern industrial societies, is devolving into an antiscientific age of criticism, or what he names a “risk society” toward facts, truth, or reality.²³ Beck, like other scholars of the Anthropocene, understand us to be in a period of transition of which capitalism and modern modes of production have imbued systemic irreversible harm to the planet. Now, societies are faced with grappling with these effects.

The anthropocentric risk society appears to pose disastrous effects on the climate and a series of unknowns that then give birth to governmental surveillance mechanisms and the proliferation of risk discourse about particular physical risks -- that is, climate change, toxins, and radioactivity -- and additional symbolic risks about particular groups in societies such as the immigrant and refugee crises as a result of migratory flows from climate change.²⁴ What is most troubling in this phase is that risk is both unknown and in need of being managed. Beck posits:

> What becomes clear in risk discussions are the fissures and gaps between scientific and social rationality in dealing with the hazardous potential of civilization. The two sides talk past each other. Social movements raise questions that are not answered by the risk technicians at all, and the technicians answer questions which miss the point of what was really asked and what feeds public anxiety.²⁵

Because risk in the Anthropocene is both known and unknown, evident and considered yet-to-come, it has something to do with “anticipation, with destruction that has not yet happened but is threatening.”²⁶ Thus, social action and movements grapple with the present, but act in relation to the future that is unknown, and as such take on new forms when relations are contingent, unpredictable, and unfixed.

This context is significant because it opens up opportunities to consider social and political relations along with nature and culture relations. The anthropocentric risk society also proffers an opportunity to take seriously how this lived experience of oscillating between disaster and hope manifests in learning spaces such as where knowledge is supposed to be produced, that is, at the university setting.

²³ Beck, Risk Society.
²⁵ Beck, Risk Society, 30.
²⁶ Ibid., 33.
Higher education spaces in the anthropocentric risk society

Given this context, this section connects the anthropocentric risk society with the space of higher education as the article moves toward utilizing the Anthropocene to make a conceptual call for rethinking the higher education space and those dwelling in it. Rousell argues:

Universities can be readily identified as hotspots for cultural change in response to the rapidly shifting environmental conditions of the Anthropocene. University campuses are places in which technological, creative, scientific, and philosophical advancements are often made on a daily basis and in close proximity with one another. Many of these advancements have the potential to address the social and ecological issues of our times. Yet these rich opportunities for transdisciplinary teaching, learning and research are often left unacknowledged.\(^{27}\)

While the university might be a potential place of transformation, it currently exists in a vacuum of neoliberal practices and individuation, lacking creativity, relationships, and social action. Leinfelder examines the challenges of higher education spaces in relation to the Anthropocene, where the former is a series of “isolated disciplines” within an “interconnected world” of the Anthropocene.\(^{28}\) One of the ways that more recent scholars suggest we rethink the higher education space is by connecting what happens within the walls of academia to a broader community in the name of inclusion as the Anthropocene era is decentralizing and deregulating social relations and learning spaces to consider nuanced expressions of learning.

While this article builds on the assumption of breaking down disciplinary boundaries fundamental to the Anthropocene, it takes a nuanced approach to rethink learning spaces in nonhierarchical ways. In other words, the paper considers a potential new creative ecological model for higher education spaces by considering the voices and experiences of marginalized and invisible individuals such as undocumented youth. Peters and Besley assist to reimagine a creative, experimental higher education space in risky times. They urge that learning be considered through the experiences of students’ learning processes.\(^{29}\) If this student experience is central, then studying the micro-level moments of learning becomes key to our understanding of the process rather than a product that is intended to resemble that knowledge was

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acquired, knowledge aligned to a rubric or standard no less. The next section begins to experiment with the conceptual call that the anthropocentric risk society necessitates in the spaces of higher education in relation to the populations in my research. Using undocumented youth and their activism and organizing, I share their perceptions of the higher education space in its neoliberal, stratified structures that exclude and render them invisible if not restricted in other ways from capitalizing on the learning that it offers. Instead, through their narratives, I argue that we consider their experiences as part of the process-oriented, activist, and participatory learning that ought to be part of the fabric of this nuanced, decentralized anthropocentric risk society outlined above.

**Anthropocene as Concept: Disrupting the Normative Anthropocentric Risk Society through Undocumented Youth Activism in Higher Education Spaces**

This section considers how we may begin to conceptualize higher education spaces of learning in this era of the Anthropocene; this section argues for a new materialist, posthuman conception of space. In this conception, space is relational, dynamic, and unfixed. I have argued elsewhere that new materialist relational space theory is one way to disrupt normative neoliberal ideologies and practices embedded in learning spaces.30

**New materialist perspectives on space**

Given that the Anthropocene thesis in higher education calls for moving beyond humanist conceptions of spaces of learning as socially constructed,31 the analytic move of posthumanist philosophers is to connect with new materialism that centralizes sensation, perception, and material realities. To consider the material realities of higher education spaces that undocumented youth are inhabiting and dwelling in, I turn to relational space theory.32 Rather than centering spatial relations on the subject, Deleuze considers the death of the subject.33 This is a shift in how the subject engages with rather

than constructs a space, forges connections, reconfigures learning processes. Rousell (2016) argues, “Education [spaces] then becomes a particular mode of perceptual attunement and topological experimentiation with the affordances and constraints of the learning environment,” referring to what Deleuze calls (1990) an “education of the senses.”

Thinking about an “education of the senses” from Deleuze, I have argued previously that we might think about youth experiences productively to uncover the relationality and materiality of youthspace. To conceptualize youthspace, I consider the materiality or the matter of things, and the plural, complex, and unevenness of human experience as it relates to the study of young people, particularly from minoritized backgrounds such as the undocumented youth in my current research. The notion of youthspace is conceived as emergent, relational, and spatial, but includes detailed accounts of how youth produced, disrupted, and made sense of space and the relations therein. A second aspect of new materialism that is useful is the focus on power, specifically how power operates and is/how can be disrupted in the social production of space. Scholars have extended this overarching focus on power to empirical research by seeking to address the “desires, feelings, and meanings” that engender social reproduction processes. Further, Rodriguez argues, these materially, relationally, socially, and spatially produced desires demystify and further reject social structures such as neoliberalism, racism or heteronormativity, for instance, as the repetitive “reason” for why things are the way they are, that is, how societies function.

Next, I apply this new materialist, posthuman inspired concept of youthspace to the undocumented youth in my current research, and the additional dimension of what I term fragmented dwelling that the undocumented youth experience in this space. A brief note on the study follows, and then a discussion of youth experiences in relation to the themes of dwelling and fragmented spaces of higher education. Since this article is primarily conceptual, I note here that the data offered is to share the experiences of undocumented youth.

35 Deleuze, The Logic of Sense, 145.
38 Braidotti, Metamorphoses, 159; Rodriguez, “Uncovering Youth Spaces.”
39 Rodriguez, “Uncovering Youth Spaces.”
youth in fragmented, decentralized higher education spaces of the Anthropocene as a way to underscore opportunities for new creativity and transformation.

This data is from a critical ethnography of undocumented youth organizers in higher education. They attend a small Quaker institution in a southern state that is known for its inclusion and tolerance. All students in the project are recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program under the Obama administration. Participants were recruited through the researcher’s networks as a faculty member at a university in the area, and an initial connection made with an undocumented youth working on campus that reached out given the researcher’s area of expertise. From this initial connection with Amelia, additional participants were recruited through snowball sampling and further connections with local community organizers. All participants (n = 10) reached out to the researcher via phone on their own and then met in person. The participants were told the purpose of the study and agreed to share their experiences being organizers and activists on their university campus, in the community, and in more state and national venues when they engaged in organizing activities. Semi-structured interviews typically lasted from 60 to 120 minutes. The participant included in this article, Juana, was interviewed multiple times. The overarching research questions for the study included: (1) How are Latinx immigrant young people responding to policies that marginalize them in the Post-Trump election era? (2) What evidence exists of Latinx movement building in local communities?

Participant-observations were also conducted of organizing activities, including protests, workshops, community meetings, and vigils during a six-month period in 2017. One event included a protest and vigil outside of the local ICE agency where undocumented immigrants along with others painted fake tombstones. Undocumented immigrant youth activities read the stories of undocumented young people who had been living in this southern state and had been recently deported, which resulted in their death upon their return to Central America due to gang violence there. Another such event that

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41 At the time of this article’s preparation, I was six months into the study, but will continue engaging in participant-observations through 2017–2018 academic year. A brief note on pseudonyms. All names have been assigned pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants. In addition, the cities also have pseudonyms. The city of Hillsview has several universities and colleges in it, one of which is where the participants attend, Hillsboro College. The city where Juana (participant) lives is less than an hour away, and I call it Crosstown; it also has a major university there, University of Crosstown.
I attended was a weekend workshop organized by undocumented youth at this university specifically for Latinx, undocumented and documented immigrant parents to help them learn about and navigate the college admissions process. I was a speaker on a panel for the parents along with other faculty and college admissions counselors while the undocumented youth organizers led and facilitated all day sessions for the high school Latinx immigrants. As an ethnographer, I attended and participated if asked to by the youth. These events and activities shed light on their activist tendencies and the dwelling they did on the campus space, whether it was a weekend or not, and beyond the space where they carried their sets of relations to other spaces such as the ICE office.

*Fragmented Dwellings: Undocumented Youth Activism in Higher Education in a Southern State*

**Dwelling spaces as sites of fragmentation**

Taking into account how Deleuzian relational space theory decenters the subject, this next section considers how social spaces are fragmented, utilizing experiences of the undocumented young people to help elucidate their fragmented realities within the space of higher education. Knowing that higher education typically maintains normative understandings of learning and borders on transactional experiences of teaching and learning, and is governed by neoliberal ideologies, with the ethnographic lived experiences of these undocumented young people, I hope to shed light on larger philosophical questions to be considered in the era of the anthropocentric risk society where opportunities for success are contingent upon resources, standardization and transactional, entrepreneurial higher education objectives. Meanwhile, these undocumented youth are transforming higher education learning spaces as they dwell within, and challenge educators and researchers to think about questions such as: What or who counts as educable? Who gets to inhabit spaces of higher education, and what happens when those spaces are disrupted by less visible dwellers such as the alien, outsider undocumented student? In addition to conceiving of the higher education organizing space as fluid and relational alongside a focus on power, this data provides to the materiality of what I call fragmented dwelling for undocumented young people. Roussell (2016) defines dwelling in the fragmented Anthropocene as a “learning environment in terms of the material flows and currents of sensory awareness within which both ideas and things reciprocally take shape” and “dwelling
Involves the immersion of beings in the currents of the lifeworld without which such activities of designing, building, and occupation could not take place at all.”

Undocumented, fragmented dwelling

Juana initially shared her story of becoming an activist, which to my surprise dated back to her middle school days. She said that she lived in a trailer park in a small town near several major research universities in the South. She explained, “There were a lot of hispanics around me. All the hispanics live in trailer parks in Crosstown.” She explained that her friends or siblings in high school or at the University of Crosstown would attempt to recruit her and her peers for activism. At our first interview at a coffee shop near the airport in this southern state, Juana revealed to me that she was a D.A.C.A. recipient, which she intimated was a struggle for her because she said there are plenty of other undocumented people, including her younger brother, in the community that she felt should have the opportunity to go to college. This tension or “dilemma” as she referred to it surfaced throughout the interview, speaking to her own fragmented sense of self within her fragmented reality of the undocumented community here. Before she delved into this, though, I asked how she decided to become more activist oriented. She said, “I didn’t know really what to do but I knew I wanted to do something. Because at that time, like there were a few protests going on and I felt really empowered in being in that protest that I felt like just by being at one protest that it was like, I needed to make more of an impact.”

Dwelling within and the dilemma about belonging and the right type of activism

While Juana desired empowerment and belonging as many undocumented students do, she was confronted with a contentious landscape of higher education, presenting dilemmas for her sense of belonging and activism. This section shares excerpts from interview data that speak to each of these dimensions of Juana’s dwelling in the higher education space. Moreover, Juana’s and my exchange exhibits her awareness about her own positionality as a

43 Data from interview.
44 Ibid.
D.A.C.A. recipient, which she sees as one of privilege compared to many of her friends and her own brother who are not “privileged” enough to have it, in her words. The following longer section provides insight into Juana’s experience of dwelling in activist spaces on her college campus and in her community, which are, of course, interconnected.

Juana: I’ve been having this dilemma lately. So like I’m starting to associate Hillsview and Hillsview College with like a third home in a sense. Mexico’s first obviously, and then Crosstown is second and always will be because that is where we first came, and this is like gonna be my third. So like I’m involved with a local activist group at Hillsview College called, “Sowing” and everything and we’re very like pro-DREAM Act. Like we want to push through the clean DREAM Act. And then I have a lot of friends in Crosstown involved in a different group called Crosstown Coalition. The Crosstown group is pushing for the undocumented community to support the SUCCEED Act. I’ve been in the dilemma of like, is what they’re doing like conforming? Or should I be conforming? This dilemma is becoming very internalized to me. Like it’s this dilemma in a sense that like I feel like I should conform to that group that is fighting for the SUCCEED ACT, but there are too many scary restrictions in it.

Juana’s “internalizing” of this dilemma, the tension in the undocumented community, is part of her “education of the senses” insofar as she is learning what each of these “Acts” means and how it will impact the Latinx undocumented community. While language fails to describe the earnest voice in which Juana explained her feelings, and yet she admitted she doesn’t allow herself to “be too vulnerable” when telling her story, she spent much of this interview explaining the differences and divides among these major organizing forces in the area—and, importantly to this article, the ways in which the tension manifested at her college. This conversation led to a discussion to the community divide she felt internally.

Dwelling and Dilemmas in the Higher Education Space/Campus

This longer excerpt from my interview with Juana is important to understanding the desires and experiences of undocumented young people in a fragmented and divided reality as they navigate activism in higher education spaces. In considering her experience, however, it is important to think of this struggle she faces as a productive possibility to rethink the ways in which higher education both restricts and expands the educational experiences of undocumented youth. Our exchange is below:

46 Deleuze, The Logic of Sense.
Juana: The undocumented community isn’t all unified. We’re trying to make some peace. We can’t just be fighting for the DREAM Act that’s not realistic. There are basically two main groups of activists in the undocumented community here and this plays out at the Hillsview College, too, because some of the leaders of one group lead various programs and offices at the college.

SR: What’s the difference between what they’re fighting for and what you’re saying you guys do?

Juana: One person in the group that I am not in, Crosstown Coalition, said to us, wake up DREAMERs, stop being like political pawns for other people. This person said to us, The DREAM Act has been like the dream, like since day one. It’s been a dream for every undocumented person. Even for herself and then she said, But we have to think realistically, the DREAM Act isn’t gonna happen. We have to like, sit down with our political leaders and like really like think about what is best for us in the long run. That is the focus of their group, to lobby in D.C. and think about conversations with Senators.

SR: So, you guys are trying to fight narrowly for D.A.C.A. to stay in place?

Juana: And for the DREAM Act. And this other group, Crosstown Coalition thinks, It’s not gonna work out, so move on. And, I think that’s where my dilemma comes in. Yeah, like they want us to sit down with the Senators like people in charge of SUCCEED Act and tell them what we think. And they want to support the SUCCEED Act and lobby in D.C. But the politicians and people even at the Hillsview College [and University of Crosstown nearby] are like, We like your stance, to the other group, supporting the SUCCEED Act [with its restrictions on D.A.C.A. renewals and focus on criminalizing immigrants]. Like kinda saying like, You guys are the good immigrants, you guys are fighting for the right cause. I think that’s where my dilemma is like am I putting the right effort in the right area? Like the DREAM Act would be the best for like everyone. But, I don’t know. So my dilemma is just figuring out if I am putting my energy into the right side of the movement. I just like feel sometimes a lot of undocumented students feel like, instead of uplifting each other, they kinda throw like shade. Like this division is saying, Your real activist work isn’t real. Like we do different work in our school. Like some undocumented students do a lot of stuff on campus while others do stuff in the community or go to lobby in D.C. It’s all the movement, but it’s like the ones on campus conform to what the people on campus want it seems and then throw shade at those of us that
aren’t doing the same type of activism. All undocumented students do their work.

SR: Do you feel included or excluded from activism on campus, then? It sounds a bit like you choose to distance yourself, is that fair to say?

Juana: I try and stay involved in the programs for Latinx students on campus. I am the secretary of a Latinx immigrants’ rights group on campus, Sowing. So it is not that I am not involved on campus, but with the divides, it is hard to just figure out where to put my energy and sometimes as I said it just seems like the college activism is more like if you’re a good immigrant, which technically I am since I received a prestigious scholarship to be here. But, I don’t always want to be in that group. Because there are other all types of undocumented people here, one of my best friends is first generation Islamic and undocumented. I try to push him to come to meetings, but I don’t want to force him just like I didn’t want to be forced when I was younger. And, I feel like the college activism is just more in your face.

This exchange provides an opportunity to learn about undocumented youth dwellings in higher education spaces and the associated dilemmas students like Juana encounter. While Juana has by and large had a positive experience in college, that is, has strong relationships with peers, connects with the Latinx community and various groups on campus, and gets good grades, her perception of Hillsview College as a safe space for organizing remains troubled, or as she repeatedly explained, “a dilemma.” She explained that Hillsview College has this reputation for being “undocumented friendly,” and that her reason for going there and staying is that she feels like “people, peers, faculty, and staff alike know what it means to be undocumented, and everyone understood my struggle,” in her words. Just the fact she sees other Latinx peers and staff felt reassuring to her. And yet, a precarious moment for Juana was when D.A.C.A. was rescinded by the Trump administration. Juana said she felt like she didn’t have anyone at Hillsview College to support her. While the undocumented community is engaging in activism the space of the campus is vulnerable. Knowing the president of the college supports all students as she repeatedly says at events that Juana (and I) have attended, the college “is still a business to her and she [the President] doesn’t want to shed too much light on it with all of the undocumented students here. That’s how she justifies it [not supporting students in more visible ways].” Finally, given this experience Juana has had, she characterizes the space of higher education as “like a hierarchy over empowerment and
empowering each other, meaning it’s all about who’s the most successful student, who has the top grades, the most service, the most accolades or who’s the good immigrant. It’s more individualized, it’s like who can be on top at the college.”

**Implications of Undocumented, Fragmented Dwelling**

Juana’s experience of undocumented fragmented dwelling in the learning environment of the college campus has implications for thinking about what counts as legitimate knowledge in these spaces, and who is rendered visible in these spaces. Rousell argues, “The learning environment becomes a milieu that exists both inside and outside of the body as a relational field of emergence, a space of co-composition that is always already inhabited by multiple others. In foregrounding dwelling as ontologically prior to construction, we are urged to discover coeval modes of becoming and knowing within the cracks of the eroding architectures and hierarchical structures of higher education.”47 Yet this brings up the necessary question of boundary conditions. Where does the learning environment begin and end? The implications of Juana’s experience do not necessarily provide an answer to where this learning environment begins or ends. However, in the era of the anthropocentric risk society, spaces are characterized by decentralization and fragmentation, and thus the point here is to excavate moments of intensity that Juana experiences in her fragmented dwelling. Her narrative illustrates the sensations, desires, fears, and dilemmas in a relational field of various undocumented immigrants and their allies and foes in the community. Moreover, as Ingold (2002) notes, “the forms people build, whether in their imagination or on the ground, arise within the current of involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings.”48 Out of the dwelling arises transformation, whether reconciling internal “dilemmas,” or learning how the self connects and belongs in sets of relations such as those in the undocumented community that Juana endeavors to explore in the expanding and restricting space of higher education. As such, Juana’s dwelling with her fragmented reality reflects the values of organizers and other youth who seek connection and belonging, despite their organizing and ideas or sensations do not carry the same currency as the neoliberal knowledge apparatus

that privileges codified knowledge and outcomes that are less risky than the contentious knowledge acquisition rooted in experience that undocumented youth take up.49

**Conclusion**

This article began with the premise that the era of Anthropocene is upon us and poses new educational problems, particularly in higher education spaces, connecting the era of the Anthropocene with the risk society to consider how social theorists are grappling with the limited opportunities and access to resources along with the proliferation of risk discourse that is both literal and symbolic toward marginalized groups such as undocumented immigrants (Rodriguez, in press). The Anthropocene provides this context as well as a moment to carve new conceptual pathways for understanding space, identity, relationships of undocumented youth in higher education.

**References**


