

Collaborating in the Electric Age: [onto]Riffological Experiments in Posthumanizing Education
and Theorizing a Machinic Arts-Based Research

By

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B.Ed., University of Manitoba, 1992
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We acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

Collaborating in the Electric Age: [onto]Riffological Experiments in Posthumanizing Education and Theorizing a Machinic Arts-Based Research is a study about locating opportunities and entry points for introducing consideration of the nonhuman and posthuman to pedagogical perspectives that are traditionally concerned with human *beings* and epistemological subjects. The research, herein, engages *doings* in collaborative effort, during conditions of unprecedented interconnectedness facilitated by the electric age. Steeped in a environment thus created by technologies' immense ubiquity and influence, this collaboration endeavours to recognize their full research participation, alongside that of humans.

This research presents collaboratively conducted, published inquiries that have been co-authored by myself and fellow doctoral candidate Richard Wainwright. Each facilitates, then attempts to articulate ways to *decentre the human* in educational contexts, beginning with our own human perspectives. As exercises in broadening our considerations of the life forms, matter, and nonhuman entities that surround humanity, this research prompts us to recognize much more than what humanity typically acknowledges as existing, given the anthropocentric frameworks it has constructed. We reorientate the nature of these relationships—*posthumanizing* them—and in doing so, disrupt our own thinking to work something different than our circumstances have hitherto informed us to consider. We have co-developed a study and conducted research in collaboration with human and nonhuman research participants.

Five nationally and internationally published co-authored journal articles, a book chapter, and five *intermezzos* (short “observational” pieces) comprise this study that explores collaboration and recombinatoriality during “the electric age” (McLuhan, 1969, 10:05). Recognizing humanity’s increasingly inextricable relationships with technologies, this

collaboratively conducted study draws into creative assemblage Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's philosophical concepts; new materialism as cultural theory; the prescient observations and predictions of Marshall McLuhan and a media studies curriculum he co-developed over forty years ago; arts-based research; museum exhibitions; features of music production such as sampling, mashup, remix, and turntabling; among many other notes and tones. A conceptually developed *riff* mobilizes our inquiries as "plug in and play," while its academic study is theorized as *[onto]Riffology*. Ontological shifts beget a *machinic arts-based research (MABR)* that develops a posthuman critical pedagogy inspired by Negri and Guattari (2010). *Collaborating in the Electric Age: [onto]Riffological Experiments in Posthumanizing Education and Theorizing a Machinic Arts-Based Research* celebrates collaborativity, discovery, and learning during the electric age.

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This dissertation contains previously published articles. As required by academic regulation, I declare that previously published materials have had equal levels of contribution from each co-author. Permission to reprint has been collected from the copyright holders.

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Dedication

Thank you, Naomi, Sarai, Ari, and Yael for all your patience, support, and love! I dedicate this study to you.

Collaborating in the Electric Age: [onto]Riffological Experiments in Posthumanizing Education and Theorizing a Machinic Arts-Based Research

Chapter 1 (Introduction): Decentring the Human and Relational Reorientations

With human and nonhuman research participants, I/we have developed a study decentring the human. What follows locates opportunities and entry points for introducing consideration of the nonhuman and posthuman to pedagogical perspectives that are traditionally concerned with human *beings* and epistemological subjects. The research, herein, engages *doings* in collaborative effort, during conditions of unprecedented interconnectedness facilitated by the electric age. Steeped in an environment thus created by technologies' immense ubiquity and influence, this collaboration endeavours to recognize their full research participation, alongside that of humans. Further, I am increasingly attentive to the materiality out of which technologies are fashioned: In fact, I am (finally!) better aware of *all* that constructs the roads, buildings, textiles, diets, furnishings, vehicles, appliances, and devices populating, even comprising, my daily life. Recognition of the nonhuman, “understood variously in terms of animals, affectivity, bodies, organic and geophysical systems, materiality, or technologies” (Grusin, 2015, p. vii), prompts me to venture beyond my typically narrow scope of human reasoning and perception towards posthumanizing educational inquiry in a variety of ways, with co-collaborators, in experimental pursuits towards pedagogical reorientations.

In a 21st century global environment of ecological ruination, social turmoil, and existentially influential technological adaptation, I am also re-assessing my lifelong reliance on humanist programmes that I observe to be failing. Meaningfully *responding* to deteriorating

circumstances necessitates me accepting that humanism's abilities to redress these conditions, that humanity has itself created, are insufficient (Cudworth & Hobden, 2017): its "Eurocentric core and imperial tendencies" contributing to its declining efficacy and dimming promise (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 16). Growing acceptance that there may be little point in applying humanism's healing salve forces me to confront the unquestioned beliefs that have been foundational to my being, upending what I have hitherto understood and relied upon.

Therefore, while humanity determinedly pursues an alarming course, driven by short sighted priorities and rapacious appetites, I am challenging the structures it favours, investigating the ways that I can alter my own participation in this state of affairs, and academically theorizing conceptualizations of these responses. Such exercises are intended to posthumanize my relationships to my surroundings by *decentring the human* during my considerations of all life forms and matter.

Determining much about humanity's proposed solutions to impending threats, while explaining those responses' woeful inadequacies and ineffectiveness, is veneration of the economic system of capitalism, around which many global entities have coalesced these past centuries (Neal & Williamson, 2015). The willingness to assess fellow humans' relative value based on the labour that workers may (or may not) provide, vast disparities in labour's monetary compensation, and outrageous inequalities typical of their disbursement, ensures that capitalism is the cause of much human suffering. But that willingness has done far more yet, motivating ingenuity to garner more capital and encourage exploitation of the features of the planet on which we live: re-purposing the earth's air, water, vegetation, and igneous rock to "bounty," "staples," and "resources." A dark spectre is cast by humanity in its seemingly unbridled pursuit of these activities globally, given their often environmentally destructive effects (Government of

Canada, n.d.; Choudhary, 2020). The healthful prospects of all that comprises planet Earth rapidly dim; billions of species that it hosts are imperilled by humans' seemingly insatiable appetites (UN, 2018; BBC, 2020). Furthermore, the promotion of projects that serve political *and* oligarchical designs for monetary enrichment has motivated the development of technologies capable of effecting those desired outcomes: militarization (National Priorities Project, n.d.), labour exploitation (Mojtehdzadeh, 2020), automation (Dzieza, 2020), and surveillance programmes (Schuppe, 2019; Reuters, 2020) among them.

This is the environment in which we live so thoroughly steeped that we are barely cognizant of the seriousness of our plight. The globe hurtles through space—revolving around the sun and rotating on its axis—carrying occupants whose near enslavement to capital's trappings, a system that humans incrementally fashioned alongside the structures that vociferously support it, severely limits the likelihood that capitalism will ever be abandoned, regardless of its threats to humanity (Žižek, 2010). All suggested corrections to the problems we face must work around capitalism, and are therefore severely compromised in their efficacy. So humanity rushes headlong to its uncertain fate, perpetuating activities that demonstrate abject disregard for life forms and matter in its midst. Disrupting my own attachment to these programmes, on which humanity so faithfully relies, requires me to reconfigure my frames of reference. To attempt to *decentre* the human encourages me to imagine other entities in its stead, facilitating opportunities for creativity, experimentality, and a willingness to reach for theoretical interpretations outside my previous experience (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Bogost, 2012; Coole & Frost, 2010; DeLanda, 2010, 2013; Grusin, 2015; Shaviro, 2014). I have collaboratively conducted and published six scholarly works that decentre the human by *posthumanizing*

inquiry. Modest yet important, these scholarly contributions are attempts to even just *try* to respond differently than we otherwise have, in the midst of looming calamity.

Relational Reorientation

This dissertation presents six published pieces about interrelationships between humans, the natural elements surrounding them, technologies, and what humans learn about—and how. These six chapters have each been co-created with fellow doctoral student Richard Wainwright, in academic assemblage with technologies and the physical matter from which our machines are formed. Technological features of the electric age (McLuhan, 1969, 10:05) have enabled, mediated, and optimized a years-long academic partnership in which its human participants—despite the significant geographic distance between one another—can closely collaborate because media, information systems, and online platforms participate in the research being undertaken. In the six chapters that follow, *we* attempt decentring the human entity and acknowledging the *human* mind-independence of all that is *nonhuman* (Delanda in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). Most often in this dissertation the pronoun “we” indicates the academic assemblage of relationships between Richard Wainwright, our technologies, and matter, while “I” is used when I tease out my own participation and perspective in order to adequately demonstrate my contribution to this collaborative endeavor.

Holding this focus, while developing this study, has ensured my increased recognition of the crucial participation of research co-creators in academic discourse: human, machine, and nature. Curiosities are chronicled in works that relate complexities of collaborative relationships engaged between human and nonhuman agency, matter, technological functions, philosophical thinking, media studies, arts-based research approaches, and pedagogical imperatives. The six chapters, published across a range of journals and in a book on posthumanities, each explore

topics steeped in contemporary theoretical bases: poststructural philosophy's vitality (Deleuze, 1995), new materialism's entanglements (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012; Coole & Frost, 2010), and posthuman educational research's inclusivity of species and matter (Snaza & Weaver, 2015).

Collaborating in the Electric Age

As doctoral students pursuing our research interests, Richard and I applied to our host learning institution, the University of Victoria, for permission to conduct a fully recognized (human) collaborative dissertation. Despite our application and rationale being ultimately rejected, we were helpfully directed to the university's sanctioned guidelines regarding co-created works, usually seen in the hard sciences rather than our location in social science: their eligibility for inclusion in dissertations could be ensured by each study's peer-review and publication. We would go on to research and co-author this study in which we draw on academic concepts and theories to explore posthuman learning. The topics and methods to which we are attracted may qualify our studies as arts-based research, however, qualitative research methodologies don't always suit our processes. *Postqualitative* inquiry, however, shares our inclinations to explore how one "avoid[s] putting the human subject at the beginning or center of inquiry" (St. Pierre, 2016, p. 112). *Postqualitative* inquiry validates (or at least helps us rationalize) our near aversion to adopting prescriptive strategies and methodological procedures (St. Pierre, 2017). Our influences are poststructuralist philosophical thought and cultural theory that advances traditionally epistemic education in exciting and influential ways (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Deleuze, 1995; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2013). This is research that responds to the moment in which we live and the total environment created by technology (Wolfe, 1967). Our learning isn't oriented toward any singular, nor predetermined direction: academic works elucidate our ideas and articulate resulting discoveries. Gildersleeve (2018) similarly describes

postqualitative inquiry as “meant to *become* [emphasis added] in dynamic and indefinite ways; there is no assumed representation of truth, no deterministic outcome of the research process, necessarily” (p. 695). We also pursue postqualitative inquiry in the manner that jagodzinski (2017) counsels it be intended, “address[ing] a ‘new world’ and ‘a people-yet-to-come’ so vital in the moment of history we, as a species, find ourselves in” (p. 290).

Schoolhouse Rocks

Across centuries, the schoolhouse abides as a physical bastion responsible for ensuring Western knowledge’s production and its dissemination (McLuhan, Hutchon, & McLuhan, 1977). Within its bricks and mortar, student clientele are primarily offered traditional, formal education. By being able to bring into relief the materiality of the schoolhouse building—the sand, rocks, and trees that comprise its physical structure and the soil on which it rests—I disrupt an image of thought I have held of schooling as emblematic of everything with which I have always concerned myself: that is, humanity and its purposes with the earth. These are spaces in which exist potentialities for re-orientations of my previous experiences and beliefs, such that impact me as an elementary school teacher employed to impart Western knowledge and language in a schoolhouse that stands on the unceded territory of the WSÁNEĆ people. What can I consider and learn that will break the bonds of my British settler ontological frameworks, and crack these mental constructs to which I hold fast? Perhaps growing recognition of the environments that ground my experiences, immersed in the electric age?

I’m deeply invested in these collaborative inquiries: their nature, shape, breadth, and drop. During school days, I share Core French learning among the elementary school student body of 350 children during 20 minute classes, across the school’s 17 classroom divisions. My iPhone signals roughly every 22 minutes throughout the day, prompting my departure from one

classroom and physical trek to each next classroom, pushing a “travelling classroom” cart with my teaching materials on it: books, lyric cards, sound equipment, games, props, etc. Nearly daily, I attempt to enhance French cultural sharing and sing-a-longs by screening YouTube videos for the young students. A portable bluetooth speaker boosts the musical repertoire of children’s songs on my iPod. When COVID-19 drove us to our homes in the spring of 2020, I telephoned every family in the school to check in with them and to invite them to view the selection of French classes (eight to ten minutes in length) that I was videotaping in my apartment, uploading to YouTube, and then linking to the school’s website. “Stasis is what you got, like a rickshaw getting pulled around by another rickshaw” (Brock, 2007).

French poststructuralist philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have prepared both conceptually fertile ground for academic innovation. Their oeuvre holds an ability to excite and vitalize pedagogues and curriculum theorists (Roy, 2003; Gough, 2007). The pair set loose creative potentials in order to imagine learning as active flows of the DeleuzoGuattarian *becoming* that unstop a stasis implied in the verb tense, “to be” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2014). Pushing, reaching, folding, and turning, Deleuze (1994) celebrates motion’s creative effects: “movement, for its part, implies a plurality of centres, a superposition of perspectives, a tangle of points of view, a coexistence of moments which essentially distort representation” (p. 56). By introducing DeleuzoGuattarian thinking to our inquiries, we engage one of the most influential aspects of our study: concepts. Considered “an art in itself,” concept creation enables possibilities; concepts are “the means by which we move beyond experience so as to be able to think anew” (Stagoll, 2013, p. 54). Our engagement in philosophical concepts has provided multiple inroads to DeleuzoGuattarian philosophical worldviews. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) dismiss dualities as limiting propositions and instead favour “and, and, and...” (Deleuze &

Guattari, 1987, p. 25). Pedagogically, DeleuzoGuattarian conceptualization of the rhizome—as tangles of subterranean growth—provides a sense of reach lacking in the hegemonic, traditional figure of the tree of knowledge and of life. Although the tree is often showcased for its height, fruit bearing limbs, and the sturdiness of its trunk, its arborescent form conveys relatively limited potentiality when compared to the tangled, molar protrusions of the subterranean rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). A multiplicity is “a complex structure that does not reference a prior unity” (Roffe, 2013, p. 181). Deleuze & Guattari (1987) write that “a multiplicity has neither subject or object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot change in number without the multiplicity changing in nature” (p. 8).

Philosophical Outlooks

This study has sought out philosophical thinking in contemplation of the vast terrain on which life is happening. As we research the posthuman and those who espouse it, we have consulted multiple perspectives and theses. In doing so, we are developing philosophical outlooks about the nature of existence on the spinning orb on which we live: one vibrating with all the energy generated by matter that composes its entire physical structure and the beings, objects, and natural features whose existences flash briefly or continue during billions of years, transported during endless, circuitous routes around the Sun. Across ontologically related fields, we have attempted to develop a cogent sense of philosophical understandings amidst (and despite) our declarations of academic “nonconformity” and penchants for incorporating whatever attracts our attention.

The chapters that comprise this study have been subtly shaped by the nature of its engagements as a “manuscript-style” dissertation, directed by joint writing tasks undertaken to secure publication, as mandated by our university. Resulting tensions between freeform inquiry,

academic expediency, and our charge to develop a study based on published works have moderately directed our course. Themes, topics, and content have been at times informed by the academic journals with which we sought inclusion. Given the curatorial processes that we have undertaken to record our study, some of the philosophical thinking that we have engaged has not always found a place in this document, despite its deep influence on our thinking and personal interest to us. While DeleuzoGuattarian philosophy early impacted our study, subsequent reading introduced us to ancillary, ontological frameworks that also appeal to our emergent sense of what philosophical conceptualization is doing. Some of the features of, and variations between, these disciplines supporting the posthuman are briefly summarized here.

We have read across a trove of concepts developed by Deleuze and Guattari “to produce connections and styles of thinking” (Colebrook, 2013a, p. 1). Deleuze grants significance to creative powers of *difference* that he affords neither *identity* (in its apparent immutability), nor *representation* (in its relative stasis). Deleuze (1994) opines that, “representation fails to capture the affirmed world of difference. Representation has only a single centre, a unique and receding perspective, and in consequence a false depth. It mediates everything, but mobilizes and moves nothing” (pp. 55-56).

Deleuze’s is described as “the philosopher of difference as becoming, rather than as opposition or negation” (Williams, 2011, p. 82). As May (2008) explains, “Deleuze does not offer us a simple formula: Live thus. If his ontology is concerned with difference then the future must be concerned with experimentation” (p. 25). Differences are not entities to be represented, but express the motion, speed, and brilliance of shifts between states, existing only in series of repetitions (Williams, 2013). Deleuze contends that repetitions are never of the same thing,

“because there is always a novel series of differences each time a ‘same’ thing is repeated”

(Williams, 2013, p. 39). Deleuze (1994) further explains that:

re-petition opposes re-presentation: the prefix changes its meaning, since in the one case difference is said only in relation to the identical, while in the other it is the univocal which is said of the different. Repetition is the formless being of all differences, the formless power of the ground, which carries every object to that extreme ‘form’ in which its representation comes undone. (p. 57)

Deleuze (1994) writes that “univocity signifies that being itself is univocal” (p. 304), and it is a univocity of being that conditions a Deleuzian plane of existence, whereby “no event or phenomenon is more real than any other” (Colebrook, 2013b, p. 295). Deleuze’s (1988) metaphysics conceptualizes a plane of immanence that is described as existing without:

supplementary dimension; the process of composition must be apprehended for itself, through that which it gives, in that which it gives. It is a plan [plane] of composition, not a plan [plane] of organization or development. There is no longer a form, but only relations, a velocity between infinitesimal particles of unformed material. There is no longer a subject, but only individuating affective states of an anonymous force. Here the plan [plane] is concerned only with motions and rests, with a dynamic affective charge. (p. 128)

Deleuze adopts Spinoza’s monism and its suggestion that there is no substance or life other than *this* one expressive life that we live (Colebrook, 2008b, p. 137). Multiple in modes and entities, including thought and expression (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012), substance exists in itself and is conceived through itself. Colebrook (2013) suggests that in Deleuze’s

conceptualization, substance may be regarded, “not as a noun—something that is—but as an infinitive: not, ‘the tree is green,’ but a power ‘to green’” (p. 278).

A Spinozan substance of multiple modes counts among concepts (alongside those of Bergson and Nietzsche) that influence Deleuze’s ontological characterizations of the real being comprised of the actual and virtual: the former as “states of affairs” and the latter as “incorporeal events [...] belonging to the pure past—the past that can never be purely present” (Boundas, 2013b, p. 300). Deleuze (2011) writes that, “the virtual [...] does not have to be realized, but rather actualized; and the rules of actualization are not those of resemblance and limitation, but those of difference or divergence and of creation” (p. 97).

Deleuze’s approaches contrast the Cartesian mind-body dualism that Spinoza vociferously opposed during his own lifetime. Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012) submit that for Spinoza, “the mind and the body are the same thing, as he stresses repeatedly. This is a most interesting contribution to a new materialist thinking” (p. 94). Relationships are understood to exist between substance’s *expressions*, not the relations between substance itself (Colebrook, 2013), whereas dualities are invalidated as characteristic of those humanist approaches that “prioritize mind over matter, soul over body, and culture over nature” (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 119). Deleuzian and DeleuzoGuattarian poststructural philosophy’s inclusion in new materialism’s theoretical formulation challenges the binary propositions that narrow thought and limit possibilities. Dolphijn & van der Tuin (2012) observe that Deleuze and Guattari “do not avoid or negate dualisms, but traverse or pass through them” (p. 127).

New materialism’s ontological moves attract philosophical adherents in shared belief that nature does not exist for the purposes and pleasures of humans. A diverse, loosely affiliated community of divergent thinkers coalesce around one shared tenet: a rejection in belief that “all

being exists only as a correlate between mind and world” (Bogost, 2012, p. 4). Meillassoux philosophically pursues removing regimes of thought maintaining a “correlationist circle” of reasoning that precludes an ability to weaken this correlation between thinking and being, and to discover abilities to consider the “in-itself” of an entity, outside of human perception (Bryant in The University Press Blog, 2014). Meillassoux (2008) introduces the term “ancestral [as] any reality anterior to the emergence of the human species—or even anterior to every recognized form of life on earth” (p. 35), and the fossil-matter that indicates not just specific instances of prehistoric life as fossils (an insect in resin, a dinosaur’s exhumed skeleton) but the reality and environment of these species’ ages and lives, long before human trace. Dolphijn & van der Tuin (2012) ask, “how is thought able to think what there can be when there is no thought?” (p. 78).

Meillassoux responds:

The question is not about convincing anyone to think otherwise, because it is a very strong feature of our era that we cannot fight in a few sentences. If I had to say something to shake actual certainties I would formulate it in a provocative fashion, but basically this is what I think: I assert that anyone who refuses to deal with this question simply does not know what he is saying when he utters the words “science,” “mathematics,” “absolute,” “metaphysics,” “non-metaphysics,” and other words of equal significance. (in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 78)

More so than holding an affinity for concepts informed by Spinozan monism (as Deleuze does), it is Aristotle’s sense of substance that is espoused by philosopher Levi Bryant (2011), who coined the term “object oriented ontology” or “OOO” to designate philosophical outlooks declining to privilege human existence over that of nonhuman objects. Aristotle’s notion of substance runs that “in short, a substance is that which is not predicated of *anything else*, and

which therefore enjoys *independent* or *autonomous* existence (Bryant, 2011, p. 72). Aristotle had submitted that across species and the primary substances of which they are composed, one being is no more or less substance than any other: “a substance can exist for the briefest moment before being destroyed, or for billions of years (Bryant, 2011, p. 88). Derived from such understandings, Bryant (2011) presents a thesis of equal being: “an equality of objects, a democracy of objects, in the precise sense that all substances are equally substances. This does not entail that substances are equal to one another, that there are no differences among substances, and that there are not substances more or less powerful than other substances, rather that all substances are equally substances” (p. 73).

In developing an object oriented ontology, Ian Bogost (2012) similarly suggests that “all things equally exist but they do not exist equally” (p. 11), and that humans are not the sole elements of philosophical interest. Objects and features of nature are understood to hold energy, exert force, and bear an autopoiesis completely independent of humanity and its intentions for it. This is the speculative realist imperative to thoroughly disavow anthropocentrism that is deemed necessary, “when we face the prospect of ecological catastrophe and when we are forced to recognize that the fate of humanity is deeply intertwined with the fates of all sorts of other entities (Shaviro, 2014, p. 1).

Bennett (2015) suggests a vibrancy of matter that is evidenced in the “lively and essentially interactive materials, bodies human and nonhuman” that surround us—previously recognized by philosophers such as Spinoza, Whitman and Thoreau (p. 224). Bennett (2015) describes:

the voluminous mountains of “things” that today surround those of us living in corporate-capitalist, neoliberal, shopping-as-religion cultures. Novelty items, prepackaged edibles,

disposables objects, past and future landfill residents, buildings, weeds, books, devices, websites and so on, and so on—all these materialities make ‘calls’ upon us, demand attention. It’s getting harder not to notice their powers of enabling and refusing us, of enhancing and destroying what we want (to have, to do, to be and become). (p. 224)

Art and Deleuzian Philosophical Concepts

In studying collaborative relationships between humans, matter, and all species, we find inspiration in creative production and explore our inquiries’ congruences with arts-based research. Various art forms are brought into assemblage with a profusion of influences also propelling the study. These interconnections galvanize creative production and our learning. Laying out the terrain of our study, how does art hold its own space alongside DeleuzoGuattarian philosophical concepts that inform our thinking?

Colman (2013) writes that “Deleuze’s preferred art works for his discussions encompassed a range of mediums, including music and sounds (birdsong), cinema, photography¹, the plastic arts (sculpture, painting and drawing), literature, and architecture” (p. 16). Painter Francis Bacon’s artistic work inspires Deleuze’s “deri[vation of] operational concepts” (Dosse, 2011, p. 448), including a “nonrational logic of sensation” (Deleuze, 2005,

¹ Among art forms each potentially generating sensations (Zepke, 2010), it is with photography that Deleuze betrays a curious relationship, warranting brief mention. Deleuze (2005) explains that “the photograph tends to reduce sensation to a single level, and is unable to include within the sensation the difference between constitutive levels” (p. 75). Perhaps his apathy to the medium is to be expected; the photograph seemingly epitomizes the representation and suggests the image of thought, both of which he eschews. Painting, music, cinema, and literature better animate the logic of sensation. In the more limited role that Deleuze (2005) determined photography to occupy, its preferred application is specifically indicated: “the most interesting cases, like Fromanger, are those where the painter integrates the photograph, or the photograph’s action, apart from any aesthetic value” (p. 159). In Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensations, Deleuze (2005) writes emphatically that “at no point does he [Bacon] ever integrate the photograph into the creative process” (p. 75). However, Bacon elsewhere thoroughly describes his process involving the use of photographs of people, paintings, and his own paintings (Sylvester, 1987). Therefore, one might deduce that Deleuze either finds this practise inconvenient to his thesis on Bacon’s rejection of the photo in his creative processes, or he doesn’t consider photos’ contributions to Bacon’s work—technical or visual—to be creative enterprise. Although Deleuze (2005) attributes disparaging opinions of photography to Bacon, any mépris (“contempt”) is indeed his own (Zepke, 2010).

back cover). For Deleuze, art creates “sensible aggregates” of percept and affect (Smith, 2005, p. viii) that engender, in Bacon’s paintings, *rhythms* becoming characters, objects, and figures populating his canvases (Deleuze, 2005). Here, “Deleuze privileges painting as an art form that affords a concrete apprehension of the forces that render a body” (Colman, 2013, p. 17). In Deleuze’s thinking, “philosophy can never be undertaken independently of art (or science); it always enters into relations of mutual resonance and exchange with these other domains, though for reasons that are always internal to philosophy itself” (Smith, 2005, p. viii). These relationships do bear tensions: “how does one talk in one medium (concepts) about the practices of another (percepts)?” (Smith, 2005, p. xi).

Illustrating Deleuzian concepts’ expression and experimentality using artistic analogy, philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2003) once suggested Jackson Pollock to be “the ultimate Deleuzian painter [his techniques] directly render this flow of pure becoming” (p. 13). Surely, Žižek’s (2003) comparison between artist and philosopher implies the sensations of affect and percept that Deleuze contends are elicited from the experience of art and its production.

Žižek’s (2003) comparison seems apt as it shares his philosophically informed impression that Deleuze’s work is as boundary expanding and indiscriminately sourced as Pollock’s artistic approaches. However, Deleuze’s interest in art and the influence that it offers his philosophical pursuits is informed by concepts. In his creation of works on paintings and cinema, Deleuze (1995) emphasizes that his interests are in the *dimensions* of affect and percept, rather than the artwork itself: “That’s what interests me, not images” (p. 137).

In this characterization, famously unorthodox practices of Pollock’s artmaking are likened to the experimental philosophy creation of Deleuze (with, at times, Guattari). Working beyond the borders of academic painting methods of his day, Pollock ignored any contemporary

focus on archival, precious materials aimed at timeless permanence in favour of the immediate. The painter scattered, poured, and dripped paint over canvases laid on the floor (so that they could be approached from all directions and angles), used paints of various consistencies that were intended for all manner of surfaces, enfolded objects such as sand and nails, threw “the full force of his whole body” into the distribution of paint as physical expression (“Jackson Pollock,” n.d.) and employed a variety of implements as paintbrushes. Harold Rosenberg coined the term “action painting” to describe the artistic approaches of Pollock and his peers: their creation was “not a picture but an event” (“Harold Rosenberg,” 2003).

Perhaps, similitude is suggested in the creative activity of Pollock’s artistic *action* and Deleuze’s philosophical *folding*. As academic scholars, we have sought out thinking, ideas, and concepts that might inform our impulses to disrupt humanist modes as we question governing humanist principles of capitalism, consumerism, and resource consumption, striving to channel the creativity of art extracting percepts and affects as new ways of feeling, seeing, and hearing (Deleuze, 1995).

The McLuhanesque

These disruptions that we perform in the following chapters are significantly enriched by the work of Marshall McLuhan and his prodigious creativity and prescience concerning technologies and media, introduced as early as the mid-twentieth century. His “probes and percepts” were fuelled by his interest in asking questions rather than deducing answers, operating on “simply an intellectual enjoyment of play and discovery” (McLuhan in Theall, 2006, p. 16). As a media theorist and public intellectual intently considering technologies and media as their fields emerged, McLuhan’s study was not of media’s content, but its effects: “Objects are

unobservable. Only *relationships among objects* [emphasis added] are observable” (McLuhan, 1967, p. 292).

“New journalist” Tom Wolfe (1967) wrote a half century ago that based on such observations, McLuhan has developed a theory that follows:

The new technologies of the electric age, notably television, radio, and the telephone, and computers, make up a new environment. A new environment; they are not merely added to some basic human environment. The idea that these things, TV and the rest, are just tools that men can use for better or worse depending on their talents and moral strength—that idea is idiotic to McLuhan. The new technologies, such as television, have become a new environment. They radically alter the entire way people use their five senses, the way they react to things and therefore, their entire lives and the entire society. (pp. 34-35)

Further, McLuhan recognized technologies as altering our experience of history and progress, the latter he claims “literally stopped with electricity because you now have everything at once, you don’t move on from one thing at a time to the next things. You have everything. There’s no more history, it’s all here” (Henry, 2012, 12:51). Assertions like these attest to the degree to which learning, knowledge, and the function of the schoolhouse are possibly becoming significantly altered by human reliance on technologies in the new environment they create (Wolfe, 1967).

Riffing Collaborative Learning

Early in our inquiries into posthuman learning, we called our research processes *riff*, and riff’s study we termed [onto]Riffology (Stevens & Wainwright, 2016). Riffing suitably signifies our attempts to better recognize the potentialities for ontological shifts taking place as humans

reorientate their relationships with technologies and the nonhuman. Riff moves among *schools of thought* that are ontologically revealing relationships between what exists, facilitating where learning takes place, and investigating how curriculum develops as disciplines become undisciplined. Consequently, our studies engage perspectives that call on experimentality, and we have adopted various “posts” in this quest: the posthuman as decentring the human (Petitfils, 2016); poststructural philosophy that extends traditional philosophy past logic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994; Braidotti, 2013a); and postqualitative inquiry that (re)routes the questions we have been asking (St. Pierre, 2017; Pedersen, 2013).

We don’t consider riffing to be particularly well suited to gathering knowledge, memorizing content, skill mastery, or predetermining learning directionalities. Rather, we *operationalize* it by reaching toward information and academic works that articulate our discoveries. The processes of our inquiries—their energy, spontaneity, and tangentiality—are riffologic; engaged to actively decentre the human subject. As technological influence grows and ecological precarity looms, riff mediates our experiences to play with the concerns that consume us: humanity’s destructive priorities and their dangerous impositions. For these reasons, we refer to riff as “plug in and play” and have adopted this near slogan to signal riff’s function in technological assemblage and its maneuverability and playfulness in relations of exteriority (Delanda, 2013a). In collaborative assemblage, riff suggests the creative production and spontaneity of sampling, remix, and mashup. Riff is how we imagine the nature and activity of these engagements, asking what riff *does*, rather than what it is.

The conditions for riff’s emergence were set in motion when my academic supervisor Dr. Monica Prendergast suggested that I partner with fellow doctoral student Richard Wainwright to write a *duoethnography* as a directed studies course. Dr. Prendergast had become intrigued by

the nature of our co-written class assignments on topics concerning criminology and poetic inquiry. In duoethnography, she recognized that its dialogical, qualitative methodology shared features with our own inquiry approaches. We wrote *Because We Play: Riffing on Rhizomes, Attribution and Voice in Duoethnographic Assemblage* in 2015. The resulting document captured both the tangentiality of *riffing* on whatever caught our interests and duoethnography's dialectical processes as "a living method" (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, p. 49). Not content to engage mere dialogue between ourselves, we attempted to mashup and sample ideas and introduce them as part of the work by quoting dozens of "contributors'" academic works, lyrics, thoughts, videos, YouTube comments, quotes, articles, tweets, songs, articles, and memes. And we *riffed*, perhaps influenced by the rhythms and styles of Sawyer and Norris' (2013) work, the researchers, who themselves claimed to "have used jazz performance as a metaphor for duoethnography [...] foregrounding its emergent, dialogic, unpredictable, disciplined, and at times magical arrangements and motifs" (p. 49).

During our duoethnography's composition, "riff" suggested the gratification of impulses and curiosities with any given prompt and the next (and next) stimulus. Riff involved snatching up a theme and riffing it as a discussion loop, until our curiosities were sated. To initiate and enrich our study, we sampled the duoethnographic practise of generating meaning by adopting cultural artefacts relevant to the study and chose *Papillon*, the autobiographical tale of French convict Henri Charriere's incarceration and eventual escape from a penal colony on a French Guiana island.² The movie (starring Steve McQueen and Dustin Hoffman) evoked our own

² Our research interests at that time were in criminology and so we supported our artefact choice by referring to Steven A. Toth's (2006) *Beyond Papillon: The French Overseas Penal Colonies*, which we also purchased.

childhoods spent watching televised motion pictures such as *Papillon*,³ which simultaneously depicted both the severity of exile to early 20th century island penal colonies and the beauty of the exotic destinations portrayed. Selecting *Papillon* also suited the pop culture sensibility of our interactions and own meaning making's themes.

Although we didn't make much reference to *Papillon* in the duoethnography, selecting an artefact helped launch our inquiries. Perhaps, the duoethnographic practise of selecting artefacts resembles the *encounters* that Deleuze similarly sought to make during his lifetime (Deleuze & Parnet, 2004). Stivale (n.d.) translates Deleuze's account of encounters' importance in English, recording:

He [Deleuze] says that he sees this as part of his investment in being "on the lookout" (*être aux aguets*; cf. "A comme Animal"). He adds that he doesn't believe in culture, rather he believes in encounters (*rencontres*), but these encounters don't occur with people. People think that it's with other people that encounters take place, like among intellectuals at colloquia [academic conferences]. Encounters occur, rather, with things, with a painting, a piece of music. With people, however, these meetings are not at all encounters; these kind of encounters are usually so disappointing, catastrophic. On Saturday or Sunday, when he goes out, he isn't certain to have an encounter; he just goes out, on the lookout for encounters, to see if there might be encounter material, in a film, in a painting. ("C as in Culture," para. 6)

To *encounter* by such means is instructive of the ways in which we might interact differently with our surroundings, informed by the multiple fields we seek out and consult. The

³ In the McLuhanesque sense, the hot medium of cinematic feature being transmuted to the cool medium television, to visually disorienting effect.

encounter introduces sources of inspiration beyond literature and my personal reliance on books and knowledge: long established go-to's in my practise (*artifacts* as it were). Deleuzian *encounters*, with paintings and music, provide opportunity to create other responses and ways of thinking with the sensations (percepts and affects) they produce (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994).

How These Chapters Matter

In early 2020, seismic societal shifts rapidly took place across Canada as awareness grew of an illness afflicting countries' citizens around the world. By early March of that year, what was becoming recognized as a global pandemic hurtled Canadians toward adopting significantly altered lives. The severe health threat posed by COVID-19⁴ immediately resulted in mandated travel restrictions; closed provincial borders within the country; severely curtailed social interaction between households; closed establishments and institutions; stay at home orders that largely prohibited physical attendance at places of employment, universities, colleges, and schools; and the recommended practice of maintaining two metres physical distance from one another in any public context and the wearing of masks.

To support efforts to socially distance in order to slow the spread of the virus, Canadian society was nearly immediately moved *online*: medical appointments were conducted over the phone or by FaceTime, business and staff meetings were held on various platforms, online

⁴ Strange and disconcerting stories about the illness' origins were emerging. We increasingly witness illnesses jumping across species, as has avian flu and H1N1, spurring the field of zoonosis (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 161) and the movement to promote the assertion that animal and human health care should become one field of medicine. Conversely, animal welfare and health is determined largely by an animal economy whereby, "more profits are squeezed out of each animal life" (Emel & Wolch in Pederson, 2015, p. 67). Pederson (2015) asks, importantly, "What would it mean for education to examine its own position in the animal and human economy? What would be the pedagogical implications of engagement with notions of human/animal corporate allergy and physicality, structured and interlinked by globalized commodification processes" (p. 67)? It is not difficult to imagine that our species are enmeshing in interesting ways, and globally disastrous ways that support posthumanist assertions of, and advocacy for, a harmonization between our species.

shopping dramatically increased, and schooling (from primary grades through to college and university) was conducted online, while students remained in their homes. To facilitate this shift, schools' tech equipment was distributed to households for students' use. The education being provided was regarded as *crisis remote learning*, and the transition was rapidly performed; instruction being delivered in Google classrooms, Microsoft Team Meetings, on platforms like Zoom, and via YouTube videos.

Although global events hastened radical changes to the nature of schools and education, given the ubiquity of technological devices and their use within a satellite environment to which we have been becoming largely accustomed during a digital age, the transition was performed with relative ease. Schooling was now conducted online. Educators (themselves instructing from their individual homes, in consultation with schools and school districts) generated the questions, assignments, and feedback, while students far more heavily relied on the internet for information to fulfill their tasks. Now situated online, the schoolhouse's role even better approximated McLuhan et al.'s (1977) prognostications: schooling would provide and pose the questions, rather than being the environment to necessarily generate answers. Perhaps, these sudden, remarkable alterations to education necessitated by the health crisis were a very long time coming, given the wider environment of technologies' use⁵. Although in many Canadian communities, physical attendance in schools has resumed⁶, a proportion of students has not returned and school districts provide accommodation for these students online, whereby teachers facilitate remote learning of core subjects.

⁵ The pandemic also advanced technologies' use in medical science in the service of understanding the scourge, its variants, paths, contact tracing...etc.

⁶ Schools' provision of "childcare," permitting parents to resume employment outside the home, motivated some of the return of students to schools in later months of 2020.

To these circumstances, learning, education, and schooling submit. What lays ahead that could further disrupt our models of education and determine our course as humanity alongside all other species? What will facilitate creativity in our responses to the conditions in which we live with all manner of life? The following six chapters perform relationships—with knowledge, thinking, and truth. Each engages thinking in active states, not daring to slip into the stasis that is risked by intentionally adopting a point of view (McLuhan, 2005, p.163). They are authentic, natural outworkings of curiosities. The largely indiscriminate ways in which a myriad of disciplines, research methodologies, technologies, and academics' works are pulled into this study ensures its originality across pedagogical and posthuman educational research fields.

McLuhan (1972) anticipated that, during the electric age and once information's retrieval became "instantaneous, it would be impossible to have monopolies of knowledge or specialism" (p. 204). This rationale supports the distinctions that Deleuze (2004) makes between knowledge and thinking. Whereas knowledge bears identities about what is recognized and understood, thinking does not easily identify itself: "thought moves beyond what is known to the difference beneath, behind, and within it" (May, 2005, p. 21).

We, in creative assemblage, "plug in and play" with multifaceted inquiries in mediated spaces. In these six chapters, we pursue *thinking* by riffologically sampling, exploring, experiencing, leading, and following across all kinds of information, as the human becomes increasingly decentred. The research is so idiosyncratically organized that it is largely inimitable and irreplicable; experimental activity during unprecedented times.

In turn, this study seeks to understand the nature of our interactions as we more fully recognize that we steep in a technologically mediated environment, what McLuhan referred to as "a satellite environment" (Henry, 2012), that is shaping our human experience during the

posthuman. These explorations matter because we are experimenting with approaches broadening the human gaze to prompt questions, curiosities, and discoveries important for addressing the environmental threats we face. As introduction to the study's chapters, I will briefly describe how each one experiments with decentring the human. The chapters are one published book chapter and five academic articles (four have been published and one has been submitted to a journal). These published works form chapters two through eight of the dissertation.

The second chapter in this dissertation is an article introducing riff that was published in the 2016 book, *Ontic Flows: From Digital Humanities to Posthumanities*. Titled *[onto]Riffology: Explorations into Collaboration, Assemblage and Learning Events*, the chapter is based on the joint-written research proposal that Richard Wainwright and I prepared that year. It provides an overview of what our curiosities then induced us to think about, while freeing us to consider; an early foray into theorizing what riff and its study could become and produce. Dabbling with Deleuze and Guattari's approaches to thinking encourages us to adopt verb tenses rather than relying primarily on nouns. We communicate what our riff is doing rather than what it is, and express matters using the intransitive verb "become," rather than remaining in the stasis of "is" and "to be." Our burgeoning interests lead us to related fields of new materialism and to musical production, including remix, mashup, and sampling. We liken riff to "plugging in" to technological platforms, which suggests philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of assemblage and an entity's components functioning in relations of exteriority, whereby its constituent parts may be detached and plugged in elsewhere, producing other assemblages. We refer to riff as "becoming curricula without syllabi," the DeleuzoGuattarian

nature of our pedagogical engagements indicates our rejection of constraints to our directionalities and the scope of our postqualitative approaches.

In chapter three, readers are introduced to our co-written article *Machinic Arts-Based Research: Posthumanizing Approaches to Art Inquiry* that has been submitted to the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education Methods*. As a “hybrid of machinic impulses and arts-based research operat[ing] in open systems to produce thought” (Wainwright & Stevens, submitted), machinic arts-based research (MABR) provides art with the necessary space in which it might “perform its work beyond the parameters of aesthetic experience.” Written as our sixth article, we pull together various strands of theory and thinking that have engrossed our studies across the preceding years and theorize a posthuman critical pedagogy.

We riff on *turntabling*—the repurposing of a tool for representation (the record player) into a musical instrument—to theorize a posthuman critical pedagogy by disrupting the ways we’ve always done and seen things. MABR asks “what can be created capable of constructing a new reality?” (jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013). *Turntabling* illustrates the relative ease with which ontological shifts may be effectuated, ones optimizing the decentring of the human in order to disrupt the ways we’ve always done and seen things. MABR potentiates conciliatory interrelationships between humanist strains of inquiry and posthumanizing educational approaches that have animated our studies. We engage MABR processes in our own research: two art exhibitions and two articles based on a half century old media textbook co-written by McLuhan (each of which is included in this study).

The fourth and fifth chapters of the dissertation are art exhibition reviews published in *Arts/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*. Both articles riff on the

commodification of museum spaces and the corporate nature of the relationships formed exhibitions' creation. Employing the perspectives of DeleuzoGuattarian philosophical thinking and new materialism, riff engages here in asking what an exhibition's curation does, rather than what it means?

In *MashUp at the Vancouver Art Gallery: "In Review" [onto]Riffologically*, we ontologize our considerations by discussing processes of mashup "far outside of humanity by applying ontological focus through riffological measures" to a four month long exhibition to which the entire Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) was dedicated to hosting (Wainwright & Stevens, 2017, p. 166). We redirect our attention from what we were being shown to what we care to see, and deepening our recognition that the art gallery's physical structure was physically sunk into the ancestral, unceded territory of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), the Sk̓w̓x̓w̓ú7mesh (Squamish) and sə̓lilwətaʔł (Tseil-Waututh) peoples. New materialisms are working on our thinking, in collaborativity.

Riff's potentials become apparent when mobilized to create both the museum exhibition review and a companion document that performs as a *riff arcade*, suggesting a technologically hosted version of the nineteenth century arcades of Paris, France. Our own unsorted screenshots, correspondence, and bits of information are compiled as a companion document, a "virtual scrapbook," reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's (2002) vast collection of source materials informing his *Arcades Project*.

A second art review (chapter five of the dissertation) explores a large scale, variously platformed exhibition, titled *The Anthropocene Project*. Virtually touring the exhibition, viewing its motion picture, and perusing its print catalogue and book, we are troubled by our attraction to

the project's scenes of environmental destruction, so beautifully portrayed in photographic imagery. We suggest that the exhibition's aesthetic acts as *anaesthetic*, lulling us with visually stunning images and engendering a sense of awe at these depictions of human achievement and ingenuity on such a large scale. Given the threats posed by anthropocenic activity, we liken the experience of visiting its sites to thanatourism, spectating suffering and death. We speculate on the monetary nature of the relationships at play in the creation of such a project (with its investors and the corporations that are funding this human production) and submit that it is not only a story of the Anthropocene, but also one of the timescape, the Capitalocene (Moore, 2016). Resisting increasingly grim prospects of earth's healthful future, given humans' proclivities, we invoke Haraway's (2016) conceptualization of an alternative timescape, the Chthulucene, that "entangles myriad temporalities and spatialities [...] including the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human-as-humus" (p. 101).

In the dissertation's sixth and seventh chapters, we posthumanize McLuhan's co-authored *City as Classroom* curriculum by drawing technologies into academic assemblage. We riff on McLuhan et al.'s (1977) understanding of the classroom's changed function during the electric age, which set in motion conditions ensuring that the school no longer functions as the primary site of information's availability.

Chapter six is *Shady Figures and Shifting Grounds for Re/Truthing: Channeling McLuhan's Posthuman*, which appeared in the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* in 2019. Despite its inclusion in the academic journal's "special issue" addressing the prospect of a "post-truth era" being ushered in with the election of the Trump administration, we bypass engagement with any polarizing effects of the American two party system by promoting riff as pedagogical endeavour "infus[ing] posthuman education with creativity" (Stevens & Wainwright, 2019, p.

115). We apply the textbook's Gestalt analysis of figure and ground to automobility and posthumanize our considerations by conceptualizing a surround that brings into relief natural elements repurposed or destroyed for road transportation's sake. We also riff on ride sharing apps, self-driving cars, and information transmittance on Twitter as President Trump's favoured means of direct communication to the public.

In chapter seven, we further riff on posthumanizing education and the tasks assigned in the *City as Classroom* textbook. *Posthumanizing McLuhan's Curriculum: Riffing on City as Classroom* was published in the *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies* in 2020, and here we theorize a posthuman critical pedagogy as a call to environmental action. We suggest that by flattening ontologies one can reimagine the human function in a bootstrap-like role that acts in *partnership* with the earth and its matter—rather than as overlord. We are influenced by Negri and Guattari's (2010) zest for revolution when indulging these aspirations that reimagine relationships in an environmentally restored world.

Intermezzos

Influenced by riff and informed by an [onto]Riffology that explores the ontological conditions of the posthuman and the learning environments created in the electric age, these six chapters develop and report some of the directionalities that our inquiries have taken. The collection of published pieces is interspersed with intermezzos intended as light entertainment, like those that performed between the acts of a play or an opera. The intermezzo's function here also suggests the DeleuzoGuattarian use of the *intermezzo* as existing in the middle, rhizomatic, where life takes place: "The only way to get outside the dualisms is to be-between, to pass between, the intermezzo—that is what Virginia Woolf lived with all her energies, in all her work,

never ceasing to become” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 277). Five intermezzos briefly explore various topics related to the posthuman and pedagogy; learning conducted in various environments, and my own efforts to engage these posthumanizing processes to try something different as *becoming*.

The first intermezzo is based on a “five minute talk” that I shared at a school staff professional development day. The presentation briefly introduces posthuman education and the nonhuman to the assembled teachers and teacher assistants of two elementary schools. A second intermezzo introduces *The Jimmy Dore Show (TJDS)* and the riffologic nature of its podcast and many related educational offerings. The third intermezzo presents a YouTube video titled *McLuhan Gets Processed By High School Students*, a 1969 audio recording of Marshall McLuhan meeting with a group of high school students in a Toronto living room that was broadcast on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). The fourth briefly demonstrates how I attempted to broaden perspectives when offering the territorial acknowledgements at a school professional development event. The final intermezzo is the transcript of a brief presentation that I made at a school staff meeting during which I applied what I am learning about ontological shifts to my own settler heritage and Canada’s *Truth and Reconciliation* process concerning the historic abuse of Indigenous Peoples. Five intermezzos punctuate six chapters that, as published works, each include the various components typical of a dissertation: including a literature review, methodologies, and findings. These intermezzos’ themes and thinking are influential to my conceptualization of pedagogical approaches that I wish to nurture and integrate.

Introduction to *[onto]Riffology: Explorations into collaboration, assemblage and learning events*

Exploring the possibility of pursuing a collaborative dissertation, Richard Wainwright and I jointly wrote a research proposal that lays out what we hoped to consider in the study we were engaging. This chapter introduces our early conceptualization of [onto]Riffology as we began to play—*riff*—with ideas beyond solely humanist concerns.

Chapter 2: [onto]Riffology: Explorations into Collaboration, Assemblage and Learning

Events

(Published in *Ontic Flows: From Digital Humanities to Posthumanities*, 2016).

The Riff

What term may be applied to an intuitively formed academic discourse of many years' length that has been entirely conducted by way of various technologies and functions such as phone, text, email? We call it riff—interactive and freeform. And if we approach it scientifically, we practice Riffology. As we seek to reference our interest in educational ontologies, we prefix it with [onto], which we enclose in brackets to suggest a compound word that's primacy of focus is placed on the active (action) constituent of “riff” and “riffing.” [onto]Riffology. We have been archiving emails and texts passed between us in an approach to learning that is largely thus: technology facilitated encounters gratifying our embodied curiosities and a *becoming curricula* without syllabi. Incrementally, we have witnessed our inquiries broaden, understandings multiply, and relationships in assemblage intensify. As educators, students and researchers we believe that there are evolving ways of learning in relationships whereby we simultaneously plug-in technological platforms and facilitate education's capabilities and capacities.

Contexts and Historicities

In 2009, the Canadian criminal justice system directed its steady gaze on Richard, the federal police investigated, various news media reported and the prospect of incarceration loomed. Societally stigmatized and isolated, while simultaneously mobilizing the material environment, he faced a seemingly inevitable path first towards prisoner, then to becoming eventual prison academic.

Around this time, a university acquaintance became correspondent. Without any physical proximity whatsoever, we two (Richard and Shannon) were first motivated, and eventually compelled, to continue learning in each other's midst. Clips of video (self produced, sourced online), photography, music, song lyrics, online encyclopedic entries, and varied text were spliced through “cut and paste” functions to visually reinforce ideas, reference thought and entertain in call(s) and response(s) across technological media.

In 2013, we brought our collaborative approaches to a doctoral program at University of Victoria's Faculty of Education, where we pursued academic interests in criminology, incarceration, institutions, prison visits, prison education, and the carnivalesque. Our inquiries became subsumed, however, by deepening interest in the *process* of our engagement; what it's ever been about, and by what sorcery it could be maximized in its learning engagement. We neither sought to bring together a structuralist account of knowledge, nor to formulate a truth in any unifying theory. Exciting approaches to attribution, technology, arts, mash-up and performance made Remix Theory an attractive area of reading. Richard's subsequent studies at The European Graduate School in 2014 brought to us concepts from continental philosophy, while University of Victoria faculty pointed us towards qualitative methodologies that might approximate our riffologic interests.

One such methodology was duoethnography, whereby two or more researchers juxtapose their life histories in order to provide multiple understandings of a social phenomenon. Duoethnography possesses qualities similar to those of our riffing; it widely sources emergent themes and the construction of meaning (Sawyer & Norris, 2013), while positioning participants not as *topics* of the work, but rather as sites of sociocultural inquiry (Sawyer and Liggett, 2012). Duoethnography features dialogue not only between research participants, but likewise between

participants and artifacts of cultural media such as photographs, music, and excerpted duoethnographic text.

We, ourselves, engaged a duoethnography during the summer of 2014 and wrote a class assignment that we titled, “Because we play: Riffing on rhizomes, attribution and voice in duoethnographic assemblage.”⁷ We incorporated archival texts and media artifacts not just to be consumed and reflected upon, but as art supplies and fragments to be assembled, disassembled, used outside of context and within. Reading the work back and forth over the telephone, writing (a)synchronously on a Google document; in our conversation, we experienced a further stabilization of our social entity’s identity through exchange’s repetition (Goffman, 1981). Its performance was creatively satisfying as we effectively pressed a “record” button on a certain day of our ongoing interactions and “paused” the collaborative experience on the date of submission, exiting the exercise in quoting the DeleuzoGuattarian prerogative—nay, *incantation*—to continue all inquiries in stammering “and... and... and” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2014, p. 25). We made glancing reference to philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari because they had been first brought to our attention that same summer. Their thought was entirely complex, their words confounding, yet we were attracted to their writing’s sense of rhythm, movement and speed. We recognized that in our own collaborative explorations, we meander, misunderstand, get lost, misdirected, redirected, and (re)understood, while accessing multiple entry and exit points. We enjoyed metaphors that evoked how lines of query lead us to next thoughts and new indulgences, that music speeds up, and individual notes form lines (Deleuze & Guattari, 2014, p. 8). We found resonance (as we had with remix studies) with DeleuzoGuattarian concepts of repetition, movement, and vibrations across planes, in

⁷ This 2014 university assignment is unpublished.

multiplicities, rhizomes, assemblages, open systems, interactions, intensities, and lines of flight. Events sprouting, pleating, interacting, refolding, unfolding, enfolding, territorializing, re-territorializing, subterraneously mapping, and nomadically roaming.

We were encouraged to hear Deleuze (2003, with Parnet) assert that philosophy is to be enjoyed by those who appreciate it, without necessarily being a philosopher, just as music and art are generally appreciated by non-practitioners (Deleuze & Parnet, 2003). We are not philosophers, yet we could tentatively approach concepts with less fear of intimidation or presumption for only wanting to let the ideas wash over us, hoping that they could eventually find purchase.

What were we to make of these burgeoning interests? Might our emerging attraction (albeit, unconscious) to philosophy that espouses rhizomes and assemblage be a response to technology's shaping of human experience during conditions of posthumanism, specifically those of *methodological* posthumanism; a philosophy of technology termed such for its provision of "conceptual tools" to facilitate study of technology vis a vis society? (Sharon, 2014)⁸

Perhaps in personal circumstances of post-incarceration, there was also attraction towards conceptions of new materialist ontologies that recognize human beings' relatively limited scope of influence in a world well outside of human authority, language, and characterization; the existence of a world "independent of our minds" (DeLanda in Van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2012, p. 39). We find ourselves increasingly influenced by concepts that stretch far beyond the temporality of our physical conditions and circumstances.

⁸ In Sharon's *Cartography of the Posthuman*, methodological posthumanism comes in two varieties: the historical-materialist axis and philosophical-object axis. Each of these axes have their own trajectories of thinkers associated with them. The historical materialist axis involves STS scholars such as Bruno Latour and Michel Callon, whereas the philosophical-object axis includes critical theorists; most important among them, Deleuze and Guattari. This project, while finding some middle ground with new materialism, tends to lean towards the trajectory of theorists situated along the philosophical-object axis.

New materialism generally seeks to avoid distinctions between inert and alive, instead increasingly “discern[ing] emergent, generative powers (or agentic capacities) even within inorganic matter” (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 9). Such discernment is recognized when political theorist Jane Bennett (2001) ascribes “agency to inorganic phenomena such as the electricity grid, food, and trash, all of which enjoy a certain efficacy that defies human will” (p. 167). If we recognize a methodological posthumanist lens directed at our inquiries, we are intrigued by the materiality of technology from (with, through) which our engagement takes place, by which software programs are used on a desktop computer, which operating system is being used on a cell phone, and in examining why talking about the same thing can take so many different forms and directions when we recognize agency in technology-machines.

Bennett’s (2001) conceptions of “enchanted materialism” and “vibrant materialities” feature on a landscape of various incarnations of this cultural theory. Barad (2007) suggests new materialism as “a diffractive methodology” that mines insights, reads for differences and bears an ethics based on entanglement expressed in a framework of “ethico-onto-epistemology” (p. 185). Diffractive reading across various new materialist scholars reveals contrasting approaches to such relationships, and to the nature of the agency that the physical world holds. Barad (in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012) posits agency as an “enactment... reconfiguring entanglements” and supporting a “relational ontology” that eschews notions of agency that endlessly mire one in humanist concerns (p. 54). Better understanding nonhuman agency in theories of new materialism will inform what a posthuman account of pedagogy might entail.

Riff as Learning Event?

DeleuzoGuattarian imperatives include those of concept creation whereby machinic propulsion replaces inert structure, and the act of production replaces the reproduction; its

metaphysics replacing that of representation (De Beistegui, 2013). Representational thought is regarded merely as categorical, even judgmental (MacLure, 2013). In rejecting “icons or images: the only reality is that of simulacra, that is, phenomena generated through *difference* [emphasis added]” (De Beistegui, 2013, p. 74).

In Deleuzian parlance, “event” is predicate expressing a verb (Deleuze, 1990). An event of whatever duration, even one that is instantaneous, indicates ‘something going on’ regardless of appearances to the contrary. Daignault (in Hwu, 2004) posits curriculum as an event, “which subsists in subject or inheres in language” (p. 195). What can riff as an event, “explosion of the unexpected” (Dosse, 2010, p. 136) provide for collaborative learning? We suggest that riff is a *learning* event, and are interested to understand how Deleuze’s conception of event⁹ may be applied to individual acts of learning, pursuing inquiry into such pedagogical potentialities.

Our earliest academic collaborations envisioned our riffing as external to traditionally conceived educational processes (which, after all, happen in the classroom or in written assignments that are composed to be handed off for external critique). We began to realize that what we once thought was ancillary to such academic work, was in fact “the work” itself. This recognition emerged despite adherence to stylistic and referencing conventions that may be less than orthodox. We “cut and paste” indiscriminately and make prodigious reference to popular culture (of which we are enthusiasts). We consider quotes and song lyrics ripe for hacking, pasting and reconstitution, sometimes pushing up against canonical materials while at other times pushing towards them. We sample theory, seek affect in discovery, imbibe concept’s

⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold*. 80. "A concert is being performed tonight. It is the event. Vibrations of sound disperse, periodic movements go through space with their harmonies or submultiples...First the solitary piano grieved, like a bird abandoned by its mate; the violin heard its wail and responded to it like a neighboring tree. It was like the beginning of the world..."

rationale and engage play beyond discourse. Individual and collaborative skills assume fluidity when each of us indulges an exploration of processing and sharing information with one another; a practise that is then repeated thousands of times as part of a fundamentally pedagogical engagement.

As the “man-horse-bow” assemblage of nomadic warfare is irreducible in composition, the relationships in our assemblage between human participants, technology and platforms empower intrinsic capacities amongst assemblage members in their combination that if even partially dispersed would significantly reduce the entity’s efficacy (Deleuze & Guattari, 2014).

Given the potential intersectionalities between technology, remix, DeleuzoGuattarian philosophical conceptualizations such as assemblage, new materialism and information transmission through [onto]Riffologic exchange, we investigate how *learning events* may be facilitated and actualized as pedagogic practice by integrating these various theories and methodologies toward curricular pursuits.

Curriculum Theory and Performing Events

Into the existing wave angles the surfer, windsurfer, paraglider; each wave’s event is in turn exited with as little impact as it was entered (Deleuze, 1995). This becomes inspirationally conceptual to our engagement with learning, and the learning event. “Get[ting] into something” becomes the prerogative of riff (getting out, as well), whilst making fleet passage during its *within* is the nature of the encounter.

In curricular domains, events span Royal, minor geopedagogic and nomadic spaces; from state mandated curricula to unschooling movements. In our collaborativity, we seek increasingly experimental, new-materialist understandings that indulge educational ontological explorations expanded by our heightening recognition of the basic, elemental material of which all things are

made, thus helping release us from anthropocentrism. Curricular imperatives and the concepts expressing them, are not to be merely burnished and endlessly reflected on, but rather pressed into *production*; “Curriculum does not exist, it happens” (Daignault in Hwu, 2004, p. 183).

The concept of virtual difference recognizes that in any given circumstance, reality emerges from an always vast number of tendencies that never will be actualised. Western thought privileges “a politics of the actual over the potential, and does this by stressing human life as already expressed and constituted” (Colebrook, 2002, p. xxx). In contemplating unfulfilled potentialities (*the virtual*) however, a plethora of opportunities to shape the future are better recognized: “If we look at all the bizarre, aberrant and different expressions of human life we begin to intuit the virtual powers that are capable of transforming life beyond what it actually is to what it might become” (Colebrook, 2002, p. xxx). Life grows richer for the exercise.

Deleuze (1994) suggests that we learn through means other than contemplation; that is, by *acting*, Daignault (2011) finds deep significance in this suggestion and proposes that learning takes place when an “accident” is transformed into an event, gleaning from Deleuze that we “don’t learn what we want, we end up wanting what we learned. There is a very Nietzschean twist here” (in Masny, p. 535).

An event possesses an inherently performative nature. It is “not the object as denoted, but the object as expressed or expressible, never present but always already in the past and yet to come” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 136). To Daignault, the nature of the event is wrapped up in Deleuze’s conception of the virtual’s actualization (as resolution of a problem), the expressible and expressed. Daignault does not intend to contradict Deleuze (who seemingly rejects an event’s *present tense*) by suggesting the importance of *expressing* the expressible (the virtual) before it is expressed, and rues that pedagogy has become increasingly overrun by “the nation state (*société*

de contrôle)” in which universities are marketed to students recruited as “clients” (Daignault, 2011). As such, students vociferously demand results and may deem any diversion from the syllabus by the professor as being “off task.” He laments that instructors navigating these circumstances increasingly trade in entirely predetermined curricular themes and expressed realities, rather than in the potentiality of the expressible or by engaging the pedagogically rich force of *expressing*. Of instruction, Daignault explains to Masny (2011):

I don't think Deleuze ever considered something like virtual pedagogy. I will try to explain via an example as I think that's part of the process of the virtual. When I teach, I have a syllabus. I have goals to reach. I have content to get across, things like that. Fine. If I just mechanically do that, regardless of how great I think I am doing that, I think I would simply be passing along expressed realities to the students and not getting them to shake up the expressed themselves. Yet most teachers I know are not at all mechanical. We all have different digressions, parentheses. We always go aside. We open a parenthesis. We think of something. We make connections. We have divergences and a kind of lateral thinking while teaching. This is the virtual at work. All those digressions are opportunities to create an event. The event is a very big concept in the work of Deleuze. I think the event and the virtual are very strongly connected. The connection is political. Virtual pedagogy would mean transforming all imposed curricula into events. To do this you have to conceive of the imposed curriculum as a kind of accident that is happening to you. Actually everything that happens to us could be seen as an accident. [...] Accidents happen all the time, but an accident is not an event. The event is what the accident makes me think about. (p. 530)

What then does it precisely take to guide the passage from an accident to evolve or become an event and what role an educator takes on in this process requires further investigation. Is it possible to guide the passage from accident to event *or* is this passage itself accidental with the consequence of educators as obsolescent? Staying on task, following the curriculum and memorizing information that may be tested on the final exam have been overly valued parts of educational policy and evaluation. Daignault (2011) asserts that in such oppressive teaching environments, richer content is often pursued in the “parentheses,” the margins, and that sometimes we can only get to the event by what seems to be an accident. This doesn’t mean that we only sequence towards events via accidents, but rather that sometimes the learning environment is so regimented (by syllabus, disciplinary requirements and standardization) that the only way to get to the event is accidentally.

As we feel an event, affect is the engendered response (Colebrook, 2002, p. xix). Both affect and percept are extracted from art (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). We paint, sculpt, compose, and write (with) sensations (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 166). Percepts are described by Deleuze (1995) as “packets of sensations and relations that live on independently of whoever experiences them” (p. 137). As a distinction is made between philosophically wrought concepts and “general or abstract ideas” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 24), we are motivated to explore how pedagogically recognizing distinctions between percepts and perceptions, affects and affections (that is, *feelings*) is apposite, and may enhance educational engagement.¹⁰ Riff embraces potentials through functions of cut, paste, alter, assemble, rewrite, hack etc. More broadly, and perhaps more importantly, riff proposes skipping the imposition of class(es), de-

¹⁰ As with jazz, riff isn’t simply accidental in its learning and performance. Humans and machines perform their collaboration in improvisation. Strings are tuned, stages are set. Jazz does riff, performs riff and jazz *riffs*. Non-human objects do music, and this music can be remixed. Sounds are lifted, played with, assembled, reassembled. There is a discipline of sorts in performance, yet its goal isn’t representation.

disciplining subjects, and re-gripping the materiality of education. These practises already exist to some degree; we suggest wider adoption. We envision riff as bootstrapping ontologies in a manner akin to DeLanda's philosophical application of the bootstrap, a computer term describing how a small amount of computer software is wired into its hardware to ease the "boot" function and break the circularity existing in the interdependence between the two. In DeLanda's (2009) conceptualization, a minimal amount of foundational knowledge may bootstrap further interests and inquiries by galvanizing the process; riff facilitates the momentum, sharing, and conditions for such. More importantly however remains the exploration of how experiences of concepts, affects and percepts by students might intensify their learning as we attempt to problematize the assumptions of humanism in education and educational research?

Events spur further curiosities, and concepts fold into the becomings of inquiries that are collaboratively engaged. The concept is a way “of approaching the world... [and] creating a world through the active extension of thinking the possible” (Wallin, 2010, p. 1). These acts of creation suggest necessary collisions of creative force igniting passions for learning. Wallin (2010) recognizes a requisite proximity of concepts to problematics, providing tensions and imperatives to shift, control, function, and without which the concept is rendered meaningless. The challenge is to engage the philosophical speculative to “create new concepts for the problems the [artists and philosophers] pose [...] (Deleuze & Guattari, 1968/1994, p. 28).

Building on the work of Pinar and Grumet (1976), Wallin (2010) understands established conceptualizations of currere in a Deleuzian, alternative sense of singularity and “individuation... the setting apart of pedagogy from pedagogy in general” (p. ix). The trajectory becomes that of flinging *centrifugally* off the circumscribed curriculum track evoked by the

“cursus” (of Grecian chariot driving), if only fleetingly released from the “structuralist legacy and reactive tendencies of pedagogical thought” (Wallin, 2010, p. 1)¹¹. For Wallin (2010), an “active conceptualization” of currere engages arts-based research “in its most radical, nonrepresentational form” (p. 1).

Difference is a creative force that acts as catalyst to the creation of concept in the “educational encounter” (Wallin, 2010, p. 8). In engaging [onto]Riffology we consider Deleuzian conceptualizations of *repetition* (in contrast to “re-representation”) and *difference*, which returns “and returns always, and always differently” (De Beistegui, 2012, p. 75) as an object of affirmation.

[onto]Riffology reaches towards remix studies, which assert that all progress and discovery are built on the creative achievements of others, nothing is ever really new. *Copy, combine, transform*. Collaborativity—artistic, academic and otherwise—harnesses much popular culture (in which we are each immersed) to effect pleasurable disruptions, production and dissemination. Riff is arts-informed in that language and communication are broadly understood to include words, art, dance, and film, all as part of cognitive and embodied exploration. Drenched in remix ethos, practise and its effects, this cultural age induces a democratization of media production mobilizing participation (Borschke, 2015, p. 107).

Methodologies, Remix and Riff

¹¹ While we do not address the structuralist legacy and reactivity of pedagogical thought here, we situate ourselves in an evolving critique within the field of educational research. The legacies we consider are those of institutions, curricula, subjects, academic and disciplines. What are the materials of learning material and how may they be remixed? What do we do with the emancipatory strategies that are embedded in education theory and history? How do we academically collaborate with people and stuff? How do we deal with attribution and intellectual property? How do we conceptualize and perform education in and around the hegemony of the familiar ‘tracks’ (academic and otherwise)? How do we hack in, sometimes uninvited to Riff for a while?

Remix becomes a “convenient metaphor for a mode of production assumed to be specific to our post-postmodern era and media technologies” (Irvine, 2015, p. 15). Where once existed distinctions between musician, producer, DJ, and audience, we suggest that as roles merge and melt, ruptures also make themselves apparent. Likewise, does the fundamental anti-essentialism inherent in remix practises, and the contingency of the relationships held in assemblage (Stefan Sonvilla-Weiss, 2015).

Riff, like remix, draws on intuitive events, and spontaneous engagements with music and ideas. Similarly, [onto]Riffology injects heightened impulse, and relational impetus not to merely talk *at* people, but rather to *engage* ideas and invite exchanges located in the event. [onto]Riffology is inherently expansive, sampling popular culture in intellectually promiscuous ways.

Academia has remained particularly obtuse to remix culture’s re/combinatorial potentials of sampling, and any relaxation of creativity’s careful attribution. Johnson-Eilola and Selber posit that academic contexts have not hitherto reflected the wider remix culture which we societally inhabit, while “other contexts, both disciplinary and popular, have developed interesting and useful remix approaches that can aid invention, leverage intellectual and physical resources, and dramatize the social dimensions of composing in this day and age” (Johnson-Eilola & Selber, 2007, p. 375).

“Remix” suggests the activity of copy and transform, while conveying the repurposing of elements, and near ancient practises of “recycling old culture to make new,” while not working alone but in joint production.” Resulting challenges of attribution are addressed by Mark Amerika (2015) when he writes that:

there are certainly not near enough conventional grounding devices that a proper academic paper would give you, some might even claim a certain lack of professionalism given the tendency to sample bits of data from contemporary new media theory without properly citing the supposed original source of the information, as if there could ever be an original source for the sampled data. (p. 3)

In the recording industry, the striating effects of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) of the late 1980's, imposed radical adherence to copyright rules. Music created just a few years prior, which prodigiously samples various sources, would never have come to be. A legal challenge to a work's legitimacy can purge this creative material from the public record by simply sorting an algorithm enforced by Google and YouTube. Notes become lines, lines become music and musical notes are further sped by video creators seeking to evade detection of a song's incorporation from record companies broadly searching content in order to stem music's unlicensed use. Alternatively, Fair Use provision may be invoked to protect the videos themselves, or to protect the video creator from prosecution (Aufderheide, 2015).

In remix, a musical riff may be sampled (lifted from an existing work) and repeated throughout a piece. Conceptually an act of becoming, the refrain (ritornello, as "little return") is similarly deterritorializing and territorializing (Parr, 2010, p. 70). A refrain territorializes when birdsong declares protection of the nest, a child's humming evokes home, a blaring television or radio announces "household within" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2014, p. 311). [onto]Riffs incrementally territorialize intellectual space, but like refrains also deterritorialize by making declarations of immanent change during preparations to leave established territories to create new ones (Drohan, 2009).

Further, the refrain provides “a contradictory dynamic to territoriality. It stretches toward a return to known territory to inhabit it and expel chaos” (Dosse, 2010, p. 253). More than marking boundaries and turfs, the refrain is recognized as expressive—sonically, mechanically or visually (Drohan, 2009). Such expression is motion, and the refrain “becomes concentrated by elimination in a very short moment, as though moving from the extremes to a centre, or, on the contrary, to develop by additions, moving from a centre to the extremes, and also to travel these routes in both directions” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2014, p. 349).

Methodological Consideration: Theoretical Framework or Practice?

The concepts we discover in theoretical, philosophical and academic reading, and our riffological engagement shape the questions we ask. We are mindful, however, that inquiries are delimited by assumptions about which “kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practises we accept rest” (St. Pierre, 2014a, p. 4). For scholars steeped in qualitative research methods—perhaps not *so* generously referred to by St. Pierre (2014) as “conventional humanist qualitative methodology,” “1980s qualitative methodology,” and ‘the posts’—some basic assumptions first involve *where* inquiries are engaged: in and out of “the ruins” of methodologies termed “posts” (p. 4).

The experimental nature of DeleuzoGuattarian philosophy and its concepts inspire emergent capacities capable of blowing *completely* apart constraining frameworks determining our understanding of all matter that surrounds us.

Reading and listening to these matters persuade us to commit to thinking past conversational tones and toward the Deleuzoguattarian conceptual; understanding that our assemblage is indispensable and irreplaceable during our shared experience of the world at this time and since our first meeting. Somehow words explicating *assemblage*, particularly those by

DeLanda (2006) explaining his conceptualization, have deeply affected us and provide clarity.

What is [onto]Riffology doing? What isn't it doing?

The territorialization that takes place in face to face interactions—through “behavioural processes defining its boundaries in space and time”—differs only somewhat from that which occurs in computer facilitated exchanges conducted between participants whose geographic distance results in a “blurring of spatial boundaries” (DeLanda, 2013a, pp. 54-55). Once ratified, the proceedings feature relational traits that benefit from affecting *ritual equilibrium* between participants (Goffman, 1981). Any destabilization of the exchange has a deleterious, deterritorializing effect on the assemblage, and grounds must be regained to reclaim the structure's integrity; content, expression *and* articulation. Even when conducted asynchronously, riff is similarly bound by the etiquette and protocols of relational dynamics.

Copy, Combine, Transformativity

Assemblage creates territories, occupying them and conducting multifaceted, complex doings; enjoying what each integral participant and component “can do.” Emergent potentials found in (re)combination of constituent parts into assemblages bearing relations of exteriority, create wholes far greater than the sums of parts.

Waves and wind gusts suggest how events of learning may be experienced in brief, almost instantaneous time periods where all the senses are harnessed and capabilities galvanized to optimize any educational opportunity the given circumstance provides, during its duration. Movement is described by Deleuze (1994) as implying “a plurality of centres, a superposition of perspectives, a tangle of points of view” (p. 56). New materialism indicates methodology that eschews dualisms (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). In its ability to sweep across historically defined academic disciplines, new materialism is claimed to be “rewriting academia as a whole,

which includes the disciplinary boundaries that organize it today” (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012, p. 40).

Deleuze and Guattari (2014), themselves sourcing widely, explain of their jointly written *A Thousand Plateaus*, “here we have made use of everything that came within range, what was closest as well as farthest away” (p. 3). Our own dynamic is an ideal happenstance found in expressive assemblage that eases space between its components (participants, technology, topics, available media, ideas) during acts of creation and agency. [onto]Riffology’s tangential nature inspires its *raison d’être*: explorations of concepts, ideas and learning as events.

Intermezzo I: Presenting at a School Professional Development Event

This first intermezzo introduces themes of the nonhuman in the form of a five minute presentation that I delivered to my elementary school teacher and educational assistant colleagues during a professional development day in February, 2017. The event was modelled on both TED Talks and *Ignite* (without *Ignite* events' use of slides that automatically advance every fifteen seconds). I was one of five presenters—and only a last minute addition to the bill, as another teacher had suffered a family loss the previous day. As a member of the committee organizing the event, I mildly pitched my interest in presenting on the nonhuman and posthuman, but when the committee lead countered with, “what does that have to do with curriculum?,” I didn't pursue the matter, knowing that I hadn't presented it very well. When a presenter notified us the evening before the event that a family emergency would preclude her attendance, I offered to fill her slot and prepared this presentation on themes of education and the nonhuman, trying to find entry points into discussion about themes surrounding the posthuman and nonhuman. Aware that staff may be wholly unfamiliar with the topics I would be addressing, I removed all jargon from the presentation, referenced current events, and framed the topic by discussing a particularly popular TED talk that I was confident many attendees would have viewed. I rose from my front row chair upon introduction, turned to the assembled attendees, and delivered the following address:

“The presentations that we are enjoying this morning have been inspired by TED talks, and one in particular comes to mind as being of interest to educators. It is titled *Do Schools Kill Creativity?*¹², and the presenter, Sir Ken Robinson Robinson, asked important questions about

¹² [Do schools kill creativity? | Sir Ken Robinson](#)

education in an engaging, humorous manner that has attracted millions of viewers since it was posted ten years ago, in 2007.

“I remember noting a point he made about the role of education in preparing students for a future we little understand and can hardly predict. This struck me because I recognized the absolute truth of his words. This seems an opportunity to look at them again. Sir Robinson shared:

*I have a big interest in education, and I think we all do. We have a huge vested interest in it, partly because it's education that's meant to take us into this future that we can't grasp. If you think of it, children starting school this year will be retiring in 2065. Nobody has a clue what the world will look like in five years' time. And yet we're meant to be educating them for it. So the unpredictability, I think, is extraordinary.*¹³

“A full decade later, Sir Robinson's views are proved indeed prescient. “Unpredictability” still aptly describes global conditions politically, economically, environmentally, and educationally. One of the driving forces influencing both change and instability is the technology that has revolutionized so much of what we witness worldwide: hacks on electronic information that are disruptive to international relationships, and are conjectured to sway democratically held elections; increasing threats to individuals’ privacy by rampant information gathering and unprecedented surveillance by nations’ governments on its citizenry; the steady gaze of close circuit television cameras as they unblinkingly surveil nations’ streets and premises. These technological innovations contribute to struggles that we are witnessing in real time, around the world. Even this weekend’s controversial US travel ban on some countries will be enforced by

¹³ (TED, 2007, 2:07)

retrieving electronically gathered information that will be used to determine travellers' citizenship, and therefore their "suitability" to enter the United States. There would be no other way to so immediately and thoroughly implement such an edict. We are being forced to increasingly recognize our co-existence with, and reliance on, the nonhuman in the form of computers and massive amounts of data that they are generating and transmitting.

"Burgeoning streams of cultural theory examine this shift to the nonhuman, and curriculum theorists have been delving into these considerations in their recognition that the nonhuman will likely completely reorientate education. We may find here a potential to shift our own pedagogical paradigms further and wider than the human lens that has primarily dominated our perceptions and concerns, as we better recognize the breadth and nature of interactions taking place all around us. This may in fact prove helpful—and even hopeful—if we, as educators, hope to address so many real concerns in tumultuous times.

"What it means to be human" becomes a particularly important contemplation in such a broader view as we orientate ourselves to a recently launched BC curriculum that encourages *Big Ideas* and expanded ways of learning when we attempt to bring our thinking into stronger alignment with—and far more respectfully to—beliefs and practices held by Indigenous peoples in our communities and as we simultaneously navigate the technologies that are exponentially more important features in our lives. These considerations may also be influential as we presently seek to introduce STEM and STEAM educational principles at Sidney Elementary.

"We may be encouraged to think past and beyond easily adopted, *humanistic* dualisms of "either, or" towards broader, even multitudinous frameworks that challenge patterns of thinking that have heretofore disserved humanity and the earth. We may increasingly recognize that experiences also—and constantly—take place all over the school, independent of humans.

Schools and their classrooms are replete with both humans and objects that *reciprocally* act on one another: object with object, object with human, human with human. One curriculum theorist terms these “more than encounters.” The elementary school is an environment of contact and collision between countless entities and textures; knees and palms scraped against cement, heads hit by balls, a baby chick’s feathers across finger tips, slivers piercing skin, desks scraping across floors, teeth wiggled out of mouths by fingers and tongues, chalk scraped against concrete, tears rolling down cheeks, chairs being rocked against desks, clothing fibres itching skin, bodies crashing with objects, objects brushing up against bodies, bodies tumbling over bodies, objects striking objects.

Children seem highly attuned to this navigation of their environment: the “more than encounters.” I recently watched through my classroom window as an eight year old child played with a small figurine on the leaves of a small bush during an entire recess. When a stack of chairs across the classroom suddenly toppled over as we all sat on the rug together, a five year old student seated at my feet immediately looked up and said, “must be my dad,” who was deceased some years previously. Hard top, leaves, the frayed carpet ends, the glue stick tube, the glue, the pencil, the electric pencil sharpener, the marker nib, its ink staining skin and the classmate are in constant relationship with children during the school day, and it takes working in such an environment—as we do—to fully witness it, and curriculum theorists to raise these interactions to our consciousness, and reawaken us to its wonder.

“We might consider philosophical belief that *none* of the activity that happens in nature is taking place for the sustenance or satisfaction of humans. None of it at all. And further, these features of nature and the objects that we fashion from natural resources are understood by some to hold energy, exert force, and remain independent of humanity and its intentions for it. This

thinking thoroughly disavows anthropocentrism—that is, the belief in the supremacy of humans—as we face environmental challenges, even the real prospect of ecological disaster, and are, as one proponent suggests, “forced to recognize that the fate of humanity is deeply intertwined with the fates of all sorts of other entities. Anthropocentrism also has become increasingly untenable in the light of scientific experiment and discovery.”¹⁴

“A decentring of humans in these interactions may promote increased concern for animal welfare and a recognition of equality in status to that of the human *animal* and an openness to environmental initiatives that reimagine a level of respect for, and protection of, nature that might curb the level of devastation caused by climate change and all its irreparable damage.

“How do we expand our experiences and curiosities to be better inclusive of philosophies that reimagine education, creativity and science in rejecting anthropocentrism? How do we temper sometimes suspicions of seemingly subversive and sinister features of the nonhuman with a wider recognition of ways of being that celebrate the earth, not as our personal playground and limitless provider of natural resources that we exploit and misuse but as a creative force that we do well to very importantly *stop making all about it endlessly providing sustenance to us greedy humans?*

“Sir Robinson’s closing remarks suggest some of the import of these topics that I have briefly mentioned, including humanity, the nonhuman, environmental concern, and animals’ well being. He quoted Jonas Salk saying, “If all the insects were to disappear from the Earth, within 50 years all life on Earth would end. If all human beings disappeared from the Earth, within 50 years all forms of life would flourish.” Robinson then suggested creativity’s necessity in navigating future challenges faced by the children that we are educating now. Ten years later,

¹⁴ Shaviro, 2014, p. 1232

deep importance of this imperative is only more strongly evident. Considering, and even adopting, broader creative perspectives on these matters, on matter, and the nature of their interrelationships, may contribute in important ways.”

Having delivered my “five minute talk,” I sat down.

Introduction to *Machinic Arts-Based Research: Posthumanizing Approaches to Art Inquiry*

This second chapter, in many ways, enfolds the entire study and is its culmination in many respects. *Machinic Arts-Based Research: Posthumanizing Approaches to Art Inquiry* (in press) is highly informed by the work of Canadian curriculum theorists, Jan Jagodzinski (Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013; 2017; 2018) and Jason Wallin (2011; 2013; 2014; 2015; Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013; Carlin & Wallin; whose work has inspired our trajectories throughout the study.

Chapter 3: Machinic Arts-Based Research: Posthumanizing Approaches to Art Inquiry

(Submitted to International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 2020)

Theoretical Dalliances

Theoretical dalliances characterize an academic study that we have engaged as doctoral students disrupting humanism in order to philosophically conceptualize a posthuman critical pedagogy. We are interested in doing research more broadly than merely describing or adoring a human perspective and enfolding arts-based research—a traditionally humanist, qualitative, research methodology—within a profusion of postqualitative, nonhuman, and posthuman theories that shift learning towards an incorporation of ontological with epistemic approaches. We are interested in that which exists near the fringes of continental philosophy and dabbling in the experimentality characteristic of remix and sampling. Favouring the processual over procedural, we are without deep loyalties nor strong adhesions to methodologies nor their proponents. We have theorized the mode of our engagements, influenced by what surrounds us academically while eschewing the prescribed research methods and playing across disciplines.

As ontological shifts are taking place, we explore how decentring the human influences our learning and explore the nature of learning's engagements as riffologic. We mobilize *riff* as free form, spontaneous, post qualitative inquiry that samples poststructural philosophical concepts, speculative realism, new materialism, and the kinds of experimental recombinationality found in remix (Wainwright & Stevens, 2017). As interventions in music production, sampling and remix indulge the same promiscuity of approach that we pursue when we conceptually “plug in and play” with materials of all kinds as tools with which we intervene with learning (Wainwright & Stevens, 2020). Here, we are deterritorializing paradigmatic conflict towards conciliatory strategies.

Arts-Based Research

Arts-based research has proven influential to art education theorists, art educators, and practitioners around the world. Its design brings artistic methodologies towards knowledge construction. According to its earliest theorists, Barone and Eisner (2012), arts-based research “enlarge[s] human understanding” (pp. 8-9). Its humanistic gravitas being well assured, “its aim is to create an expressive form that will enable an individual to secure an empathetic participation in the lives of others and in the situations studied” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, pp. 8-9). Traditionally, ABR enmeshes humanist values and phenomenological approaches that are nobly engaged alongside artistic expression to bring attention to, and alleviate, societal and ecological ills. The field is well-entrenched within educational research faculties and although its credibility may be questioned by some, it is rarely dismissed as illegitimate practise.

Under ABR’s canopy, art practitioners engage its approaches by employing artistic senses, abilities, and theories to “adapt the tenets of the creative arts in a social research project” (Leavy, 2017, p. 191). Its efforts are described as “utiliz[ing] the forms of thinking and forms of representation that the arts provide as a means through which the world can be better understood and through such understanding comes the enlargement of mind” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p.xi). Leavy (2017) lists its various formats:

Arts-based practices may draw on any art form and representational forms that include but are not limited to literary forms (essays, short stories, novellas, novels, experimental writing, scripts, screenplays, poetry, parables); performative forms (music, songs, dance, creative movement, theatre); visual art (photography, drawing, painting, collage, installation art, three-dimensional (3-D) art, sculpture, comics, quilts, needlework); audiovisual forms (film, video); multimedia forms (graphic novels), and

multimethod forms (combining two or more art forms). (p. 4)

ABR's various renderings may include art-based (McNiff, 1998), arts-informed (Cole & Knowles, 2008), poetic inquiry (Prendergast, Leggo, & Sameshima, 2009; Galvin & Prendergast, 2016), a/r/tography (Springgay, Irwin, & Leggo, 2008) and ABER as educational research (Barone & Eisner, 2012).

Anthropocentric Conditions and Shifts

We are attracted to its philosophy because of the questions that its concepts elicit within us about the human species and how it co-exists with the world, particularly during thoroughly anthropocentric conditions. DeleuzoGuattarian thought challenges our lifelong patterns of thinking and understanding. We bring riff's propulsive energies into assemblage with, among many things, a developing conceptualization of a machinic arts-based research (MABR) that ontologically maneuvers the field of arts-based research (ABR) by materializing it and "radicaliz[ing]... the human in relation to the nonhuman and inhuman forces" (jagodzinski, 2017, p. 268). Riff taps agential forces populating artistic domains and amps arts-based research through its inclusion in machinic assemblage. It entangles arts-based approaches with *conceptual* elements necessary for creating philosophy through the use of art.

Deleuze and Guattari employ the machinic to "dethrone the notion of structure" (Dosse, 2013, p. 527). jagodzinski and Wallin (2013), in turn, conceptualize a machinic arts that prompts an "operative question: what can be created capable of constructing a new type of reality?" (p. 10). We are curious about forces that might operationalize such potentialities and are intrigued by Deleuze's (1986/2014) assertion that "the power to be affected is like a matter of force, and the power to affect us like a function of force" (pp. 71–72). In what ways can we philosophically understand the capabilities of the machinic and force?

The machine is described by Deleuze (2002/2004) as being any system interrupting flows (p. 219). The machinic (distinct from the mechanic or mechanistic) emphasizes repetition, but as difference and, therefore, creative space (Dosse, 2013). In articulating the “machinic arts,” jagodzinski and Wallin (2013) invoke *turntablism* as the repurposing of the turntable from a machine facilitating representation, to one in creative assemblage with other technologies (Guins & Cruz, 2006). From music player to music maker; this challenges an image of thought that we hold for the traditional mode of playback and the work of the disc jockey. As turntablist, the DJ becomes musical artist, shifting the turntable’s purpose from that of representation to instrumentation. Technologies not only attach to walls, servers, and turntables, however. We conceptualize the technological as not necessarily a tool of man, but as a function of relationship: nonhuman and human. “Techne,” the root word meaning art or skill in Greek (τέχνη), suggests capacities that are evidenced in organic and nonorganic materials.

A machinic arts “survey[s] what art might do, [and] how it might connect to and create a plane upon which social revolution might be thought” (jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013, p. 11). Experimental recombinatoriality of art and philosophy extends and optimizes capacities for invention and concept building. ABR and its materials, artistic representations, qualitative methodological approaches, and creation of affects and percepts, all provide *source materials* that may be folded into assemblage in ways contributing to an ontology of becoming. Forces propel our [onto]Riffological task of bringing encounters, events, and learning events into such machinic assemblage.

Machinic Arts-Based Research

ABR is largely identified with social, cultural knowledge generation that is epistemic and typically attributed to humanism. ABR has been influential to our riffology. We repurpose

ABR's features as the conceptual food which animates the kind of philosophically posthuman inquiry to which some ABR has been less suited to engage, given its humanistic, representational pedigree. We riff as "prompt to event" by plugging in materially with forces that perturb and instigate the machinic, artistic, technological, human, and posthuman; as well as the agency that facilitates such passages (Stevens & Wainwright, 2016). Brought to ABR contexts, our proclivities and impulses engage what Jagodzinski and Wallin (2013) articulate as a machinic-arts that shifts research from the actual towards contemporary art's potential to create singularities (p. 11).

This hybrid of machinic impulses and ABR that we are theorizing as MABR operates in open systems of the machinic; drawing on the richness of ABR across variations such as a/r/tography and poetic inquiry. Art education is recognized as impactful learning, partly because of art's ability to access learners' emotions (Leavy, 2015). In hybridity, MABR's aesthetic and educative imperatives—as well as its intensity of engagement—are enfolded by philosophy bearing a poststructuralist perspective.

Braidotti (2013c) submits that "Deleuze's philosophical monism makes no categorical difference between thinking and creating, painting and writing, concept and percept" (p. 309). MABR's *raison d'être* is to ride waves. Weaving philosophical consideration with arts-based research in the pursuit of creating concepts, MABR is engaged as ABR that might never produce an artistic figure, figuration, or figurine. Its prerogative is, instead, to produce *thought*.

Thus, the creativity of MABR extends itself to the conceptual and even to concept creation. Artistic materials of humanist aesthetic and phenomenological context are brought into proximity with philosophies of arts and science, to alter their course. Sometimes, the turntable and LP are there to facilitate representation and at other times the vinyl provides the raw

materials with which the DJ makes art with ontological urgency. This suggestion is exemplified in Deleuze's (2005) ontological re-configuring of both painter Francis Bacon's art and the transcripts of the artist's extended interviews with art critic David Sylvester. Similarly, Deleuze's (1986/2014) turntabling of Foucault's writings does not especially represent either's thinking, but, rather, repurposes Foucault's writings: "bringing out and working with minor differences" between the two men's work (Marks, 2013, p. 113). These approaches evidence *encounters* between Deleuze and the oeuvres of filmmakers, philosophers, artists, and writers (including Kafka, Masoch, Carroll, and Proust). Each of Deleuze's works is (re)interpretive and re-imaginative to the functions that art traditionally performs, while combining constituent relations of interiority and exteriority (DeLanda, 2016).

Forceworking

We suggest that in performing MABR, riff *forceworks* and brings into machinic assemblage what Ziarek (2004) describes as that which "makes art-works distinctive from other objects and what allows art to intervene into social practise [that is] meant to reinforce the distance between the kind of work [Ziarek] see[s] modern art perform and the idea that there is primarily a cultural or an aesthetic object" (p. 30). Forcework forges interrelationships between force as "spatial-temporal play" and a Heideggerian sense of the German *kraftwerk* (forcework, a power plant) or *kunstwerk* (artwork). These interconnections and their observable results, however, are advanced in a "transformative sense," rather than as an objet d'art (Ziarek, 2004). Ziarek (2004) conceptualizes *forcework* as being capable of mobilizing art's agential powers to facilitate encounters inspiring the conceptual, rather than consigning art to being primarily commodified, collected, and displayed as objects—nay *trophies*.

Of the philosophically transformative, Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) write:

It has always been a question of forces, designated either as forces of chaos or forces of the earth. Similarly, for all of time painting has had the project of rendering visible, instead of reproducing the visible, and music of rendering sonorous, instead reproducing the sonorous. (pp. 346-347)

Ziarek's (2004) conceptualization of a forcework in art acknowledges the labour through which full artistic engagement takes place. Initially, there is "the work of redistributing forces" in the creation of artwork, then providing art the necessary space that would enable it to "perform its work beyond the parameters of aesthetic experience" (p. 31). Furthermore, forcework facilitates an appreciation of art beyond any passive contemplation or reception of its import (Ziarek, 2004). Instead, art is hurled back into the world. Labour that is performed by forcework lets "the work bring about the rupture and displacement within the usual doing, knowing, and valuing that are constitutive of social relations" (Ziarek, 2004, p. 31).

We consider new concepts to be every bit as important as the creation of traditional artistry. Riffologically engaged, concepts come together as artistic activity—sometimes we bring art to those activities, while at other times we perform activities with art. Necessarily, we initiate, induce, and even *force* disruptions to habitual ways of thinking about matter. Riff enters relational recombinatorily in mashup and turntabling. Phonographic platforms are ontologically reconstituted into musical instruments entering into machinic assemblage with computers, DJs, electricity, audiences, vibrations, proximities, distances, rotation, and revolution. Their combination annihilates the binary relationship between musical product and consumption. Turntabling traditional methodologies, MABR aspires to an ingenuity infused with the experimentality of poststructuralist philosophy that moves our thinking in, what we consider to be, important ways.

Forces of Art

In matters of the aesthetic, it is sensation that first “strikes a viewer of a painting or the reader of a poem before meaning is discerned in figuration or a thematic design” (Conley, 2013, p. 247). Thinking with the *logic of sensation* liberates and deterritorializes. Deleuze (2005) describes its logic thus, “I become in the sensation and something happens through the sensation, one through the other, one in the other” (p. 31). Shifting emphasis from representation to the creative powers producing art, artistic aesthetics duly respond: substituting “a work of art” for “a force of art.”

Art’s inspiration is provided by *sensations* with which we “paint, sculpt, compose, and write” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 166). Deleuze (1995) describes percepts as “packets of sensations and responses that live on independently of whoever experiences them” (p. 137), while the *affect* is explained as “the change, or variation, that occurs when bodies collide or come into contact” (Colman, 2013, p. 11). Deleuze and Parnet (2007) write that affects “[...] sometimes [. . .] weaken us in so far as they diminish our power to act and decompose our relationships (sadness), [and] sometimes they make us stronger in so far as they increase our power and make us enter into a more vast or superior individual (joy)” (p. 60). This is hardly insignificant and explains some of the great trust and hope conferred on art and art education.

Striving to experience felt responses and effect social change in meaningful ways, arts-based researchers access affects and percepts in both their art consumption and artistic production. Deleuze (1995) contends that art must continually create both affects as new ways of feeling and percepts as new ways of seeing and hearing. Affects and percepts become the terms in which artists think; it is their currency in thought. Deleuze (1990/1995) asserts, however, that to truly “get things moving,” a convergence of *three* forces—affect, percept, and

concept—must be realized (p. 164). Once the thinking of artists and musicians is infused with concepts, thought becomes philosophical (Deleuze, 1990/1995). “Painters think in terms of lines and colours, just as musicians think in sounds, writers think in words, film-makers think in images, and so on” (Smith, 2012, p. 25): however, philosophers think in concepts.

Artistic creation exercises a capture of forces, “making it possible to substitute the forces-matter relationship for the form-material relationship” (Dosse, 2011, pp. 463-464). Of philosophy’s transmutating potentials, Massumi (2002) writes:

Not reflection, description, prescription or judgment [...] The object of philosophy is not things as they are, but things as they potentially come-between, to become-together, outside of their normal conditions of captivity. (p. 4)

Concepts

A “becom[ing]-together” enacts a level of connective intimacy worthy of the encounter (Massumi, 2002). Alchemy potentiates innovations outside of habituated humanity and beyond human tendencies to rely on the traditional cliché. Forces of affect, percept, and philosophical concept enrich ABR’s significant potentials, as, “the philosopher seizes the expression of forces underlying forms and tries to evaluate their hidden power [...]” (Dosse, 2011, p. 463).

MABR is being theorized as revolutionary work that thrusts arts-based research towards Deleuzoguatarian becoming. This provides resistance to the default positions and strategies that we tend to “go to” in our consideration of what art is, rather than what it could do as the possible and the creative. In MABR contexts, an aesthetics of affect and percept broadens appreciation for art beyond what is experienced in the midst of the *object d’art*, while the conceptual reconfigures ontological assumptions.

Ideally, concepts facilitate thinking of the possible, while philosophy’s “job has always been to create new concepts” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 32). Deleuze (with Guattari) conceptualizes *agencement*, or assemblage, as an arrangement that is:

a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes, and reigns—different natures.

Thus, the assemblage’s only unity is that of co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a “sympathy.” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 69)

Alliances of “co-function” are temporary, reflecting Deleuze and Guattari’s emphasis on movement and time. The assemblage comprises “encounter[s] of a number of elements... that create something resembling a context...” (Dosse, 2011, p. 527).

Riffs and In-Reviews

We write in-reviews and articles as articulations of the turntabling that ontologizes our own encounters. These acts of production punctuate our processes. Each are exemplars of MABR, spinning of content—and intentions—as raw materials that we ontologically reconstitute into conceptual food (for thinking).

The in-review is a continual revisiting of sites of creativity, such as art, science, and philosophy. We draw on affect when re-experiencing these spaces and the artistic engagements they host, even online. Concepts inform our thinking about what we are witnessing. Activities of deterritorializing and reterritorializing characterize the various machinic and social assemblages to which each riff adheres and detaches in new forms. We have composed two in-reviews for *Art Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal* and, herein, describe our turntabling processes.

MashUp Exhibition

The first, *MashUp at the Vancouver Art Gallery: Appropriation, Modern Culture and Riff in its "In Review,"* was published in 2017. *MashUp* was held in the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) in May 2016, its entire gallery space dedicated to housing the exhibition. *In-reviewing* the event, we acknowledge the “unceded dirt” on which the physical structure of the gallery rests as appropriation that mirrors the materiality and themes of the exhibits displayed inside the building. We bring into relationship art galleries’ conventional practises of forming corporate partnerships, while creating commercial spaces hosting exhibitions, which we liken to Walter Benjamin’s study of the 19th century arcades of Paris, France. Benjamin (1982/2002) compiled an exhaustive collection of notes and manuscripts that were posthumously edited, then published as the *Arcade Project*. We co-opt his study of commodified spaces, reinvesting physical, structural, and historical spaces in riffing the intersubjectivity between Paris arcade habitués: flaneur (loiterer), prostitute, and collector.

The exhibition’s “engagement is redirected from officially suggested discourse to a non-representational ‘riff’ that doesn’t ask what the exhibit means, but rather what does this curation—this MashUp—do?” (Wainwright & Stevens, 2017, p. 175). Long since physically dismantled, *MashUp*’s offerings continue to elucidate in a compendium book (purchased at the art gallery bookstore), while YouTube serves as a video archive of the exhibition and the materials sampled, remixed, mashed up, then variously displayed.

We are interested in deterritorializing that which is being curated (Wainwright & Stevens, 2017) and our attention is increasingly brought to the material, the ground, the nonhuman, the bits that the exhibitors don’t particularly want us to see. This MashUp in-review is comprised of two pieces: one document that was published in *Art/Research International*, which easily met editorial standards, and another that remains largely hidden

from human view. The latter work becomes a “virtual scrapbook” evidencing the generative nature of riff. Unsorted screenshots of our notes and source materials became an arcade that is a stand-alone document and a complex archive of the fragmentary—awaiting future re-assembly. The journal’s editorial board cited concerns about possible copyright infringement and deemed the document unpublishable. It declined to permit inclusion of even a hyperlink or URL address to the website, where it resides (<https://mashup-at-the-vancouver-art-gallery.com>).

When reflecting on the dual documents, we consider the published article to be relatively tightly structured and loosely riffed, while the web published companion piece is highly riffed and loosely structured—chaotic and unencumbered by the limitations traditionally imposed by regimented academic writing. The parallel document digitally performs like Benjamin’s rough notes of paper scraps and clipped articles. It functions as an axis between structure and riff.

Published online in 2017, the human readership of our article, *MashUp at the Vancouver Art Gallery: “In review” [onto]Riffologically*, as of early 2020, has generated fewer than one hundred hits. Interestingly however, the companion document is being accessed with increasing frequency at thousands of hits per month: averaging 1,300 hits throughout 2018 and nearly 5,000, monthly, in 2019. Bots are interacting with each other, scraping online documents and entire websites. Web crawlers, online-spiders, and malware have drawn the in-review documents into discursive behaviours and machinic assemblage. This activity demonstrates that such sites comprise data of interest to algorithmic and AI processes—all largely beyond our human capacity to understand. This shifts its content from being a concern of humanistic epistemics to that of the posthuman and ontological. It is only then that we can start to map the

entanglements in an article that so few humans have read, yet Google, at one time, ranked higher than the VAG *MashUp* exhibition homepage itself (as an internet search when using the search string “*Vancouver Art Gallery*” and “*Mashup*”).

The Anthropocene Project

Our second in-review, *A Review of The Anthropocene Project: Treachery in Images*, will be published in 2020. The art event on which it is turntabled includes a feature film, pictorial catalogues, and a touring exhibition that has been held in Canada and internationally. We spin the project as a thanatouristic curation of the macabre that is turntabled by ontologizing the nature of the questions we ask.

The Anthropocene is a proposed epoch, proceeding the Holocene, during which the ecological and geological effects of human activity have been drastically escalating. If we take seriously the contention that capitalist methods of production have a role in environmental destruction, then to remain impassive to its death drive is to succumb to its violence. Therefore, if we critique the concept of the Anthropocene without applying proper consideration of the mechanics and workings of capitalist systems, we are apt to try “fixing” the problem by adopting yet *more* capitalistic means as “solutions.”

Despite our wariness, as the project’s motion picture—*Anthropocene: the Human Epoch*—plays, it engenders within us a strange sense of awe at disturbing aesthetics. By the time the credits roll at film's end, we are turntabling notions of *credit* beyond those of cinematic attribution and authorship: both the project’s receipt of film production credits in corporate sponsorship programmes and consideration about *who* is credited with the visual artistry of *The Anthropocene Project*.

In a story about the Anthropocene, the film's credits betray the extent of capital's role. Throughout the film, capital lurks outside the photographs' frames. The film—much like the entire project—bears a narrative linearity and myopic vision. We begin to ask what is scripting the film's narration, striking the eerie tones of the soundtrack, and rewarding the production team and the project's funders? There is marked incongruity between *The Anthropocene Project's* titular epoch and corporate sponsors' business dealings and this seemingly explains an inability of the filmmakers to fully divulge what influences its messaging about the Anthropocene. Researching the partnerships in this anthropocentric, deeply corporate endeavour, we deduce that there is still much about the film's photography that communicates what the filmmakers don't want viewers to see, hear, or reflect on. For example, they have seemingly expunged reference to capitalism and obscured the visibility of most brand names and logos. This is capital that “necrotizes the entire planet” (McBrien, 2016, p. 116). And the Capitalocene is a second proposed timescape, alongside the Anthropocene, during which the lure of lucre and drive for profit have worked a heavy toll on our environment in the pursuit of resource extraction and consumption.

The filmmakers have carefully framed their editorial approach. During a Q&A session held after a screening of the project's film, *Anthropocene: the Human Epoch*, its director, Jennifer Baichwal (2018), shared with the audience that both the film's visual and aural narrations were crafted to avoid dogmatic positions that might prompt prospective viewers to dismiss the film out of hand (Baichwal, 2018).

Riffs on the City as Classroom

We apply turntabling's creative enterprise to a curricular work co-developed by

Marshall McLuhan: a nearly forty five year old Canadian high school media textbook, *The City as Classroom: Understanding Media and Language* (McLuhan, Hutchon, & McLuhan, 1977a, 1977b). We wrote two pieces based on the textbook: *Shady Figures and Shifting Grounds for Re/Truthing: Channeling McLuhan's Posthuman* and *City as Classroom: Posthumanizing McLuhan's Curriculum* (Stevens & Wainwright, 2019; Wainwright & Stevens, 2020).

To play a textbook would amount to us bringing its contents to pedagogical venues and navigating within the authors' assertions, parameters, and biases. We might mirror its sentiments, in kind, by presenting a piece of work in response. To turntable the textbook, however, is to bring technological function into academic assemblage while turning the classroom out into the cityscape, as prescribed by McLuhan et al. (1977a, 1977b), and there applying technological potentials also found in classrooms.

Once foreworking curriculum outside the classroom, we disc jockey as turntablists to ontologize McLuhan et al.'s (1977a, 1977b) *City as Classroom* and McLuhan's early recognition, sixty years ago, of information's now simultaneous availability due to electric technologies. Classrooms, then, were no longer the only physical spaces in which to engage curricular tasks. The classroom is increasingly located anywhere and everywhere. In this paradigm, *classrooming* becomes both acts and sites of production.

To demonstrate how turntabling shifts humanist and representational tendencies towards the ontological and posthuman, we itemize the processes of academic publication to which we have submitted. We explain corresponding turntable approaches that infuse technological imperatives in creative assemblage: the nature of academic authorship in riff and at our host university; the content of the papers' matter; and the academic publication's

editorship and review processes. In each section below, we show how we have turntabled these encounters and then summarize both the play and turntable modes—reproduction to production—that characterize our desire to embrace the epistemological *and* ontological.

Turntabling Authorship

Lone authorship, particularly concerning dissertations and theses, has been an academic tradition these past centuries. Learning institutions find it challenging to properly address, or tease apart, computers' contributions from those of the human students enlisting their support. Assemblages are increasingly recognized as enfolding human writing with technological functions of composition that are instrumental to research operations. In our riffological study, we collaboratively avail ourselves of all manner of technological assistance and available device when co-composing various assignments, articles, and works. In the context of educational research, we theorize [onto]Riffology as activity “we do” with technologies and that technologies do with us: what is happening between all manner of actants as the human is increasingly decentred.

Our host learning institution, the University of Victoria (UVic), holds academic integrity related standards for the creation of assignments and dissertations that typically require sole authorship in order to ensure that scholars demonstrate their individual, authentic knowledge on their research. To maintain these conditions, UVic's offices issue guidelines to students that¹⁵ dictate the nature of permissible academic engagements with other students, instructors, materials, and human academic supports, such as editors. UVic states clear penalties for breaching its requirements, however, most of these institutional expectations, in

¹⁵ See: <https://www.uvic.ca/current-students/home/academics/academic-integrity>

our opinion, are no longer reflective of contemporary academic environments. Censure of human editing in academic production overlooks the reality that students, scholars, and academics are enmeshed within all manner of technological editing functions and platforms in the co-production of their work. Therefore, prohibiting human assistance in the creation of written text is inconsistent with permissible use of technological editing functions and platforms, all of which feature evolving capacities. Conceptually, editing has transitioned from being a human generated writing tool towards one that is technologically mediated with AI and neural networking tools. Universities overlook countless resources employed by scholars to shape content, question meaning, assist in completing tasks, and compose works. Multiple technological functions are generating and editing content: autocorrect; AI algorithms and news outlets; content rankings provided by *Google Docs*, *Google Scholar*, *Bing*, and *ResearchNet*; and editing software, including *Ginger*, *Grammarly*, *Hemingway*, and *ProWritingAid*. For centuries the university has acted as a repository of knowledge, however, UVic's commitment to regulating students' reliance on human sources of academic support—the kind that humans might lend one another during the writing and research process—seems an almost absurd preoccupation that ignores this online availability of information and machinic processing.

Supplanting the university, networked technology rhizomatically archives information amassed throughout human history, and activates the archive by providing date and significance rankings for academic works, their total citations counts, authors' profiles, references and hyperlinks to all other cited papers, etc. Whereas, legitimately conducting, publishing, and accessing research was once only possible through universities, students now have any number of academic publishing options, making possible an emerging field of human

independent scholarship.

By turntabling notions of “who edits” and “what edits” academic works, we rhetorically ask whether these platforms perform as tools or collaborators? What tasks of structural and stylistic editing, copy editing, and proofreading is this assortment of software capable of assuming to assist the human academic writer? In this day and age, how do we remain mindful about the nature of sole authorship in order to continue to distinguish between the contributions of scholars and their “technological assistants”? How do we adequately articulate these distinctions to satisfy academic standards imposed by universities and how much longer will we continue to make them?

Turntabling Content

McLuhan’s co-written high school curriculum of 1977 is recognized for its prescience in early anticipating the changing role of the classroom as technologies alter larger society. Convinced of *City as Classroom*’s educative potentials as riff, we simultaneously wrote two pieces based on this media studies textbook. *Shady Figures and Shifting Grounds for Re/Truthing: Channeling McLuhan’s Posthuman* was conceived for a journal’s proposed special issue on post-truth and Donald Trump. Our submitted abstract echoed the palpable sense of social polarization that we detected in the American based, peer-reviewed journal’s call for papers. We have become fascinated by the American political and media landscape: a “situation exacerbated by mercurial relationships with what is ‘truth’ and ‘fake’” (Stevens & Wainwright, 2019, p.111). We suggested that as Canadians, we are likely observing events somewhat less encumbered by the rhetoric of American partisan politics. We have been theoretically committed to resisting the dominant discourses of polemic debate that were all-consuming during the USA’s 2016 election cycle, and we breached national boundaries that

were laid out in the call for papers—and did so on the editorial board’s terms.

Living so geographically proximate to the pervasive cultural influences of our nation’s southern neighbour, we are drawn into consideration of highly polarized political narratives and the binaries that seem inevitable in the United States’ “two party system” of governance. We riffed on figure/ground analysis, the perception sharpening technique favoured by McLuhan as an approach that may appear binary but provides latitude to recognize the shading between each figure that simultaneously comprises each ground—and the reverse.¹⁶

Once invited to participate in the journal’s special issue, we composed an article that resituated the premises of the call for papers from either/or propositions to ones that provide space to play between and around multiplicities and complexity. Turntabling the binary composition of figure and ground, we conceived a *surround* as a perspective extending concept to be applied to figure/ground analysis investing in future ontologies. This surround is:

less apparent to humans and is instead attuned to intensities and forces. It introduces spatial depth to our considerations. By bringing into assemblage the functions of figure, ground and surround, we [...] ontologically re-conceptualize, re-group and re-intensify our efforts [...] We are relying on the ability of the assemblage to potentially unleash realizable force. (Wainwright & Stevens, 2020, p. 61)

In *City as Classroom: Posthumanizing McLuhan’s Curriculum*, we riffed additional themes of McLuhan’s *City as Classroom*. We conceptualized a *hypercity* that “negotiate[s] passages through and under city spaces” (Wainwright & Stevens, 2020, p. 5). The piece opens

¹⁶ Examples of “figure” and “ground” may be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7f1G6Nx5VDw>

with McLuhan's prescient, albeit humanist, observations that technologies were increasingly becoming extensions of human bodies, skin, and nervous systems. We turnable education by decoupling pedagogy from humanism, while theorizing a posthuman critical theory that interrupts a humanist ontology, while providing contexts for learning encounters to happen spontaneously and to resituate human participation. We conceptualized a posthuman *hypercity* as networked assemblages that re-world relationships away from being territorial and predatory. The hypercity posthumanizes the metropolis in its orientation of materiality.

Turntabling the Editorial Process

To satisfy UVic's requirements concerning a collaboratively conducted (post)qualitative study, collaboratively written pieces must be published in academic journals as a condition of their inclusion in the students' dissertations. Therefore, as participants in a collaboratively conducted (post)qualitative study, we find ourselves complicit in these operations as we are eager to be published. We have determinedly clawed our way into academia's journals' pages.

The editing process in research publication is anticipated, mostly linear, and contingent on completion of a hierarchical process of peer-review in which opinions are delivered and discourse is mediated. Seeking publication in academic journals has drawn us into machinic assemblage with all sorts: humans, technologies, concepts, and academic journal editors. Editorial boards bear their own respective assemblage of relations that include the journal's readership and the anonymous human reviewer. We have deemed engagement with these entities to be necessary: this shared study is largely comprised of collaboratively created works. Having submitted papers replete with theoretical and procedural disruptions, we entered the journals' editorial process, which involved anonymous

reviewer feedback. This we received outside the generative process as a necessary assessment to meet normative standards of rigour. At times, the hierarchical editorial structure imposed during review and editing invited collaboration into writing processes between primary authors, technologies, and human contributors of varying durations. The participation of supervisors, editors, reviewers, committee members, and copy editors continues throughout the editorial phase of publishing to considerably influence the theoretical work.

For example, our use of terminology in *Shady Figures and Shifting Grounds for Re/Truthing: Channeling McLuhan's Posthuman* was challenged by one reviewer who seemingly bristled at our points:

There is also a certain usage of terms like “binary,” “humanist,” and other common pejorative terms among recent posthumanist scholars . . . I am relatively fluent in this parlance, but I do not take the dogmatic positions on the Anthropocene or against binaries and humanism to be simply true.” (private correspondence, 2019)

The reviewer’s response alerted us to potential concerns held by researchers presumably engaging “conventional humanist qualitative methodolog[ies]” (St. Pierre, 2014b, p. 379), for whom “humanism” isn’t considered something to necessarily overcome, nor an ideology that requires careful framing. Traditional ways that educators have adopted pedagogical theories both synthesize learning and structure academic research to the ways we logically reason towards them. Ecological terms like the Anthropocene, particularly in the present US political climate, may feel dogmatic while its viability as a geo-political epoch is still under scientific evaluation.

We riff with journal reviewers editors, et al. and turntable their critiques, which have been technologically facilitated, sometimes anonymously, and at times excoriatingly. These interrelations of composition facilitate asynchronous authorship that intersects roles and boundaries defining editor, scholar, computer software, reviewer (human, electronic, and otherwise). Drawn into collaboration, the reviewers and editors have written themselves into the text.

Outro

Our pedagogical approach to reconsidering humanity's ill-effects on the environment, all species, and fellow human beings includes striving to break anthropocentrism's lock on our senses. We believe that humanism is failing in its liberatory aspirations, while heedlessly committing ecological ruin in its service to excessive greed, enabled by contemporary economic systems. We conceptualize MABR as a process ontology to supplement our humanist gaze by expanding our purview to encompass the nonhuman, matter, and the posthuman.

MABR's methods ideally initiate the alchemical reactions possible when affect and percept, as sensations engendered in art, draw nigh to concepts, as "the means by which we move beyond what we experience so that we can think of new possibilities" (Stagoll, 2013, p. 53). Philosophy is particularly resonant to us when imbued with the notes and tones of DeleuzoGuattarian approaches (and those of the cadre of contemporary academics who are intrigued by them). That ABR practitioners reach for DeleuzoGuattarian concepts, such as the rhizome (Irwin, 2013), suggests that they too have appetite for inquiry beyond the conventionality of the qualitative, epistemological, and humanist.

[onto]Riffology theorizes *riff* as propelling technologically mediated inquiry towards

onto-encounters. In MABR, we mobilize the influential, orthodoxy-challenging work of researchers, jagodzinski and Wallin (2013), including their commentary on the machinic arts, turntablism, and forcework. Applied to curricular pursuits, we avoid passively consuming the physical classroom and hitting play into that environment, solely to consume its output.

Deploying agential relationships, MABR ontologically turntables acts of creative production, for a world yet to come.

Intermezzo II: News Nomads

Countless pedagogical offerings are being made technologically available online in rich learning environments well suited to riffologic learning as “plug in and play.” Although the Canadian schoolhouse is still identifiable as a site of teaching and learning (despite its drastically altered relationship with the nation’s populace during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020), technological mediation facilitates vast opportunities to learn anywhere in the world from any other world citizen. On platforms such as Google, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, information is uploaded and disseminated globally in the form of engaging content: events, commentary, and human expertise.

The nature of events—their veracity, who or what is recounting them, what information is being excised and included, and the circumstances of the entity (human and nonhuman) sharing them (and with whom)—all come into play in online reportage. Masses of web hosted advertisements and click bait news items, based on machine generated content, also contribute to the concern held about events’ possible fabrication. Similar allegations of falsehood are made about the portrayal of world events that are being reported as news stories. Distrust of the motives of “bad actor” nations, most notoriously Russia during the 2016 American election also muddy the clarifying waters of truth in reporting.

US President Trump’s frequent accusations of American corporate, cable media’s trade in “fake news” posits the challenges inherent to establishing the veracity of, and instilling confidence in, news stories when network and cabal news agencies decide which narratives are reported in the striated space created by corporate, capitalist narratives.

Meanwhile, there are *nomads* online who are internet content creators providing news commentary for online viewers and listeners about the political influence of corporate interests

on American broadcast and cable news: interlocutors who regularly feature those same American broadcast and cable news channels' footage to discuss their assertions. Most often their channels and podcasts are composed of a single individual (or skeletal crew) on a "newsroom" set with a camera, microphone, and backdrop. The numbers of these new channels and podcasts indicate not only viewers' appetites for engagement with such news programming (and comments by fellow viewers), but the interest of many to create and maintain news channels. Despite likely not having achieved journalism degrees or meeting the criteria to receive journalistic credentials, news nomads conscientiously build these independent enterprises to create content compelling to them and their viewing audience. Despite news nomads' presentation of a television studio set (often, presumably, in their homes) and the features of TV programming, the show is neither lampooning network news nor mimicking it—rather, channels and programmes such as these are reinterpreting newscasting. And news nomads take their task seriously.

Savat and Harper (2016) suggest that the role of the news nomad is not so much to "create new forms of news"—as this is still very much the domain and under the control of the *urstaat* [the State]—but, rather, to "disrupt the normal flows of information" (p. 115). The news nomad creates news broadcasting procured by the State controlled news machine, and riffs on the implications of its messaging. In the United States, the absence of state media, and the close relationships with the business sector and government, ensure that media is typically private and corporate controlled (Noam, 2009).

The Jimmy Dore Show (TJDS) is a news channel hosted by such a "news nomad" (Savat & Harper, 2016). YouTube channel, podcast, and radio programme, *TJDS* provides political perspectives supporting the American Progressive left and features editorial positions that typically challenge "the status quo." This riffologically rich source is hosted by its namesake,

Jimmy Dore—a self described “jag off nightclub comedian” who lays down riff when making comment on American political matters culled from various news sources. The analysis offered by a comedic news nomad is a breadth of perception permitting one to “experienc[e] the sense of configuration; this is the sense that an artist brings to bear on painting, *a satirist on situations* [emphasis added]” (McLuhan et al., 1977, p. 10).

McLuhan supported the educative practise of “putting people on,” explaining in an interview:

I put people on. Putting people on means teasing them. Challenging them. Upsetting them. Befuddling them. Any comic, any comic puts on his audience by hurting them. You can't name a comic who doesn't put on his audience by hurting them. The technique of putting people on in my case consists simply in pointing to the things they have ignored, things that concern them very nearly, but have been totally pushed aside as insignificant. (mywebcowtube, 2011, :23)

TJDS channel features videos numbering in the thousands¹⁷ and is a syndicated radio programme carried nationwide in the United States. Dore and his small staff curate stories, clips, props, jokes and skits on segments of some two to thirty minutes' duration. The show is YouTube viewing that counters established networks, corporate or the urstaat (State controlled) media (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The show and its host play on humour¹⁸, iconoclasm, and increasingly apoplectic anger (in verbal tirades) about political corruption, “corporate capture,” the failures of the Democratic Party¹⁹ and an alleged capitulation of the Progressive wing within it to aggressively challenge the party's graft. Jimmy Dore's commentary is in support of single

¹⁷ [Food Lines Stretching For Blocks All Over US](#) (The Jimmy Dore Show, 2020a)

¹⁸ [Thank You, Hillary! Our Response To The Tonight Show's Hillary Love Fest](#) (The Jimmy Dore Show, 2017a)

¹⁹ [Compilation Of Biden's Public Lies & Plagiarism](#) (The Jimmy Dore Show, 2020b)

payer healthcare in the United States²⁰, ceasing endless war²¹, addressing poverty²², and increases in minimum wage²³, tuition free public colleges, and tackling existential environmental threats by pursuing the Green New Deal. *TJDS* attracts viewers who share his criticisms of corporate malfeasance, the rise of oligarchism, globalism, the United States' many hundred billion dollar international trade in armaments, the deregulation of Wall Street, the petrodollar system, and the CARES Act's massive upward transfer of wealth during the COVID-19 pandemic. A common theme of the show is deep dissatisfaction with "corporate tools"—politicians receiving campaign contributions from corporations and lobby groups, which he denounces as "liars for the establishment" and stronger epithets yet.

Dore is a "news nomad" in the tradition of gonzo journalists, "comedians, satirists, teachers and storytellers" who are similarly outspoken and who often use humour to deliver their brand of messaging (Savat & Harper, 2016, p. 115). In comedic fashion, Dore riffs on turns of phrase, frequently repeating lines and non sequiturs—a practise that reinforces learning by regular viewers. He is, self admittedly, most influenced by the late George Carlin's²⁴ acerbic, observational humour.

The multi-faceted *The Jimmy Dore Show* serves as exemplar to loosely structured, far reaching riffologic pedagogy. The show is YouTube viewing that runs counter to broadcast news featured on establishment networks. The show features *interactions* that include articles and video clips displayed onscreen for discussion by the host and a "panel" of fellow comedians, podcasters, and bloggers. Its sensibility is comedic and Dore's comic instincts are on display in

²⁰ [Shocking Reactions To U.S. Healthcare Costs From The UK](#) (The Jimmy Dore Show, 2019)

²¹ [How US Media Shamelessly Pushes Endless Military Spending](#) (The Jimmy Dore Show, 2018)

²² [Clinton Advisor Says Dem's Should Keep Poor People In Poverty](#) (The Jimmy Dore Show, 2017)

²³ [Hillary's Loss Makes Perfect Sense After Hearing This Man Speak](#) (The Jimmy Dore Show, 2016)

²⁴ [George Carlin's 'Big Club' Proven Real By Email Between Hillary & Tech Tycoon](#)

his sometimes outrageous, often profane outbursts; his delivery of prepared jokes and skits; his exaggerated facial expressions and gestures. Viewers' comments make reference to such schtick, while, in turn, Dore is referential of commenters' enjoyment and feedback. His comedic performance also prompts laughter and playful banter amongst show panel members, seated in the show's studio inside the garage of his Pasadena, California home. On set, Dore perches on a stool behind a counter and in front of a screen that projects either the show's logo (a swinging neon club sign) or the video clips and articles being discussed. Dore also conducts interviews with his various guests who are either in studio or on Skype: fellow YouTubers²⁵, activists, journalists²⁶, former NSA and CIA whistleblowers²⁷, comedians, screenwriters, university professors, economists²⁸, filmmakers²⁹, politicians, and political candidates. Viewers' comments also provide supplementary content—the majority of whom are supportive of the opinions expressed and information presented, or skeptical and dismissive.

TJDS also holds frequent comedy events at bars and theatres (primarily in the vicinity of Los Angeles, but, increasingly, in other states). These live shows³⁰ follow a similar format to that of the podcast: fellow comedians, journalists, entertainers, and politicians join Dore onstage to commentate on news clips and stories to highly appreciative, well lubricated, audience members. Excerpts of the evenings' content are subsequently posted as show segments online.

Additionally, Dore (accompanied by crew members) sporadically attends protests, rallies, and political events; to provide commentary, conduct interviews, and be interviewed. His show also

²⁵ [5:53 / 22:28 Julian Assange Gets Standing Ovation At TED Talk](#) (The Jimmy Dore Show, 2018)

²⁶ [The Real Looting Of America CNN Won't Show You. w/Chris Hedges](#) (The Jimmy Dore Show, 2020)

²⁷ [Courts Vindicate SNOWDEN! with NSA Whistle-blower BILL BINNEY!](#) (The Jimmy Dore Show, 2020b)

²⁸ [Economist Who Predicted Trump & Brexit Explains How System Screws You \(Mark Blyth Interview\)](#) (The Jimmy Dore Show, 2018)

²⁹ [Russia Has Devised New Generation Of Nuclear Weapons W/Oliver Stone pt 2](#) (The Jimmy Dore Show, 2018)

³⁰ [NYTimes' Bari Weiss Melts Down On Joe Rogan's Show!](#) (The Jimmy Dore Show, 2019)

features ongoing segments of audio skits that comedically imagine Jimmy in telephone conversations with various politicians and celebrities³¹. The show's multiple platforms and formats may offer information that is presented without quizzes, tests, participant evaluations, syllabi, and timetables. Instead, however, its programming encourages *thinking* about content that rhizomatically spans nearly 3000 posted videos. Pedagogically, riffs assume freeform directionality—almost certainly without any course syllabus—with technological facilitation.

Dore first gained recognition performing stand up comedy and then by providing political commentary on the YouTube channel, The Young Turks (TYT)³². He directs much vitriol at the “establishment media,” which he contends defend the State and “lie us into wars.” When he is despondent by what he considers the unscrupulous editorial choices and decisions made by network and cable news organizations, Dore punctuates his remarks with a rhetorical catchphrase: “And you wonder why people get their news from YouTube.” He suggests that because six corporations control the US media—the entirety of its newspapers, television stations and radio stations—American citizens are driven to alternative sources of news reporting to learn of events and viewpoints not represented in the mainstream media because of corporate interests.

There is a further deterritorializing effect to online news' dissemination when the content of these independent news channels is made available across the globe, collecting an international viewership of shared opinions—even ideology.

Dore maintains that he suffers repercussions for discussing news events that run counter to establishment narratives regarding war, surveillance, and political power in the US

³¹ [Bernie's Surprising Response To Mail Bomb Threat](#) (The Jimmy Dore Show, 2018)

³² [Jimmy Dore on Habeas Corpus](#) Tiny Fingered Cheeto Colored Ferret Wearing Shit Gibbon, 2016)

government. He refers to the corporate YouTube as “the bastards,” alleging that *TJDS* viewers are daily, randomly unsubscribed, notes that the platform regularly demonitizes videos decrying America’s regime change wars, and that algorithms bury the show’s videos in online searches and prohibit companies from attaching their advertisements to *TJDS* videos. In addition to YouTube advertising income, the show is financially supported by Patreon memberships, live shows, and the sale of merchandise (mugs and t-shirts). Dore also considers himself to be in the sights of corporate news agencies that have “smeared” him, such as the Washington Post (whose owner, Jeff Bezos, is regularly targeted and mocked on the show for his “predatory capitalist” business practices). We are reminded of McLuhan’s assertions that jokes are grievances: one “can tell where the grievances are by just watching where the jokes are” (Henry, 2012, 52:18). And Dore is undeniably aggrieved.

As “the tree greens” (Deleuze, 1993, p. 53), “truth newses,” and “fact truths.” The ubiquity of mobile phone video footage and citizen journalism results in professional credentialing that renders it entirely appropriate that sporadic Wikileaks “dumps” of secret (sometimes classified) information are made available online to be pored over by any interested party with an appetite for journalism, fact-finding, and intrigue. Hackers do the work of journalists, a press card may be replaced by a Twitter account, cable news pundits and news readers are accused of being “corporate shills,” and investigative journalists are still engaged in an undeniably dangerous career.

Dore shatters the binaries proliferate in media, adopting an anti-establishment positioning and prose—passionate delivery and colloquial phrasing delivered by a veritable smart ass. As viewers, we are not viewing to gather knowledge, like a training manual, nor acquiring a skill set, as much as we are feeding our appetites for online content and *thinking* in the process.

Deleuze (1994) pondered the nature of learning, writing that “we never know in advance how someone will learn: by means of what loves someone becomes good at Latin, what encounters make them philosophers, or in what dictionaries they learn to think...there is no more a method of learning than there is a method for finding treasures...” (p. 165). On *TJDS*, learning is supported by the presentation of news articles, graphics, videos, in-studio participants, and interviewed guests. Dore’s repeated references to certain of his perspectives and events, his consistency of messaging, and his turn of phrase reinforce one’s learning and inform one’s thinking.

“News”, “fact”, “truth”, and “knowledge” are increasingly scrutinized, nevertheless, in a Deleuzian sense these events always retain their “reality.” Compounding the challenges of establishing the factual from the false is that “news” dissemination has achieved exponentially rapid rates of speed in the electric age. The effects are thoroughly disorienting. A stand up comedian researches alternative news stories for broadcast on YouTube and, as a news nomad, attempts to distinguish the function of a true journalist from the cable news pundits that he derisively terms “corporate stenographers.” One guest remarked more than once that his acquaintance, Julian Assange, calls Jimmy Dore the best thing on YouTube. I glimpsed Jimmy’s gratified, but ever so slightly concerned expression upon hearing it.

Introduction to *MashUp at the Vancouver Art Gallery: “In review”*

[onto]Riffologically

The next two chapters riff on art exhibition reviews, and the exhibitions themselves. Our explorations and discoveries are galvanized by a Deleuzian sense of vibration, speed, and motion. These collaboratively authored reviews reference what we have been reading, consider, and are curious about, particularly concerning artistic expression and learning in the art gallery. Both exhibitions are remarkable in their breadth and ambitions, replete with potentialities for the type of *encounters* that Deleuze described himself seeking by visiting art galleries (Stivale, 2011): chance encounters sought out with ideas and perspectives, unleashing percepts and affects. Each might promise the conditions for a relationship of whatever length, depth, and nature. These exhibitions and projects are artistically fecund, creatively charged spaces comprising physical museum displays, online websites, feature films, YouTube links³³, and print catalogues. Each conceptually attracts our attention, then engages our riffologic processes of inquiry. Despite being quite differently composed from one another, similar themes of materiality and its commodification emerge.

³³ Since its publication in 2017, various hyperlinks included in the MashUp review have become “dead,” and are no longer available. Such eventualities seem attributable to the nature of evolving, coursing flows of information on a world wide web of thinking, and a sense of all its impermanence.

Chapter 4: MashUp at the Vancouver Art Gallery: “In review” [onto]Riffologically

(Published in *Art/Research International*, 2017)



“When the first German railway line was about to be constructed in Bavaria, the medical faculty at Erlangen published an expert opinion...: the rapid movement would cause,... cerebral disorders (the mere sight of a train rushing by could already do this), and it was therefore necessary, at the least, to build a wooden barrier five feet high on both sides of the track.”³⁶

MashUp. Move through the exhibition; riff with its sites, displays, exhibits; repeat.

³⁴ "Vancouver Art Gallery: Mashup", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhfmzMN-Lx8>.

³⁵ Richard Wainwright, *image*, 2016.

³⁶ Walter Benjamin and Rolf Tiedemann (1999). *The Arcades Project*. Belknap Press

By various means we revisit (repeatedly) our initial browsing of *MashUp*, held at Vancouver Art Gallery, applying ontological focus through riffological measures. Our intention is to welcome readers perusing this “review” of experiences across and beyond the exhibition itself. This sponsored event.

[A companion document riffs, further elucidating our process; this document tightly framed and loosely riffed, that one hardly framed and highly riffed.](#) The latter document suggests a window shopping [flâneur](#) browsing within the arcade - in this case a *riff arcade*. Its document’s footnotes also detail more and more. Both contain links to various viewables that may be perused by left clicking on words in blue font, while various pictorial representations nestle within the documents. Riff layers upon layers, in every perusal we are drawn back into more creative interaction with the material.

[We riff on *MashUp*](#)³⁷ in anticipation of art educators resonating with pedagogical approaches to entanglements of decentred human experience, and curiosities that shift query from phenomena’s meanings to questioning what events are doing. We are interested not in seeing merely what is being exhibited, but deterritorializing what is being curated.

MashUp at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC

[First floor](#)³⁸

The digital age: Hacking, remix and the archive in the age of post-production

[Second floor](#)³⁹

Late 20th century: Splicing, sampling and the street in the age of appropriation

³⁷ See <http://www.mashup-at-the-vancouver-art-gallery.com>

³⁸ "Vancouver Art Gallery, First Floor", *Vanartgallery.bc.ca*, accessed February 8, 2017, https://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/the_exhibitions/exhibit_mashup1.html.

³⁹ "Vancouver Art Gallery, Second Floor", *Vanartgallery.bc.ca*, accessed February 8, 2017, https://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/the_exhibitions/exhibit_mashup2.html.

Third floor⁴⁰

The post-war: Cut, copy and the quotation in the age of mass media

Fourth floor⁴¹

Early 20th century: Collage, montage and readymade at the birth of modern culture

*A way to talk around the problem*⁴²: Riff, Mashup and new materialism

“Riff.” What is riffing? Riff becomes information passage; passing and sharing that which passes our eyes, that which is shared unseen. Riff is creating a document like this with countless, *endless* links to more and more available information; and each perusal of such a document is experienced as completely individual and unique from any other. It is tangential, it is *method* facilitating inquiries, and it is one that we have theoretically conceptualized as [onto]Riffology,⁴³ whereby we consider what it is to riff with what we read, view and interact (technologies, sites, each other, art and art’s affect), while seeking opportunities to tap experiential forms bearing a promiscuous spirit of sampling. As [onto]Riffers we don’t simply watch as we plug in; we play.⁴⁴

[onto]Riffology finds easy resonance in mashup and remix, and here we turn both our riffological sights to the Vancouver Art Gallery which hosted *MashUp*⁴⁵ from February 20th through June 12th, 2016. Creative and combinatorial, *mashup* is identifiable in popular discourse

⁴⁰ "Vancouver Art Gallery, Third Floor", *Vanartgallery.bc.ca*, accessed February 8, 2017, https://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/the_exhibitions/exhibit_mashup3.html.

⁴¹ "Vancouver Art Gallery, Fourth Floor", *Vanartgallery.bc.ca*, accessed February 8, 2017, https://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/the_exhibitions/exhibit_mashup4.html.

⁴² "REM - Fall On Me Lyrics | Metrolyrics", *Metrolyrics.Com*, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/fall-on-me-lyrics-rem.html>.

⁴³ Shannon Stevens and Richard Wainwright, "[Onto]Riffology: Explorations Into Collaboration, Assemblage And Learning Events", in *Ontic Flows*, Matt Bernico and Manuela Kolke, eds., (New York: Atropos Press, 2016), 163-183.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ "Vancouver Art Gallery: The Making Of Mashup", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjFPesKTa5Q&t=2s>.

as fundamentally humanist and epistemological in nature. As an interdisciplinary, *ontological* practise of repurposing and reconstituting, acts of *mashup* also exist in geological activity, far outside of humanity. Elements remix, materials fold: rock and water reconstitute into sand and mud, oceans and rivers converge into hybrid space. These processes happen with and without human engagement. When recording artist [DJ Spooky](#)⁴⁶ ([1st floor](#))⁴⁷ remixes the sounds of melting ice in the Arctic, we begin to acknowledge in such artistry how generally limited is a solely humanist perspective on matter. As we mediate epistemological matters alongside explorations into the ontological and posthuman, we are inspired by new materialism; “cultural theory for the 21st century” as discussed by Dolphijn & [van der Tuin](#).^{48 49}

MashUp is an exhibition chronicling historical and artistic events touted as the “birth of modern culture .”⁵⁰ Our emergent sensibilities in new materialism discourage narratives of cultural genesis and “newness”, as suggested in such analogies invoking acts of “nativity .” “Cultural birth” does, however, suggest creative “passages” such as [conception](#)⁵¹ and [gestation](#),⁵² as we explore inspirations to mashup, *MashUp*, conditions of their ontologies, and relationships with which to riff.

Melt the statues in the park:*⁵³ *MashUp, unceded dirt and arcades

⁴⁶ "DJ Spooky's Arctic Rhythms | Nat Geo Live", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7tWXEfSps4>.

⁴⁷ Vancouver Art Gallery, *First Floor*.

⁴⁸ Baldio, "Generative Indirections: Iris Van Der Tuin Talk", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Y7fIFuoS-Q&t>.

⁴⁹ Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012).

⁵⁰ Daina Augaitis, Bruce Grenville and Stephanie Rebick, *Mashup: The Birth Of Modern Culture*, (London, UK.: Black Dog Publishing, 2016).

⁵¹ Wadji Ben, "From Conception To Birth", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ItmwtLCDVY>.

⁵² Wadji Ben, "From Conception To Birth", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ItmwtLCDVY>.

⁵³ "REM - Fall On Me Lyrics | Metrolyrics", *Metrolyrics.Com*, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/fall-on-me-lyrics-rem.html>.

An art exhibition is being held. We regard not only the gallery's building artefact at 750 Hornby Street, Vancouver, for all that it has once been (including a courthouse), and will one day become ([abandoned to its fate](#)⁵⁴); while acknowledging the indigeneity of unceded dirt on which its physical form rests. The building, and all the material contents it houses, is in deep relationship not only with its history and physical space, but also with sundry vendors trafficking their wares in the art gallery's proximity through various forms of "sponsorship" and "partnership" with businesses and foundations: a restaurant and bar chain called the *Keg*, the *Royal Bank of Canada* (both its name and [logo](#)⁵⁵ resonant of British colonialism in Indigenous territories), and *DL Piper*, a global law firm enforcing claims to [intellectual property](#)⁵⁶ and copyright, among others. Herein lays a tenuous relational balance that exists in materiality of commerce that helps fund displays but mustn't overstep consumers' willingness to be shilled.

Such divers merchants and venues of commercialization in close proximity to the Vancouver Art Gallery, and each other, bring to mind Walter Benjamin's extensive study of 19th century Paris [arcades](#),⁵⁷ enclosed passages constructed of iron and glass within which shopfronts were situated, and precursor to the urban shopping mall. The *Arcades Project*⁵⁸ proves not only a compelling examination of cultural theory, but its source materials - hundreds upon hundreds of pages of handwritten notes on multiple topics (that were only posthumously collated into book form) - chronicle its subject in scattershot ways similar to riff.

⁵⁴ http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2013/04/24/vancouver-art-gallery-move_n_3151772.html

⁵⁵ "RBC Logo", *Simcoechamber.On.Ca*, accessed February 8, 2017,

http://www.simcoechamber.on.ca/images/stories/events/royal_bank.jpg.

⁵⁶ "Intellectual Property And Technology - Overview | Services | DLA Piper Global Law Firm", *DLA Piper*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.dlapiper.com/en/canada/services/intellectual-property-and-technology/>.

⁵⁷ Leytonstongue, "Paris Arcades (With Walter Benjamin)", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6-weVtivNE>.

⁵⁸ Walter Benjamin and Rolf Tiedemann, *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999).

The Arcades Project^{59 60} becomes a theoretical underscore upon which we peruse and hyperlink the experience of visiting the Vancouver Art Gallery and the *MashUp* exhibition. We are drawn to descriptions of the *flâneur* (as idler strolling through the arcade), the *collector* (hawking his merchandise), and the *prostitute* who lingers at the fringe of the physical cityscape and its society, discouraged from loitering in the arcade lest she likewise sell her wares in heavily commodified space. At once subject in her humanity, yet self-objectifying in her occupation and her purchase, she is banished from the same space where her male counterpart is encouraged to consume. An epistemological humanist perspective concerns - even possibly condemns - itself with identity politics, with building meanings and understandings out of the human relationships. As *riffers* and new materialists we suggest that although this perspective of knowledge is useful, particularly as commentary to its historical times, we gravitate to broader contemporary understandings whereby knowledge and being become “indistinguishable... [an] ethico-onto-epistemology” (as Karen Barad discusses in Dolphijn & van der Tuin)⁶¹. We are interested in the gallery (and galleries of yore) as composite of wood, stone and dust, the relationships to the body, the complex material systems upon which the agential is but a part, and one through which agents - both human and non-human - participate in the margins, in places that are unseen and that are never *elected* to appear in the official maps of the city. This is where our interests are drawn as we seek to engage the museum, its exhibits, agential “forces” and all the ways they interact even politically.

⁵⁹ Heather Crickenberger, "The Arcades Project Project Or The Rhetoric Of Hypertext By Heather Marcelle Crickenberger", *Thelemming.Com*, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.thelemming.com/lemming/dissertation-web/about/about-nav.html>.

⁶⁰ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*.

⁶¹ Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 110.

There's the progress⁶² ...: Appropriation, remix and aura

In a work demonstrating the irrepressibility of creativity (regardless of subject, content and practise), while celebrating appropriative practises, poet [Kenneth Goldsmith](#)^{63 64} queries the differences between collage and appropriation. Referencing Pablo Picasso and Marcel Duchamp's considerable artistic influences, [Goldsmith](#)⁶⁵ likens the two artists to candle and mirror, respectively: a warm appealing glow of visually compelling collage, and a "cool reflectivity" borne of the industrially produced "[appropriated](#)"⁶⁶ object.⁶⁷ As "readymades", Duchamp ([1st floor](#))⁶⁸ hindered selected objects' performance of intended functions merely by altering their position and [locality](#),⁶⁹ while works by Picasso, such as [A Still Life and Chair Caning](#),⁷⁰ compelled visual interest by bringing objects and ideas into close proximity through mixed media constructions in ways and to degrees neither previously witnessed nor [suffered](#).⁷¹

Artistic approaches such as Duchamp's, Picasso's and DJ Spooky's are all representative of mashup amongst hundreds more "found images, objects, sounds and words [pressed] into art

⁶² "REM - Fall On Me Lyrics | Metrolyrics", *Metrolyrics.Com*, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/fall-on-me-lyrics-rem.html>.

⁶³ "Kenneth Goldsmith Interview: Assume No Readership", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAJRQJGc7DU>.

⁶⁴ Kenneth Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

⁶⁵ Chashemphill1, "Wasting Time On The Internet Professor Kenneth Goldsmith On CNBC", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJUyx383gDw>.

⁶⁶ "Appropriation (Art)", *Wikipedia.Org*, accessed February 8, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appropriation_\(art\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appropriation_(art))

⁶⁷ Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing*, 210.

⁶⁸ Vancouver Art Gallery, *First Floor*.

⁶⁹ "Duchamp Was Here", *Wooster Collective*, accessed February 8, 2017, http://www.woostercollective.com/assets/img/content/posts/341079_2355660384442_1638193129_1711131_1684017551_o.jpg.

⁷⁰ "Picasso, Still-Life With Chair Caning, 1912", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=286FiUvOeFs&list=PLZqGuLZ_7GLwvdGSXHEUInldpA.

⁷¹ "Vancouver Art Gallery - All You Need To Know Before You Go - Tripadvisor", *Tripadvisor.ca*, accessed February 8, 2017, https://www.tripadvisor.ca/Attraction_Review-g154943-d186962-Reviews-Vancouver_Art_Gallery-Vancouver_British_Columbia.html.

production ."⁷² [Remix](#),⁷³ like mashup, challenges notions of copyrighted works' appropriation, materializing authorship within contexts of hybridity and (re)combinatoriality. The rapid adoption of "collage, montage, sampling and the cut-up" are all practised in creativity's pursuit "where the New Aesthetic seeks to harmonise [the now-everyday crossover](#) of the digital and the actual ."⁷⁴ According to Benjamin,⁷⁵ the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction bears an *aura* as breath or wind that diminishes in the act of reproducing. The work becomes contemporaneous as we embrace non-mechanical reproduction vis a vis what is now digital reproduction.

***Weights and pulleys*⁷⁶: Walter Benjamin, pangs and the virtual flâneur**

[Goldsmith](#)^{77 78} declares Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* a "literary roadmap of appropriation": . . . "A great book to bounce around in, flitting from page to page, like window-shopping, pausing briefly to admire a display that catches your eye without feeling the need to go into the store."⁷⁹

Attribution becomes blurry, difficult and contentious in an age of mashup and remix as appropriation is still considered ignoble, and alleged infringement may be aggressively pursued by any aggrieved party and its legal counsel. In many ways, an art gallery exhibition such as

⁷² Vancouver Art Gallery, *Ground Breaking Exhibition On Mashup Culture To Occupy Entire Vancouver Art Gallery*, 2016, accessed February 9, 2017,

https://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/media_room/pdf/VAG_RLS_MashUpPressRelease.pdf.

⁷³ Laurent Lasalle, "RIP : A Remix Manifesto", *Vimeo*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/8040182>.

⁷⁴ "Mashup: The Birth Of Modern Culture Av Daina Augaitis, Bruce Grenville, Stephanie Rebick (Bokus)", *Bokus.Com*, last modified 2017, accessed February 17, 2017, <http://www.bokus.com/bok/9781910433393/mashup-the-birth-of-modern-culture/>.

⁷⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Work Of Art In The Age Of Mechanical Reproduction*, (London: Penguin, 2008).

⁷⁶ "REM - Fall On Me Lyrics | Metrolyrics", *Metrolyrics.com*, accessed February 8, 2017,

<http://www.metrolyrics.com/fall-on-me-lyrics-rem.html>.

⁷⁷ "Poet: Internet Has Revolutionized Reading - CNN Video", *CNN*, accessed February 8, 2017,

<http://www.cnn.com/videos/business/2014/06/03/spc-reading-for-leading-kenneth-goldsmith.cnn>.

⁷⁸ Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing*, 117.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 115.

MashUp - in its showcase of mashup - is constrained by a spectre of litigious threat that might caution any relaxation of attribution if mashup sensibilities of the co-construction of artistry were to be fully embraced.

Building towered foresight⁸⁰: Gestation, *MashUp*, and exhibitors

As doctoral students from communities outlying the primary, physical location of the *Mashup* exhibition, once hosted at the edifice of the Vancouver gallery and now long since dismantled, we continue to access its exhibits at an amalgam of sites, including YouTube, various web links and a catalogue available for purchase in the gift store; the compendium companion work, *MashUp: The birth of modern culture*.⁸¹

Once entered, the entire space is dedicated to *MashUp*. It could hardly be otherwise, for to maintain any segregated portion of the gallery for the exhibition of standard fare, say, [Emily Carr](#) paintings,⁸² would be anathema to mashup [aesthetic](#).⁸³ Throughout all four storeys, the exhibition impresses as a massive undertaking by any metric. In the gallery [entryway](#),⁸⁴ bold [slogans](#)⁸⁵ stand staircases high, and stretch across the entire floor. Spanning an entire wall are

⁸⁰ "REM - Fall On Me Lyrics | Metrolyrics", *Metrolyrics.com*, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/fall-on-me-lyrics-rem.html>.

⁸¹ "Mashup: The Birth Of Modern Culture: Bruce Grenville, Daina Augaitis: 9781910433393: Books - Amazon.ca", *Amazon.ca*, accessed February 8, 2017, https://www.amazon.ca/MashUp-Modern-Culture-Bruce-Grenville/dp/191043339X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1478009405&sr=8-1&keywords=mashup+grenville.

⁸² "Fuse At VAG - Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver Traveller Reviews - Tripadvisor", *Tripadvisor.ca*, accessed February 8, 2017, https://www.tripadvisor.ca/ShowUserReviews-g154943-d186962-r364967974-Vancouver_Art_Gallery-Vancouver_British_Columbia.html.

⁸³ Capehorn2, "Worst Art Gallery Ever Visited - Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver Traveller Reviews - Tripadvisor", *Tripadvisor.ca*, accessed February 8, 2017, https://www.tripadvisor.ca/ShowUserReviews-g154943-d186962-r337746648-Vancouver_Art_Gallery-Vancouver_British_Columbia.html#REVIEWS.

⁸⁴ Vancouver Art Gallery, "Vancouver Art Gallery: Mashup", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhfmzMN-Lx8>.

⁸⁵ Robin Laurence, "Barbara Kruger Transforms Vancouver Art Gallery's Rotunda For Bold Mashup Show", *Georgia Straight Vancouver's News & Entertainment Weekly*, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.straight.com/arts/634331/barbara-kruger-transforms-vancouver-art-galleries-rotunda-bold-mashup-show>.

images of [Logorama](#)⁸⁶ ([1st floor](#)),⁸⁷ an award winning film that challenges proprietary notions of logos' use by featuring thousands of them.

Countless exhibits within the gallery showcase mashup, montage, sampling, collage, remix and (mis)appropriation. (Re)photographic works by photographer [Richard Prince](#)⁸⁸ ([2nd floor](#))⁸⁹ are exhibited. French film director Jean-Luc Godard's 1965 work, [Pierrot le Fou](#)⁹⁰ ([3rd floor](#))⁹¹, which applied numerous features of the pop art movement, is shown in one of several small viewing theatres. Elsewhere, a video plays which highlights American director Quentin Tarantino's ([2nd floor](#))⁹² reliance on [homage](#)⁹³ in his filmmaking; an approach also alleged to be blatant appropriation. Vidding - as fan ("vidder") produced music video creation - is also on display, including such offerings as "[multifandom](#)⁹⁴ space vid," Bironic's [Starships](#).⁹⁵

Throughout the gallery, videos loop examples of the cinematic remixer's craft: Joseph Cornell's 1936 collage film, a curiously composed ode to film actress [Rose Hobart](#)⁹⁶ ([4th floor](#)),⁹⁷

⁸⁶ Autourdeminuit, "LOGORAMA, By H5 (VF)", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgrHFEVJY4w>.

⁸⁷ Vancouver Art Gallery, *First Floor*.

⁸⁸ The Art of Photography, "Cite A Website - Cite This For Me", *YouTube.com*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWhY99cjJ64>.

⁸⁹ Vancouver Art Gallery, *Second Floor*.

⁹⁰ Janusfilms, "Pierrot Le Fou Trailer (Jean-Luc Godard, 1965) - Subtitled", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycg2yb3qiUo>.

⁹¹ Vancouver Art Gallery, *Third Floor*.

⁹² "Vancouver Art Gallery, *Second Floor*.

⁹³ IndieWire, "Tarantino's Best Visual Film References... In Three Minutes!", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGheyJKDwrM>.

⁹⁴ Jacob Grey, "Multifandom", *Urban Dictionary*, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=multifandom>.

⁹⁵ Closetfan, "Starships - A Multifandom Space Vid By Bironic", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTGdGKEEiYE>.

⁹⁶ TheLyulai, "Rose Hobart (1936) By Joseph Cornell", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQxtZlQITDA>.

⁹⁷ Vancouver Art Gallery, *Fourth Floor*.

and filmmaker and Canadian National Film Board (NFB) employee [Arthur Lipsett](#)⁹⁸ ([3rd floor](#))⁹⁹ who created an oeuvre comprised of sound clips and found images from NFB archives.

The culture of the the 1980's [drag ball](#)¹⁰⁰ ([2nd floor](#))¹⁰¹ is featured as a subgenre of entertainment created by New York inhabitants who were male, African American and gay, and who “seized available cultural artifacts and objects to create an organic composite culture.”¹⁰²

Hip hop, electronic and dub ([3rd floor](#))¹⁰³ tracks are available for listening. [Dub's](#)¹⁰⁴ Jamaican roots, and pioneering use of multitrack technology are showcased as an approach whereby “any song could become countless other songs through dub's playful recastings.”

[Machinimas](#)¹⁰⁵ genre's “misappropriated” use ([1st floor](#))¹⁰⁶ of [video game equipment](#)¹⁰⁷ to create movies, exemplifies the [Situationist](#)¹⁰⁸ conception of [détournement](#)¹⁰⁹ that is elsewhere featured ([2nd floor](#)).¹¹⁰

The Internet archives many of these films and artistic works, continuing the experience of the gallery's exhibition long after the physical incarnation has been disassembled. It really was

⁹⁸ Xezeze1, "Very Nice, Very Nice - Arthur Lipsett", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mY7B2-Wqj6g>.

⁹⁹ Vancouver Art Gallery, *Fourth Floor*.

¹⁰⁰ Chromatic BloodBloodBlood, "Paris Is Burning 1990 VOSTFR 720P HD Full DOC", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hedJer7I1vI>.

¹⁰¹ Vancouver Art Gallery, *First Floor*.

¹⁰² Tim Lawrence, "Drag Ball Culture: Vogueing And Realness", in *Remix: The Birth Of Modern Culture*, Daina Augaitis, Bruce Grenville and Stephanie Rebick, eds., (London, UK: Black Dog Publishing, 2016), 222-225.

¹⁰³ Vancouver Art Gallery, *Third Floor*.

¹⁰⁴ Don Osir, "WACKIES-JAMAICA DUB", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwTysnSXYFc&sns=em>.

¹⁰⁵ Mipmeister, "Common Sense Cooking - Live", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0HvI9FBQD4k>.

¹⁰⁶ Vancouver Art Gallery, *First Floor*.

¹⁰⁷ David Silverberg, "The History Of Machinima: From Art To Brand (Part 1: The Art)—By David Silverberg", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uj1-Ci0ybbw&sns=em>.

¹⁰⁸ Joyce Augustine, "The Society Of The Spectacle By Guy Debord (1973) Dub Fr Sub Eng", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IoUIHBSiVAY>.

¹⁰⁹ David Gross, "Sniggle.Net: The Culture Jammer's Encyclopedia", *Sniggle.Net*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://sniggle.net/>.

¹¹⁰ Vancouver Art Gallery, *Second Floor*.

an informative and inspiring display; highly influential. We thrilled to attend and witness it all. It still reverberates in and around us.

Feathers, iron...¹¹¹: Crowning, commodification and appropriation

Goldsmith likens its readers (as we, similarly, liken rifiers) to virtual flâneurs navigating the Web by “hypertexting from one place to another... casually surfing from one place to another; how we’ve learned to manage and harvest information, not feeling the need to read the Web linearly, and so forth.”¹¹²

In riffing on *MashUp*, we find ourselves less enthralled with notions of birth, and “cultural birth”, preferring instead a visual metaphor of “plugging in”; and “riffing” to do so. We also contest implied dualities between man and machine, modern and non-modern culture, and separations that imply any superior human agency, as we acknowledge progression in the relationships between technology and human entities in both mediated and unmediated shared spaces.

Humanistically museological legacies of “exhibition” as representational, positivist, and epistemic in their historicity are contemplated alongside new materialist curation as performative, embodied, and ontologically focussed. For example, by engaging the ontological, an exhibit by [Brian Jungen](#)^{113 114} ([2nd floor](#)) plugs into relationship with the unceded aboriginal dirt [under the building](#).¹¹⁵ How do entrances and exits relate to a physical structure’s

¹¹¹ "REM - Fall On Me Lyrics | Metrolyrics", *Metrolyrics.Com*, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/fall-on-me-lyrics-rem.html>.

¹¹² Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing*, 114.

¹¹³ Art21, "Preview: Brian Jungen In Season 8 Of ART21 "Art In The Twenty-First Century" (2016)", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9eh9wQcrw10>.

¹¹⁴ Daina Augaitis, "Prototypes For New Understandings", in *Remix: The Birth Of Modern Culture*, Daina Augaitis, Bruce Grenville and Stephanie Rebick, eds., (London, UK: Black Dog Publishing, 2016), 222-225.

¹¹⁵ Kay Johnson, "Decolonising Museum Pedagogies", *Adult Education, Museums and Art Galleries* (2016): 129-140.

surroundings, and reflect a continuous sense of inside, outside, reversals; an exoskeleton that is reminiscent of the architecture of Frank Gehry ([3rd floor](#))?¹¹⁶

Similarly, *The Keg Restaurant and Bar*, as *Presenting Sponsor*, litters its banners and logos in the gallery's materials; the contradictions between the *MashUp* curation's presentation and participation in matters of appropriation, contrasting the protection of intellectual property provided for clients by *Sponsor* DLA Piper. Prostitute, flaneur, collector. We relate Wonder Woman's inclusion in the exhibit to pop culture's "embrace of commodity culture"¹¹⁷ to the dress code for waitresses at the sponsoring [Keg Restaurant and Bar](#).¹¹⁸ Why not? Flaneur, prostitute, collector.

The human and non-human co-occupy this space as remix, mashup, and exhibitional performance. Engagement is redirected from officially suggested discourse to a non-representational 'riff' that doesn't ask what the exhibit means, but rather what does this curation - this *MashUp* - do? Museums can be sites of radical encounters, contentious maps can overlay official programs, and ontological foci may hasten pedagogical collision. Throughout, we riff (with) these encounters, finding inspiration and precursor in Benjamin's monumental *Arcades Project* of which Goldsmith (2011) writes:

"It is (...) made up of refuse and detritus, writing history by paying attention to the margins and the peripheries rather than the center: bits of newspaper articles, arcane passages of forgotten histories, ephemeral sensations, weather conditions, political tracts,

¹¹⁶ J. Fiona Ragheb, "The Richness Of The Parts: The Gehry Residence", in *Remix: The Birth Of Modern Culture*, Daina Augaitis, Bruce Grenville and Stephanie Rebeck, eds., (London, UK: Black Dog Publishing, 2016), 142-145.

¹¹⁷ Stephanie Rebeck, "The Invention Of The Supercut", in *Remix: The Birth Of Modern Culture*, Daina Augaitis, Bruce Grenville and Stephanie Rebeck, eds., (London, UK: Black Dog Publishing, 2016), 147.

¹¹⁸ CBC News, "Sexy Staff Outfits: CBC Marketplace Goes Undercover", *YouTube*, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0KoKhygSqc>.

advertisements, literary quips, stray verse, accounts of dreams, descriptions of architecture, arcane theories of knowledge, and hundreds of other offbeat topics.”¹¹⁹

This is the stuff of [onto]Riffology and new materialism’s cultural sensibilities that bring onto-epistemological readings to the creative, “the uncreative,”¹²⁰ the material, the arcade, the art gallery, mashup, and MashUp “in review .”

¹¹⁹ Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing*, 114.

¹²⁰ Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing*.

Intermezzo III: Presenting Territorial Acknowledgements at a School Staff Professional Development Event

For a professional development morning, held in the spring of 2019 at the elementary school where I teach, I was asked by the organizers to give the territorial acknowledgement delivered at special events. The Saanich school district (#63) script for such acknowledgements reads: “we acknowledge and thank the W̱SÁNEĆ people on whose traditional territory we live, learn, and teach. The W̱SÁNEĆ people have lived and worked on this land since time immemorial.”¹²¹

I wanted to try to exercise some of the sense of history and materiality that I have been considering in my studies and “enhanced” the script, which I read to the teaching staff:

(This morning) We acknowledge and thank the W̱SÁNEĆ people on whose traditional territory we live, learn, and teach. The W̱SÁNEĆ people have lived and worked on this land and since time immemorial. I want to briefly comment on the term ‘time immemorial,’ attempting to comprehend how long Indigenous settlements have existed on this island and those nearby. This can be a difficult exercise for me, to understand “time immemorial,” seemingly in the absence of the kinds of architecture we often identify with ancient civilizations: structures like Egyptian pyramids and Mayan ruins.

However, on Galiano Island (Swiikw) there is a site of great antiquity that indicates the long habitation by Indigenous Peoples in the region. It is a midden, Coast Salish peoples having gathered over the span of three thousand years to harvest their catches. This long practise has created a beach that is not one of sand but of entirely small bits of shell.

‘Shell Beach.’ It’s a remarkable thing to see, to touch, and it provides a tangible

¹²¹ (<https://www.sd63.bc.ca/>)

indication of what is 'time immemorial,' helping me to grasp its length, depth, and impact vis-a-vis our Indigenous hosts.

Introduction to *Review of “The Anthropocene Project”: Treachery in Images*

This second piece on museum exhibitions, *Review of “The Anthropocene Project”: Treachery in Images*, was published in 2020 in the art journal, in *Art/Research International*.

Throughout, we situate our considerations on mountains, hills, and points of elevation.

Consideration of the mountain brings to mind a scene in the 2019 documentary *Knock Down the House*¹²² that follows the grass-roots American primary campaigns of four progressive left candidates, including a West Virginia senatorial hopeful, Paula Jean Swearengin (Netflix, 2020).

In one scene, Swearengin (herself daughter of a coal miner) looks over a quarry of hills to which an unidentified man has brought her on an all terrain vehicle. Gesturing at the landscape he exclaims, “It’s gone. I mean this mountain, at this point right here, it was really high. They took all that out. They just leveled this mountain here” (Netflix, 2020, 16:21).

Swearengin adds, herself gesturing across the scene before them:

That community down there, they’re breathing toxins every day. Whether their water’s polluted or not, they’re breathing in that air. You talk about jobs, you can probably count here how many people’s out (sic) here on this site for miles and miles and miles. Where are the jobs? We don’t have to do this. [Swearengin pauses]. If another country come (sic) n here, blew up our mountains and poisoned our water, we’d go to war. But [the coal] industry can. (Netflix, 2020, 16:30)

The next shot is an aerial view of coal mines’ scarred earth and “suspenseful music” plays.

¹²² [Knock Down the House](#)

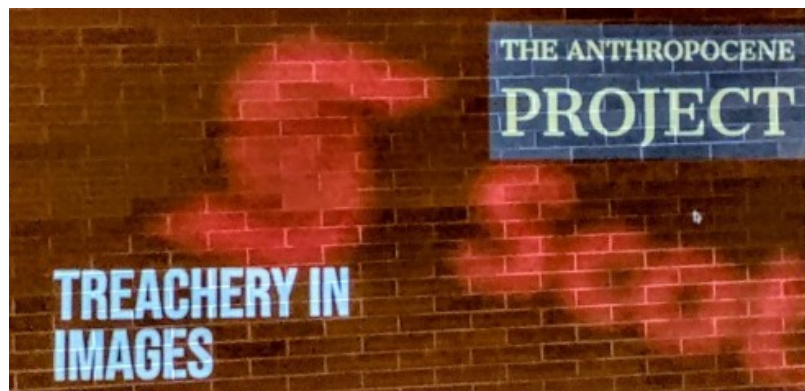
Chapter 5: Review of “the Anthropocene Project”: Treachery in Images

(Published in *Art/Research International*, 2020).

Figure 1

Projected in Kamloops, BC: The Anthropocene, Treachery in Images, (2020).

Photo Credit: Richard Wainwright.



“The sooner governments move to allow additional pipeline capacity to be built, the better off Canada will be” ([Scotiabank](#), 2020a).

“Soon the Gypsy Queen

In a glaze of Vaseline

Will perform on guillotine

What a scene! What a scene!”

Lyrics to Karn Evil 9 (Emerson, Lake, & Sinfield, 1973)¹

Recounting the Colorado Territory’s Sand Creek Massacre of 1864, George Bent stated, “White Antelope, when he saw the soldiers shooting into the lodges, made up his mind not to live any longer. He stood in front of his lodge with his arms folded across his breast, singing the death

song: ‘Nothing lives long,’ he sang, ‘only the earth and the mountains’” (Ives, 1996).

The Anthropocene Project

The world is replete with natural features that humans find visually pleasing. For example, humans confer much aesthetic value on mountains: towers of igneous protrusion formed at points of contact between tectonic plates. Mountains compose artistry alongside plant life, waters, and animals, in assemblage. They express themselves creatively as their crevices and grades determine waters’ courses and flows, while these waters reciprocally act on mountains by slowly eroding contours into their surfaces.

Despite mountains’ self-expression, there is also potential for their human exploitation and they have long been co-opted, commodified, and monetized in service of humanity’s various projects. An art exhibition that was unveiled in 2019, *The Anthropocene Project*, showcases the extent of human activity’s impact on planet earth. Truly a *project* in its many components, it includes photographic displays in art galleries and museums both across Canada and internationally, a feature length film (*The Anthropocene: The Human Epoch*¹²³, an illustrated catalogue¹²⁴, a book of essays¹²⁵, a lecture series, educational programmes, a proposed curriculum, virtual/augmented reality, a podcast, and smartphone applications.

As doctoral students, we bring ontological curiosities to the topics raised by *The Anthropocene Project*. We view, review, experience, and critique its offerings vis-a-vis the things that make us think, how we think about them, and what we might do with thinking about them. Exploring what the exhibition is doing becomes the preoccupation of this museum “in-

¹²³ Feature film: Baichwal, J. (Director). (2018). *Anthropocene: The human epoch* [Film]. Mercury Films.

¹²⁴ Exhibit catalogue: Burtynsky, E., Baichwal, J., de Pencier, N., & Boettger, S. (2018). *Anthropocene*. Steidl.

¹²⁵ Hardcover book: Hackett, S., Kunard, A., & Stahel, U. (Eds.). (2018). *Anthropocene: Burtynsky, Baichwal, de Pencier*. AGO/Goose Lane Editions.

review” (Wainwright & Stevens, 2017). We attempt to redirect our gaze from aesthetically pleasing images of global destruction to what actually *drives* proclivities that risk calamity. In doing so, different relationships, forces, and concerns come into relief.

Thanatourism

Mountains’ biomes are collections of physiological adaptation, which include mosses, fungi, grasses, plants, insects, and animals. These combinations demonstrate artistry independent of mind and human involvement. Viewed through an anthropocentric lens, mountains are natural wonders and visual masterpieces; however, their images belie significant environmental impacts sustained within their ecosystems. While admiring their majesty from a distance, humans simultaneously scheme to access mountains’ hidden treasures: their vast potentials for tourism and resource extraction by mining and drilling. Although mountains have always been obstacles to the easy conveyance of humans and resources, Herculean feats of human tunneling—assisted by the mighty force of dynamite—have been increasingly successful in conquering such challenges. Like rock, glaciers’ ice may also be tunnelled as touristic sites. Mountains host all manner of recreational venues as theme parks for winter play and sport. At their highest and most inhospitable elevations, mountains can become sites of macabre spectacle. Climbers litter detritus that becomes preserved in the snow through generations: including, at times, their corpses.

Touristic industries that visit upon the macabre and unseemly have long existed. These direct the human eye and body to visceral experiences, while stirring emotions when one is in physical proximity to sites “[...] associated with death, disaster, acts of violence, tragedy, scenes of death and crimes against humanity” (Walby & Piché, 2011, p. 451). This genre’s offerings

are variously called “dark tourism”, “shock tourism”, or “thanatourism”— “thanatos” meaning death in Greek. Making excursions to this touristic genre’s theme parks and museums, visitation is engineered as an immersive experience that may employ enhanced use of sound effects, audio recordings, videographic presentations, and sensory events to heighten grisly experiences (Walby & Piché, 2011).

Human desire may give rise to a double articulation that both fetishizes destruction and makes palatable its cinematic representation. As a multi-mediated exhibition co created by Jennifer Baichwal, Nicolas de Pencier, and Edward Burtynsky (2018a, 2018b), *The Anthropocene Project*¹²⁶ thematically addresses these pressing, yet controversial, matters of our age: climate change and the effects of human activity on the earth. The project comprises multiple sites that each warn against the spectre of ecological calamity, while perversely showcasing the visual appeal of rubbish tips, pools of polluted water, and topographical scarification. During the project’s capstone feature length movie, *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch*, its filmmakers (Baichwal, 2018) use photography to “document evidence and experience of human planetary domination” (The Anthropocene Project¹²⁷, 2018b). *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch* has played in cinemas internationally, on Air Canada flights, on CraveTV, and is available for purchase on DVD. *The Anthropocene Project’s* multiple approaches (film, exhibit, books, curriculum, merchandise, etc.) all become part of a cultural conversation on, and of, questionable ethics. *The Anthropocene Project* performs something wholly curious, disturbing,

¹²⁶ According to its homepage, “The Anthropocene Project is a multidisciplinary body of work from world-renowned collaborators Nicholas de Pencier, Edward Burtynsky and Jennifer Baichwal. Combining art, film, virtual reality, augmented reality, and scientific research, the project investigates human influence on the state, dynamic and future of the Earth.” See <https://theanthropocene.org/> Given its multiple forms, platforms, and creators’ functions, we variously reference and cite de Pencier, Burtynsky and Baichwal across this in-review as they indicate in their credits.

¹²⁷ Here *The Anthropocene Project* refers to the legal entity and corporate author of the webpage <https://theanthropocene.org/>

and informative in its presentation of images. We are spectating a triumph of human-will which allows the aestheticization of the colours, textures, and sounds of environmental disaster. The viewer is seduced by lingering scenes and compelling images of ecological destruction.

What is it about these times, our sense of aestheticism, and our personal taste for nihilism that a CBC news article about *The Anthropocene Project* can apply such an improbable term as “apocalyptic beauty” to the project’s film aesthetic (Tremonti, 2018) and we can imagine the truth in this juxtaposition of words? We are convinced that having never enjoyed proximity to whales we would rush to view one stranded, among dozens of its species washing ashore onto coastal lands each year. Almost analogous to our curiosities about beached whales is a human propensity to zoologically display all types of animals and insects, both in life and death. Humans nobly attempt to address our species’ role in hastening other species’ displacement and depletion by protecting their remaining numbers. However, zoos are problematic, too. Zoos regularly *keep* animals wholly unsuited to the climates of their host institutions (polar bears in Mexico, camels in Canada). Attempts to anthropocentrically *care* for animals by displaying them has perpetuated a worldview that wildlife exists for human entertainment. We fetishize their exoticism, as we lament their near extinction. Visiting a zoo is a childhood rite and initiation that early normalizes our domestication of wild species. In a futuristic version of a zoo that need not be physically visited, *The Anthropocene Project*’s photographic catalogue¹²⁸ (Baichwal, de Pencier & Burtynsky, 2018) features an augmented reality (AR) display of the last remaining male northern white rhinoceros (now deceased).

As visitors to the project’s locations, we are thanatourists who pay admission fees to

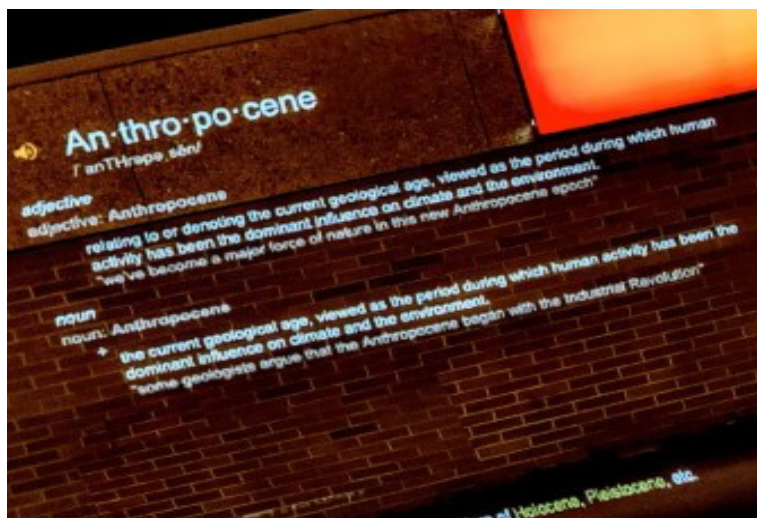
¹²⁸ This refers to the museum catalog.

experience the physical museum exhibits, browse the project's collections in printed catalogues, and peruse its website. As online attendees, our participation in the exhibition, and all that surrounds it, is disorienting. This is not simply "a world for us" (jagodzinski, 2018, p. 16). We are jolted by the exhibition's affect. If we find ourselves awed by aesthetically pleasing portrayals of human and technological achievement among displays of environmental ruin, what does this betray about our personal collective desires? Burtynsky, the project's photographer and cinematographer, employs light and chemical properties with skills that render work sites, quarries, mines, and garbage dumps as works of art to a degree far beyond what our mind's eye typically summons. Given both the project's title and premise, we enter its sites prepared to submit to education by grim spectacle. Instead, we find ourselves seduced by the elaborate photographic treatments that the images have received. We wonder why we haven't previously recognized this beauty in a landfill or an excavator? We attempt to confront our disconcerting tendency to champion anthropocentric achievement. In what ways are we becoming complicit in a treachery of images by appreciating aesthetically beautified photographs that anaesthetize viewers in order to regulate their exposure to anthropocentric scenes of horror?

Figure 2

Projection: Anthropocene Definition, Kamloops B.C., 2020.

Photo Credit: Richard Wainwright. Projected image contains a snippet from the online Oxford (Lexico) Dictionary (n.d.)



“Scotiabank affirms their support of the Paris Agreement and that matters related to the Anthropocene are of critical importance” (Scotiabank, 2020b).

anthropoScene Card

The sixteenth century Dutch painter Pieter Bruegel¹²⁹ created busy scenes of peasantry engaging in the rituals and festivities of agrarian society. *The Anthropocene Project’s* photography often adopts a bird’s eye view perspective that evokes Bruegel’s approaches and subjects: depictions of distant elevated landforms, foregrounded by villagers and buildings viewed from on high—presumably viewed from hills and mountains. The artist portrayed nature and humanity in relationship, centuries before the Industrial Revolution, and explored darker themes suggesting the degree to which these relationships can go awry.

Burtynsky elevates his camera’s viewpoint using airplanes, helicopters, and drones to achieve vantage points that only mountains and hills have historically provided¹³⁰. Receiving

¹²⁹ See Bruegel painting that depicts peasant life:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_Brueghel_the_Elder_-_The

¹³⁰ See <https://www.edwardburtynsky.com/>

Burtynsky's attention, details become indistinct and colours come to the fore. Skilled photography creates beauty in scenes of lithium ponds captured many hundreds of metres above ground, a result that would seem impossible to achieve in a human held glass of these same ponds' murky, poisoned waters.

If such eco-disasters are the cost of doing business, then should we feel anything but dissonance when peering at the digital cinematic photography yielded by alchemical potions of disaster capitalism? Presumably, newspapers would not publish descriptions of a human crime scene showcasing "the murderous beauty of the mass shooter's skill." Yet, here, views of nature stripped, poisoned, and mutilated elicit our attention for their seduction.

Aesthetically pleasing portrayals of disaster desensitize—denervate—us as viewers, thus, stymieing meaningful considerations of that which remains ontologically unseen and unexplored. *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch* is billed as a "cinematic meditation" (2018b). Its effect reassembles our felt horror at what is going on in the world. Viewing skilled filmmaking (sets, script, lighting, soundtrack, editing) provides impetus to structure visual, auditory, and cognitive narratives about what we need to take back into the world as affect.

Like Bruegel's village scenes of workers centuries ago, this pictorial study similarly features site workers, salaried machine operators, and unskilled labourers busy at their tasks. In the film, employees populate various scenes; however, we don't see images depicting the matrix of relationships between public and private stakeholders, nor the historicities of how these relationships came to be. Anonymizing bureaucratic and corporate structures in *The Anthropocene Project* serves to obfuscate the relationships between what incentivises human activity and the capital motivating it. Notably, most every scene's depiction of the Anthropocene—photographic and cinematic—has been seemingly purged of most indications

of corporate ownership, including logos that normally brand companies' names. These have been obscured by light, fog, distance, or absence (possibly by removal). In this manner, *The Anthropocene Project's* unscripted narrative is analogous to showing the enormity of Hiroshima without mentioning America's development of nuclear technology and its willingness to deploy it.

Figure 3

Projected in Kamloops, BC: Banking on the Anthropocene. 2020. Photo credit: Richard Wainwright.



“The *Anthropocene* exhibition, presented by Scotia Wealth Management, documents how humans have changed the face of the planet”
Scotiabank (2020c).

Capitalocene

When viewing *The Anthropocene Project's* feature film and books, we grow concerned that depictions of the role of corporations in resource extraction, the manufacturing of goods and services, distribution processes, consumption, and ultimate disposal have ended up on the

cutting room floor. Perhaps this excision results from the filmmakers' attempts to chronicle anthropic effects on ecologies, while dodging capital's significant role in driving them. We are curious about the tenuous relationships that the filmmakers maintain and the fine lines they tread in this pursuit. *The Anthropocene Project* gives us pictures of the anthropocentric problem, while avoiding disruption to shareholders' profits. For example, in *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch*, the segment about the German Tagebau Hambach open-pit coal mine makes no mention of the RWE Power company, its connection to the German government and to European private security firms; nor that it has been accused of waging a low level war against those who oppose its activities (Brock & Dunlap, 2018). Curiously, despite being the focal point of its images, the mine's mammoth excavators are positioned at considerable distance, in already small photographs. In one of these images, the machine's logo hangs suspended on its frame, but is inexplicably blurred and illegible. Were these omissions the conditions to which the filmmakers submitted in order to secure entrance to the worksite and its impressive machinery's inclusion in the motion picture?

Overall *The Anthropocene Project's* thrilling presentation fails to contextualize a geopolitical crisis that is framed in capitalist exploitation. There is an alarming paradox between *The Anthropocene Project's* subject and its corporate sponsors' business dealings. Scotiabank provides key funding, while investing in environmentally controversial projects worldwide that include fossil fuel mega-projects (Banktrack, n.d.). Various Canadian telecom providers also financially support *The Anthropocene Project* and we are intrigued by the nature of the contributions they make through the Canadian Radio and Telecommunications Commission's (CRTC) *Certified Independent Production Funds* programme. The CRTC requires that Canada's cable television providers contribute 1% of their annual gross revenue to independent

drama productions (Government of Canada CRTC, 2013). Hence, the funding of this film has been at least partially operationalized by corporations' inclination to receive tax breaks and financial incentives from government mandated programmes, more so than pursuing editorial truths or engaging meaningful altruism.

This is all a continuation of the complex, but compromising, relationships between humans and nature compellingly depicted in the project. We are witnessing the “consequences of environment-making” (Moore, 2016b, p. 78). Haraway (2016a, 2016b) recalibrates the Anthropocene from prospective *aeon* (that proceeds the Holocene), to a phenomenon of far shorter duration: a boundary event. Additionally, Haraway (2016a, 2016b) introduces the Capitalocene as a concurrent boundary event to the Anthropocene. The Capitalocene recognizes capital as being the force compelling relentless resourcing of the earth by means of “exterminationist extraction” (Haraway & O’Neil-Butler, 2016). The Capitalocene marks the era when “nature became a factor of production” (Moore, 2016b, p. 91). Some five hundred years ago, a new economic system—an ideology—was born from supplementing the agrarian concerns of land productivity with those of labour productivity at lowest cost.

The emergence of anthropogenic capital explains even the historical reluctance of landowners to assert personhood to slaves: humans' value was only fully optimized once their labour could be so fully exploited. In environmental realms, capital's existence explains why earth's *bounty* is communicated by using terminologies that bespeak the manner in which humans readily commodify nature: fish become “fisheries . . .” “[...] animals ‘livestock,’ trees ‘timber,’ rivers ‘freshwater,’ mountain tops ‘overburden,’ and sea coasts ‘beach front’” (Crist, 2016, pp. 28-29).

Altvater (2016) asserts:

‘Nature’ has been transformed into capital asset. Nature has been reduced to something that can be valued and traded and used up just as any other asset: industrial capital, human capital, knowledge capital, financial claims, and so forth. (p. 145)

Perhaps it is not the mandate of an exhibition called *The Anthropocene Project* to overtly explore or portray these relationships of capital, but herein lays a treachery. Capital suggests why all the humans depicted in the film show up at those worksites. Capitalism indicates why the earth’s crust is being relentlessly scraped and scoured. The Anthropocene “sounds the alarm—and what an alarm it is! But it cannot explain how these alarming changes [allegedly to planet earth, purportedly by human activity] came about” (Moore, 2016a, p. 5). The Capitalocene invests in strategies nearly exhausted; always cost shifting to a future of increasingly doubtful longevity. We had best develop “capacit[ies] to forge a different ontology of nature, humanity, and justice” (Moore, 2016b, p. 114). How do we achieve this without being as financially, editorially and aesthetically compromised as *The Anthropocene Project* appears to be?

Curations

In Bruegel’s 1562 work, *The Triumph of Death*¹³¹, we witness suffering and desolation across a smoke choked landscape of scorched earth, deadly waters, dying trees, beached fish, emaciated animals, and distraught humans that are being dispatched, irrespective of their social status, by malevolent skeletons. This is an apocalyptic vision; we observe its tableau from an elevated viewpoint that permits us to more easily behold the extent of its ghastly proceedings.

Thanatouristic narrations abound in the Anthropocene. “In darkest tourism, museum cyberguides and curators will take their virtual-tourist on real time tours of active detention

¹³¹ See https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:The_Triumph_of_Death_by_Peter_Bruegel

camps, killing fields, death rows, and execution chambers” (Miles, 2002, p. 1177). There is a certain moral superiority that is implicit to the thanatouristic experience, as we gape at the barbarity of human activity through the ages. The thanatourist feels a sense of relief at the privilege of not having to remain in these curated spaces after business hours. The nature of the Anthropocene is different. Whence is our escape from this macabre theme park? Who and what beings are exempt from its grave portent? *The Anthropocene Project* tests our efforts to resist our tendencies towards representational thought. We are disciplining ourselves by attempting to look past images of human endeavour and their capture, so that we might ask questions of a different nature: ones layering those typically asked of the content as epistemology, rather than ontology. We are, therefore, hopeful that the act of viewing artistic images in an exhibition such as *The Anthropocene Project* will serve to galvanize new thinking and understanding. We enfold Deleuze’s (1989) caveat concerning over-reliance on the representational: “When grandeur is no longer that of the composition, but a pure and simple inflation of the represented, there is no cerebral stimulation or birth of thought” (p. 164). This informs a suspicion about the “inflated” representation of striking images of destruction included in this project. The photographic production, and its curation, has been intentionally preserved as other worldly and devoid of context. The photographic representation detaches us from the true ugliness of the depicted scenes. The skills and resources dedicated to beautifying these images are considerable—why should this be a priority to the creators of *The Anthropocene Project*? How do our appetites inform what we want to view, and not see?

Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2014) suggest that “for all of time, painting has had the project of rendering visible, instead of reproducing the visible...” (pp. 346). Photography is doing likewise throughout the Anthropocene Project. As cameras are pulled back farther and

flown higher, colour diffuses across space and shifts the appearance of what lays between. The catastrophe must look aesthetically pleasing, not interfere with stock values, not provoke disruption to work sites, not attract protesters. The capitalist aesthetic is to make everything for sale. This is the banality born of a socio-economic system: Its negotiation takes place when citizenry is held hostage to an inevitable course, whatever form that may take.

Closing

Mountains thoroughly preoccupy humans, they are relied on for their beauty, resources, and recreational uses. Mountains, however, exist independently of humans' conceptions of them and intentions for them. Mountains do not depend on humans for either their beauty or artistry. Their composite is not intended for human use. Flags of patterned fabric planted on their summits are irrelevant to their being. Anthropocentrism asserts belief in "mountains for us," however mountains long precede us, and the future of humanity will be predicated on a rapidly forged ability to reimagine relationships with our physical environments, including with mountains.

Haraway (2016a, 2016b) suggests that alongside the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene, a third timescape of Chthulucene spans past, present, and future. It comprises mutually reciprocal relationships that are entwined, *tentacular* existences of all species in a reconfigured world (Haraway, 2016a). "The unfinished Chthulucene must collect up the trash of the Anthropocene, the exterminism of the Capitalocene, and chipping and shredding and layering like a mad gardener, make a much hotter compost pile for still possible pasts, presents, and futures" (Haraway, 2016b, p. 61).

Describing "precarious times, in which the world is not yet finished and the sky has not fallen—yet," Haraway (2016b) further asserts:

We are at stake to each other. Unlike the dominant dramas of Anthropocene and Capitalocene discourse, human beings are not the only important actors in the Chthulucene, with all other beings able simply to react. The order is rather reversed: human beings are with and of the earth . . . (p. 59)

The Anthropocene Project is a defining moment rather than an epochal one about environmental catastrophes. *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch* features a human vocal narration that sings a gentle song, and scores violently calm images that lull us in our eerie state of dissonance. The project co-creators, individually and jointly, are masters of their crafts and seemingly stress the aesthetic of the distant and surface, rather than the affective and intellectual. If the planet's future is to be determined by the interests of capitalistic investors and the cinematic images they fund, as in the case of *The Anthropocene Project*, then the planet's future looks frightfully amazing.

Figure 4

Projected in Kamloops, BC: Edward Burtynsky. 2020. Photo by Richard Wainwright.



“Photographer Edward Burtynsky and [Scotiabank’s] CONTACT are requesting submissions for the 2020 Burtynsky Grant—a \$5,000 annual grant to support a Canadian artist in the creation of a photobook” ([Scotiabank](#), 2020d).

Intermezzo IV: Marshall McLuhan Getting Processed

What might fully engaging riff look like in action? Marshall McLuhan¹³² early recognized that despite its changing role, the schoolhouse might still hold the questions, in “electronic environment.”¹³³ McLuhan riffed, in the way that it capable of pushing, pinging, and propelling ideas. His probes and percepts were fuelled by his interest in asking questions rather than deducing answers (Theall, 2006). McLuhan resisted being held to a point of view, believing that such massive flows of information in the electric age weren’t conducive to such stasis. This is rhizomatic learning, the recording starts after the presentation begins and is interrupted by the producer reading the credits and signing off.

Fortuitously, in 1969, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) recorded McLuhan in a room full of high school students. YouTube hosts three versions of this recording, one of which continues playing through the programme’s closing credits over its theme music, when the announcer reads, “Well there it is, Marshall McLuhan getting processed by a group of high school students gathered in the living room of freelance broadcaster Alan Anderson who prepared the programme” (Henry, 2012, 52:43).

Not much else is known about the recording, its date might only be gleaned by references to a then recent incident involving a Kennedy driving off a bridge (“The Chappaquiddick incident,” 2020), and a fire at Yale university that McLuhan mentions was allegedly set by students (“Rudolph Hall,” 2017). The assembled group’s size might be estimated by the response

¹³² Media theorist, international media personality, and public intellectual, Marshall McLuhan is difficult to describe as he rejected labels to his professional work.

¹³³ Marshall McLuhan 1977 Interview (sp) by Carl Scharfe on City as Classroom.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aX9j_3bxZU0&t=2s

given to a student who contends that she didn't know that Marshall would be attending the event. To her claim another student scoffs: "Amazing. You must be one in thirty" (Henry, 2012, 18:47).

The recording, made by the CBC but not necessarily broadcast at the time (or ever, until posted on YouTube), has been uploaded to YouTube decades later and listened to by thousands on their various devices.

McLuhan broached topics tangentially and without any particular commitment to his pronouncements.¹³⁴ McLuhan asserted that in the technological age, "Any moment of arrest or stasis permits the public to shoot you down" (<https://www.wired.com/1996/01/saint-marshal/>). His enjoyment was in ideas, processes (Henry, 2012). YouTube hosts a fair selection of McLuhan's lectures, interviews, guest appearances on network television programmes, and film projects. One such offering particularly suits our riffologic propensities and inquiries: a full recording of a radio programme, *Marshall McLuhan gets Processed by High School Students*¹³⁵, recorded by the CBC in a freelance broadcaster's Toronto living room during a summer afternoon in 1969.

The teenagers' discussion with McLuhan is remarkable given the breadth of subjects raised, their prescience a full half century ago, and the students' frequent challenges to McLuhan's pronouncements. When an adult in the room admonishes the students about offering teachers respect, McLuhan opposes the notion: "Don't worry about respect here, please. I don't want anyone's respect. I want the attention" (Henry, 2012, 7:36).

¹³⁴ "He [McLuhan] was dismayed by any attempt to pin him down to a consistent analysis and dismissive of criticism that his plans were impractical or absurd. His characteristic comment during one academic debate has taken on a mythic life of its own. In response to a renowned American sociologist, McLuhan countered: 'You don't like those ideas? I got others.'" <https://www.wired.com/1996/01/saint-marshal/>

¹³⁵ There are three versions on YouTube. This is the only one that runs long enough to include the announcer description of the venue and that it was being broadcast for *Ideas* on CBC. For this reason the other two versions incorrectly identified the recording as possibly having taken place in 1961 and during one of his Monday Night Lectures held at the University of Toronto 1961."

An assemblage is formed of high school student invitees, a living room, a production crew from the CBC, a visiting speaker who traffics in “probes and percepts”, microphones (not many of them, which renders inaudible much that the participants furthest from the microphones speak), recording equipment, and Toronto’s cultural milieu at the nation’s centenary, a future radio audience—all in relationships of exteriority that could each be plugged into any other scenario, however, they are irreplicably assembled here with the results archived for posterity. In McLuhans’ probes, one might recognize a riff on Socratic methods of his inquiries, in that he doesn’t so much ask questions as float assertions that often rile the attendees. The students frequently remonstrate at what they are hearing. McLuhan intersperses his illustrations with stories, jokes, and analogies to extend thinking. We recognize that some of his themes and material has been repurposed from other addresses featured elsewhere.

Excerpts are included below on a breadth of topics raised on seemingly random themes, although wider reading and viewing of McLuhan indicates how many of these points are raised by him multiple times, not unlike the “material” that a comedian develops as jokes during onstage appearances. McLuhan, perhaps, shares these in various contexts in hopes of imparting the import he himself recognizes them bearing. Sample excerpts are included to indicate the nature of the exchanges and to contextualize the society during which they spoke, likely during the summer of 1969. These portions demonstrate McLuhan’s astounding foresight a full half century ago, long before people were generally familiar with computers and aware of the lack of personal privacy they would shortly ensure. Portions of the dialogue are selected as samples of spontaneous interactions with students, examples of the ease with which the conversation moves between topics and ideas that were bewildering to many at that time (Marchand, 1989), and the students’ resistance to the societal environment being created (while they still recognized the

changes around them taking place). These excerpted exchanges touch on themes that McLuhan often reiterated in his works, interviews, and discussions: the rapidly changing environment and its effect on education, James Joyce, put ons, jokes as grievances, surveillance, etc.

Adult Voice: I still fail to see how communication, as a transference of information, is dead (Henry, 2012, 1:03).

McLuhan: I didn't say it was dead, it's just changed. It's mostly nonverbal, it's mostly done by environments. For example, high rise is a form of communication (Henry, 2012, 1:09).

Adult Voice: It all depends where it is though, doesn't it (Henry, 2012, 1:20).

McLuhan: If it's on the side of a mountain it looks nice, if it's on a flat street it looks horrible (Henry, 2012, 1:22).

Adult Voice: If it blocks out individual homes, it's kind of bad at times (Henry, 2012, 1:26).

McLuhan: No, otherwise, it's just a cemetery. They have high rise cemeteries now. That's what they're really intended for. You buy yourself a little box in the sky instead of taking up space on the ground. Literally, the new high rises are all cemeteries in the States (Henry, 2012, 1:30).

Student: It seems to be a general trend, you take boxes, they put you into what they call classes (Henry, 2012, 1:48).

McLuhan: They still do (Henry, 2012, 1:56).

Student: And everytime that they do that (Henry, 2012, 1:58).

McLuhan: Why don't you try to find out where it all came from. who thought it up in the first place? Because it's certainly dead. You want to track it back, I mean, you know, the 'who instituted the crime in the first place' (Henry, 2012, 2:03).

Student: Why try to track it back, why not just ignore it? (Henry, 2012, 2:14).

McLuhan: Bypass it, that's one way (Henry, 2012, 2:17).

Student: You get to a point where you have to just let things flow (Henry, 2012, 2:19).

McLuhan: Well for example, I'll tell you one of the difficulties of bypassing. Castro bypassed, used tv to bypass, the electoral system. Now the electoral system, one little vote at a time, as a means of representation and public representatives is utterly obsolete. It's finished. Image making, which is the thing that puts people like Trudeau and Nixon into office, has nothing to do with voting. But, Castro simply, he didn't try to reform anything, he just bypassed the whole electoral system and went on to tv and talked straight to his people on an educational basis. He turned politics into education, this is the crime that Trudeau has been accused of by Peter Newman of the Star. Peter Newman has accused Trudeau (Henry, 2012, 2:23).

Student: [Inaudible] (Henry, 2012, 3:14).

McLuhan: Now politics has become essentially an educational enterprise. Um, with public participation. Where there's tv. But if you use the electoral system you have bureaucracy and there's no possibility of education through politics. So, until you have dialogue between the bureaucracy and the government you have only the old fragmented electoral system, with all the machine work and party systems between you and the government. The same way with education. In actual fact, you go to school with a hundred times more information than your grandfather ever got in his whole life time. The day you entered grade one you know more than your grandfather knew when he graduated (Henry, 2012, 3:16).

Student A: Excuse me, you told us everything is... dead... and obsolete¹³⁶, so what we want to know is... (Henry, 2012, 4:04).

McLuhan: What's alive (Henry, 2012, 4:14).

Student A: ...what we can do about it. And we need help and we need solutions and we don't want to sit there [in school] wasting our time, and we don't want to sit here listening to you... [inaudible] (Henry, 2012, 4:15).

¹³⁶ The METROPOLIS today is a classroom; the ads are its teachers. The classroom is an obsolete detention home, a feudal dungeon (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967, p. xxx).

McLuhan: I'll tell you what's alive and what you're not bringing any attention to and that's the satellite environment. The classroom is not having any influence on you, the satellite environment is having a profound influence on you and you're being here this afternoon (Henry, 2012, 4:21).

Student A: Sure! Great! Then why can't we spend our time in the environment instead of sitting there... (Henry, 2012, 4:35).

McLuhan: Do you know what the satellite does to you as an environment, when it goes around the planet? (Henry, 2012, 4:42).

Student A: No, tell me... (Henry, 2012, 4:44).

McLuhan: As an environment? (Henry, 2012, 4:45).

Student A: What? (Henry, 2012, 4:46).

McLuhan: As it goes around the planet? (Henry, 2012, 4:47).

Student B: It's there (Henry, 2012, 4:49).

McLuhan: It's a proscenium arch. It turns the planet into a stage, makes you want to be an actor, do your thing. Everybody now wants to do his *thing*! Since 1957, when Sputnik went up, and

then ever since, the satellite arch went around the planet, the planet ceased to be nature. What we used to call nature is gone. A planet is now contained inside a human box. There is no more nature. What remains is simply whatever we make of this planet by programming. There's no nature anymore. I see no point in schools. At all. Man has returned to the condition of the hunter (Henry, 2012, 4:50).

In an exchange about drug convictions:

McLuhan: Have you ever asked yourself why drugs have suddenly become popular when they weren't, say, thirty years ago? (Henry, 2012, 9:57).

Adult Voice: I think it's because there's no future (Henry, 2012, 10:01).

McLuhan: No. Inner tripping is natural in the electric age. All electricity is inner tripping, the electric age is inner trip. Period (Henry, 2012, 10:03).¹³⁷

Student C: Marshall, I don't understand the connection between that and when you said that man is becoming more like the hunter. We are regressing back to a hunting stage (Henry, 2012, 10:13).

¹³⁷ "New journalist" and novelist Tom Wolfe had written the *Electric Koolaid Acid Test* in 1968 and describes inner tripping in the electric age: "There is no way to describe how beautiful this discovery is, to actually *see* the atmosphere you have lived in for years for the first time and to feel that it is inside of you, too, flowing up from the heart, the torso, into the brain, an electric fountain" (pp. 59-60).

McLuhan: Well, quest for identity, quest for food, quest for any knowledge, quest for awareness, quest for anything at all. Man is all, researchers are all hunters, the CIA, the whole bunch of hunters. All the business community, all the learned community is engaged in hunting today. Cyclopes. They don't have goals anymore, they play the total field. The hunter plays the total field. He doesn't have a goal (Henry, 2012, 10:21).

On "progress":

McLuhan: When you hear the word progress you know you're dealing with a 19th century mind. Progress literally stopped with electricity because you now have everything at once. You don't move on from one thing at a time to the next thing. You have everything. There's no more history. It's all here (Henry, 2012, 12:45).

Student F: [inaudible] (Henry, 2012, 13:06).

McLuhan: It's all here though. There's no past. There isn't any part of the past that isn't with us. Thanks to electricity. But now it's not thanks to print, it's not thanks to photography, it's thanks to electricity. Speed. Huge speed up means there's no more past. Now, there is no more history but your teachers and your parents have no belief, whatever, in identity or the goals of our society. They just go on through the motions (Henry, 2012, 13:07).

On the owners of the system:

McLuhan: But you see, the owners of the system don't believe in it. Now, I'm not talking about Marxism, which I think is another nineteenth century thing (Henry, 2012, 16:31).

Student F: [inaudible] ...If they don't believe in it, what is it still doing here? (Henry, 2012, 16:41).

McLuhan: Well, you'd be surprised. You might ask, 'Why are coke bottles lying on the curb where there are cabs drawing up. Why?' Because nobody has enough energy to pick 'em up, that's why! Nobody has enough energy to wrap this society up and put it away! (Henry, 2012, 16:46).

On "the old rearview mirror bunch" (Henry, 2012, 17:43):

Student G: One second, Marshall, you said something about, okay... the unstructured people agree[ing] with you, but what about all the structured, the very structured principals and school teachers? (Henry, 2012, 17:31).

McLuhan: All right, the old rearview mirror bunch. Naturally, they feel the way you do: that their livelihood depends upon saying yes to this system. And it takes an awful lot of energy to change the system. And they don't have it (Henry, 2012, 17:43).

Student H: But what if we do have it? What if we... maybe, we don't have the energy, maybe we want to try to have the energy to get ourselves together to change the system? (, 2012, 17:55).

McLuhan: Well all right, for example, it takes a lot of energy to have a dialogue like this!
(Henry, 2012, 18:03).

Student H: Fine! (Henry, 2012, 18:08).

McLuhan: So most people would rather learn, memorize a few pages of history or a few pages of grammar and be done with it (Henry, 2012, 18:09).

Student H: But what about those of us who don't? (Henry, 2012, 18:15).

McLuhan: Exactly. It takes energy (Henry, 2012, 18:17).

Student I: I was thinking that this discussion is so much like a school system, it's actually even worse than it. People come here just to sponge (Henry, 2012, 18:19).

Student H: No! (Henry, 2012, 18:25).

Student I: I think they do (Henry, 2012, 18:26).

McLuhan: Sponge on what? (Henry, 2012, 18:28).

Student I: Why are so many more people here for this class than for an ordinary class? (Henry, 2012, 18:30).

McLuhan: Is this a class?¹³⁸ (Henry, 2012, 18:32).

Student I: ...Because we have someone here who [inaudible]... (Henry, 2012, 18:34).

Student H: No, there have been this many people here before! (Henry, 2012, 18:36).

Student I: ...has an aura around him that'll bring people in (Henry, 2012, 18:40).

Student J: Perhaps to some extent, but I mean I didn't even know he was coming! (Henry, 2012, 18:42).

McLuhan: A stripteaser... (Henry, 2012, 18:45).

Student I: Amazing, you must be one in thirty (Henry, 2012, 18:47).

McLuhan: A stripteaser... (Henry, 2012, 18:47).

Student J: No, really, I didn't know he was going to be here (Henry, 2012, 18:50).

¹³⁸ Is it?

McLuhan: A stripteaser... (Henry, 2012, 18:52)

Group members: [inaudible] (Henry, 2012, 18:52)

McLuhan: A stripteaser puts on her audience by taking off her clothes^{139 140} (Henry, 2012, 18:54).

Student I: And people go because they know she's there and they come here because they know you're here... [inaudible] (Henry, 2012, 18:58).

McLuhan: No, I put you on, I put you on by baring my mind. I put you on as an audience. I wear you as my clothing (Henry, 2012, 19:01).

Student I: Do you think this is an equal discussion? (Henry, 2012, 19:13).

McLuhan: It isn't (Henry, 2012, 19:15).

Student I: That you are equal to each one of us... (Henry, 2012, 19:16).

McLuhan: I don't know (Henry, 2012, 19:18).

¹³⁹ Tom Wolfe describes taking McLuhan to a "topless restaurant" in San Francisco where he observed that the waitresses "are wearing us, they are putting us on" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzBPmRPa7ls>

¹⁴⁰ McLuhan also applied this understanding of the "put on" to "streakers," likening them to the striptease artist putting on her audience, as he did in correspondence with Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, referring in 1974 to recent episodes of "streaking," their grievances, and relationship to strikers (Kahn, 2019, p. 112).

Student I: Or do you think that you are equal to the whole group? (Henry, 2012, 19:18)

McLuhan: Okay, ask the stripteaser, is the strip teaser equal to the whole group? (Henry, 2012, 19:21).

Student K: I don't usually think about a discussion group like that (Henry, 2012, 19:29).

McLuhan: The stripteaser has to bare herself in order to put on her audience. And when she puts on her audience she is a corporate power (Henry, 2012, 19:32).

Student L: She's an artist (Henry, 2012, 19:40).

McLuhan: When she steps off the stage she's a private nobody (Henry, 2012, 19: 41).

Later:

McLuhan...Because I am interested in understanding processes... (Henry, 2012, 21:02).

Adult Voice: He wants to be a catalyst in the... (Henry, 2012, 221:07).

McLuhan: No, not necessarily a catalyst, but I am interested in understanding processes and I understand what's making you tick and what's making you unhappy, but I do not approve of or

endorse any of the changes that are causing you to feel this way. Echo is a point of view and if the world is changing very rapidly you can't have a point of view (Henry, 2012, 21:09).

Students: [inaudible] (Henry, 2012, 21:30).

McLuhan: A point of view depends upon fixity... (Henry, 2012, 21:32).

Student M: [inaudible].. is an illusion... (Henry, 2012, 21:34).

McLuhan: No, it's only an illusion in an electric world. When things are moving very fast you can't have a stationary position or target (Henry, 2012, 21:35).

On processes and newsmaking:

McLuhan: Just a moment! What were we talking about before newspapers? Because we don't want to get derailed (Henry, 2012, 22:31).

Student N: We were understanding processes (Henry, 2012, 22:36).

McLuhan: Processes. Yes, I want to understand the processes by which something becomes news. 'He made the news.' He made it! He made the news. What's it mean? What is news? (Henry, 2012, 22:37).

Student O: It means he applied his point of view to a certain situation... [inaudible (Henry, 2012, 22:49)].

Student H: Not necessarily! (22:54).

McLuhan: Who? It takes an awful lot of people to make news, you know. One person can't make news (chuckles) (Henry, 2012, 22:55).

Student P: [inaudible] ... different points of view... (Henry, 2012, 23:00).

McLuhan: It takes a lot of editors, a lot of machinery, a lot of bureaucrats, a lot of very eager, hard working little typesetters and so on. Masses of people to make news! (Henry, 2012, 23:02).

Student P: This is where you get to the question of what is the true picture of a situation. There is no... [inaudible] (Henry, 2012, 23:11).

McLuhan: Of course there is (Henry, 2012, 23:15).

Student L: Now you're getting into the manufacturing of news.

McLuhan: Ya. It's a process though. I'm interested. I'm interested in the process of the manufacturing of you!¹⁴¹ (Henry, 2012, 23:20).

Student L: The manufacturing of me?! (Henry, 2012, 23:25).

McLuhan: Ya, you've been manufactured. By our society (Henry, 2012, 23:28).

Student H: In other words... (Henry, 2012, 23:32).

McLuhan: You're a product. I'm interested in the process by which you got turned into the shape you're now in (Henry, 2012, 23:32).

Student Q: What she's saying is that... [inaudible]. Right? (Henry, 2012, 23:40).

McLuhan: I endorse nothing. I am not seeking solutions. Except understanding. I am not promoting any angles, any points of view (Henry, 2012, 23:44).

Student L: Well, I'm here because I am sponging off you, like he said. I'm here to sponge a little bit of knowledge that I can (Henry, 2012, 23:55).

Student R: Aren't we all? (Henry, 2012, 24:05).

¹⁴¹ Gareth Mensah3 years ago (edited) "i'm interested in the manufacturing of you...Yes you, you're a product." Goddamn the ways he says it, lol, cold hearted. McLuhan is a G.

McLuhan: Well, why not? But you see, in dialogue I often discover things that I would never know without dialogue. I make most of my discoveries while talking, not afterwards, not before, but actually while talking. Nearly every insight I've ever made in my life has occurred to me while talking. To people. In the classroom, I make more discoveries than I do anywhere else (Henry, 2012, 24:08).

Student S: Are you an individual? (Henry, 2012, 24:33).

Marshall: (Pause) Well, in some sense (Henry, 2012, 24:36).

Student S: How? (Henry, 2012, 24:37).

Marshall: In some sense. In some sense. I mean, I'm an individual in the sense I occupy a space that is not the same space that you occupy (Henry, 2012, 24:38).

An exchange about computer surveillance:

McLuhan: You have to have a crowd around you like this to have privacy. You need a public before you can have privacy (Henry, 2012, 46:35).

Student H: You mean, in other words, to get lost in the crowd to have your own privacy (Henry, 2012, 46:40).

McLuhan: Ya. You cannot have privacy without a public and you cannot have poverty without affluence. You cannot have ignorance without learning. And you cannot have a coloured man without white people (Henry, 2012, 46:43).

Student U: Going back to a point you raised earlier about we're all hunters? (Henry, 2012, 46:56).

McLuhan: Now, in our time (Henry, 2012, 47:00).

Student V: Who's hunted? (Henry, 2012, 47:03).

McLuhan: Well as you know, most of the time it's people, that are being hunted down (Henry, 2012, 47:04).

Student H: Then who's the hunter? (Henry, 2012, 47:10).

McLuhan: Didn't you read recently, that this room may have, well at least according to the law of averages, there'd be three or four Pinkerton people here in different guises.¹⁴² In this room now. Are you pink? Or red. But, this was in last night's Star. That in the ordinary human gathering there are amateur sleuths and Pinkertons, hired, retained in every school room, in every

¹⁴² On November 23, 2020, an article in *Business Insider* was titled "Amazon is using union-busting Pinkerton spies to track warehouse workers and labor movements at the company, according to a new report" (Canales, 2020).

university, masses of these people. Just keeping tab on one other has become big business (Henry, 2012, 47:11).

Student W: Paranoia (Henry, 2012, 47:46).

McLuhan: Information data banks have become very big business. And they can store vast quantities of information that couldn't previously be put in filing cabinets (Henry, 2012, 47:48).

Student X: Will computers dehumanize... (Henry, 2012, 48:01).

McLuhan: Ya (Henry, 2012, 48:02).

Student X: ...our society... (Henry, 2012, 48:03).

McLuhan: Ya (Henry, 2012, 48:03).

Student X: ... or have they already done it? (Henry, 2012, 48:04).

McLuhan: No, they will take away every vestige of private being that you possess and private image... that's already happening at very high speed (Henry, 2012, 48:05).¹⁴³¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ In 1991, the University of Toronto, where McLuhan was professor much of his career, developed an interdisciplinary project, *the Citizen Lab*, developing research in citizen privacy protection and global security. <https://citizenlab.ca>

Student X: So, are you basing your point of view towards any... I guess you're not basing it towards a goal but can you relate it to the ending of the society or the changing of the society? Or, you know, is there any direction... (Henry, 2012, 48:13).

McLuhan: I'm pretty sure, I'm pretty sure that when people see the pattern of things around them then the thing is already cured (Henry, 2012, 48:28).

Student X: Is there any way... okay, suppose, suppose that I, I have a revelation and I, see, see it all. What can I do to, to either, to either make other people see it... or what? (Henry, 2012, 48:36).

McLuhan: Look a-busy! I'll tell you a story. There's a guy having too many beers in a London... a Dublin pub. And in the midst of his drinking he suddenly sees the figure of Christ standing in the doorway of the pub and he takes another belt of booze and looks again and there he still is. So he backs slowly toward the telephone at the back of the pub and he rings 'BAT69,' the pope's phone number. And he is so urgent, and so convincing, that they put him through to the Pope. And he says, 'I am here in Murphy's bar and I have seen the figure of Christ standing in the door, what shall I do?' There's a pause and a voice says 'Look a-busy. Look a-busy.' That's the answer. You know... (Henry, 2012, 48:46).

¹⁴⁴ Edward Snowden commended the project on the Joe Rogan Experience podcast (PowerfulJRE, 2020, 12:09). https://youtu.be/_Rl82OQDoOc

McLuhan: What do you tell for fun, as jokes? I'm interested. I collect jokes. Of every type (Henry, 2012, 50:56).

Student Y: A Japanese watchmaking school's Tick Tock Tech (Henry, 2012, 51:04).

McLuhan: Tick Tock Tech. Japanese watchmaking school. Tick Tock Tech. That's not bad, it's like James Joyce.¹⁴⁵ You know him? '[I am] yung and easily freudened' (Henry, 2012, 51:07).

Students laugh and groan¹⁴⁶.

McLuhan: Well, Tick Tock Tech is the same kind of pun (Henry, 2012, 51:22).

Student Z: Well I was just wondering how the Newfies feel about the jokes... (Henry, 2012, 51:26).

Student H: They tell mainlander jokes (Henry, 2012, 51:30).

McLuhan: That's what I said, they say, "see that blue thing out in the bay? That's the guy who was telling Newfie jokes." They tell, they have their own comebacks. But think of all the bilingual jokes Wherever there's grievances and there's bitterness, there is humour. You can tell

¹⁴⁵ The pun is central to McLuhan's work and thinking, inspired as he was by Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. Bob Dobbs writes of the book and its author: "Joyce, the linguist, took this acoustic experience [picking up an radio and shortwave radio broadcasts] of being able to scan up and down the dial and presented this sound collage on almost every page of *Finnegans Wake*, published in 1939" (personal communication, January 17, 2020).

¹⁴⁶ Were the students really so familiar to Joyce and this reference to respond thus?

where the grievances are by just watching where the jokes are. What do you tell about school in the way of jokes? Tick Tock Tech. Okay. That's really all you've been saying about school is Tick Tock Tech. I mean that's what you've been saying. It's the place where classified knowledge and correct answers—and uh, Tick Tock Tech. That's a very capsulated form of saying it, eh? But it's a grievance! So when you say Tick Tock Tech that's a grievance.¹⁴⁷ That's pun (Henry, 2012, 51:31).

Student H: So as far as I can see, this whole thing right now, the whole solution to our big, big problem is just to leave it (Henry, 2012, 52:16).

McLuhan: There are no solutions. There are processes... (Henry, 2012, 52:23).

Student AA: There are ends (Henry, 2012, 52:26).

McLuhan: There's violence. There's conquest. There's perpetual struggle. Ya! (Henry, 2012, 52:26).

Dramatic theme music (52:31).

This is a window to the social and political conditions nearly contemporary to McLuhan, Hutchon, McLuhan's (1977) curriculum project, *City as Classroom: Understanding Language*

¹⁴⁷ haupper 1 year ago: The best part is how he turns around the student's "tick tock tech" joke and points it toward their collective grievance about their schooling.

and Media, published eight years later, on which we have riffed during the following two chapters. The proceedings in the discussion held between McLuhan and the assembled students are riffologic, a radio broadcast that is, decades later, subsequently uploaded to YouTube (a platform that initially bore the tagline, “Broadcast Yourself”).

McLuhan’s understanding of the import of Illich’s (1970) deschooling manifesto (mywebcowtube, 2016, :35) and his observations of electricity’s effects on education, the schoolhouse and larger society all prompted his belief that the classroom’s function was being reoriented. The school would become relegated to a site not of learning, so much as a physical space where questions are asked. Students would be turned out into the wider world—the city—to learn their answers. The textbook, *City as Classroom* would be developed over the next years as his attempt to respond to these altered conditions of learning.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ McLuhan’s earlier study of education in 1964 (appendix, *Understanding Media*, 1994).

Introduction to

Shady Figures and Shifting Grounds for Re/Truthing: Channeling McLuhan's Posthuman

Shady Figures and Shifting Grounds for Re/Truthing: Channeling McLuhan's Posthuman was published in the Journal of Curriculum Theory in 2019. The article riffs on many ideas, including figure/ground analysis as presented by McLuhan in a co-written high school media textbook, *City as Classroom* (McLuhan et al., 1977). Borrowed from painting and Gestalt psychology, McLuhan et al. (1977) describe Gestalt psychologist Edgar Rubin as having “adopted the terms figure and ground to assist the study of structure in visible phenomena” (p. 9). We extend our inquiries to what *surrounds* the figure and ground, including matter that may be drawn into, often environmentally, unsound anthropocentric concerns and quests.

Chapter 6: Shady Figures and Shifting Grounds for Re/Truthing: Channeling McLuhan's

Posthuman

(Published in the Journal of Curriculum Theory, 2019).

Medium

A tumultuous relationship is taking place between the American presidency and its nation's media and is on display in front of the entire world no less. Its technologically mediated discourse is demonstrably rancorous, making for fraught terrain that antagonizes divisions exacerbated by frequent allegations of lying and misrepresentation lobbed between the establishment media and President Trump and his administration.

Donald Trump has proven to be a ubiquitous force in "technospace" owing to an unprecedented approach to his professional role as U.S. president that has been amplified by his particular brand of relationship with the American media. Experiencing a strong sense of his mediated social presence, these conditions indicate acclimatization to a rapidly changing environment during which humans have been slow to recognize the extent to which they coexist with nonhuman machines. Meanwhile, Trump and his administration hold a particular affinity for Twitter, presumably attracted to the tweet's brief, impactful nature and the immediate conveyance of its messaging directly from @realDonaldTrump to Americans and world citizens alike. These are among visible effects of the electric age permitting an instantaneity of information's release (McLuhan, 1964).

In conditions such as these, Twitter's global reach and sense of immediacy create a space of consequence rivaling network news' coverage of American presidential communications, while displacing traditional power relations. During technologically mediated coverage of roiling debates and divisive policies, American media are oft times preoccupied with reporting Trump's

lack of presidential etiquette and various faux pas, among other manufactured dramas and exaggerated upheavals that distract our attention and fail to safeguard us from attending to far more consequential concerns. Political events of global import—among them America’s withdrawal from various treaties and accords, thus, renegeing on obligations to address climate change and nuclear arms proliferation—call for multiple rationales: not only epistemological, but ontological, philosophical, and pedagogical.

Our interest in the educational implications of these circumstances has us delving into approaches conditioned by the posthuman, during which relationships between human and nonhuman actants are being more fully imagined. Herein, we do so by consulting a rare document co-written by Marshall McLuhan, a work that propels a consideration on media, technology, and education in the present day as riff. *City as Classroom: Understanding Language and Media* is a 40 year old high school media curriculum that McLuhan (McLuhan, Hutchon, and McLuhan, 1977a, 1977b) co-developed to sharpen the perceptions of Canadian teenagers when engaging their surroundings. McLuhan (1964) early recognized the effects of media and technologies when he posited that “all technologies are extensions of our physical and nervous systems,” thereby challenging a basic humanist premise (still largely assumed today) that humans exist independently of their “tools” (p. 137).

We are intrigued by the profundity of McLuhan’s often pithy pronouncements, his highly original approach to information, and his curricular strategies. In this present “Post-Truth Era,” we suggest that failing to scrutinize media’s effects leaves us vulnerable to imbibing polarizing binaries and being constantly distracted by frivolous narratives instead of grasping larger, far more consequential threats: a situation amounting to us leaning in closely to read mediated

messages that are actually, in the words of McLuhan, “the stenciling on the casing of an atomic bomb” (McLuhan, 1969/1995, p. 238).

AI

Interactions with networked technologies and public platforms like Twitter, keep bumping up against Trump, who troubles widely held conceptions of what a world leader looks, sounds, and acts like. Holding a presumption regarding what an American president says or does, we compare Trump to this image of thought and the chaos and disorientation with which he is associated, particularly in regard to media. For example, he frequently alleges that the American media trades in “fake news.” Is he merely identifying reportage that is “yellow journalism”? Or is he correctly identifying a territorialization of news corporations by “liberals” and corporate interests? Conjecturing posthuman veins, are relationships between humans and machines sufficiently developed to a degree permitting networked technologies to independently generate news items outside of human authorship? We are suggesting a world of the machines that is, to humans, still enigmatic.

Figure

A dramatic shift in ground across the American political and social landscape is taking place, the kind that happens when a figure such as Trump conducts himself in the media, including through Twitter. In describing approaches to navigating a changing world through media, McLuhan employed the concept of figure/ground to evaluate media and their effects: a pursuit in sharpening perceptions. When an object of interest becomes figure (the content), the ground is often overlooked. We have ourselves employed figure/ground analysis to better recognize that a traditionally accepted humanist lens as figure has largely precluded recognition of a posthuman grounding that increasingly structures the conditions of the developed world’s

existence (Sharon, 2014). Western society may be presently disrupted by political events internationally; however, holding one's attention on both the figure and its (back)ground helps to better understand both the relationships between, and the properties of, mediated situations and meanings conveyed. A "PostTruth Era" warrants educators' recognition that the ground, as "underlying structure," supplies the "conditions for experiencing any part that presents itself as figure" (McLuhan et al., 1977a, p. 14). When compelling figures "advance into the foreground," it is important to recognize their effect on perception and to balance relationships between the figure and their ground (McLuhan et al., 1977a, p. 9).

While figure and ground are constantly reconfigured amongst consumers of media preoccupied by their immediate environments, rapid developments such as technological change, the looming threat of environmental disaster, and militarization remind us that we are arguably on the brink. While Trump's political priorities are largely shared by supporters, even some of his opponents may hold quiet sympathy for particular issues: including protectionist and isolationist stances. The situation is further complicated by an accelerated concentration of American media ownership since telecommunications' deregulation in 1996, the corporate nature of which bears global importance. Alongside advertising, mainstream media's approaches are still often determined by the demographics of a generally aging television audience, homogenizing content to accommodate the news coverage preferences of its viewership, including talking points and panel discussions. There has been much upheaval throughout broadcasting as "alternative" news sources stream video content on platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, each requiring independent channels to enter contractual agreement and remunerative relationship before being reminded that, despite their "independence," they must

uphold the corporation's terms of agreement lest they risk being disciplined for disrupting their platform hosts' advertising revenue streams.

McLuhan

McLuhan's work established humanist theories in a radically new way by "explor[ing] the contours of our own extended beings in our technologies," while creating space for understanding more and differently (McLuhan, 1964, p.7). Although situated in a humanist tradition of the mid20th century and having never witnessed either the personal computer or the Internet, McLuhan's prescience ensures that posthumanists recognize him as having cleared space for academia to theorize technologies. Malabou (2017) suggests that, by corresponding technological development with an "extension of the nervous system to the very limits of the world" (p. 48), McLuhan (1964) recognized the Anthropocene when he wrote:

After three thousand years of explosion, by means of fragmentary and mechanical technologies, the Western world is imploding. During the mechanical ages we had extended our bodies in space. Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. (p. 5)

McLuhan held serious concerns about "the disaster civilization faced if mankind could not learn to use new media wisely" (Gordon, 2010, p. 102). We can only guess the nature of his sense of foreboding; however, what most troubles us now are the ecological ill effects wrought by rampant capitalism, material consumption, and technological conditions that permit facilitation of our exacting, destructive whims. Haraway (2016) asserts that, as proposed geological epoch, the Anthropocene too anthropocentrically bespeaks an innate speciesism of "human exceptionalism," disproportionately focusing on threats posed to humans and

particularly the human concerns of those inhabiting developed regions and monetarily wealthy classes (p. 49). In addition to the Anthropocene, Haraway (2016) introduces her conceptualization of additional “timescapes.” The Capitalocene is a timescape during which capital is recognized as the force driving relentless resourcing of the earth by means of exterminationist extraction (Haraway in O’Neill-Butler, 2016), like the Anthropocene, a boundary event, for its projected short duration. The Chthulucene is conceptualized as a timescape—past, present, future—comprising mutually reciprocal relationships as entwined, tentacular existences of all species in a reconfigured world (Haraway, 2016).

City as Classroom

In the mid 1970s, McLuhan co-wrote a media textbook for Canadian high school students: *City as Classroom: Understanding Media and Language* (McLuhan et al., 1977a). Recognizing that, in a technologically mediated society, knowledge increasingly resides outside the schools that had once been physical hubs of information, McLuhan et al. (1977a) sought to pose questions within school walls that then could be explored outside them. Committed to honing media informed perceptions about the city as a “changing environment,” McLuhan et al. operationalised the early twentieth-century psychological work on figure/ground analysis by Edgar Rubin as a study in structural relations.¹⁴⁹ The authors contended that balancing relationships between figures and their ground will expand understandings of the situations with which one is confronted (McLuhan et al., 1977a, p. 9). Let us demonstrate figure/ground using a familiar urban scene: that of congested traffic in which vehicles will idle, crawl, briefly

¹⁴⁹ For examples of figure and ground, visit:
https://www.google.com/search?q=my+mother+in+law+and+my+wife+figure+ground&safe=strict&sxsrf=ALeKk01UbaBTMn4h3RvfS2JKt-7E2BUyNg:1605276154963&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjCjO7X1__sAhVStZ4KHfN0DwkQ_AUoAXoECAQQAaw&biw=1186&bih=602

accelerate, frequently brake. The motor car, a quintessential symbol of modernity and human ingenuity, typically dominates one's attention and, therefore, acts as figure. Backdrop to the motorized vehicle, however, are the countless entities that support the automobile's existence and function: gas stations, highways, traffic lights, parking lots, toll booths, and signage, etc. (Marchand, 1989). Moreover, the automobile's ground includes the extent to which modern society is arranged and habituated around its use, including motorists' acceptance that to travel by the motorcar is to be subjected to traffic jams. Figures are altered by their ground, which is never static.

We suggest that the ground of the United States' once familiar domains is experiencing seismic shifts, a situation exacerbated by mercurial relationships between the Trump administration and the nation's establishment media, locked in disputation about what is purported to be "truth" and "fake." McLuhan, Hutchon, and McLuhan (1977b) asserted that by "concentrat[ing] on the structure of a situation, we can assess problems more realistically and change the situation or our response to it" (p. 10), surely an advisable course of action in seemingly chaotic times.

Twitter

How far are post-truth narratives being advanced through a U.S. president's Twitter activity, his repeated allegations of "fake news," and the scrutiny these accusations bring upon the journalistic practices of American establishment media? In Trump's tweets, how might he be interchangeably positioned as figure, ground, or medium? These questions reflect features of a new era in media, its reporting, and milieu, all demonstrating the observation by McLuhan that "the clearest way to see through a culture is to attend to its tools for conversation" (Postman, 1985/2006, p. 8).

Tweeting, retweeting, and hashtagging engage Twitter users in co-authorship that reconfigures traditionally regarded roles of writer, audience, content, subject, and object. Readers are themselves co-opted into writing Trump's messaging as Twitter mines information about who views each tweet, where the cursor is placed and clicked, for what duration it rests, to whose account it is retweeted, which hashtags are added, what commentary is made, etc.

The use of analogies between information networks and vehicular traffic seems apt. Automobility, so intimately tied to a North American sense of freedom, is situated on networks of roads and freeways that, when gridlocked, may cause a level of human frustration, even rage, that is demonstrated in the kind of violent scenes at times reported in the media.

When Trump tweets late at night, he is riffing with technology, with available information, with his Twitter followers, with his thinking, and with the Twitter publishing mechanism itself. His declarative statements are setting conditions that are in turn riffed in media reports and retweets, online discussions, news programming, late night television monologues, and comedy skits. Some of his tweets, which presumably (although not necessarily) feature his own, uncensored words, bear the immediacy and environmental impact of some kind of detonation within and well beyond Twittersphere. Any resulting consternation, excitement, upheaval, and validation experienced by members of the U.S. electorate, even global citizens, fully demonstrates the prescience of McLuhan's iconic phrase, coined over a half century ago: "the medium is the message."

Trump's early penchant for retweeting the opinions of others, including nefarious individuals and groups such as David Duke and Britain First, provides the President opportunity to present (even seemingly endorse) controversial positions without personally stating them—acts of collaborative activity, engaged however briefly. The "ground" (be it human personalities,

corporations, demographics, or algorithms) constantly shifts beneath “shifty” figures (again human personalities, corporations, demographics, and algorithms) constantly altered by their conditions. Hidden ground exists as the entire political, economic, and AI apparatus that is required to establish conditions on which Twitter activity is conducted, becoming so familiar that it tends to be overlooked—users having “stopped paying it any conscious attention” (McLuhan et al., 1977a, p. 19).

Algorithms

On city streets, a triangulation of cell phone data, Wi-Fi signals, and GPS provides a great deal of information to data providers, while Google and Apple services have been able to harness this data to determine traffic speed, areas of congestion, and make recommendations about how to navigate adverse conditions. Vehicles now routinely have sensors to automatically parallel park, move the car out of harm’s way, protect pedestrians, avoid lane drift, etc. Roadways increasingly have sensors that monitor traffic flow and adjust the regulation of stoplights and automated sensors regulating variable speed zones according to weather conditions. Some emerging networked technologies use Bluetooth/Wi-Fi and microwave technologies to aggregate more specific information about who is travelling where, while collecting information from roadside and overhead monitors that feed back into big data systems. The smooth flow of traffic is figure, while the backdrop is a massive collection of data that is being catalogued for all types of current and future purposes, many of which were unthinkable a relatively short time ago.

Transportation related technologies possess features that are shared with Trump’s use of social media. Trump’s tweets aren’t simply unidirectional communications injected hypodermically into the veins of Twitter, paralleling the communications of broadcast television.

Like the conceptualization of automobility as the AI guided aggregate of car-driver-road, here we think of Delanda's (2010) man-horse-bow assemblage. Trump's Twitter compositions end up being an amalgam of tweeter-Twitter-tweet, increasingly entwined in such a way that the boundaries of each role are no longer easily identifiable. Once Trump's tweets become further encoded with tracking data, visual framing, and comments by other users, the texts (in the broadest sense) accumulate and morph machine data in previously unimaginable ways.

Upon tweeting, Trump and his team have immediate access to reports indicating where the tweets were posted, retweeted, and what feelings readers attached to these messages. This contrasts earlier forms of opinion polling whereby reactions to a U.S. president's controversial platforms were collected after their unveiling. The results took days, even weeks, to assemble. There is now immediate access to sentiment data provoked by any message, including the broad demographics of gender and location. Trump and his administration can easily renege, shift, or pursue positions within a few hours of posting any given message on Twitter, in effect employing a "try before you buy" method of laying out policy shifts and initiatives. Creating a continuous cycle of text, this feedback informs how the tweet is further circulated in other media such as Facebook. The process continually adds or subtracts data from the transmission, the reader, the writer and the medium, all contributing to the way that Twitter exists in an almost virtually real world.

In the Twittersphere, we participate in what is an often chaotic social media version of an "information superhighway": tweets blast like car horns on digital roads, political pundits erratically careen and glance off one another, and bottlenecks form in areas of high traffic circulation that are also frequented by passersby slowing to rubberneck at any spectacle.

Surround

Reliance on humanistic, binary claims of “truth” and “fake,” or “lies” and “false,” restrict perceptions by being “either/or” propositions that keep us bound within the present. Figure and ground can also amount to binary positions, so we expand our purview beyond the largely anthropocentric concerns of McLuhan’s use of both by proposing a further layer of consideration for analysis, one we term surround. This additional perspective is conceived to recognize the parts of the situation displaced or destroyed in order to accommodate emerging properties such as technofossils and anthroturbation—countless traces of human activity now abundantly populating earth. Surround acknowledges environmental impact on the earth caused by human activity. Revisiting our example of the automobile, a configuration of figure/ground/surround helps us to recognize not only a car as figure and the roadway beneath it as ground (in two senses), but also a surround comprising the swathes of land, plant life, and rich soil that have been excavated, paved over, tunneled under, and, thus, “lost” to roadways, back alleys, driveways, and car lots.

Surround’s inclusion alongside the figure/ground paradigm permits us to better recognize the extent of ecological destruction caused by urban development—loss and ruin compounded by automobility that permits travel over further and further distances. Arable land is similarly lost to petroleum wells, oil sands, and tail ponds (not to mention the copious amounts of freshwater consumed in fracking for natural gas). The decentring of the human becomes imperative to both recognizing and mitigating the extent of humans’ environmental impact while, in educational contexts, heightening students’ awareness beyond immediate observations, familiar constructs, and epistemological debates. The Anthropocene continues to manifest distress, marked by a sense of growing anxiety, that Morton (2015) claims is:

precisely the feeling of the loss of the world—the end of the world, but not as we thought, a great bang or a void, but a prolongation of things in synchrony with the disappearance of meaningful backdrop—and thus the disappearance of the foreground as such. (p. 185)

Rideshare

The tools we use and the modes of transportation on which we anthropocentrically rely are expiring. Human work forces are becoming just another data set, increasingly consigned to fulfilling tasks informing machinic learning. Here, we look to a widely heralded player in the “sharing economy,” Uber. In congested traffic, some cars are being engaged for the purposes of ridesharing, an arrangement secured by both patron and driver through the Uber app. An Uber hired car assumes a figure in traffic quite unique among the cars, apps, drivers, and occupants in its midst. What is the ground of the Uber car operated by the Uber driver? It is likely significantly different from the cars around it, for the Uber platform is using onboard smart technologies in its development of nonhuman automobility. Once ridesharing vehicles’ activities are mapped by Uber, the humans presently conveying its technology (on company issued cell phones) are likely to be made redundant in their employ as driver. Human activity is in the midst of a tremendous existential shift; in the near future, the human will no longer drive vehicles carrying people and transporting freight. Meanwhile, online shopping continues to seriously disrupt human employment in retail work.

While we hold an image of thought that humans program the computer technologies that run automated devices, increasingly, it is machine learning technologies that collect information from humans and any other data source. Hierarchically, humans’ position in matters is changing, and humans are being irreversibly delegated to machines’ use. More specifically, humans aren’t

teaching self-driving cars their expanded role, as they are increasingly introduced to city streets, but are most likely sitting as passengers while being machine chauffeured—humans effectively riding “shotgun” from the driver’s seat.

Philosophy of technology academic Tamar Sharon (2012, 2014) articulates a “cartography of the posthuman” as a typology of biotechnologies during the posthuman that careens between reactions to technological and human interactions: alternately dystopic, liberal, methodological, and radical. Identification of these types prompts similar questions about how technologies spring from human creativity yet reciprocally shape our human experience. Methodological shifts toward philosophical frameworks, such as those of Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 1994), and radical posthumanism recognize the “political potential inherent in technologies to overcome some of the most detrimental effects of modernity” (Sharon, 2014, p. 8).

Riff

What might educational learning during the posthuman look like and how might it be pursued? We identify our rhizomatic tendencies towards unfettered discovery (primarily, but not exclusively, by technological means) as a compulsion to riff (Stevens & Wainwright, 2016; Wainwright & Stevens, 2017). Our learning is potentiated by thought: ideally open ended and without hierarchical structure. An assemblage of figure/ground/surround is conceptualized as a tool of analysis to develop simultaneity of perception, taking into account the entire “visual” field. High school students of media were encouraged by McLuhan et al. (1977a) to summon powers of observation to assess what might be these settings during the electric age: “You are always the figure, as long as you are conscious, the ground is always the setting in which you exist and act” (p. 10). These considerations invite approaches developing awareness, particularly

when any given ground is better understood as composing any other entity's figure (human, nonhuman, technological). "The interplay between you and this changing ground changes you" (McLuhan et al., 1977a, p. 10). We are interested in posthumanizing these important curriculum initiatives created by the authors of *City as Classroom*. McLuhan's career-long study of media was self admittedly always of its effects rather than of its content, which is what still distinguishes it as unique in its field.

Such analysis encourages observation and curiosity, a breadth of perception permitting one to "experienc[e] the sense of configuration; this is the sense that an artist brings to bear on painting, a satirist on situations" (McLuhan et al., 1977a, p. 10). Our personal sense as pedagogues is to "plug in and play"—to riff—and we have been developing an [onto]Riffology, which is rooted in our tendency to tap philosophy, cultural theory, and critical approaches in technology to infuse posthuman education with creativity (Stevens & Wainwright, 2016; Wainwright & Stevens, 2017).

Riff pursues freeform inquiry that has never been about "bring[ing] together a structuralist account of knowledge, nor to formulate a truth in any unifying theory, [but rather] we sample theory, seek affect in discovery, imbibe concept's rationale and engage play beyond discourse" (Stevens & Wainwright, 2016, p. 169). In research and classroom contexts, riff effectuates a posthuman leveling of hierarchical relationships between teacher and student. In our development of [onto]Riffology, we draw on the theoretical work of various educational theorists exploring Deleuzoguattarian approaches during which the human is decentred, representation is avoided, and understandings of "what it means to be human" are interrogated. In conceptualizing riff, we are inspired by Wallin's (2011, 2015) mobilization of philosophy for thinking pedagogical difference, Jagodzinski and Wallin's (2013) machinic arts, Roy's (2003)

case study on nomadic spaces, and St. Pierre's (2017; St. Pierre, Jackson, & Mazzei, 2016) elaboration on post-inquiry.

We take notice of the extent of technological interactions and that humans are deeply enmeshed with the machinic. This is hidden ground that we explore by way of riff. Riff is information sharing between humans and nonhumans in relationships of (re)combinatoriality—one action bootstrapping another's function in machinic assemblage. Humans riff off the nonhuman, machines riff off machines, machines riff off humans, and humans riff off humans. Expanding our lens past the human to grasp the nature of these relationships has been akin to lifting a veil or developing an additional sense; we are continually upending figure/ground/surround, while engaging multiple, intersecting lines of reasoning that tenderize otherwise binary debates about whether, for example, Russian interference significantly impacted the 2016 American election. Socially mediated contexts indicating hostility result in disagreements held on epistemological terms that stymie what is better achievable by way of ontological strategies of becoming.

Riff seeks to emulate methods of experimental inquiry; the research that is termed “post qualitative” or “post-inquiry” by proponents who likewise relinquish dualisms of organization and belief such as “same/Other, human/nonhuman, mind/matter, culture/nature” (St. Pierre et al., 2016, p. 99). Much as it is near impossible to unsee nonhuman and technological paradigms once they have been recognized as fully existing alongside the human, it is a difficult prospect to unlearn post qualitative research approaches once introduced to them. Post-inquiry disrupts the relationships between the traditionally privileged fields of knowledge (empiricisms) and those of being and becoming (ontology); methodological frameworks just no longer suit (St. Pierre, 2017).

Mr. President

When a car works as expected, we don't notice the necessary tools and labour that keep it in running condition. In the case of Trump's presidency, we enter a state of "breakdown." When Trump refuses to "act presidential" in the function of his job, great discomfort results. It is like a gestalt that switches figure and ground (what Trump says and what the medium does), optical illusions holding us transfixed. As long as the American governmental machine performs to our expectations, we rarely reflect on the nature of the tools, their workings, and their operations. Trump's approach to the presidency draws attention not only to Trump, but to the entire Trump/tweet/Twitter/reader assemblage in general—and the nature of the presidential role in particular. To riff on this tension is not so much to critique Trump's singular performance as president, but the presidential role over centuries. It's not that the King is without clothing; it's that the monarchy's textiles are made using exploited labour, and the kingdom's cotton is being picked in the Plantationocene (Haraway, 2016). Citizens of other countries, likewise monitoring Twitter and the media, join in a collective state of dissonance at the unfolding of internationally mediated events. Trump's disinclination to act "presidential" makes us all intimately aware of this fact.

This becomes the terrain of double figure/ground, the creation of which is "the most potent tool for creating insight and facilitating analysis" (McLuhan et al., 1977a, p. 49). In mediated circumstances, this technique alters figures and grounds to both form ground by their stark incongruence—bringing divergent audiences "into sudden collision" (McLuhan et al., 1977a, p. 49). It all plays with perceptions in the ways that one may expect when a gameshow host, property developer, and political neophyte unexpectedly becomes president of the United States (not entirely an unexpected phenomenon in the country given the political careers of

Ronald Reagan, Clint Eastwood, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jesse Ventura, and Al Franken). The situation of Trump's ascendancy creates an interesting figure and ground scenario of compelling dynamics all on its own; however, a double figure/ground comes into play when a media celebrity of this self styling becomes a world leader yet declines to perform presidentially. What is created by these juxtapositions becomes "the basic structure of much satire and most metaphor" (McLuhan et al., 1977a, p. 49), deeply jarring but exceedingly compelling. Such assertions raise important questions when the spectre of post-truth is fully cast. Is it the handiwork of intentional obfuscation or merely the nature of (even, unintentional) satiric work?

Probes

Deleuze's philosophical propensity for experimentality in thought inspires our mobilization of his concepts to explore and understand news events (published, streamed, or broadcast) and what to make of alleged "fake news" (as lies with an intent to misinform its audiences). In Deleuzian thought, events are conceptualized as stemming from processes of two intertwining flows: both the real as actual and the real as virtual.

Deleuze (1993) considers the actual event not as a state of affairs but as "actualized in a state of affairs" (p. 152, emphasis added), while the virtual comprises "incorporeal events" (Boundas, 2013, p. 197): "Real without being actual, ideal without being abstract"; and symbolic without being fictional" (Proust as quoted in Deleuze, 1994, p. 208). In navigating distinctions between the actual and virtual, "elements and relations" forming structure must not be overstated in the former circumstance, nor understated in the latter (Deleuze, 1994, p. 208). Moment by moment, as countless virtual events become actualized, exponentially more don't. While always real, actualized events in due course return to virtuality—events endlessly flow from states of

virtuality to a moment of actualization and then return to the virtual. Massumi (1995) describes the virtual as:

a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect; where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt—albeit reduced and contained. For out of the pressing crowd an individual action or expression will emerge and be registered consciously. One ‘wills’ it to emerge, to be qualified, to take on sociolinguistic meaning, to enter linear action-reaction circuits, to become a content of one’s life—by dint of inhibition. (pp. 30-31)

This interplay between actual and the virtual fuels riff by pushing towards mobilization of theory, pressing concepts into active tenses. What is this world of our creation, and by what impulses and constraints is it alternatively propelled and structured? “Predatory capitalism,” “proto-fascism,” “democracy,” “consumerism,” we can’t necessarily slow global systems and curb its preoccupations, but we may engage thought to not act complicitly. Identification of “fake news” is a provocation to discovery and engagement. Where does it exist, and what does it do? Riff is a tool kit of borrowed concepts, particularly those pursued as learning trajectories as becoming, infused with a sense of discovery and naïveté challenging us to think our way out of this mess. Humanity’s ultimate destination may not be averted by such intellectual diversions, but the ride might be more interesting. Understanding figure, ground, and surround, we read the inscription and see the atomic bomb on which it is stenciled. We also see the material waste and poisoned water left in its construction’s wake, as well as the dead beings and land that will feel its touch, if launched.

Zombies

We recognize that what we may well be witnessing is the culmination of the Anthropocene, a scenario about which Wallin (2015) evokes chaos, eco-catastrophe, and zombies—a scenario in which humanist educational ambitions to lift humanity out of a morass of its own creation are entirely for naught. Analogies of the post-apocalyptic and zombies (equatable to Sharon’s [2012, 2014] description of the posthuman as dystopic) bring a certain cult movie sensibility—something like a breath of pollution choked air—to *mises-en-scène* that counter all the sentiments of hope that humanist pedagogical aspiration attempts to muster, then inspire. We’re dying here, alongside all life forms. There is no real escape, and we rush headlong to our own demise, hastened by our unbridled anthropocentrism, that “key assumption of modern Western rationality” (Shaviro, 2014, p. 1). Wallin (2015) invokes zombies in breaking “the humanist conceit of progress and perfection by actualizing the occulted unconscious background of horror and decay with which human life is imbricated” (p. 140). Like this apocalyptic rendering of the Anthropocene, the Chthulucene tells its own tales, of an “order [that] is reknitted: human beings are with and of the earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of this earth are the main story” (Haraway, 2016a, p. 55).

Having suggested that, in a Deleuzian sense, reality inhabits the potentialities of the virtual and the actual, we now work within its ontology to consider McLuhan’s confidence in figure/ground analysis as an “approach to problems as interrelated aspects of culture...stress[ing] the fact of continuity in a world of seeming change” (McLuhan et al., 1977b, p. 1). Our motivations in resurrecting a four decade old curriculum—albeit one co-developed by a foremost public intellectual, astonishingly prescient in his anticipation of the impacts of technology on civilization and learning—include unsettling our thinking and paradigms to embrace further implications of the posthuman conditions into which we have been thrust. We explore the nature

of interchangeable subjectivity between online author, reader, and text, whereby, through responses, retweets, hashtags, and algorithms, Internet content is co-written—further disrupting traditional notions of news and its production.

In *City as Classroom*, McLuhan et al. (1977a) refer to “problems” inherent to a changing environment, betraying a decidedly dystopic approach to networked technologies and their effects on society. Both the textbook and its accompanying teacher’s guide instruct students to be vigilant while identifying figure and ground when navigating “two major concerns...[both] to discover the new problems this environment poses, and to develop ways of coping with these problems” (McLuhan et al., 1977b, p. 1).

Shifting understandings of interdependence between animal, vegetable, and mineral, the metropolis becomes something like a petri dish of relationships culturing human and nonhuman matter. Over four decades after McLuhan et al. (1977a) introduced figure/ground analysis to Canadian youth to broaden their gaze on topics of media studies, speculative realist ontologies—such as object oriented ontology (OOO) theorized by Graham Harman (2002, 2010), Ian Bogost (2012), and Levi Bryant (2011)—further move notions of subjectivity in multiple directions. Any traditionally understood exceptionalism of human inhabitants over their nonhuman counterparts is being completely reimagined, particularly a hitherto acceptable hierarchy in which human life is considered more worthy of subjectivity than is matter.

Ontologies

The self-driving car becomes “figure” on the city’s streets, an editorial plotline and a point of both interest and consternation in the ever changing world. The autonomous vehicle, engineered to carry freight and passengers, will one day end any reliance on human drivers, and this eventuality will create massive (human) job redundancy. As we recognize the many ways

that Twitter induces human users to collaborate in garnering its data, we can anticipate how much of self driving cars' learning will take place on city streets. In its experimental phase, the autonomous vehicle has already caused human fatalities when systems have failed to anticipate all situations and eventualities. Without human pilots, the cars will be in transit night and day, car ownership will be reimagined, and the considerable space presently dedicated to parked vehicles and roadways may be repurposed. Figure becomes ground becomes surround, elements of ground become figure, and human perceptions are accordingly honed as foci shift.

Proponents of autonomous vehicles note that collision avoidance features will be based on detailed vehicle placement technologies that will virtually eliminate traffic accidents. For the first time, vehicles will be able to simultaneously focus attention in all directions. No longer will vehicles' navigation be compromised by human pilots' periodic gazing into the rear view mirror to assess their ability to safely proceed.

In an era of human-built machines, the automobile ("self movable") has shaped modern existence while being human navigated. The car's future incarnation as autonomous will necessitate new tools and concepts that require radical transformation of existing thought images based on perishing technologies of car/driver binaries.

Fake, truth, false claims, and lies are not just about trying to figure out what is fake and what is true, but concern striving towards a new conceptualization of the possible, of a new becoming. This doesn't happen by trying to continuously decipher the meanings in any particular statement or reporting; it comes instead by shifting figure, shifting ground, enlivening new folds, and by avoiding distractions caused by epistemological debates being sponsored by corporate interests, their bought politicians, and the mainstream news agencies.

Ontologizing our surroundings and engagements better navigates our passage than constant epistemological ruminations. Ontological considerations reimagine relationships in the many ways necessary to stem the ruin we have wrought. This will take more than a shift of content or even medium. It requires an entirely new way of creating and conceptualizing what's real. McLuhan (1967) wrote that “when faced with a totally new situation, we tend always to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavor of the most recent past. We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future” (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967, pp. 74-75). But we march, regardless. We riff to decentre the human, avoid representation, and to engage ontologies to question war economies, rampant material consumption, cult of celebrity, political malfeasance, and environmental destruction—the makings of a posthuman critical pedagogy.

[onto]Riffology is an attempt to posthumanize education and ontologize learning that is optimized by machines and networked technologies, inklings more than knowledge, discovery more than dogma. Humanist renderings of the figure, ground, and surround are perhaps analogous to the bomb, its stenciling, and catastrophic detonation. Does a posthuman version of figure, ground, and surround approximate a combination of the boundary events and timescapes, Anthropocene, Chthulucene, and Capitalocene? What do these next years look like?

Trump and the lies spun from the presidential office seem to demand action of some sort. The entire American broadcast news media arguably inspires less confidence than ever. We are, however, attempting to shift our attention from this figure and that ground to instead scrutinize the significance found in posthuman events.

Intermezzo V: Presenting at a School Staff Meeting

“Nothing has its meaning alone. Every ‘figure’ must have its ‘ground’ or environment”
(McLuhan & Nevitt, 1972).

As one of two “key people” among my elementary school’s teaching staff, I am responsible for helping facilitate the integration of Indigenous learning as part of the nationwide *Truth and Reconciliation* process. Among other initiatives (supported by district Indigenous Education teachers and educational assistants, the district Indigenous Education principal and office secretary), my key person partner(s) and myself have been typically permitted a few minutes at our monthly staff meetings to present materials and announce events promoting Indigenous learning in Canadian education. In March, 2018, I shared the following presentation at the staff meeting, having secured a few extra minutes from the principal to deliver it.

When called upon to speak, I distributed small photocopied copies of *My Wife and My Mother-in-Law* by American cartoonist William Ely Hill in 1915, and briefly described how one might see one of two women in the picture:



I then began my address:

During a recent aboriginal education enhancement agreement event, attendees were encouraged to speak to our respective schools' staffs more personally, answering a question "Who am I?," and relating these reflections to our individual journeys vis-a-vis reconciliation between First Nations and the nation that is now Canada. I will take a few minutes to do that now, as an alternative to introducing a resource or theme or a project idea for your consideration. I have asked Tom for about five, six minutes today to share this.

Recent events in the Canadian media and consciousness have had me particularly asking myself, "Who am I?".

Firstly, here I have my grandmother's book, a resource produced about a small pocket of tiny rural communities in Southern Manitoba: towns of a couple of hundred inhabitants each. Around 140 years ago groupings of immigrants, primarily from England, Scotland, and Ireland began to arrive to the region. All four branches of my parentage came on ships, then trains, river boats, then on foot, to these regions, attracted by the promise made by the Canadian government of inexpensive land on which to homestead. One of these land plots received by my paternal family had a creek on it that had been named "Shannon" by earlier arrivals from Ireland, hearkening to their native land's largest waterway: the Shannon River. These forebears were "settlers," and I thoroughly recognize that their experiences and sensibilities are influential to my conditioning and thinking.

These weren't the earlier *pioneers* to North America, who were relatively few and followed the even fewer European explorers. These were the European settlers, arriving "en masse," who fanned out across the west. Shelters, livestock, large gardens and barn raisings shortly preceded the institution of schools, banks, stores, and churches in these remote communities. These were among the many thousands of agricultural communities in which 90

percent of Canadians once lived. It's difficult to imagine that not so long ago this nation almost entirely lived in small rural towns, villages, and hamlets; on farms and not in cities. We have seen such a migration to metropolises.

This book, *Living Gold*,¹⁵⁰ is full of genealogies and accounts, yet there exists one glaring omission, an omission that never particularly glared at me before: a complete absence of any account or even mention of First Nations peoples and their own relationship to the region discussed in the book. I am thinking that this oversight is partly due to an already by already disrupted migratory patterns of the nomadic First Nations who had passed across those grounds for thousands of years. Indigenous people who had long watered at that creek long before it was "Shannon." In a settler's mind and reasoning, and in complete ignorance of the nature of nomadic culture, nobody technically "lived" *there* and *technically* never really had and, well, the Canadian government was offering opportunity.

Little thought would be spared Indigenous peoples because there was little obvious corresponding relationship to European land "ownership" amongst these hunters and gatherers who had followed bison, birds, deer for millennia. By then many were already being forced into communities called reservations, countless wiped out by European illnesses brought over and fatally introduced to their populations, and their ancient lifestyles were already being - often violently - eroded and lost, as was all that knowledge about ways of so capably thriving in harmony with the environments around them.

As millennia old ways of life were being severely threatened for Indigenous peoples, my immigrating families' lives were only beginning on this land mass of untilled soil, in communities modeled on those left behind in Europe. Canada was formed in 1867 and Manitoba

¹⁵⁰ Edited by E. Mullen

entered confederation in 1870, the fifth province to do so. Manitoba is an Assiniboine name for “water of the prairie,” precious resource. My story descends from that region, I was born only some eighty years after the region that became the Roland Municipality was settled by Europeans and I was named for that creek called “Shannon.” I was born on Canada’s 99th birthday, July 1st being the day of Confederation.

Who am I? This is a “figure” [I indicate to a larger version of the drawings I have distributed]. Everything I really have experienced is through this lens, this account. What I really want to try to do is go here, into this surrounding “ground .” What comprises the ground of those communities and larger territories that formed the regions in which I have lived this half century?

More specifically, how did what makes up my *figure* catastrophically affect everything that makes up this corresponding ground, how has my ancestors’ arrival to this land mass contributed to circumstances so thoroughly disrupting everything the first peoples ever knew and valued as their own figure (which I have largely dismissed as my ground)?

A recent court trial has been, by turns, re-establishing and challenging my figure. In August, 2016, Gerald Stanley, living on a remote Saskatchewan farm and therefore a “settler” (in the manner I have defined my own family’s lives on the prairies) took the life of a young Indigenous man, Colten Boushie of the nearby Cree Red Pheasant community. This news story brought up a lot of my settlerhood and settler thinking within me. I went right to a “logical” place of settler sensibilities: Stanley not wanting any trouble on that summer day on a remote farm, but prepared to respond if need be. The arrival of young people with seemingly dubious intentions hastening a situation that became dangerous too quickly to properly manage the risks. The acquittal of Stanley by a jury of his peers did nothing to negate for me the tragedy of the

whole matter, and even betrayed many failings of the Canadian legal system. I was disappointed by reports of police insensitivity toward Colten's family in the aftermath¹⁵¹ More recently, I read a headline that an independent report demonstrates shoddy police work in handling the subsequent investigation.

I have been saddened for Colten's family and their loss, however, I also note a knee jerk defensiveness within myself if I hear what I deem to be "too much" criticism or critique of Canada's handling of these affairs. I find myself defaulting to a rationality that the Canadian legal system, however flawed, can't abandon its safeguards to compensate historical wrongs; the facts and evidence must prevail.

However, I want to crack into my settler skull and flip to what forms this background to the figure that is my life, a ground that has always been Indigenous and that forms part of the picture on this landscape of my personal life, communities, and nation. There is a sharpening of perceptions at work when I do that. This figure exists for me, it has shaped a great deal of who I am, however these lines and shading also form integral parts of me also and the environments in which I grew and thrived, the land that fed me and supplied all I need. And still does. There were people living here when my ancestors arrived from Europe and I want to look to this ground around me in relation to their presence. I want to extend my considerations to what might be the figure for community members who have had a very different experience than mine, how their stories form their own figures based on individual conditions and experiences. Century long experiences of the Canadian government, The Indian Act, and of the laws, school systems, Christianity settlers, and their court systems have triggered the visceral reactions of lamentation

¹⁵¹ I went on to become disturbed and appalled when I viewed the 2019 National Film Board (NFB) documentary [nîpawistamâsowin: We Will Stand Up](#) and learned of the extreme racism the bereaved Buschie family experienced online in the wake of the tragedy.

within communities over recent trials. I confess I haven't always understood the thinking. I still don't. I can, interestingly, seemingly more easily understand some of the parallel challenges of "settlers" to Africa and Israel. I'm not completely blind to all the issues around me, but I have a difficult time perceiving more than my "figure" and it is an important exercise for me to recognize that lines and shading are shared and forms my ground. This is the figure of someone else's life and my settler figure forms their ground, often one of great pain and loss.

The Stanley family alleged that Colten Bushie had entered their settler property with the intent to steal their property (a vehicle), hastening the tragic events that took place on land that has for millennia hosted and nourished Colten's ancestors. Who has stolen from whom? How can allegations of trespassing and theft be made in circumstances such as these?

What I can attempt to do is be open to the suggestion that if my "figure" has so much formed the basis of my perspectives and viewpoints and being (or becoming)—as recent events have shown me—then *of course* others' experiences and "figures" have done likewise for them and their beliefs and understandings will be as closely held as I hold mine. This provides me an opening to approaches towards far more understanding, in all aspects of my life.

I don't mean all this in a "Kumbaya" way, but more in a "I am going to have to dig deep, here" kind of way. This, I believe, is the work and part of the reconciliation process.

Introduction to Posthumanizing McLuhan's Curriculum: Riffing on City as Classroom

The second article riffing on *City as Classroom* was published in JCACS in early 2020. Here, we explored city spaces and their materiality, posthumanizing the city with conceptualization of a *hypercity*. McLuhan recognized that city spaces, not long a Canadian phenomenon in the mid 20th century, superseded the capabilities of the traditional schoolhouse to which students are still educated, in 1964, McLuhan (2003a) he wrote:

we are actually living out the paradox of having provided cities that are more potent teaching machines than our formal educational system. The environment itself has become richer. We seem to be approaching the age when we shall program the environment instead of the curriculum. (p. 53)

Chapter 7: Posthumanizing McLuhan's Curriculum: Riffing on City as Classroom

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City as Classroom

From within this present Canadian educational milieu, we¹⁵² delve into the half-century-old prognostications of Marshall McLuhan on media learning during the electric age, recalibrating one of his many remarkably prescient works. The textbook was designed to transport secondary school media students into the city in order to alert and expose them to “problems in their cultural environment” (McLuhan, Hutchon, & McLuhan, 1977b, p. 2). Once out of the physical classroom, they were challenged to train their perceptions by “concentrat[ing] on the structure of a situation” (McLuhan, Hutchon, & McLuhan, 1977a, p. 14).

As human scholars collaborating with technologies, academic influences, and physical environments within agented assemblage, we have studied the approaches with which we explore informational spheres. We have fashioned this study as an [onto]Riffology during which we perform riff as a medium for exercising postqualitative research's attractions. Riff, as a process ontology, operationalizes the experimentality of Deleuzoguattarian philosophy by embracing becomings, interrupting hegemony and recognizing nonhuman agency. In composing this paper, we resist linearity, instead allowing emergences of refrains and bass lines. Each section's headings punctuate these emergences, attempting to straighten nonlinear processes. These media-enabled ruminations and our technologically mediated tangents invite readers' participation in a bootstrapping process that will be discussed herein. When we “leave off”, it is with a call to action for a people and world yet-to-come (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994).

¹⁵² When “we” refer to “we” and “us”, these pronouns are referencing all human and nonhuman actants which operate in collaborative assemblage.

McLuhan's media textbook has us thinking about all manner of spaces of ontological potentials. We theorize a posthuman critical pedagogy that draws on Guattari and Negri's (2010) liberatory work, and we regard their revolutionary tones as aspirational. Posthumanizing a study on the city as classroom, we negotiate passages through and under city spaces, and we immerse ourselves in a hypercity that is not just for humans, and which is enmeshed with materiality. We adopt as signposts the various human ages, called timescapes (Haraway, 2016a), and geological epochs mapping our histories and futures. One demarks the human populating of the earth after its most recent ice age (the Holocene); a second eyes capitalism's inability to structurally regard the needs of the nonhuman as central to the needs of the world (the Capitalocene); a third bespeaks the significant impacts of humanity on earth (the Anthropocene); while another favours multispecism and deprivileges the myopic humanism that has preceded (the Chthulucene).

As educators, we build pedagogical tools, rendering students more than repositories of facts. However, there remains a dearth of clear indications about how to fully engage learning encounters that equip students for their futures. Although the banking model of education has been largely abandoned, learning encounters are still often physically situated in vaults and safety deposit boxes holding bonds and certificates of graduation, available only during bankers' hours, and with staff supervision. In schools, education is being offered in epistemological conditions that have indeed evolved, while technologies have destabilized ontological ambitions and hastened the posthuman.

In their time, McLuhan's pronouncements seemed strange to audiences, barely comprehensible to most. The general public and academic community, alike, struggled to grasp the ramifications of what was taking place in a rapidly changing world and were troubled by McLuhan's assertions. Early on, McLuhan had suggested that any human-made artefact, idea or

tool becomes medium once harnessed to human use, and he forewarned that technologies—products of the electric age—were the media that had increasingly become extensions of human bodies, skin, nervous systems and functions. In the post-world-war era, the simultaneity in availability of information through technology had launched the world on an irreversible course to a seemingly unknown destiny. By as early as the late 1960s, however, the implications of satellites orbiting earth, of computers' ability to surveil and of societal infiltration by technological media were becoming apparent to McLuhan and were startling to consider. His pressing concern became how to deal with the effects of the burgeoning media.

Decentering the Human

In 1977, McLuhan co-wrote a media textbook for Canadian youth, in collaboration with school teacher Kathryn Hutchon and McLuhan's son Eric. The authors reimagined the school's function in response to the altered circumstances of an electric age. *City as Classroom: Understanding Language and Media* explores a modified function of schools as venues in which educators ask questions that elicit discovery in urban spaces. Although McLuhan and his collaborators recognized that the preponderance of available information was now sourced outside school edifices, McLuhan also believed that the school "might still be useful for examining the real education children were receiving from the electronic media" (Marchand, 1989, p. 275). McLuhan et al. (1977a) tasked students with activities that they hoped would expand their gaze and sharpen their powers of observation. An example reads thus:

Have you ever tried to find a book which you knew was in a particular bookcase, yet still couldn't find? We're too used to looking at the books on the shelves as we look at the wallpaper.

Be sure to find a safe and sensible place for the following experiment, where you are legally entitled to drive at the speed suggested. Arrange to have both the driver and observer in the car. They should not share responsibilities.

Put a Toulouse Lautrec poster beside the road. Drive by at 10 km/h.

Can you read the poster? Drive by again at 80 km/h. Can you see it?

What information have you discovered from this experiment about the ground of nineteenth-century France? What have you discovered about the ground of twentieth-century North America? Is there a difference between town and country billboards?

Are city billboards supposed to attract conscious attention?

Are they figures or part of our barely noticed, urban ground? (p. 19).

The three educators wrote curriculum that was intended to “enlist the school system as a prophylactic against the effects of advertisements and best sellers” (Marchand, 1989, p. 274).

We, in turn, want to understand what it is about their manner of engagement that helps us to learn. Our interest is in posthumanizing education by decentering the human, and our point of departure is the textbook *City as Classroom: Understanding Language and Media* (McLuhan et al., 1977a). These considerations of posthuman education delve into the implications of McLuhan’s assertions that media (a chair, a film, a motorcar, a satellite) are prosthetic to humans and are even extensions of our nervous systems (McLuhan, 1969). Relationships between technology and humans have complexified to a degree not quite anticipated even a few decades ago, while technology in schools is still presented as partitioned learning and often as a defined subject area taught by human instructors. Epistemologically, computer learning is often still presented as “the tech bit” of a school day, a topic of study scheduled to fit timetables.

The school wall is no longer the site into which students and school systems plug their computers, but whence worlds of artificial intelligence (by way of an “always-on” network connection replacing the dial-up modem) are reciprocally plugging into students’ intellects, technologies, social systems, ecosystems, and even physical bodies. Today, students have far less legitimate networked access within learning institutions than is granted during youth’s private use of technology outside of school hours.

Riff

We are interested in posthumanizing education by decoupling pedagogy from the humanist enterprise (Snaza, 2015). Riffologic activity compels us to “plug in and play” (Wainwright & Stevens, 2017), generating a toolkit of strategies that interrogates the traditional methodological approaches to which “emancipatory researchers” often default, regardless of how enthusiastically they have been hitherto dabbling in the experimentality of Deleuzoguattarian concepts (St. Pierre, 2014a). We resonate with St. Pierre’s perspective (2014a, 2018) as we, too, reach towards post-inquiry and Deleuzoguattarian ontology and defy contemporary qualitative research methodologies.

By mobilizing riff, we explore ways of becoming that are other than anthropocentric and which attempt to initiate a posthuman critical pedagogy that is preparing for a people yet-to-come, before knowing who those people will be (Carlin & Wallin, 2014; Deleuze & Guattari, 1994; St. Pierre, Jackson, & Mazzei, 2016). Here we anticipate what lies beyond, in a future of people inseparable from other beings and matter. Riff is not merely an epistemic response or logical argument against humanism, but rather, it interrupts the ontology of humanism by appropriating, hacking and eroding its relationships with “resources”, while reimagining relationships capable of life-fulfilling balance.

Riff draws from the concepts of Deleuze, Guattari, other continental thinkers and a contemporary discourse that engages new materialism, the nonhuman turn, the ontological turn and the posthuman. Haraway (2016a) broadens our thinking of the conditions in which we are situated by asserting the existence of a Chthulucene, an epoch she posits as a becoming-together. During this timescape, one may better recognize that relationships between the human and nonhuman are inextricably interdependent and that sym-poiesis “makes with” all species to effect co-existence on this planet, Earth. Rather than perpetuate human practices of rampant resource extraction and heedless ecological dominance, we wonder how we might, over less explored terrains of thought and experience, push posthuman ontologies farther yet.

Riff facilitates pedagogical engagements: those happenings that populate educational encounters and stimulate learning in assemblage as “becoming curricula without syllabi” (Stevens & Wainwright, 2016, p. 163). The nonlinear history of humanist pedagogies includes Platonist assertions of the individual as “raw ontological input” rendered human through one’s education (Snaza, 2015, p. 21). Aristotle’s early rationalist reasoning, Descartes’ cogito, Dewey’s social projects and Freire’s (2000) liberatory ambitions each posit relationships between human democracy, citizenship and freedom, in the context of educational pursuits. If human education is concerned about agency, emancipation and democratic institutions, a posthuman education decentres the human and envisions a different type of agency that encompasses matter, conceding the limitations of humanist critical pedagogy, while adequately broadening participants’ scope, tools and relationships.

Wallin (2011) and Jagodzinski & Wallin (2013) submit that humanist emancipatory pedagogies are no longer central to education for social change. Thoroughly surveying the field of posthuman education, Snaza and Weaver (2015) admit that posthumanist thinking without

concern “for what things mean for humans” is so recent a prospect that its implications are still largely undiscovered: a situation necessitating educational approaches that even more fully imagine critical engagement through an exploration of relational ontologies. We contemplate the role of schooling (and, by extension, teachers) during conditions of radical-reshaping of human and nonhuman engagement.

Bootstrapping

Are we mistaken in our belief that teachers remain critical to the survival of the world and the creation of a world worth surviving? What becomes of the human instructor once students are immersed in posthuman education streams, particularly if learning is happening during their encounters with the vastness of information simultaneously available? If learning and change are closely tied to aleatory processes, then how do we set conditions in which events are experienced?

Daignault (2008) describes curriculum as accidental encounters that are neither scripted nor anticipated. Curriculum becomes parenthetical. Despite our avowed interest in the spontaneities of thought and curiosity—the very lifeblood of riff—we are mindful that if human instructors are relegated to merely providing contexts for learning encounters, their function is threatened to become reduced to opening schoolhouse doors, rebooting computers for students’ use and staffing the physical locations in which students will potentially engage learning during online collisions with stimuli. Moreover, if this is the case, we wonder, do educators’ roles simply approximate those of the technician, casino croupier, or code authenticator? We alternatively attempt to re-invigorate aspirations held by school teachers to become change agents, submitting that such an incarnation of the educative role and pedagogical endeavour

benefits a societal circumstance determining that students generally average more time daily spent with their school teachers than with any other adult presence in their young lives.

To initiate these capacities, bootstrapping as conceptualized by DeLanda (2013) intrigues us. Its human function activates a “machinic ontology” that is performed in a manner analogous to computing’s assemblage of hardware, software and bootstrap loader. The schoolteacher’s part corresponds with the activation of the small strip of code responsible for loading the operating system and hardware once a computer reboots and initiates its potentials. The educational bootstrap’s operations are intentional, setting terms and conditions for learning events. Bootstrapping re-situates human participation in learning from that of engagement in operating the machine to being machinic. A necessary shift away from anthropocentrism’s typically custodial role takes place when riff is deployed. Consequently, the machinic assemblage depends not on the human as master, but on the human as one of many agential collaborators.

In bootstrapping, DeLanda (2003) recognizes that “a realist ontology may be lifted by its own bootstraps, assuming a minimum of objective knowledge to get the process going and then accounting for the rest” (pp. 27-28). If bootstrapping is indeed a machinic function of social and educational change, then, in turn, the application of Freirean (Freire, 2000) critical pedagogy—with its Marxist-inspired focus on emancipation from the oppressor—demands a different type of revolution. This circumstance hearkens back to Guattari and Negri’s (2010) enthusiastic claims:

Nobody will seize power in the name of the oppressed! Nobody will compensate freedoms in the name of freedom. The only acceptable objective now is the seizing of society by society itself. The state! That is another problem. One should not oppose it in a frontal way, nor flirt with its degeneration to smoothen the way of tomorrow’s socialism! (p. 126).

New Alliances

Process ontology encompasses the tenor of Guattari and Negri's (2010) version of revolution and Guattari's (2011) advocacy of social, mental and environmental ecologies that counter the homogenizing processes applied by mass media and Integrated World Capitalism. A flattening of ontologies, thus, ensures that humans become partners-in-the-world, rather than its rulers and stewards. The bootstrap incorporates, within an ontology of becoming, an insertion of crucial, human-constructed, objective knowledge that jumpstarts technological processes, providing a context for educational encounters to become Deleuzian events. Without this necessary piece of mind-dependent reality, how do humans know that they are moving in any particular direction and singularity, either by aleatory means or ones shaped by ecological encounters? We submit that for the purposes of explicating bootstrapping, Guattari and Negri's (2010) rather humanist revolutionary stance serves to operationalize Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of revolutionary change.

Guattari and Negri's (2010) call to action, *New Lines of Alliance, New Spaces of Liberty*, sets forth mechanisms by which we can apply Deleuzoguattarian thought to riff, effecting a change theory that shifts our reference points beyond established humanist critical pedagogies and Freirian dialogical epistemologies, and towards a materialist ontology. The pair writes, "What we are evoking here is not a utopia. It is the explication of a real movement, which innumerable traces and indices designate as a power in action" (Guattari & Negri, 2010, p. 73). Guattari (2011) conceptualizes three ecologies—re-singularizing social relations, the environment and the human mental state—which he contends are vulnerable to mass media's ill effects that penetrate "people's attitudes, sensibilities and mind" (Guattari and Negri, 2010, p. 53). Guattari's ability to fully anticipate the acceleration in speed and impact of social,

environmental and mental decay suggests him to be every bit as prescient as we have deemed McLuhan.

Hypercity

While physically inhabiting his mid-20th-century North America environs, McLuhan was always anticipating the ways that the electric age would wholly change societies. Given his observations of technologically wrought change, he early predicted that the metropolis would:

become a circuited city of the future [which] will not be the huge hunk of concentrated real estate created by the railway. It will take on a totally new meaning under conditions of very rapid movement. It will be an information megalopolis. (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967, p. 72)

Railways had once been the circuitry of cities, their installation influential in determining the locations of cities, their formation central to the amalgamation of towns, and their groupings into megalopolises. It is, in fact, locomotives' sheer physical mass that has determined the location of train stations, requiring their separation at a distance of some three to five kilometres, to permit both their acceleration and deceleration (DeLanda, 2016). Such spatial distribution has similarly influenced the positioning of subway stations beneath cities. The physical materiality of cities' transportation systems is juxtaposed with information systems travelling at lightning speed, these systems the means of its technological conveyance.

McLuhan brought cities, information and the classroom into proximity when he posited that "the metropolis today is a classroom, the ads are its teachers. The traditional classroom is an obsolete detention home, a feudal jungle. The city is obsolete, ask the computer" (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967, p. 12). His curriculum projects on studying the effects of media had been taking shape for some years, having been first conducted in 1964 (Gordon, 1997).

Our riff on McLuhan, cities and education now imagines the posthuman metropolis as a hypercity: its spaces energized by hypermediated engagements. What it means to be human is changing at an exponentially rapid pace during an “hyperreal 21st century” (Petitfils, 2014) during which humans have been slow to recognize the extent to which they have become interdependent with machines (McLuhan, 1994). We apply to “city” the prefix, “hyper” to imply activity, speed and movement toward conceptualizations of hypermedia and hyper-objects.

The hypercity challenges an ideology that the city is made only for humans. Instead, all matter coexists and potentiates in assemblage within many layers of enfoldment. Returning to McLuhan’s assertion that “the city is obsolete, ask the computer,” we now do exactly that, and often.

Siri, is the city obsolete?

Understanding Media

McLuhan et al. (1977a) sought to enlist media students in addressing what the authors feared would be the deleterious impact of the electric age on youth. As curriculum, *City as Classroom: Understanding Language and Media* encouraged high school students to spill into city spaces while engaging the study of media and its properties: magazines, motor cars, newspapers, light bulbs, films, clocks, airplanes, satellites, money and so on. (McLuhan et al., 1977a). Class members were to group themselves with one or two other students, select a project among the textbook’s many offerings, exit the schoolhouse to engage their inquiries within the city and reassemble to discuss their findings, upon completion of their tasks. These explorations were designed to help students identify patterns and structures within their social environments, while sharpening perceptions about their surroundings. The research would be “important and original” (McLuhan et al., 1977b, p. 1). It would study the media’s effects rather than its content.

The culture presented “problems” that McLuhan believed could be ameliorated by engaging the perspectives presented. However, *City as Classroom* never gained traction.¹⁵³ Perhaps, it has been suggested, the curriculum merely comprised “too patently a bouquet of McLuhan’s ideas” to ever be widely accepted (Marchand, 1989, p. 275). Its inability to prove influential to youth quite disappointed McLuhan and it would be his last work published during his lifetime (Marchand, 1989).

Plug in and Play

We are interested in potentiating pedagogical complexities in the city’s physical, informational and ecological spaces. *City as Classroom* assumes the nature and spirit of the school field trip: taking the world seriously, engaging it as fieldwork. Upon having returned to the physical classroom, the “intelligibility” of the world can be determined through a discussion of one’s findings (McLuhan et al., 1977b, p. 1). Investigations into these environments explore tensions between what happens in the classroom, the city and the rest of the world.

Our conceptualization of a hypercity aligns with speculative realism and its disavowal of anthropocentrism: a response that is deemed necessary “when we face the prospect of ecological catastrophe and when we are forced to recognize that the fate of humanity is deeply intertwined with the fates of all sorts of other entities” (Shaviro, 2014, p. 1). *City as Classroom* addresses features inherent in a cultural environment considered to be evolving too rapidly to be entirely understood by its denizens (McLuhan et al., 1977a).

In the 21st century, the Anthropocene—a geo-political epoch subsequent to that of the 12,000 year-long Holocene—is evinced, signalling the degree to which humans impact the

¹⁵³ The textbook was retitled and published in the United States in 1980, only to suffer the same fate (Marchand, 1989).

earth's ecosystems and geology. Haraway (2016a) characterizes the Anthropocene as one of various "timescapes," alternatively proposed to be "boundary events" when these geological episodes are of relatively short duration. Another such timescape and boundary event is the Capitalocene, which recognizes wealth's acquisition as a primary factor driving the earth's resourcing by "exterminationist extraction" (Haraway, 2016a). Haraway (2016a) contends that because the Anthropocene asserts the anthropocentric, its premise is, therefore, speciesist. Further, its moniker bespeaks not only "human exceptionalism", but primarily concerns itself with the activity of homo sapiens who live in highly industrialized regions and who occupy higher socio-economic classes. Haraway (2016a) submits that it is the Chthulucene that more inclusively and accurately tells the story of humanity's, and all beings', circumstances. It is a timescape—situated in the past, present and future—wherein the multiple species of survivors, victims and refugees of the Anthropocene construct intertwined tentacular existences and thrive during mutually reciprocal states in an ecologically reconfigured world.

Figure, Ground, Surround

As we are exploring how engagement and informational access course through learning as rhizomatic pressings-forth, it is the nature of what happens to thinking that spurs interest in discovery of concepts. Learning events are situated in a pedagogical assemblage that includes the bootstrap as evidence of both human interjection and a capacity to leverage, in Deleuzian parlance, what is real, virtual and actualized (Deleuze, 2011).

An articulation of riff is enriched by Deleuze's conceptualization of the event: "a garden, a chair, the great pyramid, a collision with a bus, Adam sinning, a concert..." (Williams, 2011, p. 82). Events signal a "set of singularities . . . [as] turning points and points of inflection; bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centres; points of fusion, condensation, and boiling; points of

tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety, 'sensitive' points" (Deleuze, 1990, p. 52). Indulging spontaneity, tangentiality and inspiration in learning, we can perhaps say both that riff events and that the event riffs. In its momentary appearance, "it's the chance we must seize" (Deleuze, 1995, p. 170).

In *City as Classroom*, students are encouraged to learn to differentiate between "figure" and "ground",¹⁵⁴ introducing the early 20th-century psychological work of Edgar Rubin as a study in exercising perceptions. The structural relationships of any given situation are examined by recognizing what scrambles to the forefront of our attention, which is "figure," while "ground" becomes backdrop (McLuhan et al., 1977a). Although a "figure" might immediately recede into "ground," then reverse again, the components (lines, shading, sounds) of figure and ground may be simultaneously detectable by the viewer: "Therefore the ground, or underlying structure, of a situation provides the conditions for experiencing any part that presents itself as figure" (McLuhan et al., 1977a, p. 14).

Inattention to the "hidden ground" of sound, representation, technology and media takes place because its familiarity has resulted in us no longer "paying it any conscious attention" (McLuhan et al., 1977a, p. 19). A hidden ground of media exemplifies how technology, too, may elude notice. When McLuhan (1994) posited in 1964 that "all technologies are extensions of our physical and nervous systems to increase power and speed" (p. 90), he understood that humans do not exist independently of their "tools." McLuhan was suggesting both that there is agency in the technologies used by humans and that humans are merging with their technologies by extending themselves in prostheticity. The nature of these mediated relationships aligns with Sharon's (2012) typology of the posthuman, which features four manifestations in

¹⁵⁴ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7f1G6Nx5VDw>

biotechnologies: liberal, dystopic, radical and methodological. The extension of human function through technology as prosthesis may alternately be viewed as bringing more comfort and leisure to human existence (the liberal), creating the conditions of our human demise (dystopic) or providing to humans the tools that overcome tyranny during future revolution (radical). The category of methodological posthumanism is aligned with the riffologic project as an advancement of conceptual frameworks in both science and technology, and in the adoption of tools “that can better account for the networks and zones of intersection between the human and the non-human” (Sharon, 2012, p. 6).

In riffologically methodologizing the posthuman, we expand our purview beyond the anthropocentric concerns of McLuhan’s use of both figure and ground to propose a further layer of consideration for analysis which we term surround (Stevens & Wainwright, 2019). Interchangeably, figure becomes ground and hidden ground (by its familiarity); ground becomes figure; and surround encompasses materiality that is figure, ground, hidden ground, and all that is largely imperceptible to humans. We conceptualize surround broadly we now narrow our interest to its enfolding of entities, features and resources that have been displaced, destroyed or reconstituted in a centuries long capitalistic orgy of destruction imposed on ourselves and all matter. Surround’s inclusion alongside the figure/ground paradigm permits us to better recognize, among other things, the extent of ecological damage caused by urban development, anthroturbation (human tunnelling) and technofossils (plastics, aluminum and the cement used to human tunnel, etc.). Surround provides context for consideration of matter to which we may be largely inattentive because it does not serve capitalistic gain.

Technological Assemblages

McLuhan et al. (1977a, 1977b) promoted figure/ground analysis in order to hone perceptions to solve problems. Figure and ground are observable to humans, each alternately creating territory and, in turn, reconfiguring territory within binary relationships. However, Harman (2009) deems “figure and ground” to be confining and relegated “to the sphere of human perception” (pp. 119-220). A conceptual surround is less apparent to humans and is instead attuned to intensities and forces. It introduces spatial depth to our considerations. By bringing into assemblage the functions of figure, ground and surround, we attempt to ontologically re-conceptualize, re-group and re-intensify our efforts to decentre the human. We are relying on the ability of the assemblage to potentially unleash realizable force, as demonstrated by the oft cited "man-horse-weapon" configuration, which brilliantly illustrates all that these interrelationships impel.

Deleuzoguattarian nomadic "innovations in war" include "technological elements ... the saddle, stirrup, horseshoe, harness, etc." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 404), all maximized in assemblage. Tools may become weaponized as a result of speed—not merely absolute speed, but its expression as well (DeLanda, 2016, p. 75).

The galloping horse ever increases its pace once spurred by a rider prosthetically attached to his mount through feats of technological engineering (saddle and stirrup). In turn, the rider augments the inflicted damage of his weaponry by supplementing the speed of his mount with his own physical strength in order to maximize his weapon’s velocity—its tip sharpened by technological means to a degree befitting its deadly intent.

What Deleuze and Guattari consider "innovation," McLuhan (1994) recognizes as "disruption" that catalyzes performance. McLuhan (1994) posits that:

unless there were such increases of power and speed, new extensions of ourselves would not occur or would be discarded. For an increase of power or speed in any kind of grouping of any components whatever is itself a disruption [emphasis added] that causes a change of organization. (p. 90)

Social Assemblages

Hypercity comprises assemblages of the physical, the social, the technological, the human and the animal, the organic and the inorganic. The hypercity exists in sites of anthropurbation, for example, subway systems, which are far more than spaces occupied by human beings shuttling to their destinations. Multiple material features contribute to subways' transportation functions, including platforms, rails, electricity, tunnels, plumbing and turnstiles. There are also life forms dwelling in these subterranean spaces that include, but are not limited to, moulds, mildews, viruses and rodents, which complexify an elaborate ecosystem beyond what has been a traditionally anthropocentric gaze. So complex is this hidden life that as much as half of the DNA found in New York subways remains unidentifiable to human categorization (Afshinnekoo et al., 2015). Toronto's sewer systems intersect with its subway systems, at times creating spillages of human waste and weather-related effluents. In these complex networks, humans, trains, power, fresh-water, raw sewage and storm run-off all may converge and diverge (Bharti, 2018). The innumerable elements forming a subway's (eco)system offer opportunities for learning from everything in one's environment.

Alfred North Whitehead pioneered realist conceptualizations of nature as independent of the human mind, engaging metaphysical speculation to overcome what he considered an error of modern Western thought. He identified this oversight as the separation between

phenomenological interactions and the “hidden physical reality” of the natural world (Shaviro, 2014, p. 2). Whitehead (2004) explains:

The reason why the bifurcation of nature is always creeping back into scientific philosophy is the extreme difficulty of exhibiting the perceived redness and warmth of the fire in one system of relations with the agitated molecules of carbon and oxygen, with the radiant energy from them, and with the various functionings of the material body. Unless we produce the all embracing relations, we are faced with a bifurcated nature; namely, warmth and redness on one side, and molecules, electrons and ether on the other side. (p. 32)

Fully integrating the scientific properties of a fire with the sensation of its heat and the visual attraction of its “glow” is an apt example of all we wish to witness in the hypercity as space beyond cities, energizing sights, sounds and smells.

Networked Assemblages

Cities are traditionally recognized as busy, physical, geographic locations of populations, systems, interactions and intensities, all of which concern the doings of the “social agents” inhabiting them. In riffologically exploring the hypercity and the significant complexities existing between the human and nonhuman, we refer to DeLanda’s (2013) consideration of realist ontologies as being committed to “a mind-independent existence of reality” (p. 1).

DeLanda (2016) suggests that social and biological identities are forged in the extensivity of spaces such as “the frontiers of a country, a city, a neighborhood, or an ecosystem; or . . . the defining boundaries of our own bodies—our skin, our organs’ outer surfaces, the membranes of our cells” (p. 110).

Extensivity is described by DeLanda (2016) as quantitative features, such as length, area and volume, while the properties of the intensive are qualitative, expressing “speed, temperature, pressure, concentration [and] voltage” (p. 76). The former may be mapped as physical features that include coastlines and mountain ranges, while features of intensivity may include “zones of high and low pressure, cold and warm fronts, air masses moving slowly or rapidly” (DeLanda, 2016, p. 110).

Cities, as networked assemblages, are heterogeneous in composition, made up not just of human inhabitants but of all manner of matter. DeLanda (2016) lists city occupants as including: the material and symbolic artefacts that compose communities and organizations . . . the architecture of the buildings that house them, the myriad different tools and machines used in offices, factories, and kitchens; the various sources of food, water, and electricity; the many symbols and icons with which they express their identity. (p. 20)

Recognizing that a material world exists “independent of our minds” (DeLanda in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 39) disrupts human reliance on anthropocentrism.

Leaving off

The city retains heat and muffles wind. It shades plants that grow, and it hosts water-flow systems that flush out detritus. The city acts as contaminant, as sediment and as a filter. The city is assemblage and is in assemblage.

Reconfiguring an understanding of community, a hypercity is a posthuman metropolis, a collectivist entity not just for humans, nor restrained by geographic location. It comprises networked relationships amongst humans, animals, organics, bacteria and networked technologies. Different classes of relationship engage these diverse ecologies in a hypercity: teacher, student, technology; soldier, stirrup, bow.

The *hypercity* as classroom is both a physical space and one of intensities. Human cities, even the ones into which McLuhan pitched media students, will stand as relics of times past, as ontologically distinct from the hypercity as is a 1960's gasoline-fuelled car from a fully networked, self-driving 2020 Tesla. McLuhan and Fiore (1967) forecast that "former 'cities' will be preserved, museum-like, as living monuments" (p. 72). The posthuman city brings into relief living matter that thrives within metropolises. We recognize the hypercity, and the nonhuman features comprising it, when navigating spaces on which trains travel. Long conditioned to the sight of railway tracks across city surfaces and in subterranean tunnels, we now turn our attention to the rhizomatic nature of their domains of microorganisms and subterranean life forms. In so doing, we are reimagining the *City as Classroom* which ushers in a "becoming curriculum without syllabi" (Stevens & Wainwright, 2016). This is a hypercity.

Our present Canadian educational milieu demands that teachers and students act revolutionarily in their work. The ecosystem is in a state of human-made crisis, and technological change is happening at such a rapid rate that every part of human economies is affected. Traditional, humanist strategies have largely failed to address environmental degradations, safeguard technological development from dystopic (even malevolent) application and ensure equitable distribution of income and wealth. Strong stances buttress resistance to commercialism and rampant consumption. Departing from the liberatory practices that traditionally link human democracy with human education, this emancipatory work necessitates a flatter and more worldly consideration of an *agency of all things*.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The previous six chapters chronicle research that engages posthuman education and learning in ways and to degrees still infrequent in school teaching, and even in academia. The pursuit of these understandings—all that I have read, studied, considered, and composed—has raised my awareness of the environment in which I abide, the *nature* of which I have rarely previously questioned. Engaging [onto]Riffology and MABR across this study, our assemblage explores their abilities to enact “a posthuman methodology and a critique that beget new projects and waypoints” (Bernico, 2016, p. 252). [onto]Riffologic and MABR processes, once operationalized, become a wellspring to posthumanizing all manner of curiosity and situation. Generating these inquiries, we create spaces in which to mobilize our explorations: riff ontologically plugging in and playing with whatever we come across and MABR posthumanizing arts-based research.

We have gratified countless curiosities as we read increasingly widely about DeleuzoGuattarian philosophy, new materialisms, the posthuman, and posthumanizing education, alongside online reading, viewing, writing, and sharing. We aren't highly invested in *what* we think, we only work over each point long enough to determine its viability, its conceptual agreement with our riff, our ability to digest the import of difficult concepts, and then to integrate them into our studies. This has been a mammoth project in a riff arcade.

When describing the composition of this research, words like “sorcery” (Stevens & Wainwright, 2016) and “alchemy” (Wainwright & Stevens, submitted) have been summoned to suggest the nature of this assemblage and its agency; how nearly inexplicable becomes academic *proceedings* when collaboration is engaged to the degree that [onto]Riffology encourages—and

when this activity is recognized to be taking place with humans, technologies, and matter forming those machines. Entirely online, Richard and I have conducted a study crammed with ideas and rich content. We have engaged in academic enterprises exploring posthumanizing education, while making many of our most exciting discoveries together on the telephone, looking at the same Google document on our individual computers hundreds of kilometres apart. The nature of the pathways, technologically and neurologically, etc., facilitating this geographically remote collaboration in real time remains entirely unfathomable to me. There is also something quite outside each of us that takes place when collaborating, whereby what we express—the emergent concepts and theorizations—seems mysteriously formed. We regard this jointly created work and marvel at how it came together, and at how little we understand our individual contributions reaching towards each other across technological functions, platforms, and physical space.

At this juncture, our creative assemblage is returning to the virtual whence it formed. Its character altering as its tasks are fulfilled, I am detaching as one of its composite parts after years long, intense participation. What will determine my next moves once this study is submitted to the university, to be shelved in “online” spaces? What of this study, and all that comprises it, will be carried to future ventures? The nature of my employment won’t significantly change during the prospective decade that I will continue its pursuit: daily trundling a “teacher’s classroom” cart along school hallways, entering individual classrooms to share French language learning with four to eleven year old children. Any of the aforementioned “entry points” to posthuman pedagogical instruction will be jerry rigged more than stormed. My personal life will remain daily constituted on pushing aside acceptance of the overwhelming improbability of the

earth's restored health, as I pursue “reducing, reusing and recycling” as some kind of meaningful contribution to sparing our host planet some of the ill effects to which humanity subjects it. In these circumstances, what can I do and what dare I hope? (Badiou, 2008). Such questions condition my relation to the world, while potentiating *real* responses—the realm of the actual and virtual.

Pressing onwards, what optimizes all that the study has wrought, and may be applied to personally existential pursuits such as cracking open my settler skull, ontologically shifting my thinking, *glimpsing* the elusive character of other organisms' experiences, renouncing representation and the images of thought on which I have so assiduously relied?

To pedagogically address these quests, I am interested in further riffing Daignault's (2011) conceptualization of curriculum truly happening when an *accident* is transformed into a Deleuzian event. We early considered what we termed *the learning event* in our first piece, *[onto]Riffology: Explorations into Collaboration, Assemblage and Learning Events*, but never subsequently delved more deeply into how its conceptual potential might be operationalized (Stevens & Wainwright, 2016). Could a *learning event* be more fully optimized once we enfold the fields of thinking that we have accessed during these intervening years? Can riff galvanize an event's ability to “problematize” situations (Daignault, 2011, p. 532), and learning be enhanced by recognizing the extent to which collaboratorativity exists in pedagogical?

Briefly, I mention here some of the thinking, themes, and methods introduced across the study, gleaned to bolster the kind of educationally related growth and pedagogically informed moves that I hope to access, then implement in further studies on pedagogical matters.

In our first chapter, *[onto]Riffology: Explorations into Collaboration, Assemblage and Learning Events*, we introduce riff and its theorization as a study bringing to consciousness our daily reliance on technologies and contemplation of new materialisms. Loathe to direct our inquiries any particular way, we only note the personal circumstances that condition our approaches and responses. In an important sense, riff is only becoming actualized based on what we can humanly digest as thinking. Many ideas regarding riff and its development remain still undeveloped, even undiscovered. The processes of riff and their abilities to convey the tangential natures of our curiosities will continue to be well suited to pedagogical endeavours, particularly as the “curriculum without syllabi” that riff’s practise suggests (Stevens & Wainwright, 2016, p. 163).

Emerging as the final and culminating work of this research project, a machinic arts-based research (MABR) challenges orthodoxies in qualitative research fields as boundary crossing moves that pursue conciliatory intent. In *Machinic Arts-Based Research: Posthumanizing Approaches to Art Inquiry*, a “machinic-arts” is coupled with “art-based research” to ontologically shift humanist, qualitative research towards posthumanizing educational approaches. *Turntabling* particularly eases decentring of the human to disrupt the ways we’ve always regarded matters, while *forcework* similarly folds art into machinic assemblage, and thereby initiates its creative, agential powers to effect social change. We introduce a posthuman critical pedagogy that draws on arts-based research methods, recombinationality, liberatory ambitions, and decentring the human perspective to address environmental damage incurred by humanity during anthropocenic conditions.

Two art journal reviews of art exhibitions lend pedagogical consideration to contexts generating “packets of sensations” that are percepts, alongside affects that also exist independently of those experiencing them (Deleuze, 1995, p. 137). The review of the *MashUp: The Birth of Culture* exhibition in Vancouver, BC, early demonstrates riff’s easy association with innovative, creative music production practises, including remix, sampling, and mashup. Characteristic of our still emerging riff, we spin multiple ideas and themes away from the meanings afforded phenomena towards querying what events are doing. New materialisms influence our thinking and we enjoy freedoms and permissions in collaborativity. Unleashing such propensities in educational spaces heeds Wallin’s (2010) advice that states, “curriculum theory must be faithful to its potential (potentia) for encounters, its linkage of bodies and forces, and its ‘desire to become’ (Braidotti, 2006, p. 134)” (p. 137). And although we “riff on MashUp in anticipation of art educators and arts-based researchers resonating” with pedagogical approaches (Stevens & Wainwright, 2017, p. 169), we learn in time that it is web crawlers and online spiders that prowl the secret spaces where its companion document, a riff arcade of our source materials, rests online. Nonhuman traffic visiting its site to thoroughly “devour” its contents in ways far outside human ken.

In *Review of “The Anthropocene Project”: Treachery in Images*, we roam the exhibition, online and variously sited: a feature length film, museum and art gallery exhibitions, a catalogue, book, and proposed curriculum. These are touristic sites of death. All that is being promoted *and obscured* in the project’s pictorial exhibits suggests the Capitalocene, capital’s influence at work and on display.

Whence can pedagogues derive hope to impart to students? We afford some measure of confidence in Haraway's (2016) illustrations of the Chthulucene (a timescape that builds multi-speciesist community); the making (with) kin; and the perseverance and fortitude of Indigenous peoples. Haraway (2014) promotes the "practise of joy" in combating the cynicism and despair to which one could succumb unless persevering and "staying with the trouble" (KIASualberta, 2014, 12:57). Might I likewise role model joy in my pedagogical practices, about the subjects I am entrusted to share, to the students I am responsible to teach, and despite my private concerns about how heavily dependent are children's wellbeing on ecological balance.

Finally, two collaboratively created works posthumanize McLuhan's (1977) co-written media curriculum, *City as Classroom: Understanding Language and Media*, by applying riffological techniques. Sourcing rare copies of McLuhan et al.'s (1977) text book through online vendors, we develop approaches suited to our contemporary environment. In both *Shady Figures and Shifting Grounds for Re/Truthing: Channeling McLuhan's Posthuman* and *McLuhan's Curriculum: City as Classroom during the Posthuman*, we riff on McLuhan et al.'s (1977) premise that while the schoolhouse may still situate the questions being asked students, the environments outside of their edifices increasingly determine what they learn and where. The turning out of children from schools during 2020 supports this increased likelihood going forward.

In the textbook, McLuhan et al. (1977) posit figure/ground analysis as an important pedagogical tool for "training perceptions." In *Shady Figures and Shifting Grounds for Re/Truthing: Channeling McLuhan's Posthuman*, we posthumanize the figure/ground duality by introducing a *surround* that acknowledges all that is lost and repurposed to accommodate

humanity's anthropocentric activities surrounding transportation (Stevens & Wainwright, 2019). We also riff on ride sharing apps and self driving cars as examples of machine learning and information transmittance on Twitter: then President Trump's favoured means of direct communication to the public.

In *McLuhan's Curriculum: City as Classroom during the Posthuman*, we riff a second study using McLuhan et al.'s (1977) media textbook to conceptualize a posthuman critical pedagogy that acts as a call to environmental action in which one acts in *partnership* with the earth. Guattari (2010) writes that "new social practises of liberation will not establish hierarchical relations between themselves; their development will answer to a principle of transversality that will enable them to be established by traversing, as a rhizome, heterogeneous social groups and interests" (p. 123).

We explore the city for sites of learning, subterranean, inaccessible to humans, which we ontologize in our conception of the *hypercity*. The hypercity encompasses all manner of life that thrives in urban centers and the physical matter composing them. These are the metropolitan features of posthuman consideration.

Contributions

Our attempts to decentre the human, think with concepts, and broaden our perspectives have been experiments in free form thinking that have provided us opportunity to build cogent rationales for our suspicions, thinking, and assertions. Each study's selection for publication indicates academic interest in the research. The national and international publication of all six pieces better ensures that potential research contributions will be realized. Their resulting

availability online, in open-source journals, significantly increases the opportunities for this research to be accessed and our studies' findings disseminated.

Our processes have spawned inquiry approaches theorized as riff, [onto]Riffology, and machinic arts-based research (MABR), each mobilizing our research strategies. While their applicability to future contexts, ventures, and assemblages is still undetermined, their contribution to how we think about and refer to the work in this study has been immeasurable. Their well documented conceptualization illuminates paths to similar engagements.

Asking “what does this research do?,” this research maps two scholars' attempts to decentre the human in our own thinking and apply the processes we have engaged to works we encounter around us, including museum exhibitions and an historic textbook. Re-evaluating the nature of human relationships with technology and the nonhuman, this research disrupts our own thinking and could incite similar stirrings for others studying in the fields of arts-based research and critical pedagogy, etc. MABR introduces strategies to further this work.

The five intermezzos included here bring riffologic and personal practices into learning contexts. The “schoolhouse” emerges as a motif for exploring the changing roles, venues, perspectives, materiality and meaning conferred on pedagogical pursuits. The intermezzos become interludes of varying length and form, including vignettes and a radio programme transcript, that explore how this study has influenced my worldview, broadening its scope to matters I had little previously regarded and had little recognized any outlet to share. These Intermezzos provide a venue to tell simple stories in formats markedly different in form and purpose from each of the chapters (as published articles) included in this study must necessarily adopt. The intermezzo engages riff differently, still technologically mediated as they are. I find inspiration in pedagogical places that include a radio programme episode shelved on YouTube

of a learning environment created in a Toronto city living room with Marshall McLuhan, or a comedian broadcasting progressive leftist commentary on world news events from a set constructed in his garage and uploaded to YouTube. Riff influences these rhizomatic shoots; I could compose hundreds more. These are themes derived from online viewing combined with personal reflection that is *always* technologically networked in the satellite environment I little recognize surrounding me in the electric age. These brief accounts of recognizing opportunities to expand perceptions and perspectives of myself and others contribute to small acts of ontologically altered thinking, and their inclusion here brings into relief this one [onto]riffological participant's experience of learning in the world.

Following

In a project of rhizomatic nature some research interests aren't, ultimately, pursued quite as intended; our directionalities influenced by each last stimuli and interest. It's exciting to contemplate where assemblages of collaborative inquiry might take future interests. These six preceding chapters are instructive for these purposes.

A rhizomatically pursued research project catalogues countless directions that our inquiries could next take. Derived from these six chapters, posthuman critical pedagogies influenced by liberatory revolution and machinic arts-based research would be fascinating to further explore and work over (and through).

The learning event, introduced in *[onto]Riffology: Explorations into Collaboration, Assemblage, and Learning Events* hasn't been afforded its full outlet in the study that has been conducted. Attempting to conceptualize and theorize a posthuman learning event would serve as a critical next step in galvanizing this study by mobilizing all its movable parts to develop

posthuman critical pedagogies during an unfolding future *forecasting* rapid societal and environmental change. Posthumanizing a *learning event*, inspired by Daignault (2011), holds pedagogical potential for impactful, intellectual engagement that could approximate the happy, welcome occurrence of the Deleuzian encounter and the alchemic nature of relationships in collaboration.

It would be exciting to apply riff and MABR to the field of posthuman criminology and the carnivalesque that expands the work of postmodern criminology (Arrigo & Milovanovic, 2016; Henry & Milovanovic, 1996; Presdee, 2000) and posthumanizes pedagogical opportunities for incarcerated learners. Prisoners' lives are more visibly surveilled and controlled than, perhaps, the general population registers. Further projects would encourage our seeking out of the DeleuzoGuattarian concepts populating the poststructural philosophical field and thinking that informs speculative realities.

Demonstrating what "riff can do" is evidenced in all that has been worked, and conceptualized in our study. It may be said that riff has been put through its paces. What we are still uncertain about is whether it can be replicated and adopted in other assemblages, and other contexts besides the ones we have engaged? Is this necessary, and can even Richard and I replicate its conditions elsewhere, in relationships of exteriority (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)? And we wonder if it matters?

It has been gratifying and informative to have made acquaintance with members of the community of "McLuhanites" who were related to McLuhan, those who met the man, and refer to his thinking and quote him with ease. The late Eric McLuhan (1977a; 1977b; 1988; 2020) graciously offered us a copy of the teacher's guide when we contacted him and immediately put

us in touch with the study's co-author Katherine Hutchon-Kawasaki (1977a; 1977b; 2020) and his son, Andrew McLuhan. I have enjoyed long telephone conversations with Bob Dobbs, with whom Andrew McLuhan put me in touch to learn more about the Marshall McLuhan Getting Processed recording, and as someone contemporary to the years during which McLuhan taught at the University of Toronto and helmed the Centre for Culture and Technology. I contacted a "Randolph Lump" after reading a comment he made about McLuhan's DEW Line card deck that features McLuhan's aphorisms and pithy sayings: the notion of them having immediately attracted our sense of play. Dr. Lump graciously sent me a deck of the cards from his home in Denver, Colorado. These correspondences are all mediated technologically, like riff. What else exists online as YouTube recordings and rare McLuhan works to be encountered; as we did the rare document, *City as Classroom: Understanding Language and Media?* It's all available to us, as McLuhan early asserted it would be.

Wrapping Up

Humanity lives surrounded by the fruits of its labour, in a bed of its making, with the systems it values. Of all possible realities these are the ones that became incrementally actualized. This reality is what humanity has applied its ingenuities to impel, and has pressed the earth's features to supporting. Capitalism will continue to thrive on commodification and consumption its offspring dogmas. Within just fifty revolutions around the sun, humanity has created conditions in which 68 percent of species are now extinct (Rott, 2020). We have become completely immersed in this extinction event. This wanton destruction of life has become only hidden ground to humans' daily goings on, all fully anticipated by Marshall McLuhan, predicted

in a living room to thirty high school students. Imagine hearing him say a half century ago, a period of some fifty revolutions around the sun:

The satellite [is] a proscenium arch. It turns the planet into a stage, makes you want to be an actor, do your thing. Everybody now wants to do his *thing*! Since 1957, when Sputnik went up, and then ever since, the satellite arch went around the planet, the planet ceased to be nature. What we used to call nature is gone. A planet is now contained inside a human box. There is no more nature. What remains is simply whatever we make of this planet by programming. There's no nature anymore. I see no point in schools. At all.

(Henry, 2012, 4:50)

Social media, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube and TikTok demonstrate the truth of his assertion, all assisted by the satellites that unblinkingly observe our goings on. The palm sized cameras that we carry around, the selfies we take, “doing our thing”: this is what humanity has busily created and where it has *arrived*. There are nearly 2500 operational satellites orbiting Earth (World Economic Forum, 2020)¹⁵⁵. Within these conditions we have begun to disrupt our thinking and broaden our perspectives to encompass so much more than humanity typically acknowledges within the environment that the electric age has permitted, then created. With human and nonhuman research participants, I/we have developed a study decentring the human.

¹⁵⁵ 3500 more satellites are are inoperational and orbit Earth as “space junk” (World Economic Forum, 2020).

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