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# Planetary activism at the end of the world: Feminist and posthumanist imaginaries beyond Man

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## Abstract

We are currently experiencing a planetary crisis that will lead, if worst comes to worst, to the end of the entire world as we know it. Several feminist scholars have suggested that if the Earth is to stay livable for humans and nonhumans alike, the ways in which many human beings – particularly in the wealthy parts of the world, infested with Eurocentrism, (neo)colonialism, neoliberalism, and capitalism – inhabit this planet requires radical, ethical, and political transformation. In this article, we propose that feminist theory, particularly feminist posthumanities, and Black feminist and decolonial thought, together with creative practices such as writing, have much to contribute to transformative planetary activism that imagines different and other kinds of worlds and futures based on an ethical consideration of nonhuman others and collective caring for the planet.

## Keywords

Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Anthropocene, Black feminist thought, creative writing, decolonial thought, feminist posthumanities, feminist theory, nonfiction, Pauliina Haasjoki, poetry

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\*This article is a joint project and written in collaboration. We have listed the author names alphabetically to indicate that we have contributed equally to the project and want to attribute an equal share of credit to each author.

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The current era of human domination has caused a planetary crisis that will lead, if worst comes to worst, to the end of the entire world as we know it. This crisis has prompted, through the question of the human species' ability to live ethically with other species and their environment, feminist scholar Patricia MacCormack (2020) to provocatively claim that humans do not deserve to live on the Planet Earth at all. Many other feminists as well as decolonial thinkers have rather advocated for the end of 'Man'; the figure of the liberal monohumanist Man or, 'Colonial Man', instead of the entire species (Wynter and McKittrick, 2015: 23, 9; Yussof, 2018; Zylinska, 2018 cf. MacCormack, 2020: 10, 21–22). In any event, if the Earth is to stay livable for humans and nonhumans alike, the ways in which many human beings – particularly in the wealthy parts of the world, infested with Eurocentrism, (neo)colonialism, neoliberalism, and capitalism – inhabit this planet requires radical, ethical, and political transformation.

In this article, we propose that feminist theory, particularly feminist posthumanities, and Black feminist and decolonial thought, together with creative practices such as writing, have much to contribute to transformative activist knowledge production that imagines different and *other* kinds of worlds and futures based on an ethical consideration of nonhuman others. Feminist theory has often relied on the power of (re)imagination. Scholars such as Teresa De Lauretis (1980), Donna Haraway (2016), and Rosi Braidotti (2019) have argued that we have to be able to imagine alternative realities, futures and worlds, inspiring and/or carrying out transformative action.<sup>1</sup> Artistic and creative practices offer a space for these kinds of re-imaginings to thrive. Poet Audre Lorde (2007[1984]), for example, considers poetry as vital for (Black) women's meaning-making, a catalyst for action that does not rely on knowledge created by the 'white fathers' but on women's emotions and experiences (pp. 26–28). For Lorde, poetry 'lays the foundation for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before' (p. 27).

In what follows, we think with a number of feminist theorizations and illustrate how contemporary poetry and creative nonfiction enter in dialogue with these theorizations. We examine poems by Pauliina Haasjoki, an award-winning Finnish author with a PhD in literature, whose poetry is depicted to ambiguate anthropocentrism of language, together with the lyric and meditationlike nonfiction of Alexis Pauline Gumbs, an award-winning North American poet, activist, scholar, and Creative Writing Editor of *Feminist Studies*, who positions themselves within queer and Black feminist thought. Both Haasjoki and Gumbs have combined scholarly and artistic work to engage in experimental writing that creatively reimagines life after the more and more ominous end of life on the planet. Whereas Haasjoki is known for constructing transformative imaginaries and ethics beyond Man as well as feminist and planetary ethos in their poems, Gumbs' essays open possibilities for transformative, decolonial, and multispecies survival and cohabitation of the planet through, what we would call 'multispecies listening'. We argue that intertwining their creative work together with feminist theory in our examination offers new potential for feminist reimaginings concerning the earthly troubles that we humans – or at least quite many of us – have caused.<sup>2</sup>

Several scholars, writers, and artists have already placed emphasis on the potential of artistic, creative, and critical practices for political (re)imaginings. In a dialogic essay with Katherine McKittrick, Sylvia Wynter highlights that worldviews and scientific paradigms are socially constructed by stories (Wynter and McKittrick, 2015: 70–73). Wynter

encourages humans to think carefully about their capacity to critically re-envision futures in new and provocative ways (McKittrick, 2015: 4) and calls for the ‘rewriting of knowledge as we know it’, as the ‘West’ has to realize that they ‘*did*, change the world, *totally*’ when colonially forcing their destructive mode of being human onto the whole planet (Wynter and McKittrick, 2015: 17–18). Similarly, adrienne maree brown (2017) depicts a feeling of being trapped in someone else’s imagination that invented race and other oppressive systems, and how this feeling creates an urge to engage in one’s own imagination in order to break free (p. 18). New stories of being human are needed urgently for a new story of earthly survival.

Haraway (2016), too, emphasizes the capacity of storytelling in cultivating ‘responsibility’ and in furthering multispecies survival on Earth, stressing the importance of the kinds of stories we tell and how we tell them (pp. 35–41). Moreover, Barbara Creed (2019) places emphasis on the ability of artistic, creative, and critical practices to tackle political questions that challenge the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman (p. 19). In the light of these discussions we ask: How are we to create and tell stories that make worlds in which ethical cohabitation of the planet (Karkulehto et al., 2020) is made possible in the future? What potential do feminist reimaginings – through theorizing and creative writing – of the planet and the species that inhabit it offer for transformative activist knowledge production in times of ecological crises?

We suggest that the feminist theorizing and creative practices examined in this article go beyond a critique of the existing crises to offer parallel and shared imaginaries of multispecies flourishing on Earth. These shared imaginaries can summon together transformative planetary activism invoking the feelings of belonging to and collective caring for the planet.

## Staying with the trouble in the Anthropocene

Feminist scholars have critiqued the concept of the ‘Anthropocene’, perhaps the most common denomination of the current era of human domination, as it does not recognize the uneven responsibility between different groups of people for the destruction of nature (e.g. Bennett, 2021; Yussof, 2018; Zylinska, 2018). Anthropos, or ‘Man’, represents only a certain, modern ‘monohumanist’ and colonial idea of the human subject (Braidotti, 2013; Wynter, 2003; Wynter and McKittrick, 2015; Yussof, 2018). Wynter calls for the unsettling of the overrepresentation of Man to destabilize the coloniality of power, in which the Western bourgeoisie’s model of being human, the ‘*homo oeconomicus*’ that always thrives on accumulation, overrepresents itself as the model for all humans and subordinates all ‘Others’ (Wynter, 2003: 260; Wynter and McKittrick, 2015: 9–10). This is also the reason why some theorists prefer coinages such as Capitalocene to Anthropocene, which puts emphasis on how the endless capital accumulation and extraction of natural resources is the driving factor of today’s planetary-scale problems (cf. Haraway, 2016; Koistinen and Karkulehto, 2018; Malm and Hornborg, 2014; Moore, 2014).

Although Haraway, as referred above, has spoken in favour of imagining different realities and futures, in *Staying with the Trouble* they are critical of the two most common responses to the crisis of the Anthropocene and/or Capitalocene in which imagining

speculative futures succumbs to rescuing the status quo. In Haraway's (2016) view, such practices are too often divided into either (techno)utopias or (post)apocalyptic dystopias that either lull one into a false belief in a future salvation through technology or God or propel one into crippling pessimism (pp. 1–4, 10–13). Regardless of Haraway's critical stance towards some forms of imagining of the future, they (Haraway, 2016) and other feminist scholars such as Braidotti (2003, 2019) have argued for the potential of storytelling, literature, and the arts to imagine new kinds of feminist worlds (see also Wynter and McKittrick, 2015: 70–73).

Haraway (2016) emphasizes that we should stay with the troubles of the present – that we should think with them and tell stories of them (pp. 1–4, 10–13). This would allow us to reconsider how we understand the world and how we construct it, and to start a more just multispecies cohabitation of the planet, in order to facilitate, what, thinking with Haraway (2016), we would call, 'multispecies ongoingness' (p. 132). We claim that creative and critical practices allow us to imagine the present world differently and build new potential worlds and futures, which also help us act more ethically in the present. Haraway (2016) and Braidotti (2003), among others, pay particular attention to science fiction's potential to imagine better realities. Indeed, as a genre focused on alternative worlds, futures and realities, science fiction is well suited for the imagination of different ways of existing in the world. Therefore, it is also suited for activist purposes (Imarisha and brown, 2015; Vozian, 2020). Furthermore, brown (2017) calls all actions that change the world 'science fictional behaviour' as science fiction is 'a way to practice the future together' (pp. 16, 19). We weave these ideas further and claim that poetry and meditative essays can also encompass imaginations of new worlds, as well as offer their readers alternative viewpoints that call for action in the present (cf. *The Monster Network*, 2021; Koistinen and Karkulehto, 2021).

Similar to Haraway's idea of staying with the trouble, Lorde (2007[1984]) argues that 'action in the now is always necessary' (p. 27), and poetry, for them is the way 'toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into tangible action' (p. 26). Poetry, as an imaginative practice, can therefore be considered a form of activism. Indeed, for MacCormack (2020), all action is art since all activism is based on imaginative practices (pp. 78–90). Due to uneven societal power structures, the possibilities to act are nevertheless not the same for everyone. Lorde encourages everyone to speak their truth and take action. Yet they remind us that, for some people, action might not be as possible as for others due to the different consequences that speaking out loud and engaging in action might have; some might fear judgement, while others might fear annihilation (Lorde, 2007[1984]: 31–32). Furthermore, nonhuman animals and nature cannot speak their truth, at least not in any human language, or engage in political action, and even the possibilities of human beings to represent nonhumans through language to speak for them has been critiqued (Karkulehto et al., 2020; MacCormack 2020: 56, 79–80). Accordingly, Jessica Holmes (2021) argues for the method of bearing witness as a literary practice:

Poetry in particular is a literary genre, which has consistently lent itself to expressions of silenced or oppressed voices and bodies, in part due to its capacity to embody loss, fragmentation, and absence. Contemporary poems thus provide a useful foundation for rethinking narratives of

anthropocentrism and revisiting vulnerable bodies (both human and nonhuman). When engaged in such interventionary and reparative practices of thought, poetry constitutes a form of activism. Poems offer alternative methods of seeing or bearing witness to, remembering and assigning value to individual subjects. (p. 229)

Using Ariana Reines' poetry as an example, Holmes argues: 'Where seeing is flawed or thwarted by forces of erasure, feeling holds the capacity for a different kind of "knowing"'. They continue to state that 'while not all poetry can (or aims to) argue on behalf of animals or oppressed bodies at large, it can help us relearn how to feel – sorrow, disgust, anger, connection, empathy' (p. 238). Therefore, for Holmes: 'Poetry constitutes a form of activism', when 'it *actively* strives against the ongoing erasure of oppressed bodies' (p. 239). In this article, we aim to establish how both Haasjoki's poetry and Gumbs' meditative, lyrical essays create imaginaries that not so much speak for the nonhumans but attempt to speak, or *write and breath, with them* – therefore engaging in a kind of multispecies planetary activism, or crafting possibilities for it.<sup>3</sup>

### **Imagination beyond the apocalypse: *Writing-with the planet***

Contemporary popular culture is saturated with various stories and images of the ends of the world even if they have evoked an ample amount of criticism (cf. Haraway, 2016: 35). For example, Joanna Zylińska (2018: 13–15) claims that apocalyptic scenarios of the Anthropocene are really not about the end of the human, but the end, and messianic return, of Man. As Zylińska writes, the apocalyptic Anthropocene narrative assumes a 'planetary messianism': that Man will, in the end, finally 'conquer time and space and rise above the geological mess he has created' and save us all (p. 15). Therefore, Zylińska calls for "a feminist counterapocalypse" that, in adopting precarity as the fundamental condition of living in the global postindustrial world, contests many of the masculinist and technicist solutions' to the so-called Anthropocene (pp. 1–2).<sup>4</sup>

MacCormack's (2020) *Ahuman Manifesto* could perhaps also be called a radical feminist counterapocalypse, as it suggests human extinction as the solution for the current troubles caused by human domination of Earth. MacCormack advocates for 'radical compassion', which means caring for the nonhuman even at the expense of the future of the human species (pp. x–xi, 34). Nevertheless, this does not mean that we could not live a good life, as humans, here and now, for as long as we still exist. For MacCormack, the end to anthropocentrism can also afford experiences of joy, and the purpose of their manifesto is to rejoice in life in all forms (pp. 7–10). The call for human extinction nevertheless raises serious issues: why should all people become extinct, when it is the dominant few that has been causing systemic violence towards the racialized and sexualized 'Others', as well as the destruction and exploitation of the naturalized others, of earth resources, nature, and nonhuman animals (cf. Braidotti, 2013; MacCormack, 2020: 10, 51–65)?

MacCormack (2020) also points out that many nonhuman animals and minorities are already being born into a kind of apocalypse in which they face discrimination, violence, and death (pp. 171–176, 189). Therefore, the idea of 'our' shared apocalypse is artificial. Similar criticism has been expressed among Black and Indigenous science fiction writers

(cf. The Monster Network, 2021: 157). From a decolonial perspective, Audra Mitchell stresses that extinction seems to be a metaphor only for the Western, white-dominated humanist world that fears the annihilation of the(ir) world. For the 'Others' of the humanist and colonialist ideal of Man, extinction is very tangible due to real-life violent events and threats of transversal structural violence such as settler colonialism, environmental racism, or the destruction related to extractive capitalism. Too often Man's fear of extinction as a possible, universal future event masks the dominant subject's, its representatives', and the colonial capitalist system's role in the ongoing real-life destructions, while perpetuating and taking part in this violence on a symbolic level (Mitchell, 2017a, 2017b).

In a collection of essays titled *Himmeä sininen piste* ('Dim Blue Dot'), Pauliina Haasjoki (2019a) responds to apocalyptic stories with an alternative politics of imagining the future. According to Haasjoki, there are two types of apocalypses, 'those predicted by comets, and those predicted by statistics, calculations, and analyzes of research results' (pp. 66–74).<sup>5</sup> They argue that beautiful fictional depictions of the apocalypse distract us from current research-based knowledge and may influence political decisions and possibilities to adhere to them. 'If the end of the world would only come already, if only it weren't too withdrawn and difficult!' condenses Haasjoki (p. 68). In the following, we suggest that in their poetry, Haasjoki tackles the thematic of ending in a manner that does not rely on the apocalypse metaphor but invites the reader to consider the messy connections between humans and other life forms – and the planet.

Like MacCormack (2020), Haasjoki (2019a) emphasizes that the end of the world is happening right now – we already live in a time consisting of continuous little endings (pp. 68–70). Haasjoki's (2019b) poetry collection *Promessa* addresses these little endings – albeit also becomings, where new life is at hand. The opening poem of the collection (p. 5) is a (para)text titled *Promessointi* ('Promession', original emphasis) that refers to that of the collection, and its style is reminiscent of a dictionary definition:

A burial method in which the body is frozen with liquid nitrogen / and then decomposed into dust by vibration. After the separation of metals buried in the soil's / surface layers, the dust turns into humus within a year.

The text can be read as a key to the collection, which, in Harawayan fashion, creates tentacular connections (Haraway, 2016: 31–32) between life and death, the beginning and the end, and the human and the nonhuman world. Haraway declares that the human and humanity is rather to be thought of as humus than the oppressive and exclusive *Homo* or *Anthropos*, and our current state of being is rather that of a *compost* than *post-human* (p. 55). The terms bring into the fore the messy entanglements of human and nonhuman beings but also provide a promise of a forthcoming flourishing that the composted (earthly) matter would support. Life is to Haraway a shared composting, and thus human, *humus*, is just one soil type in this process of composting. Promession refers to the ecological burial of the deceased, most banally expressed as disposing of the body through freeze-drying (Barthuly, 2019). 'Promessa', on the other hand, is a word in Italian and means 'promise' or 'commitment', and especially when combined with the word 'humus' (Latin for 'earth', 'soil'), as it is in Haasjoki's use, it strongly associates to



Haraway's (e.g. 2016: 12, 65) thinking on the shared cycle of life – the endings and becomings – between the human and the nonhuman (see Koistinen and Karkulehto, 2021).

The idea of humus is also visible in another poem, where a mushroom becomes inseparable from its surroundings<sup>6</sup> – a tree and the soil:

The mushroom is at the foot of the tree, // under a root of some unknown tree that has risen to the surface / half visible. Its bread-coloured cap is craggy and gives / way from where the root passes, where the cap collides with the root. The mushroom's / white, blunt stem comes off bearded from the soil, and there is a hole, / which it made for itself in the earth. // But the mushroom is not only at the foot of the tree, it is also on top / of the tree, in its crown, around it and far below. (Haasjoki, 2019b: 74–75)<sup>7</sup>

The promession in and after death that *Promessa* deals with can be read as the processing of life. In Marietta Radomska and Cecilia Åsberg's (2020) biophilosophy, processes of death, life, growth, and decay are viewed as 'complex interweaving and entangled phenomena' rather than as opposites, a view which 'contest[s] the Western cultural imaginaries that tend to draw thick dividing lines between bodies, between the human and non-human, organic and inorganic, and life and death' (p. 58). This biophilosophical idea of the intertwining of growth and decay, human and nonhuman, as well as life and death, is visible and present in *Promessa*'s compostable entangled network (see Koistinen and Karkulehto, 2021). It can thus be argued that in its celebration of humus, *Promessa* celebrates the cycle of life and death, where the survival of the human is no more important than that of the nonhuman. *Promessa* (Haasjoki, 2019b: 82) continues:

Isopods are not only under human feet but on them, / in the crusts and far ahead; the isopod whose feet under the hem / carry it imperceptibly like over water. A human is / not only around stone but in its layers, sleeping / particles in its pores and compressed in its sediments. / A stone is not only under lichen but on it, in its twirling movement / with it and chasing it; the wood pigeon is not only around a tree / but at its foot, surface and knee, a child is not only on the earth's / knee but around it.

In the context of contemporary environmental crises, a biophilosophical ethical approach, in which human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic, and life and death are thought of as intertwined, indicates a transformative planetary thinking and activism that leave human-centeredness behind but at the same time aim to preserve life. In their work *Kuolinsiivous* ('Death Cleaning'), poet and prose writer Eeva Kilpi (2012) uses the term 'planetary feel' to describe the emotional burden and sense of responsibility created by their own environmental anxiety (p. 16). Anxiety and responsibility are extended in the work to apply to all of 'us'; we are all responsible for the state that the world is in – even though not in equal measure – and for ending the exploitation of all human and nonhuman lives and of the environment (cf. Haraway, 2016: 38–39). Kilpi understands caring for nature as part of such an ethical humanity that is not yet realized (Keski-Lusa, 2020: 59–60; Koistinen and Karkulehto, 2021). For us, a planetary feel denotes a feeling of *belonging to the planet*, *feeling as part of the planet*, instead of only feeling *for* the planet (see also Koistinen and Karkulehto, 2021; cf. Heise, 2008). As in Haasjoki's poetry, the



planetary feel resides in the messy entanglement of humans and nonhumans, in the humus that is the making of all existence on Earth. Haasjoki's poetry could therefore be described as writing with the planet, – the soil, mushrooms, as well as plant and animal life – or, *writing-with* to emphasize the creative agency of nonhuman life in the process (see Ryan, 2021).

Drawing on Ursula Heise's (2008) *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, poet and researcher Isabel Galleymore (2020) critiques environmental writing pedagogy from placing too much emphasis on writing in local nature. Instead, they argue for 'creative strategies that question and expand a sense of place', and ask, 'what kind of text might invite readers to develop their understanding of place and realize their own global connections no matter where they find themselves' (p. 34–35). Galleymore highlights the potential of poetry to discuss place on a global scale. As an example, they analyse the works of US-based poet, critic, and editor Juliana Spahr 'whose work demonstrates how apprehending connections between personal, local and global frames complicates our self-identity and identification of our surroundings to produce more informed approaches to being "placed" in the world' (p. 35). Likewise, the messy connections between humans and the nonhuman world in Haasjoki's poetry invite the reader to consider their understanding of their place and their 'planetary feel', or sense, as part of the planet.

'Planetary feel' resonates also with Lorde's (2007[1984]: 25) and Holmes' (2021: 238) claims of the importance of embracing experiences and feelings as sources of knowledge, as well as with recent discussions on planetary ethics, such as the concept of 'planetary well-being', which seeks an alternative for the idea of sustainable development and elevates nonhuman nature as equal with the human (Kortetmäki, 2021). All these discussions are intertwined with the transformative planetary thinking and planetary activism that we propose as inspiration for radical, ethical, and political transformation. Poetry and other creative and/or critical practices, such as *writing-with the planet*, can broaden our imagination and help us to express uncomfortable feelings, making it a potential practice for activism based on a 'planetary feel'.

## Undrowning entanglements: *Breathing-with marine mammals*

Alexis Pauline Gumbs' (2020) creative nonfiction volume *Undrowned. Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals* consists of 19 sections that are grouped around Black feminist practices, such as breathing, remembering, or organizing, that are here shaped by learning from marine mammals (p. 10), and which can be seen as forms of pleasure activism taken further by Gumbs. The concept pleasure activism is known from adrienne maree brown and Gumbs' essay collection appeared in the Emergent Strategy Series<sup>8</sup> edited by brown for AK Press.

Brown (2019) defines pleasure activism as 'the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy' and as something that believes 'that by tapping into the potential goodness in each of us we can generate justice and liberation' (p. 13). In line with brown, Gumbs embraces their ancestors', as well as marine mammals' struggles, and weaves

their undrowned stories together, thriving for change and transformation, while creating more space for solidarity, joy, grief, and healing. According to Gumbs, in the times of the rising ocean levels, the ‘scale of breathing is collective, beyond species and sentience, so is the impact of drowning’ (p. 1). By claiming this they acknowledge the humans’ symbiotic and entangled evolution with other beings and entities that is also central to, for example, Haraway. Moreover, Gumbs (2020) acknowledges the harm historically inherent in these entanglements due to the colonial and capitalist exploitation perpetuated by Man and its Capital: ‘The oil and the blubber of Caribbean monk seals literally lubricated the machinery of the plantation economy. Without it nothing could function’ (p. 139).

Gumbs focuses on the scale of breathing to express our multispecies entanglements. Breathing is a basic function of many different lifeforms as well as a meditative practice for grounding. Could we transform our past/present/future through a collective, multi-species meditation, planetary breathing and feeling practice – *breathing-with*, cf. *writing-with the planet* – as a new form of posthuman ethics and planetary activism? This stands in opposition to the lurking historical and present/future danger of collective drowning. Gumbs’ volume is an ode and a love letter to all former, present, and forthcoming ‘undrowned’ of the planet, meaning the ones who have survived colonialism, slavery, extractive capitalism, and speciesism, and who will survive the present and the upcoming ordeals caused by Man. One question remains unresolved, however: the one of the undrowned of the future. Will there be any, and will humans be among them?

‘We will all be marine mammals soon’, elaborates Gumbs (2020) and refers to a possible transformation of our being (p. 117). This may imply that by listening and learning practices humans can transform the individualistic and oppressive ways of living into the collective way of life of many marine mammals. In this case, the Western dominant human subject, the ‘homo oeconomicus’ known to us today, would cease to exist to give way to a reimagined (post)humanity: entangled, immersed and built upon difference as affirmation instead of exclusion. Or, of course, Gumbs’ text can literally imply that on a melting and warming planet many land mammals are soon to become marine mammals, as they will be flooded by the rising water. If life can be sustained on Earth in the future, will land mammals, including humans, return to the seas and become marine mammals again, as in the earlier phase of their evolution, and as such, turn out to be survivors of the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene? In this imagination, as well as in Stacy Alaimo’s (2017) aquatic vision of the Anthropocene, where they propose a model of ‘the Anthropocene subject as immersed and enmeshed in the world’, humans can literally become immersed in the world (p. 103).

In section 14, dedicated to *surrender*, Gumbs addresses the Earth itself:

Vessel for water, holder of space, round revolution. Your cycles make everything. And you let the moon love you and pull on your tears. And you’ve let us live here long enough to remember. And the length of the lesson is letting us go. We can learn to let go or you will let us go for us. With a rush and a surge and a kiss of renewal. You’ll embrace us again. Send us back to the stars. (p. 126)

On one hand, ‘letting us go’ could mean the disappearance of either Man or the entire human species. ‘Embracing us again’, on the other hand, implies a positive

kind of transformation, while 'sending us back to the stars' elevates the discourse into a celebratory, resigned, and peaceful dealing with death and a deep connection with not only the planet but the universe. However, 'surrendering' in the title of this section means much more than this, which can be observed from the following:

And what happens if we just let go? Like dolphins who beach themselves on shore to eat, and trust the tide to bring them back into the water, or who time their birth cycles to seasonal floods, or migrate across the world following warm currents on a menopausal planet. What it would take to tune in with our environment enough to be in flow with the Earth, instead of in struggle against it. [. . .]

I wonder too all the time about creation and destruction. The role of ancestral power. Surrender and change. [. . .]

Yes, I aspired to dominate in a world that oppressed me. But now I need antennae for a world I can't imagine. Now I need to listen more than I need to say this. But I do still need to say this:

I surrender. To a love so big it could face and acknowledge monsters. To a love so deep and wide it could create oceans and whales. To an ancestral reach so long it could become us. And when they name us back what will they say? What stories will they use? How great a love, that could create all this? How will they name all of what we destroyed? What fugitive intentions will survive? Or will the planet sing again without us? I surrender. To a love too big to name. (Gumbs, 2020: 121–124)

Surrender here, in the first part of the citation, refers to tuning into the environment, embracing our entanglements and inter-dependency with it by basing our practices on trust and attunement: 'to be in flow with the Earth, instead of in struggle against it'. This emphasizes the posthumanist idea of humans as part of the natural world, as a part of the natureculture continuum (Braidotti, 2013; Haraway, 2016) and not something that excludes and exploits the naturalized others. In this sense, surrender, albeit it does not stem from anxiety but love, can be interpreted here as the kind of planetary feel and belonging to the planet that we outlined above. Letting go of the domination of Man and its internalized violent ways of relating to each other opens the possibility of a hardly imaginable transformative new world. To achieve this, Gumbs perceives surrender as a practice that is not giving up but rather giving in. Not necessarily giving up on life but giving in to the forces of trust and love. However, the lurking possibility of death remains present, signalled by the rhetorical question: 'will the planet sing again without us?' Does this refer to the extinction of our species or to the disappearance of the overrepresentation of Man, or only to the (natural) death of the members of this generation?

By surrendering to love and putting surrender and change alongside each other, Gumbs (2016) expresses desire to change the dominant story, to transform the colonial and human-supremacist story that other stories are being told with, and as we know from Haraway, 'it matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories' (p. 12). Gumbs calls for a reimagination of the world, but only future storytellers can tell how it will turn out.

Gumbs' attempt to reimagine the world, to embrace change and transformation, to become the practice, to learn, to unlearn, and to listen and breath in solidarity with their

ancestors and fellow marine mammals, can be understood as an attempt to unsettle the coloniality of power and to end the overrepresentation of Man as defined by Wynter (2003). This is also a possible manifestation of Chthulucene, a concept coined by Haraway (2016) to replace the Anthropocene, characterized by multispecies ongoingness. Moreover, Gumbs's attempt intertwines with afrofuturism, 'an artistic aesthetic and a framework for critical theory' that aims at including Black people in the imaginations of the future (Womack, 2013: 6–7, 9).

Surrendering to love resonates with the core idea of pleasure activism as well – to take pleasure in seeking social justice and change, and to emphasize the pleasure of the oppressed. In this context, Gumbs' meditative language that learns to listen to marine mammals or, in a Harawayian framework thinks-with them, breaths-with them and learns from them, can be regarded as a form of pleasure activism that seeks social and multispecies justice and transformation. It is also in line with the way in which Lorde (1996 [1988]) reclaims care and self-care for Black feminists as a revolutionary tool: 'Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare' (p. 332).

Alongside taking pleasure in embracing the interspecies entanglements of our world and in advocating for resilient survival, individual and planetary-scale transformation through unlearning old norms and learning new practices, Gumbs expresses recognition, gratitude, and love for their ancestors, for marine mammals, and all humans that struggle on the warming planet against the grip of exploitation. Offering love for marine mammals and facing, perhaps even forgiving, the violent old practices of some humans – 'a love so big it could face and acknowledge monsters' – can be seen as a planetary and transformative rethinking of humans' relationship to nonhuman, which is historically characterized by exclusion and destruction. Brown (2017) names love 'an energy of possibility' and 'the possibility of wholeness' (p. 32). They claim that it's 'a healing behaviour, to look at something so broken and see the possibility and wholeness in it' (brown, 2017: 19). Gumbs' surrender to love, to a creative deep force, is a vision of transforming and healing our suffering world. This love is maybe humans' best possibility to embody survival.

In section 4, dedicated to *practice*, Gumbs (pp. 43–45) raises questions and contemplates answers like the following:

What are the intergenerational and evolutionary ways that we become what we practice? How can we navigate oppressive environments with core practices that build community, resistance, and more loving ways of living? [ . . . ]

[D]olphins evolved dorsal fins from practice across generations. [ . . . ]

Yes. I want a dorsal fin. I think I can make one if I practice. [ . . . ]

Gumbs emphasizes that dolphins grew dorsal fins because of every day intergenerational. In their view, the practice of love (cf. hooks 2000), the idea that we become what we practice is at the core of pleasure activism as defined by brown (2019). Gumbs emphasizes that dolphins grew dorsal fins because of every day intergenerational practice. In their view, the practice of love (cf. hooks, 2000) is a deliberate choice: 'Out here

in the ocean we have our breathing and our practice. We have each other if we choose each other (p. 45)'. By choosing love for ourselves, and for other humans and nonhumans, we can start *breathing-with the planet* and growing 'dorsal fins' to navigate through destruction and oppression. What this love and the 'dorsal fins' can give us, is a reimagination of our relations to the world that projects a possibility of a just, feminist, and transformative past/present/future.

## **Precarity, preservation, and planetary activism**

In this article, we have explored how feminist theorizations, particularly feminist posthumanism, Black feminist and decolonial thought, as well as contemporary poetry, and Black feminist meditative essay writing (re)imagine different kinds of pasts/present/futures that take seriously the survival and flourishing of all species. Many feminist scholars have suggested that the end of a certain mode of being human, represented by the monohumanist idea of Man, would be a beginning for different ways of being human that see the survival of humanity as dependent on the living conditions and survival of other species. In this way, endings and the renunciation of 'old worlds', or even apocalypses, can be perceived in relation to the reimagination of current epistemologies. In other words, the modern scientific way of comprehending, structuring, and producing information is not the only way to approach and give meaning to the world. For our epistemologies to change, we need to broaden our imaginations to different possibilities of experiencing our humanness as part of the environment, or the planet.

We suggest that one way to do this could emerge from creative practices such as poetry and essay writing, pursued in the framework of critical feminist thinking. We are not saying that creative practices automatically lead to epistemological transformations, but we do argue that they can engender new imagination and new forms of activism by, for example, embracing multispecies ongoingness and justice. Thus, we dare also to suggest that these practices serve as a promise for transformative planetary activism that embraces affirmative action, be it, for example, privately made decisions to downgrade and change personal consumption, transforming our relations with humans and nonhumans to build communities based on mutual care, performing activism for social and environmental change in public, or telling more and more transformative planetary stories. This is how broader epistemological changes, more just societal structures, and novel ways of ethical thinking may emerge.

Environmental ethics are often framed by the idea of giving things up and renouncing our comfortable and destructive ways of being in the world, even though not all humans share the same lifestyle. Some of us (Koistinen and Karkulehto, 2021) have suggested a shift from the rhetoric and ethics of individual renunciation to the rhetoric and ethics of communal preservation and redistribution. Here we want to suggest that this shift in rhetoric can serve as a basis for activism; language makes worlds, and a new rhetoric may therefore help us to imagine more sustainable worlds. Instead of only asking what we are willing to give up (always questioning who is this 'we' that 'we' are talking about), we could imagine what is vital for an equal, multispecies flourishing and justice. This rhetoric, or imagination, is visible in Gumbs' idea of surrendering to love and in

Haasjoki's 'biophilosophical' poetry that envisions a compostable entangled network of humans and nonhumans – and *breathing-* and *writing-with the planet*. Injustices must also be fought, and in the spirit of feminist theorizations, Haasjoki's composting planetary thinking and Gumbs' multispecies learning and listening, we offer transformative planetary activist thinking and writing as strategies for aiming at more ethical future for the world after Man. We hope that this way we can find ways to tell new stories that encourage us to preserve the wellbeing of others, or planetary wellbeing, for the sake of ethical cohabitation and the planet here and now.

Braidotti (2019) has argued for affirmative ethics that consider the often-uncomfortable affects and emotions we face 'in our fast-moving, cynically competitive world' (p. 15). As a possibility for this kind of affirmative ethics, we propose creative and (re) imaginative practices, such as the practices of *writing-* and *breathing-with the planet* explored above, as a foundation for transformative planetary activism that relies on the understanding of humanity as part of, not separate from, the planet – or Kilpi's (2012) 'planetary feel' (p. 16; see also Koistinen and Karkulehto, 2021). Although Kilpi's term arises from anxiety, uncomfortable affects and emotions can also be translated into action, as envisioned by Braidotti and Lorde, and this action can bring forth feelings of connection, pleasure and joy. In other words, affirmative action might denote the form of pleasure activism in Gumbs' writing that offers love for marine mammals and all (future) ancestors who survive, or the joy and connection to the world that arises from preservation and ethical cohabitation – by sensing one's place as part of the 'humus' of the planet, as imagined in Haasjoki's poetry.

Creative and (re)imaginative practices such as *writing- and breathing-with the planet* can thus inspire us to embrace the precarity of the world and the vulnerability of all humans and nonhumans as part of a damaged, changing planet, here and now, even in the face of an uncertain future. They can produce transformative activism that considers the nonhuman, the joy of preservation as well as multispecies liberation, justice, and flourishing. These practices we advocate here can thus mean the ability of humans to feel a meaningful, motivated, and pleasurable desire to preserve connection and transform the manners of relating with other animate and inanimate matter.


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## Notes

1. The debate over human dominance and responsibility in the current global crises often refers to people as a unified group, as a 'we', while the richest 1 % causes most of the world's emissions (see, for example, Alaimo, 2018). 'We' also rhetorically elevates humans from other animals. This can be thought of as reinforcing human's destructive behaviour towards the environment and other animals, as they are seen only as exploitable 'others'. However, it is difficult to completely avoid the pronoun 'we' (cf. MacCormack, 2020: 2, 10), and avoidance too can distance the reader from the issues at stake. In this article, we deliberately use 'we' to remind 'us' of our responsibility to consider the problems caused by human dominance and to take action (see also Koistinen and Karkulehto, 2021).
2. As feminist scholars/writers/activists, we are committed to the idea of situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) as the basis of both scholarly and activist practice. Our analysis brings together feminist theorizations and creative imaginaries developed in different geopolitical, social, and historical contexts, and we consider our analysis as a dialogue with them. Broader discussions on positionality, be it ours or the thinkers' and writers' whose work we think with, are, however, beyond the scope of this article.
3. On writing with nonhumans, see, for example, Haraway (2003); Holmes (2021); Ryan (2021).
4. Anna Tsing (2015: 20) claims that precarity is the condition of our time, not just the condition of some unlucky ones. According to them, '[p]recarity is the condition of being vulnerable to others. Unpredictable encounters transform us; we are not in control, even of ourselves'.
5. All essay and poetry translations from Finnish to English by Hannah Ouramo.
6. Cf. Tsing (2015: 20) for a discussion on the matsutake mushroom's messy, transformative entanglements with other species.
7. For another analysis of the poem, see Lummaa (2020).
8. Further and even deeper exploration of the convergences in brown's and Gumbs' thinking would be looking at the practices of emergent strategy described by brown (2017).

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