



**THE EKOLN LETTER:
A CONVERSATION ABOUT
UNIVERSITIES IN THE ERA OF
CLIMATE CHANGE**

*An introduction to the Ekoln Letter on Universities in the
era of Climate Change*

In May 2020 the plan had been to bring together at Lake Ekoln in Sweden, a group of people who are all, in their own way, interested in the question of how we might rethink universities in the era of climate change. Some were professors working in universities, some were leading activists, some were doctoral students exploring the frontiers of new thinking, some were artists and facilitators of public conversations; some see themselves as educators others as climate researchers and others resist definition. We had hoped to go deep into the questions of what a university is, could be, can't be and should be in a world of profound ecological harm and inequality.

And then we know what happened next. The pandemic hit, borders were closed, and we were left, like the rest of the world, to work out what to do instead. In place of a three day conversation that had been intended to be as slow, as embodied and as reflective as possible to allow us to really learn from each other, we met online to speak in the strange flat world of the video conference. For none of us was this enough, and so the project you have in your hands (or on the screen) was born: a letter exchange, where each of us would write to one other in response to an initial prompt, attempting to speak honestly about our sense of where 'the university' might go in this era of profound change. The letter exchange lasted four months, a week at a time or more for each person, through the long summer of 2020 when all were navigating a new reality. The pieces were not written for publication, they are not polished, none have been edited, they were intended only for the recipient. On completion, however, we wondered if there was enough here potentially to be of interest to others exploring the same questions.

So we share these letters with you, as an echo of a conversation that could have happened and as perhaps the beginning of different conversations, negotiations, collective experimentation with how universities might be otherwise.

Feel free to write back and to join in, or to carry on and take this further.

Keri Facer

Zennström Professor in
Climate Change Leadership
Uppsala University
2018-2020

Sanna Barrineau

Zennström Initiative
Coordinator
Uppsala University
2018-2020

Contributors

Jan Masschelein

Heila Lotz-Sisitka

Budd Hall

Karen O'Brien

Ana Dinerstein

Vanessa Andreotti

Pella Thiel

Lovísa Eiríksdóttir

Ilan Chabay

Dougald Hine

Sue Wright

Sanna Barrineau

Ronald Barnett

Sharon Stein

Isak Stoddard

Noah Sobe Webster

Keri Facer

Injairu Kulundu-Bolus

10th April: The Invitation

Dear colleague

What if we don't need it, this civilisation that is crumbling with coronavirus? What if this is just the latest in a long line of increasingly urgent reminders that we are living not on a dead planet, but on a lively planet – an abundant liveliness that comprises not just us, humans, in our teeming billions, but bacteria, foxes returning to cities, newly loud birds in cities, forests and palm oil plantations, carbon dioxide and methane forming quiet blankets around the globe. What if we are not outside nature, but part of it, both infinitely more vulnerable than we imagined and infinitely stronger, more resilient, part of a rich complexity that generates a radical novelty that we cannot predict with all our mathematics and machines? What if it is not our job to 'fight' viruses and beat back nature, to 'win the war' against death, but to explore what, with all our boundless creative, imagination and care, we might be able to become in dialogue with an endlessly generative world? What if we are not the centre of that world?

I start with these questions because I am convinced we need to reset the collective conversation about universities and climate change – a conversation that is too often dominated by a language of urgency and technical solutions, in which if only we can stop flying, if only we can teach enough kids about climate change, if only there was enough research funding to build enough models and to develop enough technology, we (who?) could 'fix' climate change. This has been a conversation conducted as though a changing climate is just a technical problem and not also a phenomenon that emerges from wider patterns of economics and politics, and deeper structures of feeling and belonging. This has been a conversation conducted as though universities themselves were not entangled in practices that reproduce and intensify ecological exploitation and economic inequalities, a conversation conducted as though maintaining business as usual should be the height of our aspirations.

As some of you have already been arguing, we need a different sort of conversation about universities and climate change. One that asks

what spaces and practices are needed to help us understand what it means to live as part of an abundant, troubled, creative, complex, lively planet; and what institutions are needed help us to imagine and create a form of civilisation able to regenerate our common world. These spaces and practices may be part of the universities that we have today, they may draw on traditions and practices elsewhere, they may need to be invented. We may not be able to imagine, yet, what form they should take and we may need to draw on old forms long forgotten. Our challenge, though, is not simply to ask what tweaks we might need to make to our current imperfect institutions, but to examine, fundamentally, the forms of education, research, scholarship and engagement needed under these conditions, and to explore what the paths might be from here to these new forms. And so, I invite you to join this exchange of ideas by exploring the following question:

What university might we need if we consider climate change to be not a technical problem but a civilisational transformation? What educational practices might it require? What sorts of knowledge would it value? What can we see already that provides glimpses of such a university?

Looking forward to the conversation, thank you for agreeing to join.

Keri

1

Dear Keri,

Thank you for your invitation and for the way you frame the question of the university we might need. It will come as no surprise to you that I would like to suggest that we need to *reinvent* the university as *university*, i.e. not as a production machine or supportive infrastructure that protects ‘learners’ and ‘researchers’ and facilitates their productive, personalized and profiling activities (producing relevant knowledge with impact or learning outcomes), but as its old name indicated: an ‘association or gathering of and as students’, a ‘universitas studii’. This association (although it was immediately confronted with attempts to neutralize or tame it) indeed tempted to give shape to, offer the time and space for, a particular *pedagogical* (not religious, political) *life* (Durkheim): the collective and public life of and as students. And I would like to emphasize for the moment very much this notion of ‘student’ which is directly related to the notion of ‘studium’ (and come back another time to the ‘gathering’).

Being a student, in the way I want to understand it here, is not referring to some socio-economic ‘position’ or a sociological category (you are not a student because you enrolled and paid your fee, or because you sit in class). Being a student names a kind of relation to the world and others, and refers to a kind of existence which is a public one and one of co-existence. Being a student is being ex-posed (out of position or equilibrium). It is not being a subject of knowledge confronting an object of knowledge, but being exposed to some ‘thing’ in the old German sense, that Heidegger reminded us of: that what starts to be of concern, starts to live and affect, starts to ‘speak’, is situated and embodied. Another way to understand being ex-posed is being-near, being in the company of (meeting, encounter) in the strong sense. While things start to ‘live’ in the strong sense of the word being a student mean being confronted with two questions: under which conditions do I exist (who and what is involved) and how to live together with (that thing/those things).

Maybe we should better speak of becoming a student. Becoming a student in and through an event of gathering that is fabricated and staged in a particular way through study practices and that makes that for the time of the gathering I become ex-posed. So the central question is how to gather as students (this is not as colleagues, friends, researchers, experts, learners, not as subjects of knowledge that confront an object of knowledge, not as members or disciples of religious orders, civil services, scientific disciplines)? How to make this gathering, which suspends 'our positions', happen? How to turn learners and researchers into students (which discipline and diets of the mind and the body, which material and spatial arrangements, exercises, do we need to 'work' as a student, to situate our thinking)? I think this is a crucial way to relate the question of the university we need to the issue of our living-together which is not about asking to open up to society, to try to have impact, to respect the 'Other', to take into account stakeholders, or to soften (hard) sciences with ethical or ecological considerations, but about what I would call the difficult, challenging, even dangerous organization and arrangement of study practices. In a way it becomes a 'technical' question about how to 'stage' a gathering that transforms our relation, that is giving 'things' the power to transform us into students (into a thinking, studying public). And of course, in the sense that I understand it here, there are still many student gatherings and study practices (inside and outside the formal institution called university), and we could try to (detect and) protect the existing ones and invent new ones, that is to protect and reinvent the *university*, rather than trying to protect the researchers and learners that are increasingly occupying and accommodating its space and time in view of their needs. To put it a bit bluntly, not which university do they need, but the reverse: what does the university requires.

I hope it makes some sense, at least as a first contribution to the discussion.

All the best
Jan

2

.....
Dear Keri and Jan, thank you for this open invitation ...

I add to Jan's words, reflecting on the challenge in his phrase "I think this is a crucial way to relate the question of the university we need to the issue of our living-together which is not about asking to open up to society, to try to have impact, to respect the 'Other', to take into account stakeholders, or to soften (hard) sciences with ethical or ecological considerations, but about what I would call the difficult, challenging, even dangerous organization and arrangement of study practices".

My contribution is framed as a creative think piece in re-imagining a "What if ... our university could do this, be like this, want this, and forge passions in our scholars for these intents and practices ...". My contribution is a short essay in transgression. I see transgression as a new metaphor for, and praxis of learning.

Jan makes the point that our universities used to be places of dialogue and inquiry, but in the 20th they shaped themselves into models of production for human capital for industrial societies, knowledge economies and now data economies as we write and send our letter chain and as we are forced online by lockdowns. Even as the world's flights are grounded, we can't so easily escape our fossil footprints since each of our emails produces an estimated carbon footprint of 4 grams of CO₂, and a large attachment could have a footprint of 50 grams.

In this almost impossible context, my interest in transgression is to re-imagine our primary metaphors for learning. First, to guide our learning in universities we had modelling, then acquisition, then participation. Modelling framed behavioral learning responses, specialized knowledge drove acquisition and dualism, and revolutions against oligarchy, patriarchy, coloniality and assembly line thinking produced participation (with the latter still being worked out in the halls of academia). We urgently now need transgression to escape our fossil histories and the hot mess we have created for people, planet and our non-human compatriots, especially also to save us falling mindlessly into

the data economy after lockdown. What should drive transgression as new metaphor for learning in our universities?

I share a piece written last year as part of a wider decolonial initiative led by Early Career Researchers in the 'Living Aula's' [classrooms] in the Transformations to Sustainability programme of the International Science Council. The initiative was an exercise in re-imagining research and university education, using the suitably strange notion of a 'Pluriversity for Stuck Humans' (McGarry, 2018; Weber, 2018). A more extensive piece is currently in publication representing this transgressive initiative launched by T-learning researchers (McGarry et al., 2020).

My intent in the piece that I wrote for this (shared below) was to transgress the emphasis on institutional impact, most often discussed as the primary motive and *raison d'être* for research in universities.

Please enter ... 'The Department of Attunement'

In the Department of Attunement, we tune our ears to the beauty of song. We sense the rhythms of each other's visions. We attune ourselves to the darkness of narrations that require healing, to pain, suffering and the ragged edges of contradiction and power.

We attune to fringe theories, marginal voices and lost creatures that have not made it into the mainstream, listening out for what they might offer.

We attune to the stories blaring in our heads about the worlds' wounds.

The most complex assignment in this Department is attuning to the squeals and clicks of the almost invisible golden mole during the mating season.

The golden mole is one of Africa's oldest underground creatures. It is endemic, not found anywhere else. In fact there are 21 species that are endemic. We find ourselves stuck. Stuck in not being able to hear that 11 out of 21 endemic species of golden moles are endangered.

Dying out. The squeals and clicks of their mating periods disappearing forever.

In this Department, we also find ourselves stuck listening to the pain of Somalian poet Sadia Hassan[\[1\]](#) who encourages a

“willingness to make noise however terrifying, and attune one’s ear to the beauty of it”.

Like Sadia expressing refugee pain, we hear the shape, texture and sound of survival, “the stretch and dip and immense weight or weightlessness of it”.

Terrifying noise and sensitive attunement for the world’s wounds.

Sadia and the golden mole teach us to use hypertrophied middle ear ossicles to adapt to seismic vibrations of immanent pain and extinction in the middle of the hot mess we are in.

With this, become singer, squealer, click-maker and listener in the Department of Attunement.

As you enter the Department of Attunement, be the “wild creature” being of Ben Okri[\[2\]](#) – one who holds on to wildness in storied worlds, in order to hear and give joy.

Make terrifying noises. Attune sensitively. Sharpen acoustic reflexes. Seek out better frequency resolution. Hear seismic vibrations of immanent pain and extinction. Click. Squeal.

Hear each other’s clicks, squeals, pain and rhythms above the blaring of the stories in our heads.

Above the noise of institutional impact measures.

(McGarry et al., 2021)

To continue the conversation, we may need Departments that can help us reach the Last Straw; Departments of Closing Unnecessary Gaps; Departments of HumaNature, Departments of the [under]Commons; Departments Against Kaktocracies; Departments of CultureART; Departments of Skirting the Abyss; Departments against CONcepts (especially those concepts that are cons and that misdirect, mislead and mis-educate); Departments of Re-generation; Departments of SeedFreedom; and Departments of FutureAbility. All of these could be, together with the Department of Attunement outlined above, situated in Faculty of Existance where we can learn to transgressively take a stance on existence.

With kind regards to you all, and #staysafe in lockdown!
Heila

3

.....

Dear Heila (and Keri and Jan)

First I want to thank Keri for initiative this conversation. The pandemic has perhaps done us a favour as we now have time to get to know each other in advance of any personal gathering that we may someday be able to achieve.

Because many of us do not know each other, perhaps each of us might wish to add to personal context. I am a settler Canadian of English Heritage. My great grandparents immigrated to Vancouver Island where I now live and work around 1870. The 'bought' land that had been the traditional hunting and gathering territory of the Halalt First Nation peoples, the Indigenous families that had looked after than land for 12-15,000 of years prior to external contact. The acquisition of that land transformed my family from landless and poor to middle class. Their children, their children's children and my generation have all attended university as a result of benefiting from the wealth of the land. The Halalt families whose land was taken are still here but live lives of poverty. I am therefore writing to you today from a position of privilege having benefited directly from the removal of land from the original land stewards of the Chemainus river valley so that my great grandparents could have a 200 acre farm.

I am 76 years old, white, male, straight and benefit from aspects of social location that have been referred to as 'an invisible knapsack of privilege'. I am grateful to live and work today on the unceded traditional territory of the Lekwungen speaking peoples, the Esquimalt, Songhees and WaSaanih First Nations. I am a retired Professor of Community Development from the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria and Co-Chair with my colleague Dr. Rajesh Tandon or PRIA, India of a UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. I have three grandchildren. My wife is also an academic and I am also a poet.

So Heila, I love your Department of Attunement piece! Your opening lines,

In the Department of Attunement, we tune our ears to the beauty of song. We sense the rhythms of each other's visions. We attune ourselves to the darkness of narrations that require healing, to pain, suffering and the ragged edges of contradiction and power.

We attune to fringe theories, marginal voices and lost creatures that have not made it into the mainstream, listening out for what they might offer.

are sublime and are lines, with your permission, that I would love to share with others in my networks. I am a profound believer in the power of the arts to help us reconnect our heads and our hearts, ourselves with the rest of nature, and the cognitive and the affective. You and I seem to appreciate how poetry does this. I regularly teach courses on poetry and social movements, poetry and learning, poetry and hope and more. And of all the teaching that I have done over my career, my poetry courses have been the most up-lifting and transformative both for my students and for myself.

In the teaching that Rajesh Tandon and I do with experienced scholar-activists interested in becoming mentors in our Knowledge for Change Consortium, we place a high value on the role of the arts within the research process. We include all the arts, poetry, drama, dance, song, mettisage, murals and more. We do so because our focus is on the co-creation of knowledge with university-based and community-based knowers, knowledge for transformation, knowledge for change, knowledge for action in the contexts of the climate crisis, the pandemic, homelessness, gender-based violence or any other wicked problems. The arts can be used to create or curate or accumulate transformative knowledge. They can be used to share knowledge with all of the participants in the research. And perhaps more powerfully, they can be used to build community awareness, influence local officials, draw public attention to issues that a traditional academic paper would not do and introduce an element of celebration and joy into our lives.

So sign me up to the movement to create, *"Departments that can help us reach the Last Straw; Departments of Closing Unnecessary Gaps; Departments of HumaNature, Departments of the [under]Commons; Departments Against Kaktocracies; Departments of CultureART; Departments of Skirting the Abyss; Departments against CONcepts (especially those concepts that are cons and that misdirect, mislead and*

mis-educate); Departments of Re-generation; Departments of SeedFreedom; and Departments of FutureAbility. All of these could be, together with the Department of Attunement outlined above, situated in Faculty of Existence where we can learn to transgressively take a stance on existence.”

4

.....

Dear Karen,

I understand we are to add some additional thoughts broadly responding to the prompt which Keri has given us, an invitation to engage with an endlessly generative world. I took a peek in the internet to see who you are (well at least those bits that float about on the web!). You have given much thought to questions of vulnerability within the context of the climate crisis and are part of the wonderful network of smart folks who make up the IPPC. I find myself somewhat conflicted when I think about re-imagining higher education within a climate crisis framework. I am by personality drawn always to the creative leaps which will take us to a newly imagined idea of knowledge and the university. But because my work over some 50+ years has been informed by the realities of the excluded in my own country of Canada, Indigenous Peoples, the poor, those without shelter, women living in fear of violence and in the many parts of the world where I have been learning...Africa, Latin America, South Asia, I believe that our universities must address issues of vulnerability. I am writing these words in this way totally fresh...perhaps naïve...stimulated by these initial exchanges of thought. I do not believe that we can arrive at a vision let alone a practice of a transformed university if we do not engage in a conversation that is based on ideas of transformation that include equality, justice, fairness and so forth amongst people. We need to 'widen our communities of questioning', as a friend of mine Andrea Vargiu of Sardinia tells me. We need to enlarge our knowledge making practices to include on the human front all those who are part of the challenges we seek to address. In medicine they now speak of patient centered health, so for work on poverty those poor persons who have positions of epistemic privilege on issues of living lives of poverty. In Indigenous Studies, we hear the call, 'nothing about us, without us'.

At one point in history only the Kings and Aristocracy 'knew'. Then we had uprising of the Feudal regimes and some kinds of democracy was born. At one time women did not 'know' nor did they vote, but now

we have seen transformation. So are we now at a time when our knowledge curating interactions might be able to change between human beings and the rest of nature? Are we presently engaged in a civilizational conversation with what we humans have labeled at the Corona-virus 19? Where I live on an Island in the Salish sea I am drawn to the idea of conversations between our local Orca whales and ourselves. Well so much to think about! Let me share Karen with you a poem that I did about our vulnerable Orca's. I hope that you like it!

A Letter from the Matriarch of the J Pod of Orcas to an Alberta Oil CEO

I expect that you will be surprised to find a letter from me, a 65 year old Orca. You may be surprised to learn that we have always had the ability to communicate with you out-of-the water humans, but we have managed a reasonable relationship up until now, so I did not think it necessary. I had hoped that the positive energies of the Creator that gave life to both our communities would touch our out-of-the-water humans with a sense of common purpose, a goal to preserve all life both of our water beings and the out-of-the-water beings.

Please don't shout at your assistants wondering who in heavens is playing a trick on you. It is not Tzaporah Berman or the Coast Protectors or any of the out-of-the-water humans that you might suspect.

I live in the Salish Sea. I am the leader of what you out-of-the-water humans call J Pod. We call ourselves eeeeeeeeeeeeeeooh. Please extend my greetings and the greetings of all the members of my pod to you, your children other out-of-the-water relations. While we may live on different parts of water and out-of-the-water, we share much. There are 70 of us in our pod, but we are not having as many young ones born than we used to. I am the daughter, the grand daughter and great great granddaughter of more than 15000 years of Orcas. We have lived in the Salish Sea for most of that time in harmony with those out-of-the-water humans you call First Nations. But for the last 150 years we have struggled. That is the reason that I am writing today.

We are not feeling well. We are losing weight. It is harder to find salmon than it used to be. When we have calves many of them die young. We share the Salish Sea with many of your ships. Many of your ships carry oil from out-of-the-water to lands far away. Their noise makes it hard for us to talk to each other. Sometimes we are hit by your ships and sometimes we are killed or critically wounded.

I know that the Creator wanted my Orca family and your out-of-the-water human family to live together in the celebration of life on this

water not water world of ours. But it seems that your loud machines or incomplete education or confusion about the sanctity of all life has blocked your ears, your eyes and your heart.

We are writing to you our out-of-the-water friends to invite you to a meeting, a ceremony and a feast. We believe that if you can begin to know us better as fellow creatures of the Creator like yourselves, your actions such as increasing the shipping of oil or taking too many salmon will be understood differently. Let us get to know each other. We can celebrate our common existence as beings of the Creator. We both eat salmon so a meal together would be nice. If we are lucky we might find a tuna to share as well.

We want our pods to continue to live as they have for thousands of years. We want the out-of-the-water humans to live in harmony as they used to do before what you call settler colonialism happened.

We look forward to hearing from you and to working together in the interest of all living beings, beings of the sea and of the out-of-the-water world.

Budd L Hall

October 10, 2019

Written for my grandsons, Quincy, Ashton and Leo

5

.....

April 28, 2020

Dear Budd,

Thank you for your thoughtful letter, and for sharing your powerful poem. Like you, I took a peek on the internet to learn more about you. The video of the children in Odisha, India thanking you for the sports equipment was really touching! I resonate with your recognition of the knowledge-generating capacity of ordinary people. I am very concerned that when it comes to climate change, biodiversity loss, poverty, inequality, global pandemics, and other global crises, we are vastly underestimating our individual and collective capacity for social change. I find it remarkable that we continue to address these issues as if they were technical problems, with a strong focus on “getting people to change” rather than recognizing people as subjects of change. I have been inspired by Paolo Freire’s work and about thirteen years ago, I read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* through a “climate change” lens. His point that “the well adapted individual suiting the oppressor’s needs” made me step back and rethink how we are approaching climate change adaptation. Since then, I have been focusing on understanding how we generate equitable and ethical transformations towards a world where all life can thrive.

Like you, I feel a strong commitment to equality, justice, and fairness in the world, as well as to integrity and oneness. Having worked on a number of IPCC reports, which make it so clear how much is at stake, I am convinced that we are looking for solutions in all the wrong places, and not the least from the wrong paradigm. Over the past decade or so, I have exploring the metaphorical and meaningful significance of quantum physics for society in general, and for social change in particular. Inspired by books like Alexander Wendt’s *Quantum Mind and Social Science*, Karen Barad’s *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Andreas Weber’s *Enlivenment*, I think it is important that we challenge the individualistic, reductionist, deterministic way of relating to the world

that we have inherited from the Enlightenment. This brings me to education, and to your beautiful poem.

“You would be surprised that we have always had the ability to communicate with you out-of-water humans.” This is critical! What else are we missing, simply because we are not looking for it? I once read a story about brain researchers in Finland who discovered that we have a glymph system in our brain. It has always been there, but they never saw it. When future generations look back, will they see what we have not been able to see, and wonder why we burned hydrocarbons. “Could they not see that fossil fuels could be turned into the plasma that we now use to store solar energy?” “Didn’t they realize that animals had feelings and consciousness, and were communicating with us all the time?” We have so many blind spots, and following the advice of the Matriarch, the role of the university should be to unblock our ears, our eyes, and our heart. It is my hope that we can make a creative leap (in my mind, a quantum leap) to a healthy and harmonious world for your grandsons and for everyone.

Best wishes,
Karen

6

.....

I have been reflecting on Keri's question about what educational practices might be required to promote a civilizational transformation, and what sorts of knowledge it would value. In relation to climate change and sustainability issues. I think it is time to go beyond the promotion of "Education for Sustainable Development" and pursue "Education for Transformation." This involves much more than teaching about the biogeochemical cycles, climate impacts, vulnerability and adaptation, or environmental policies and the SDGs. It also involves enabling and empowering ourselves and others to create alternative realities that truly represent a paradigm shift -- in other words, transforming ourselves and our systems to support of a world where all life can thrive. This involves engaging with the practical, political and personal spheres of transformation based on values that apply to all of us -- equity, dignity, compassion, justice, and integrity, to name a few. It is a "head-heart-hands" approach not just to teaching but also to the entire institution of higher education. Education for transformation would contribute to developing knowledge, capacities, and qualities to generate equitable and sustainable transformations at a rate, scale, speed and depth that is hardly imaginable today.

Where do we begin? Regardless of the subject, discipline, faculty, or one's place of position at the university, and even if one is not at a university, we can prioritize an integral approach to education. Integral approaches recognize the connections between experience, culture, behavior and systems, and acknowledges that how we show up makes a difference. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that rapid change is possible, but it also reveals how dysfunctional many systems are, and it is having devastating effects on lives and livelihoods. We can do better than this.

Doing better this means doing things differently, seeing things differently, and thinking differently. This is a continuous challenge for all of us, and takes practice to notice when we are captured by the old education paradigm. As an example, over the past couple of years, I have been working on a book about "quantum social change" called

“You Matter More Than You Think”. It sounds like a self-help book, but it is an inquiry into the relationship between individual change, collective change, and systems change. I am looking at how the metaphors and meanings of quantum physics can inform our understandings of social change, and in particular, how we can activate a different quality of agency from the coherent and entangled space of [I/we]. I do not talk about this project with my colleagues, perhaps I fear that they will roll their eyes and dismiss me as “New Age.” I have hesitated to send it to an academic publisher, maybe for the same reason, but also because I want it to reach a more general audience, including those who have been educated to feel that they do not matter. Recently I realized that I am a prisoner of the current paradigm when it comes to wanting academic credit for writing a book, seeking peer approval, and so on. Recently I decided that I would simply make a draft of this book public and start a wider conversation about what it would mean if we recognized people as the most powerful solution to climate change.

That brings me Keri’s last question regarding glimpses of what an alternative university could be. Every time I meet students from my “Environment and Society” course, I catch a glimpse of what an alternative university could be. These students take climate change and transformative change seriously, and they are ripe and ready for an alternative paradigm. They are *being* change, and we need an education system that supports them in becoming powerful agents of change. They give me hope for the future!

7

.....

I share your concern about what kind of approach do we need to explore and promote sustainable transformations. The clock is ticking, and we should consolidate what we know as well as advance new knowledge through communication, debates and interactions at platforms such as this created by Keri. Universities are failing to take climate change seriously because their approaches are too limited to confront the overwhelming problem laying ahead. Science is taking the lead because scientists are trusted by the public. They are explaining climate change from their scientific perspective. However, as you say, social sciences have a key role to help society to understand itself. It is important to identify what kind of knowledge, and produced by whom, can lead us to open paths to 'a civilizational transformation'. I agree that 'Education for Sustainable Development' has misled us to believe that we could continue in the same way. The "Education for Transformation" that you propose involves much more. You've made such a good point: COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that rapid change is possible. Yet, you said it: we are prisoners of the current paradigm. While a shift in paradigm would be necessary, I still feel that not everybody is prepared to confront the status quo created and defended by those who resist the shift due to ideological conviction, ignorance, disbelief, inertia, lack of knowledge, bureaucratic mentality, you name it. We must 'learn hope' as Ernst Bloch suggests but this, as I once wrote elsewhere, cannot happen in isolation. It requires an engagement with those who are already learning and organising hope, anticipating better worlds through their struggles. As an academic I try to find courage to say or write what I need to say or write in grassroots movements' stories and trajectories. They are challenging the reality that has been demarcated by power and within which we operate, and, in many occasions, these acts of defiance and dignity have brought danger and pain to them. But they have taught me that we must constantly venture beyond to see what is on the other side, what is possible...rather than probable. The point is to engage with the people's proposals for alternative ways of organising our societies, because their collective actions include important pedagogical

experiences that constitute both their everyday life and, at the same time, belong to a global depository of pedagogical and hopeful individual, collective and, in some cases, institutional, experiences. One could say that the crisis of climate change is entangled with the crisis of the educational system. Therefore, to save the planet we need an alternative pedagogical experience for a new University.

8

.....

In her question, Keri uses the word civilisational to characterise the type of transformation required to address the climate change crisis: a civilisational transformation. It is interesting that many Latin American scholars, including myself, use the same adjective, i.e. 'civilisational', to designate the profound crisis that is unfolding before us: a *civilisational crisis* (*crisis de civilización*). The notion of civilisational crisis is used in place of climate change crisis to portrait the present impossibility of (re)production of sustainable and dignified human life on the planet and to produce, instead, eliminable forms of human suffering, environmental destruction, and the promotion of violence. A civilisational crisis requires, no doubt, a civilisational transformation. This civilisational crisis entails a crisis of social reproduction, i.e. a crisis of the capitalist-colonial-patriarchal forms of mediation of the social reproduction of life, which was sparked by the collapse of wage labour endemic unemployment and the retreat of the welfare state during the period of acute neoliberal reforms; accelerated by the financial crisis of 2008; prolonged by austerity policy as a solution to the problem. But this crisis also became apparent in indigenous movements' struggles for the true recognition of their habitats, cosmologies, and philosophies, which were neglected and oppressed for centuries, and now are under a dangerous threat. And there is a third crisis that moves in tandem with the previous two: *a pedagogical crisis*, or a crisis of education for a sustainable world. We can see now the limitations or, if I may, the obsolescence of the modern educational system, including the University. How little or insufficient engagement is there with those already committed to the creation of alternatives, planting the seeds for a potential civilisational transformation that Keri has asked us to think about. In their praxis, the pedagogical occupies a significant place. In my work, I explore theoretically and empirically these alternative forms of decolonial, anti-patriarchal, and non-capitalist alternative practices, sociabilities, economies, environment, pedagogies, politics, i.e. 'concrete utopias'. I established a strong association between the social organising and struggles around issues of social reproduction and Ernst Bloch's

philosophy of hope. I love Bloch's philosophy because he was not fearful of theorising possibility. His critical philosophy is all about possibility. To Bloch, hope is key for the revolutionary transformation of the world. I have named the creation of alternatives 'the art of organising hope' because it is about organising what it does not yet exist by imagining it and concretely anticipating it collectively, usually within contexts of struggle and hardship. Thus, my exploration into the new educational practices is about grasping the utopian content of present struggles by diving into the 'ecology of knowledges' that they are creating. This term coined by Boaventura de Sousa Santos enables us to think of the new university as an observatory and a depository of concrete utopias and their pedagogies. The latter can be 'translated' into educational practices. With a caveat. People's pedagogical experiences can inform new educational praxis leading to a civilisational transformation only if translators are as prefigurative as the movements in question. Therefore, this 'translation' of pedagogical experiences into educational practices would not attempt to suffocate alternatives -ignore, obliterate, co-opt, distort, to make them fit into existing practices. This time, as a prefigurative translation, it would protect and nurture them, helping us to appreciate and expand their utopian elements as a key source for the transform the latter.

9

.....

My response to all of Keri's questions, at this point, is honestly "I don't know." I can't see our generation being able to imagine beyond the myths we have inherited: the university as a site of moral authority, civilization as progress, transformation as improvement, knowledge as the basis for agency, glimpses of alternatives as genuine change... If the university is grounded on a civilizational project that is both inherently violent and unsustainable, and if humanity is headed to the precipice of dying from this civilization, then, what questions would be most relevant to ask in current sites/processes of higher education?

Questions first articulated in the "Dark Mountain" (<https://dark-mountain.net/>) project come to mind: What is worth salvaging? What do we need to mourn and re-story? What seemingly benevolent things were fundamentally toxic and need to be left behind? What can we learn from the rise and fall of this ("civilizing") event? I would also add questions from "Gesturing towards Decolonial Futures" (<http://decolonialfutures.net>): How can we decolonize the unconscious, including our hopes, desires, and capacity to imagine something genuinely new? How do we de-activate our fragilities and develop the stamina to sit with what we were socialized not to see? How do we start to compost the collective material, cognitive, affective and relational "shit" we have accumulated? How can we interrupt consumption (of critique, hope, alternatives, utopias) as a form of escapism (from the shit that needs to be composted)?

I work at the interface of questions related to historical and systemic violence (how do we sit with our complicity in on-going harm?) and questions of unsustainability (how do we sit with the extinctions we have caused and the possibility of our own extinction?). I also work in-between groups in high- and low-intensity struggle: people who come from relatively intersectionally privileged backgrounds and who are interested in alternatives to the current system (low-intensity struggle), and people for whom what we call "social collapse" has been their normal social reality for a long time (high-intensity struggle).

Drawing on questions emerging from postcolonial, decolonial and Indigenous studies, my day-time job as an academic has been about problematizing patterns of representation and engagement between dominant and marginalized populations (low- and high- intensity struggle). This work attempts to make visible the harmful implications of widespread analyses and strategies that tend to promote ethnocentric ideals (of justice, change, sustainability), paternalistic relations, simplistic feel-good solutions, self-congratulatory and self-serving interventions (i.e. the savior complex), tokenistic and appropriative inclusion, and other tendencies grounded on different modern-colonial entitlements. Through the work with Indigenous scholars and communities in Latin America and Aotearoa/New Zealand my research team has been involved in translations of analyses and horizons set beyond the parameters of intelligibility/desirability of modernity-coloniality.

Beyond the day-time job, drawing on non-Western psychoanalytical practices, I work with a group of researchers who are interested in examining how the modern-colonial system works on our individual and collective unconscious: how it allocates what is possible for us to imagine and desire by harnessing fundamental existential insecurities (i.e. fears of death, loss, pain, worthlessness, scarcity, belittlement, abandonment, and more). This group is also interested in psychoanalytical practices that can promote neuro- and onto-genesis, re-activating metabolic capacities that have been exiled from the “house modernity built” <https://decolonialfutures.net/house-of-modernity-zine/>.

10

.....

In my research and practice around the difficulties of interrupting systemic violence and unsustainability, one of the things I find is that the university equips us very poorly to sit with knowledge that lies outside the parameters of legibility, relatability and desirability that we have systemically inherited and/or knowledge that challenges our perceived sense of entitlements, especially entitlements for security, hope and futurity. In a recent climate emergency related zoom session at my university, a climate student activist seemed to challenge this common pattern. She said: “I want an education that does not infantilize me. I don’t want someone to tell me this can be fixed in order to give me hope. We need to go through deep disillusionment with the current system in order to be able to want something genuinely different”. However, her request was unimaginable and unintelligible to the majority of the faculty in the meeting who were mostly concerned about when we could get back to “normal” and proceed with business as usual with perhaps more cycling and recycling and less flights and fossil fuels.

If *dis-illusionment* is necessary for *dis-investment*: for us to *want* something genuinely different (implying this is not an informational, but an affective and relational issue), what might support this process as it relates to the university? I asked a close colleague at an earlier stage in her academic career in the field of critical higher education studies. In response, she wrote a blog about “higher education otherwise” (link below) where she presents an analysis of different sets of responses to crises in higher education and how they tend to be based on the same modern-colonial ontology. Her text articulates responses to Keri’s questions that, perhaps, like the faculty in the zoom meeting, most colleagues at my institution would find uncomfortable – or even unthinkable. She also offers a critique of the positive use of the word “civilization” (very present in this conversation) and concludes with a set of questions that may support us to hold space for generative disillusionment, including:

- How do universities benefit from exploitation, expropriation, destitution, and genocide? How are those of us who work and study in universities complicit in systemic harm?
- How do universities naturalize human exceptionalism and modes of relating to the earth premised on consumption and treating the earth as a resource for human extraction? How has our existing educational system set us in the direction of individualism, consumerism, and infantilization?
- Why do people deny that the current patterns of ecological destruction, consumption, and exploitation are unsustainable, even when we have plenty of research that proves that this is the case?
- How might ancestral and Indigenous knowledges and practices prompt us to interrupt this sense of separation [from the land] and re-sense our entanglement, and how can we engage these knowledges and practices without extraction, appropriation or romanticization?
- How can we interrupt and unlearn harmful ways of thinking, feeling, doing, relating, knowing and being? What will it take for us to wake up and do the difficult and uncomfortable work that needs to be done, without expecting it to feel good or make us look good to other people? How can education prepare us to 'grow up' and face the many global challenges and crises ahead of us?
- What can activate a sense of responsibility before will, beyond normative ethics or calculated personal benefits?
- How much longer will our universities exist?
- What kind of (higher) education would we need in order to face the end of the world as we know it without fear, panic, and violence?
Sharon Stein, <https://higheredotherwise.net/2020/05/07/the-possibility-of-he-otherwise/>

11

.....

What happened to me in the face of the Corona crisis was that I went back to a mission I was involved in ten years ago. The local Transition towns group in my municipality planted potatoes on the most visible place we could find, outside the library. We did it because we wanted to highlight issues around resilience and the resource dependency of our societies. We arranged “Future Weeks” where people participated by showing their best practices for a sustainable society, with talks, study visits, exhibitions. We had meetings with local politicians asking them to act for local resilience, sharing our thoughts on what the climate crisis might mean for our society. They responded by asking us if we didn't think people would be worried when we were talking about that? The gap between what we believed needed to happen and their understanding was an abyss.

Since then I have been mostly working with people who have a better understanding (I believe) of what climate change means, building the field of people who are doing real systemic change in the Transition Network. And increasingly putting my energy into working for transformational governance structures like Rights of Nature and ecocide law, as well as education in ecopsychology. The interesting thing was, that as the effects of the Corona crisis became obvious, I was thrown back to the potato growing days. And we started the [Potato Appeal](#) in TN Sweden. It was a visceral response; suddenly the more structural, policy related work seemed like a hobby, like a frivolous luxury. I felt like I believe it must be to be asked to care about climate change when you don't know how to feed your family next month. The Potato Appeal has met with huge resonance; it is like people really feel the urgency and the possibility, step forward, feel they are part om something important.

My colleague in transition, Ylva from western Sweden has continued to skilfully and forcefully focus on local resilience. She was planning her seventh Future Week in april. Of 120 events on the programme, 95 was cancelled. Previous Future Weeks have gathered researchers and practitioners at the forefront of climate science and resilience thinking

and doing. And yet, "It hasn't mattered, anything I have done" Ylva said. "Corona has done more for peoples' understanding than any Future Week. It is just impossible to make people understand unless they are forced to." Her disillusion was tangible. Change cannot happen until it happens.

Illusion, etymologically, means "*act of deception; deceptive appearance, apparition; delusion of the mind*" (www.etymonline.com). So, what illusions do we need to loose now to become disillusioned?

I must confess, that I am at the moment sick and tired of putting up with people from the academic sphere. (Gross generalisation here of course.). Either the rearrangement of illusions is very strong and almost impossible to penetrate. It is like the illusion of progress is so strong it blocks out the data and makes an honest analysis impossible. Or, disillusionment and cynicism is all that is left, and what remains is the analysis that everything is impossible and futile. There is a call for "transformational policy" but transformational policy proposals are largely ignored. I find it incredibly lame, and very difficult to play with, as those people are always the ones with the credibility and legitimacy. If, as a shitty activist, you try to move through disillusionment, to be transcynical, to search for visions on the other side of collapse, you risk looking as a naïve hippie. But how can we find something *genuinely different to want* than we have collectively been striving for, if we settle with the understanding that it is game over?

Climate change might mean, probably means, the collapse of current form of society (whether we take it seriously or not). The Apocalypse. Climate change threatens the understanding of what development, or progress, *should* be. We were supposed to be rational; to take in information and based on understanding it make our choices and shape our actions. We were supposed to be in control. We *should* thus act on the information on climate change, but if we do, we have to acknowledge that the other *shoulds* around what the future holds are in danger. Maybe it can't be fixed.

We get locked in a construction of thoughts, like a rational maze, and it leads nowhere but to denial or cynicism. The *shoulds* don't hold and the future becomes something to avoid.

But where is the longing, the attraction, the desire? What if the apocalypse is a step towards something?

Apocalypse has almost the same meaning as disillusionment; it means unveiling, revealing. Is it possible to move through the rational maze to reveal another state of being, a state that is simply out of reach

as long as we rely on our conscious thinking? Is it possible to be transrational? To reveal something to desire?

Desire is a bodily sensation, an emotion. To open oneself to sensing desire is also to open to other, more uncomfortable emotions, like fear or pain. To loose control. To put the models on a shelf for a while and listen, inwards and outwards. To allow irrationality. To encounter the world, instead of trying to control and thus dominate it. To play, to experiment without having a fixed idea on where it might take you. This takes enormous courage.

This is a huge shift, as the focus on rational thinking has shaped the worldview of western culture as well as its institutions (e g universities). To transcend that idea would be transformative. One way of doing that is by growing potatoes. There are many other ways.

12

.....

I'm so happy to read that you have started to grow potatoes around your local community. I myself just became a garden owner and have been thinking about what to start to grow. However, I haven't gotten myself into it, before or after Corona-times, I just don't do it. I wonder if we have to have this rupture in our lives, like the Corona crisis, to start to do something truly meaningful, meaningful in a sense that it's now, it's harmless, it's valuable for life, life on earth. But I am sceptical. For me, the corona-crisis, has just given me more time to think about how I have not started the 'enormous' project of growing my own food.

Cynicism, we are all too cynical. I connected directly to you when you started to write about cynicism. My PhD project is about education for sustainability (ESD) in business schools where I have deep conversations with professors around meaningful education. My main finding is that we are too cynical to act. Too cynical to change, because we always believe that our change will not get us anywhere because *the others* are so bad. So, rupture or no rupture. We need something else. We need a new belief, the belief that we ourselves are the force of change, before it's there and before we know what it will be. We need to start to believe that I and the other are and can be true forces of change. You say 'change cannot happen until it happens' – but why so cynical? I think the change first happens with a new belief, a new view, before or after the skies are bluer or grass is greener. Even though the skies are more blue and the grass is more green now, in the middle of Corona, I believe that the real change is not here yet. We have put on pause in our machinery world where we all act as cogs, it doesn't mean that there is any change in our minds. There is no insurance that we will keep the skies blue, quite the opposite, the world is trying its best to get back to normal. Just like I am waiting to get back to work so I'll have more focus to write my thesis, the thing I am supposed to do, so I have less time to think about how I am not growing my own food. I believe that no change will happen until we stop being cynical. We are solely on pause, craving to get back to the same opportunities and the life we had before.

We might have time to think now, to reflect, but what will make us think differently? I do agree with you that we need to be able to go from control, from domination. I call my ESD project *From Control to Care*, where I teach in management. In management, we are always trying to manage the situation. I ask, what if we start to care about the situation instead? But for us to be able to get there we will need to start to let go, where we do not have to know the exact 'return on investment'. By writing my PhD I know that I will get my degree and a promise of a higher income in the future. By starting to grow my own food in my garden – uffff!! What if I take all this time from my writing to grow something that will perhaps not come up, or not be enough for a healthy diet for my family. Why bother, if I have to go to the store anyways. How much difference will it really make? But deep inside I know that it is meaningful, that it is one way to act towards something better. That I will harvest, perhaps more than the article I am trying to tailor around a journal. But I do not know if I'll have the stamina to do it until it will have an enormous impact on life on earth – while everyone else is climbing the career-staircase. Because I too am cynical, teaching my students to not be cynical. How pathetic.

Like you say, 'to experiment without having a fixed idea on where it might take you' it takes enormous courage. Do I have to be the hero? Do I have to start? You have started to grow potatoes and I will take it as an inspiration. I am still just thinking and writing about how everyone has to stop being cynical, being all too cynical myself.

13

.....

Transformation, what does that mean? I hear it all the time in my context. Business schools are transforming their education towards sustainable development. My PhD research is about three business schools in Scandinavia that have all committed to transform their education by signing the UN PRME initiative (Principles for responsible management education). The main narrative for that commitment are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which turns out to be an empty signifier in all its glory. It is everything and nothing at the same time. They make students hold big and squashy boxes with their favourite goal and put it on Instagram. Or make them do projects with big companies like Unilever or Ikea that all have 'outstanding' sustainability reports but at the same time are the biggest palm-oil and cotton buyers in the world. 'Any goal', they say 'you choose', and as long as they pick a goal to put on the power point - it's a success. Goal number 8 is the most popular. Economic growth, what can be more important than that? This, all this, while we live in a world where people are forced to drink dirty water, gorillas have no home any longer, whales are becoming storage for empty plastic bags and only twenty men in the world have more wealth than all the women in Africa.

Yes, it is easy to get cynical in my context. Our fairy-tale is about management and control, efficiency and consumption as the quality of life. It always becomes technical - about entrepreneurial heroes that find solution to everything that goes in the way of the machinery. How do we get from control to care?

I believe that education for sustainable development is much more about moral considerations rather than technical solutions. The questions are *non-technical*, like Hannah Arendt described the way out of the banality of evil. The problem with dealing with moral consideration in a scientific environment is that it doesn't guide us towards a specific goal. It leads us to the unknown. But to truly care and be a force of change we will need to stop being philistines and get the courage to go towards the unknown, towards something new, towards something more meaningful. And the meaningfulness will not be found

with science but what comes before – ontology of care instead of control. It is not enough to only be thirsty for knowledge for its own sake, we will have to care about where our knowledge takes us and what it will be used for. We will need to stop and think more. ‘Thinking, unlike scientist’s thirst for knowledge for its own sake, is a quest for meaning’ Arendt wrote in her essay on *Thinking and moral consideration* (1954). The universities have the responsibility to look for meaning. With more knowledge comes more power and with more power comes more responsibility. In every subject and in every discussion, the questions; (1) what kind of world do we want to build and (2) what kind of world do we want to support, should never be ignored or suppressed. We are always looking for the lesser evil, when we should be looking for the good. Never been as enlightened and never been as cynical. It is obvious to me that we need something else than more enlightenment. What we need is less cynicism and actually believe that we can be a force of change.

However, I wonder, who should lead this transformation in the universities when the most enlightened people are the most cynical ones. We are all too cynical to believe that we can be the force of change. Can a cynical person educate other persons out of this cynicism? How to start, not to find alternative but to stop being cynical and get the courage to experiment with things, even though it might not have clear and immediate results? How to stop being philistines? How to go from control to care? And most importantly, how to educate for it?

I don’t know the answers to these questions, but I believe in them. I believe in the questions, not the answers.

14

Lovísa's perceptive and impassioned letter raises important questions about the possibility of changing the nature of the university from focusing on learning to control to learning to care and changing critics from cynics to leaders in experimenting for emergence.

Let me riff on her letter with the following thoughts:

As Lovisa describes, most universities function as highly conservative institutions (though not all do so uniformly) that train people to follow in the existing traditions. Many explicitly promote innovation in technological forms, but do not at all or do not adequately prepare people to challenge existing and create new socio-technological patterns. However, at least a few universities or parts thereof with which I am familiar (Univ. of Chicago, Arizona State Univ, Leuphana Univ, Stanford) are sufficiently open and iconoclastic in some respects that in fact they may provide a rather special environment for launching independent creative enterprising thinkers/doers.

The traditions of universities have largely built on the Enlightenment with its expert enclaves and reductionist methodology. The sharp focus and depth of disciplinary sciences and scholarship are and will be important and necessary, but they are neither sufficient for addressing complex systems that are intrinsically inseparable into independent components, nor can science and technology any longer be treated as objective, rather than fundamentally normative.

I take the SDGs as somewhat more than “an empty signifier in all its glory.” They are also valuable as a global collective aspiration that includes societal change and not only biophysical limitations and technocratic solutions. They do not guide us to a specific goal – the goals are desired futures and the targets within each goal are there in a vague form for national fulfillment that in principle allow for acting in accord with local contexts and cultures. Yes, “green washing” and such diversionary tactics are prevalent, but they are not the only path that has been engendered in creating the SDGs.

I would prefer to modify the statement that “universities have the responsibility to look for meaning.” I suggest that the universities have a

responsibility to prepare its students and support its faculty in their own searches for meaning.

I wholeheartedly agree with Lovisa's call for us to believe in the questions, to experiment openly, and to educate for care. To expand on experimenting, I would say to learn to play with ideas, as well as things, in search of emergent ideas and to do that as not only a solitary, but also a collaborative process. The latter allows for collective creativity to build on merging of the "adjacent possible" (an abstraction of Stuart Kauffman's 1970s model of biological origins of life) in groups. Educating for care to me means learning to listen to the many different voices and knowledge holders in a sustained transdisciplinary process of doing science and scholarship that seeks to address the complex systemic risks we face now and into the future.

Ilan Chabay, 27 May 2020

15

Universities as Hubs of a Learning Ecosystem

The impacts at multiple spatial and temporal scales of complex global phenomena, including the current COVID-19 pandemic, are severely and often tragically disruptive of lives, economies, and social patterns. At the same time, they are also potentially generative of new opportunities to motivate and catalyze collective behavior change toward sustainable futures. What can be done under (or despite) the exceptional current circumstances to seize opportunities to change societal patterns and enable human societies to move on pathways to sustainable futures, including diminishing the negative impacts of pandemics and climate change?

Moving away from unsustainable practices and policies to sustainable futures entails changes in the way that people in all sectors, cultures, and contexts understand, perceive, and respond to the challenges they face now and in the future. People must understand the challenges in terms that are meaningful in their particular social, environmental, and economic context, if they are to become committed to individual and collective actions for sustainable well-being of the deeply interdependent social, environmental, and economic systems on Earth. How can academic knowledge and research, including social and natural sciences, humanities, and arts, together with cultural, procedural, experiential knowledge and recognition of democratic rights and responsibilities become accessible, salient, and compelling in ways that meaningfully engage all the diverse elements of society?

I imagine that this can be done in part by developing universities into hubs of a new learning ecosystem that expands their role to welcoming people throughout society in making sense of the changing complex challenges humanity faces. This means actively engaging with the larger community of people from early childhood through entire life spans. In such a university, learning becomes more of an adventure that takes curiosity and energy to explore new intellectual and relational spaces and reflect deeply on familiar ones. This is a constant shared

process for the cohorts of children, parents, youth, faculty, and administrators connected through the hub and simultaneously a unique adventure throughout each person's life. The university organizes intellectual, physical, and financial resources, brings together people in dialogues, creates and makes use of mixed reality and virtual reality games as boundary objects, and fosters collaborative projects to facilitate learning – importantly including those who support the learning of others, i.e., educators. The university as a learning ecosystem hub supports multiple communities of purpose, in which common interests, as well as divergent thinkers and holders of opposing views seek to find and effectively address points of common need and purpose. In this way, the university can help in building a broad pattern of collaborative processes in society that enable and prioritize learning to design for continual change, rather than falling back on fixing what is broken by restoring unsustainable past conditions.

In collaboration with diverse communities and stakeholders, the university as learning ecosystem hub becomes facilitator of the combined synergetic use of technology, social and natural sciences, art and humanities to design for continual future-facing change and thereby to catalyze collective behavior change on evidence-informed pathways to just and equitable sustainable futures.

Ilan Chabay, 27 May 2020

16

.....

9 June, 2020

Dear Ilan,

Thank you for the letter in which you set out your vision of ‘universities as hubs of a learning ecosystem’.

Reading your words, I remembered a scene in Alain Tanner’s film, *Jonas qui aura 25 ans en l’an 2000* (1976). The new history teacher plants a suitcase on the desk at the front of the class, pulling out a length of blood sausage, a chopping board and a metronome. To its relentless, mechanical ticking, he delivers a reflection on the experience of time, coiling like the sausage in his hands, and its transformation in modernity. Capitalism, he says, turned the cycle of the seasons experienced by agricultural societies into a corkscrew, with which the winners opened the bottles of ‘inferior’ cultures, drinking their fill, and then smashing the bottles. There is a new kind of violence here, he proposes, and with it comes a new fear – of the past, of the ‘inferior’ – that if these things should catch up with us, they would show us the same pitilessness that we have shown them.

Why does this come to mind now? Because I long to see us lose our sense of innocence, the stance that treats the university as a natural source for the individual and collective actions called for in the face of climate change and the other aspects of our current predicament. I long for a conversation that is grounded in a recognition of how often the disciplines and undertakings of the modern university have served as the sharp point of that corkscrew: the cutting edge of extraction, applied to the human worlds of culture and the more-than-human world of ecology, bringing devastation to both. I say this not to damn all that goes on within the walls of the academy, but because without the kind of reckoning such a conversation would imply, I can’t see how we start to salvage all the good that remains within the institutions and traditions we inherited. And – from where I’m standing, at least – it seems there’s much within those institutions that has a part to play in the work of re-

growing a living culture among the ruins, though perhaps not as dominant a part as they tend to assign themselves.

‘What if we imagined intellectual life as a peasant woodland,’ writes Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, ‘a source of many useful products emerging in unintentional design?’ As she acknowledges, this requires a ‘work in common’ that goes against the logic of commodification that now dominates academic institutions. In the latest issue of *Dark Mountain*, the journal I co-founded, Mat Osmond offers the image of a ‘nurse log’ within a forest: ‘a fallen ancestral giant slow-releasing nutrients, from whose decaying body a tangle of adaptive cultures is even now emerging’. He is thinking of this image in relation to the heritage of organised religion, but I offer it here as a glimpse of what it might mean for the university to take its place within an ecosystem.

Warmly,
Dougald Hine

17

.....

9 June, 2020

Dear Sue,

Greetings from the kitchen table in Västerås! Sitting with Keri's questions, I remember our conversation a few weeks ago over Zoom, where we had been asked to bring a 'thing' from the university we might need for a changing climate. I had brought this table – and you brought the smile that you had seen disappear from the faces of academics in the course of your career.

I used to talk about being part of a 'university in exile', a generation graduating around the beginning of this century, whose teachers warned us off the path they had taken. We found each other instead in pockets that lay on the boundaries of art, activism and technology. There was a year when I rolled all of this into a big story about creating a new kind of university, then watched it unravel. Since then, I've been learning to tell humbler stories about these pocket-shaped schools that grow up around a kitchen table or someone's garage or a patch of land on the edge of the estate, convivial institutions closer in size to a household than a corporation.

What stayed with me from our conversation, though, was your observation that the university in which your career began was made up of household-sized departments, loosely stitched together. This brought back childhood memories of the buildings where my father was a chaplain and my mother a mature student at Leeds University in the 1980s. And it gave me a bridge between that big story I used to tell and the work I've been doing lately with these small schools.

I don't have many answers to the questions we've been given. I'm glad to be invited away from approaching climate change as 'a technical problem', though 'a civilizational transformation' sounds like a euphemism! Not long ago, I crossed paths with a collection of thinkers who talk about 'rebooting civilisation' in response to climate change and

other threats. I realised that I'm interested neither in computing analogies, nor in 'civilisation', which feels like a grand story that has always left too much out.

Wendell Berry writes that the only possible 'manual for spaceship earth' is not a book written by a committee, but a hundred thousand local cultures. The university has been at the heart of the civilising project, but in conversations around the kitchen table, I imagine a network of pockets, hospitable to the social goods which have sometimes found a home in the university, whilst serving the regeneration of such an interwoven fabric of living cultures. I imagine that the kinds of knowledge it would value would be less placeless, less confident of their universality than the kinds of knowledge the university has mostly produced. (Perhaps what I have in mind is more a 'specificity' than a 'university'!) And I imagine that there would be laughter in those pockets, and smiles (as well as tears) in the gatherings it would host.

Perhaps we will meet there, one of these days!

Warmly,
Dougald Hine

18

.....

Dear Sanna,

Dougald's letter to me refers to the very good conversation he and I had about our objects during the Zoom small group session in May. He brought his kitchen table because he envisages educational institutions more the size that can sit around one table than a corporation. I brought a smile because I was sad that smiles had disappeared from the faces of colleagues and for me any future university needs to bring joy, excitement and be deeply satisfying. Otherwise the umph goes out of academia.

Dougald asked me when the smile left academia, and my immediate response was late 1980s. I was a new lecturer in the UK and suddenly colleagues were worried about the Jarrett Report, which argued that VCs should behave as CEOs and turn the university into of a company-like structure, with each department a competitive cost centre, tied into a hierarchy of leaders culminating in max. four reporting lines to the top. At the same time the first Research Assessment Exercise was held to audit our research output, followed in successive years by an Institutional Audit and then Quality Assurance to scrutinise our teaching and student support and assure the Thatcher government that their 'ratcheting up' of student numbers each year was not affecting quality. This is what Cris Shore and I call 'audit culture' and it has now extended to rankings and performance indicators and is a pervasive mode of standardising academic activities at the same time as it sets individuals, departments and universities in competition with each other. In my experience, disciplinary distinctiveness suffers from standardised measures, collegiality is only maintained as a determined form of resistance to the competitive ethos, and it is now the performance controllers who refer to themselves as professionals, and the capacity of academics to enact freedom as a social responsibility and according to their disciplinary ethics is eroded. This feels like a travesty of academia and a complete waste of intellectual and emotional effort.

How to get the smile back? I read Keri's questions, especially the sentence, 'Our challenge, though, is not simply to ask what tweaks we might need to make to our current imperfect institutions, but to examine, fundamentally, the forms of education, research, scholarship and engagement needed under these conditions, and to explore what the paths might be from here to these new forms'. I want to add what forms of organisation do we need in future universities? This is where Dougald's kitchen table reappears, and also your allotment, with its abundance that you have not planted and are not trying to (or able) to control. We know when we are in a setting that enables us to feel excited, committed, exploratory – truly academic! How do we create such settings organisationally? That's my question.

I've just been re-reading Gibson-Graham's *Postcapitalist Politics* with their examples of building community economies. I'm thinking, wouldn't it be interesting to approach a university as a community economy? To start by not treating the way universities are tied into capitalism as a coherent, homogeneous and coercive system – even though audit culture does feel that way - and instead look for the gaps or 'intimations of possibility'. I'm sure they called them 'spaces of hope' somewhere but I can't find the reference. I envisage people thinking reflexively about how to use the strengths of each discipline to build multiple local environments and then a matrix of conversations between disciplines – a kind of rhizomic network of kitchen tables – to shift metaphors. But that takes me back to your allotment – I envisage a future university as an over-abundance of exuberance that is out of control yet harvestable. I loved your picture and description of the allotment and I wonder how you would translate that great energy into the kind of university needed now, let alone in the future?

Warm regards,
Sue

19

16 June 2020

I find myself present in a rhizomic network of kitchen tables; there are people, ideas, and thoughts moving at different paces, multiple speeds, between, over, and through the tables, sometimes occupying a space or channel for a long time, otherwise fleetingly. There is circulation, life, unmanageable and uncontrollable; curiosity and *joie de vivre* fuel this dynamic ecosystem of thought. We are all paying attention to the patterns that emerge in this space, to the ways exchanges occur across the edges of tables, or how things circulate and morph in the veins of this network. This is how I start to imagine a university as a community economy, a thought that resonates with my imaginings of a university that cares.

Today, my smile waxes and wanes. The landscape around me consists of zombies and bands of resistance. Corporate ideology and bureaucratic relationships do their best to snuff out nurturing collegial ones (create more zombies!). My sense of the effects this audit culture grows daily. Many resistance groups are worn out, yet still trying to endure – trying to collaborate, trying to engage across disciplines, trying to change the narrative of Western higher education. But stations to refuel are scarce. This then sometimes plays out as reluctantly adopting techno-policy speak (for example, a Sustainable Development Goals check-list approach to wicked societal challenges) to please funders and leadership, or mapping out *exactly* how students shall pass courses – even if it means just pretending that they learned. It feels like a pretty dark place.

Heila (citing Morton) wrote that from dark places, renewal is possible. From the dark, can spaces of hope emerge? My sense is that spaces of hope are necessary, but not sufficient. Elizabeth Minnich, student of Hannah Ardent asks, how do we practice reflexive thinking that keeps us conscious? That keeps us away from auto-pilot (hello zombies!)? From being thoughtless? That keeps us not just awake, but aware? I think the potential of rhizomatic network is more than just as a

space of hope (at least how I conceive of this – a space to spot ‘intimations of possibility’). It is a space of interdependent attachments, where, through constantly weaving through it, we practice awareness. This awareness is performative; it is care.

It is this care that lies at the heart of an over-abundance of exuberance, but this abundance is wasted unless it is shared and distributed amongst the carers; we stop smiling, we experience emotional burnout. The ways care is realized are always relationally specific, and according to Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, this means that we must pay attention to the ‘requirements of an ecology, obligations of the practitioners, *and* their struggles’ (2017:164). We encounter each other at the kitchen table, meander between the tables, weaving new and tighter interdependencies, and over and over again observe our performance, building awareness. The forms this practice may take are unpredictable (as they should be!), but how to create them? Common practice in these networks must be listening to other [than human] voices, allowing spaces for things to grow wild, and, of course, sharing the harvest.

20

.....

16 June 2020

No templates exist for any present or future universities, just as they do not exist for an ecological life. Yet it is to ecological life that I think we can look to for inspiration in considering what elements might we need in a future university. In fact, I believe we need to look far beyond the walls of the academy, and down into the soil beneath our feet and trees over our heads. Here I reflect shortly on how the principles of permaculture have informed my practice and thinking recently, both practically in garden and process design, but also in thinking about how to design social and emotional landscapes that are more resilient than the current ones in which we exist. Permaculture is a holistic design practice guided by three ethics – earth care, people care, and future care – and its wisdoms are certainly not new, but have resurfaced in Western culture under this strange term of ‘permanent agriculture’. Creating designs that focus on the relationships *between* all elements in a system in ways that they support each other lies at the heart of permaculture design. How might this and its other principles be generative in our thinking for universities?

First, *observe and interact*. Thinking with this principle, we are invited to work in deep observation. We begin to notice the flows of energy of a place, of the animals, plants, people, ideas and build understanding of what influences this context. We see things in relation, rather than as isolated elements. We may begin to *notice patterns*, subtle relationships, surprises, and build curiosity and respect for our place. We slow down. What may emerge in academia while thinking with this principle? We find academic practices that do not obscure or discount ‘unproductive’ uses of time, that productionism does not determine value because we begin to tune in to the diverse timescapes of the earth (e.g. ‘soil time’) as Maria Puig de la Bellacasa suggests. These types of practices disrupt the restless and efficient anthropocentric temporalities of technology, giving space to ‘unproductive’ and slow experiences that have been marginalized by a

dominant futuristic drive. In doing so, we gently create explicit room for the unexpected and diverse means of participation. Valuable knowledge emerges in encounters – both planned and unanticipated.

This helps us to, secondly, *use and value diversity*. What if we started from a place of abundance and excess rather than scarcity? Devoted the academic landscape to growing as much diversity (rather than monocultures) as possible? In academic practice this might mean building course foundations using as many different ingredients as possible to encourage diverse communities of thought and being that support a healthy educational culture. It invites us to leave spaces on the course landscape for ‘wild’ things to occur, to allow space for the unplanned. Permaculture principles further encourage us to *use edges and value the marginal* since it is at the interface where often the most productive and diverse relationships occur. It is at the edge where new things come into being. There are plenty of ‘edges’ in the university (e.g. disciplinary), but we are sorely missing their potential. What other edges may exist where the diverse, beneficial, and wild could emerge in the university?

21

Dear Sanna,

You raise so many issues in your intricate letter to me - thank you! So much of what you say and so many of your ideas chime with me - your speaking of ecology, looking down (into the soil) and up (into the trees), ethics of care and Earth and future, conjoined elements in a system, flows, energy, flow of energy, relations, patterns, time-scapes, slowness, room for the unexpected, diverse means of participation, encountering, diversity, abundance, and wildness. What a cornucopia!

You start by observing - and I much agree - that 'no templates exist for any present or future universities'. Perhaps this is as it should be, not least given your hopes for diversity, abundance, and the unexpected. But how then might we move forward? It is surely to follow your implicit advice, to identify principles that might be 'generative' in our thinking for universities. And you offer us three, each of which is to the point and is suitably pointed: observe and interact; use and value diversity; use edges and value the marginal.

If I might be permitted, I'd suggest that there is an order into which the three principles could be placed and even embellished a little: value the marginal and use edges; observe and interact; and value and use diversity. That is to say that we may encourage diversity, abundance and the unexpected by (i) valuing diversity; (ii) encouraging it forward (by, for instance, emboldening and giving voice to the timid); (iii) using edges and liminality which requires (iv) observing matters very attentively and (v) providing spaces for interaction.

However, this conspectus poses a key challenge. First, what of power? Does not the implied lack of diversity spring from power that imposes limits? Which are the powers that lurk in the university and what limits do they impose? Superficially, which is not to suggest they are nugatory (quite the contrary!), we can cite instrumental reason and entrepreneurialism. Money talks, as they say but, insidiously, in expected the university to be a prime engine of cognitive capitalism,

knowledge is converted from being in-itself into being-for-economic return. In turn, it is the disciplines that are assumed to offer the greatest economic return that are favoured (the STEM disciplines). Using your metaphor, we may say that the humanities have fallen off the edge. This is now, it seems, a non-productive edge.

Power also accumulates in and around the management function (when it becomes managerialism), the drive for digitisation and in the pedagogical relationship, as student are consigned to units caught in the quest for learning outcomes.

So what are the prospects for your 'wild things' to grow? For many, only pessimistic readings are legitimate: the university in ruins, the crisis in the university, the toxic university (and so the dismal epithets go on). Is all bleakness then? No! That there remains room for optimistic offerings such as your own suggests implicitly that spaces still are present at least for hopeful imaginings. The question is this: could such imaginings constitute feasible utopias or are they destined to remain unrealisable?

Ron Barnett

London, 24 June 2020

22

Redesigning the University: geology needs topology

Dear Sharon,

For the event originally planned to take place in Sweden, Keri provided us, as preparatory homework, a paper by Bruno Latour, *'Is Geo-logy the new umbrella for all the sciences? Hints for a neo-Humboldtian university'*. The paper is a characteristic Latourian performance, with huge vistas, ideas, allusions, hints, histories, landscapes, worlds, the Earth and institutional dynamics tumbling on top of each other.

Two words of warning, if I may: the paper is not for the faint-hearted, even apart from its density. Firstly, catastrophe is not far away in its musings and the challenges in redesigning the university that it implies are formidable. Secondly, the Humboldt of which Latour speaks is explicitly not Willem (of university-founding fame) but his brother, Alexander, explorer and naturalist, and 'who was a major figure in the classical period of physical [geography](#) and biogeography—areas of [science](#) now included in the earth sciences and [ecology](#)'. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Latour puts us onto new ground for the university.

Latour suggests that humanity has its place *in* Earth, and by 'Earth' Latour means a narrow band of what we have thought of as the Earth. This narrow band of the Earth's crust has been especially the object of study of the geological sciences, which are now forming a 'new network of disciplines' and which could help us to reflect that not only are *we* in this Earth but - to extrapolate beyond Latour - this Earth is *in us*. But we have failed to understand this and so we need, Latour suggests, to land anew upon the Earth.

Universities are to be central to this quest and so Latour implicitly has a go at answering Keri's question: 'What university might we need [for] a civilisational transformation?' Latour answers with three lines of thought: public engagement as 'no longer an afterthought'; 'design, performance and data visualization'; and all disciplines turned towards

the Earth. In a single paragraph, Latour takes us beyond the natural sciences and breathlessly through sociology, political science, theology, the law school, anthropology and the humanities. Then he stumbles over philosophy, admitting that he has 'not enough imagination to invent ways in which ... philosophy could become earthly'.

Suppose we take up Latour's challenge in relation to philosophy. One way forward might lie in bringing the two Humboldtian brothers together, Alexander and Willem, the Earth and the Human. Philosophy would then become a critical discipline oriented to the examination of 'modes of existence' (to use another Latourian phrase) but not in a facile way. It would become a kind of linguistic cultural anthropology with imaginative and critical leanings, examining the *potential latent in concepts* that may be helpful in providing new imaginaries for the world *in* this Earth. In short, as well as the geology of which Latour speaks, we may say that we also need a topological mapping of thought and imaginings *on* Earth.

And the university itself? It would become an Earthly institution, with an agency and collective vitality deriving from its concern with the Earth in all of its manifestations, human and non-human; of the mind and of materiality; of institutions and persons; of science and of the humanities. It would be a site of *epistemic spaciousness*, at once open, critical, generous, optimistic and constructive with its collective feet on and even in the ground, even while confronted by a disconcerting world.

Ronald Barnett
London, 27 June 2020

23

Dear Ron,

It is always a pleasure to read your creative and capacious thinking about the university. In fact, you were one of the first people I encountered as a graduate student who modeled that it was possible to produce scholarship about higher education that exceeded the usual patterns of dutiful descriptions of ‘what is’, and narrow prescriptions for practice and policy within existing imaginaries. Also crucial to shaping my thinking was the decolonial work of Indigenous scholars and communities. Encountering Indigenous ways of knowing and being so unsettled the grounds of higher education for me that, many years on, I am still discerning what I have learned from this interruption and its call to responsibility.

In the case of this letter, I welcome your and Latour’s invitation to rethink the relationship between humans, the earth, and how that might inform the future of the university. In my response, I also draw on what I have been taught by Indigenous theories and practices, recognizing that my learning is partial, situated, and in no way represents the deep wisdom of numerous diverse Indigenous communities. After all, Indigenous education has always centered the earth as a living, thinking entity (of which humans are a part), and even frames the land itself as a teacher (Ahenakew, 2016; Marker, 2004; Simpson, 2014).

With my Indigenous colleagues in mind, I feel compelled to ask a question that I am confident you will receive in good faith, which is: does Latour really put us on new ground? Or is the same old ground, repackaged as something new? This is a genuine, not a rhetorical question, in part because I have not read the Latour piece, but also because I want us to think collectively about the ways that we tend to reproduce invisibilized colonial frames, even in our earnest attempts to imagine something different. Shall we return yet again to the European patriarchs of modern higher education and Enlightenment thinking for our inspiration? After all, the knowledge production of Alexander

Humboldt cannot be separated from its entanglement with the colonial project, whatever his personal feelings about colonialism may have been. This is not to say that he – or his brother, or Latour – have nothing to teach us, but that if we center them, we are missing the opportunity to “pluralize the future by pluralizing knowledge in the present [in order to produce] a better, more honest and wider range of options—material, ideational and normative—for human beings and societies to choose from” (Nandy, 2000).

There are many ways of reimagining the university, but what Indigenous theoretical interventions have taught me is that the modern university as we know it is just one, relatively recent, mode of organizing higher education that became nearly universalized largely through processes of colonization. Other forms of higher education have always existed, and continue to exist. Are we really reimagining if we return to the same foundations? Writing about critical approaches to development, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2006) suggests we need not just *alternative forms of development*, but also *alternatives to development*. Rather than alternative universities, might we imagine the possibility of alternatives *to* the university, inspired by multiple traditions of higher education (and by new ones that are viable, but not yet imaginable)? Perhaps alternatives that center no human thinkers, but rather the earth itself? I am hopeful that the answer is yes, but before any such imagining could be possible, we would need to declutter the colonial desires and assumptions that populate our conscious and unconscious minds.

I nonetheless wonder if this call to rethink relationships to the earth could be a generative starting point for conversations about higher education at the interface of different knowledge systems. What might we learn from bringing recent developments in Western thinking about the earth into conversation with long-standing Indigenous wisdom, honouring the inevitable tensions, complexities, contradictions, and incommensurabilities that will arise, without seeking to resolve them or arrive at a new consensus?

Warmly,
Sharon

24

Dear Isak,

In a recent [blogpost](#), Luis Prádanos asks, “[I]s it really smart to educate people to technologically and theoretically refine a system that operates by undermining the conditions of possibility for our biophysical survival?”. Prádanos argues that it is unwise to approach higher education in a way that presumes the continuity of our existing system, as this would ultimately cause us to exceed the limits of the planet. He suggests, “higher education would better serve students in particular and all humans in general if our teaching and research methods stop perpetuating the cultural paradigm that brought us to the brink of extinction and start encouraging students to imagine and create alternatives to it.”

We often assume that more critical knowledge and literacy about “the cultural paradigm that brought us to the brink of extinction” will prompt us to make different choices. But what if the choice to educate people for an unsustainable (and unethical) system has less to do with a lack of information about this system’s inability to ensure collective well-being, and more to do with enduring psycho-affective investments in the promises and entitlements that it offers? What if the primary barrier to reimagining higher education is not ignorance, but colonial attachments and desires? If this is the case, a commitment to imagining and creating an alternative university will not in itself necessarily lead to an interruption of satisfactions with the harmful promises that are offered by the existing university (including certainty and predictability; epistemic and moral authority; human exceptionalism; innocence; hope; and unrestricted autonomy). If we try to reimagine the university without first interrupting and “composting” our desires for and investment in these promises, then we risk taking them with us as colonial baggage into any alternative university we create.

While a growing number of people are fed up with existing universities, and eager to imagine and construct something new, what might be required is rather for us to have patience enough to sit with

and be taught by the limits of the institutions we have inherited so that we can learn from their mistakes and hold space for the difficulties of disinvesting from them, and of confronting their possible demise. This is why, rather than suggesting an *alternative university* in the face of current crises, perhaps what is needed is *alternatives to the university* (Santos, 2006). After all, the university as we know it is just one of many possible forms of higher education; although this institution has become globally hegemonic over the past several centuries, largely thanks to processes of European colonialism, other modes of higher education are not only possible, but continue to exist despite colonial efforts to eradicate them.

While it can be difficult or scary to imagine the end of the university as we know it, this would not mean the end of higher education full-stop; just the end of a particular (modern/colonial) mode of higher education. And this is a future that we might be facing whether we like it or not.

All my best,
Sharon

25

.....

Dear Sharon,

As I read your thoughtful letter I'm sitting at the window in my grandfather's art-studio, occasionally looking out over the vast mountain-heath that I love. This rough yet soft land is probably the place where I most easily feel at home in this world. It is a place that speaks, and listens. The old maps, with straight property lines drawn all over them, speak a very different language. A thwarted, meager representation, seemingly ignorant of the ecological and cultural history of this place. But what they do speak of, or show rather, is its colonial heritage. How also this land, the land of Sapmi, has been colonized, taken, privatized, fought over, subdivided.

Spending a sabbatical year up here in the mountain cabin that my grandparents built in the early 1950s, gave me a set of new friends among the people that now inhabit this place; and it showed me just how alive and variant these lines of conflict still are. The year also gave me ample time to reflect on my own family's history to this place - this remote and small 'piece of land', just by the tree line, that was bought, plotted out on the official property maps of the Swedish state, and where a small set of cabins now stand. How am I entangled, complicit in what this place has been, is and may become?

Your letter resurfaced some of these earlier thoughts of mine, but how do they really relate to the contents of your letter and questions concerning universities in a changing climate? I wholeheartedly agree that we need to interrupt and "compost" our desires for - and investments in - the harmful promises that are offered by existing universities. What I'm curious to explore is how that might be done, and which parts of us such practices and processes of (un)learning speak to. Do they speak to a part of us that is more than just our genetic make-up, family histories or cultural identities? Do they acknowledge our individual yet deeply relational, entangled (and mysterious) nature?

Having spent almost 15 years now struggling to shift (but also hacking, and at times perhaps even hospicing) educational practices

within Sweden's oldest (and most rigid?) university, I have also increasingly started looking outside the walls of current academic institutions for signs of a higher education that is relevant and more helpful for the times we now live in. What I have come to think is that perhaps it is not really new institutions that need to be built, considering the times we are in, but rather a form of rhizomatic alliances between initiatives and peoples - rooted in places, communities and ecologies, but nomadic in their thinking and learning. Something much less universalizing, yet more universal?

But what of the universities then? What if the end of the university as we know it means a transmutation into something even worse (some would perhaps argue that already has happened)? How long does one hold out, stand ground, undermine, salvage, compost in the hopes that something good still may come from within? And what else could we put our hearts and minds to?

Wishing you all the best from the tree line,
Isak

26

Dear Noah,

Just got off the online etymology dictionary where I looked up the following:

university (n.) c. 1300, "institution of higher learning," also "body of persons constituting a university," from Anglo-French *université*, Old French *universite* "universality; academic community" (13c.), [...] in Late Latin "corporation, society," from *universus* "whole, entire" (see [universe](#)).

universe (n.) 1580s, "the whole world, cosmos, the totality of existing things," from Old French *univers* (12c.), from Latin *universum* "all things, everybody, all people, the whole world," noun use of neuter of adjective *universus* "all together, all in one, whole, entire, relating to all," literally "turned into one," from *unus* "one" [...] + *versus*, past participle of *vertere* "to turn, turn back, be turned; convert, transform, translate; be changed"

In the response I just wrote to Sharon Stein's letter I reflected on the possible distinctions one could make between *universalizing* and universal forms of higher education. What strikes me now, in my etymologically induced sauntering of mind, is how very bold (or perhaps brash depending on how you look at it) the proposition of a university really is. With some jazzy cut and paste moves: An institution of the whole world, a body of persons relating to all, a society turned into one, an entire community transformed.

To me, the promise of the university lies perhaps most strongly in the idea of a body of persons, or a community where the universal and the particular, the representational and the generative, the sensuous and the intellectual can not only co-exist, but also be played out against each other – in a rhythmic drama of harmony but also in dissonance. The Swiss philosopher and poet, Henry-Frédéric Amiel, once said: "As

long as a university can renew itself, it is a living world". I would perhaps add that it is not only that it can renew itself that matters, or where it has its intellectual roots, but also in which ways it is in touch *with* the living world as it attempts to renew itself. And if we are speaking of a body of persons, or a community, rather than an institution, this becomes a more direct and useful question to each and everyone of us that find ourselves on a search for meaning or understanding. How are we in touch with the living world?

I'm reading *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture* by Italian philosopher Emanuele Coccia (2017). He argues that not only is our world and existence a direct product of plant life, but that plants are "the most intense, radical, and paradigmatic form of being in the world. To interrogate plants means to understand what it means to be in the world." So, not only do we have plants to thank for the transformation of matter, air and sunlight into a space of habitation (or the world in which we are suspended), but they may also offer us an ontological and metaphysical clue on what the world actually is, or could become.

How does this relate to my current sentiment of how the university that I find myself in could relate to the predicament turned back on us by climate disruption? Well again, I think the question needs to be asked also at the personal, day-to-day, very practical level, and will have a myriad of different answers. But perhaps Henry Miller was on to something more universal when he wrote:

*We must die as egos and be
born again in the swarm, not
separate and self-hypnotized, but
individual and related.*

27

Dear Isak,

I enjoyed your meditations on university and universality and the idea of being born again in the swarm – or in the verdant tangle of root, leaf, stalk and growth. (The Coccia book sounds really interesting, I'll try to get a hold of it.)

Thinking the university in terms of a community of the whole is a challenge for me and I appreciate that it pushes me. I tend to think of the aspirational universe of the university as the universe of the known and knowable. In fact, one of my regular complaints about the university I am at is that we sometimes get far away from the knowledge generation, knowledge sharing/transmission/co-construction aspect of the enterprise. I see this (1) with regard to pressure to customize student learning to professional employment outcomes, and (2) with regard to much that is done in the idiom of 'service'. It's all fine and good to open community mental health clinics and make biodiesel, etcetera, but at some point I begin to wonder if we become more of a social service agency than a university proper.

And that's where I like your thinking about the university as a body of persons or community on a search for meaning and understanding in touch with a living, changing world. I would agree that it is definitely important to weave the sensuous in with the intellectual and consider meaning and understanding to extend well beyond "knowledge" (with a nod to Foucault and also to Eve Sedgwick and what is sometimes called the 'affective turn'). However, 'community engaged in search for meaning and understanding in touch with a living, changing world' would also be a self-descriptor that any other number of entities might also plausibly claim. For example, I can think of some progressive protestant Christian congregations that would conceptualize themselves in the same way.

This makes me think about the university qua university and how the enterprise involves very overt striation and status differences within the body of persons that constitute it (people have specialized roles as

teachers, learners, administrators and so forth; some wear silly hats, others don't). Qua university, the enterprise also entails a particular historical relationship to knowledge as cumulative and as advanced only according to specific protocols. To me these are not features to be simply left-behind. While they need to be problematized, diversified and expanded, they need our continued engagement.

The university is a brash proposition and I am still deeply submerged in the question of whether the university is the kind of institution that will help humanity move beyond a 'fixing' approach to climate change. I'm tempted to make the argument that the activity we're all engaged in now is showing that the professoriat (its own separate institution) is the live wire, that which we can lean on to reimagine and advance proposals for regenerating our common world.

Looking forwards to continuing this discussion and seeing where it takes us all.

-Noah

28

.....

Dear Keri,

I am really enjoying this activity and grateful that you involved me in it. I also feel that with the UNESCO Futures interactions you and I are getting to know each other's thinking pretty well, which is a pleasure and huge enrichment on my side.

In the letter I penned to Isak a couple days ago I wrote a bit about the form of the university and its relation to knowledge. It is really fascinating right now to be at another organization that styles itself a 'knowledge organization.' To wit, UNESCO, though I imagine there are consulting firms and think tanks that also advance this same self-description claim. To be sure, UNESCO uses knowledge in very heterogenous ways within itself. It is decidedly not a university but has many of the same universal and universalizing proclivities that the etymological concept of the 'university' evokes – addressing all that is known and knowable, an ambition to encompass totality of possibility, plus intense righteousness about its own purpose ... At the moment I think I can best describe what happens at UNESCO through museum studies lenses of collection, curatorship and exhibitionary practices, though ask me again in a year and maybe I'll have a different schema for trying to make sense of it all! It may have been done already, but if not, there's a fascinating PhD project to be done on the history of the UNESCO library, what this has meant, and how it has shifted over the past 75 years.

I find the cueing questions you have raised to be really useful. In particular, the charge of thinking about spaces and practices that are needed to understand what it means to live as part of a troubled, complex and endlessly generative world. Of course, the invitation of this exercise is also, in part, to think about universities as one such set of potential spaces. So, I suppose my first observation on this is that, in contrast to the vast majority of higher ed scholarship, we take care to ensure that universities are granted no exclusivity in this (or any other) task. We might think of ways that universities can help to support /

generate support for other spaces that will help generate the kind of understanding you have pointed to. And, frankly, might also want to think about spaces the university should leave well enough alone!

I love the challenge of thinking about what sorts of knowledge a reset collective conversation about climate change would require. For certain some would come from academically oriented research (for me, Arjun Appadurai's definitions of the Western research imagination is a spot-on diagnosis). Surely culture and the arts also will supply some of that knowledge. As will indigenous and other cultures. As will the archives of past human civilizations. And, and, and – but of course it needs to be mobilized and made meaningful.

For whatever reason, I often think of an installation piece by Walter De Maria called *Broken Kilometer*. It's on lower Broadway in Manhattan and consists of 1000 meter-long brass rods laid out in rows in a large room in the center of New York City. So, since 1979, we have devoted a rather large space in one of the world's priciest and most important global metropolises to a collection of pieces of metal! Crazy. I've always thought of it in these terms: some people with influence and means decided that it is useful to keep around as a stimulus to human reflection, presumably because there is some perceived value in thinking about time, wholeness, human endeavor, etc... I most often think of the *Broken Kilometer* when my university puts money in my bank account when I am on sabbatical or between semesters or even during semesters: that I too am being 'kept' because there is (God let us hope!) some value in what we do from the ivory tower rooms of Brittany, Chicago, New Hampshire, Paris. Of course one could say that trying to be more socially useful than 1000 brass rods is setting a low bar. (And I'm sorry for the awful pun, it just came to me and I can't make it go away)

-Noah

29

Dear Noah

I'm reading your letter and chuckling to myself at your pun and at your image of the insanely expensive broken bars kept - for the edification of who, you don't say - in Manhattan. And this and the rest of your letter have sent me off in so many different directions that what I would really like right now is a long conversation in a french bar with a cold drink. But as that is not forthcoming in our current times... here are slightly more words than I should be writing.

With your image of the broken bars and parallel with your sabbatical, you invite me to think about universities as being 'kept'. Which makes me ask - what else is 'kept'? Pets? Old books? Lovers? Tame things that won't cause too much trouble. Something for which there is deep love but which cannot be acknowledged. Things that are useless for now but might come in handy later on. Which sort of 'kept' – dusty, loved, wild - are we in universities? Do we even know? And do these different forms of 'keptness' bring different responsibilities? You invite, with this analogy, reflection on both the utility and the responsibility of the university. There is a sort of crisis of confidence in your bracket "(God let us hope!)" that I think goes to the heart of what I also am trying to wrangle with when I ask what the role of the university is in the era of climate change, a wrangling with privilege, with responsibility, with love and with utility.

My first instinctive response to your question is to work out how to understand how and where universities are useful. But is this the right direction? It leads into dangerous territory – does everything have to be useful? There is much in the world that does not seem immediately useful but is fundamentally necessary to what it means to be alive, that we are destroying. Is it possible, I wonder, to have a conversation about universities and their responsibilities that does not fall into the language of modernity-efficiency that has destroyed so much of what is necessary to the world (I'm thinking here of mass industrial farming). Is there a

language that allows us to argue the case for protecting the necessary but not efficient – *without in so doing*, simply bolstering the privilege of, for example, wealthy Manhattanites wishing to proclaim their enlightenment through their keeping of expensive art works?

Perhaps the only basis upon which an argument for ‘keeping’ free forms of inquiry, such as those to which universities are in theory committed, is if there is evidence that in so doing, they also increase the collective human capacity for such inquiry. If not, are they, like the protected space of the expensive art gallery, just the safe space to tame unruly questions, the space that allows a society to *think that* knowledge and exploration is what it values? Is a knowledge institution without easy access to entry to all possible students, without the respect and care for other knowledge practices, without a committed, activist defence of the collective human capacity to ask hard questions, just a safety valve? Almost more dangerous than not existing at all? Does ‘the university’ without these commitments become the thing that we need to defend ourselves against, if we wish to create conditions for collective human inquiry? I don’t know, but I wonder. You gesture towards this in your letter. There is more for us to talk about here.

Yours, looking forward to continuing the conversation.

Keri

30

Dear Injairu

I hope you are well! I'm so pleased to be writing to you; since reading your work earlier this year, I have been looking for an excuse to be in contact – and here we are.

So, in this letter I need to respond to my own provocations from 4 months (a lifetime..) ago at the start of the pandemic. In that provocation – I asked *'what if we consider climate change not a technical problem but a civilisational transformation'*. Oh – I have to admit that those words tire me today – I know what I was getting at when I wrote them – the desire to not just focus on science and technology but on questions of beliefs and culture – but today I feel exhausted just thinking about them, about the sheer work and labour that they would require. About the sort of mentality of 'managing change' that they risk implying. They just feel like the wrong place to start. I don't know how to answer my own question.

So – perhaps I start somewhere else. I've spent the last couple of days sitting at the back of my house and reading papers on posthumanism and cyborgs and calls for entangled human/machine/planet concepts of identity. While I've been doing that, I've been watching two men dance their tractors around the fields, cutting and lifting hay in clouds of seeds, dry soil and stalks in the sun, bailing it into giant rolls, lifting them onto tractors. It's been a display of the mechanic virtuosity of industrial monocultural agriculture and there has been a deep pleasure and a deep sadness in watching it. Inside, I've been working my way through the intellectual virtuosities of monocultural feminist science studies, a reading that brings its own pleasures and frustrations. And as both of these worlds have been unrolling in front of my eyes, I've become deeply, physically aware of the gulf between them – of the profound, fundamental ruptures between these different ways of living. And I've been wondering - should these virtuosities stay in their own separate worlds, or can we collide them? What would happen if they met? How could a conversation be conceived between them?

Would understanding be possible? Perhaps it is only in that sort of collision, and myriads like them – between the physicist and the acupuncturist, between the engineer and the basketweaver - that we might begin to imagine a form of collective human inquiry capable of giving birth to ideas that, within them, may have seeds of different ways of living.

I don't know how to answer my own question, but I have an instinct of where we cannot start. We cannot start with an acceptance of structural, physical, political alienation from each other, of strangeness that breeds distrust, of a world of green zones, and safe areas, and no go zones, of a practice of comfortable self-isolation amongst friends. We have to remember, again, what it means to be in public talking with strangers and begin to find the common work together to allow us to companionably, convivially, recognise that we are alongside each other, alongside our tools and our technologies, and alongside the other beings on the planet. In other words, I wonder if the slow process of just learning to live together is not the first task we need to attend to right now.

Sending you all my best, Injairu
Keri

31

.....

Keri,

It is interesting that your initial contemplations asked questions about belief and culture. I feel a lot of resonance with that and also with the tiredness that comes with mobilising within that inquiry. And yet when I circle the layers of issues as they present themselves, the climate, the pandemic, the future and the question of what the role of education can play I can't get away from how pervasive our muscle memory is! How our ways of being that stem from inherited beliefs and cultures across times scupper us from understanding or feeling the magnitude of what our collective actions continue to create - even (and sometimes especially) when we are well intentioned. We are sometimes like that machine that keeps powering through the fields.

I am additionally astounded that our collective hurt continues to polarise us, and I really wonder what kind of holding allows us to forego the swag of an oppositional focus towards the gritty work of trying to live into a more honest appreciation of how we are all in this together. I mention this swag because it feels like it has become an important cultural currency to perform our indignation with each other without the additional work of considering how entangled we are with it all. As Alice Walker once said, "you can't curse a part without cursing the whole" yet I am aware that sometimes our conscious or unconscious cursitory glances towards each other, other beings and different ways of knowing has come to hold a illusionary veneer of "power over" which is a great hangover of a paradigm of war and its conditioning. I think we have failed to adequately conceptualise what decolonial love could be.

A thought struck me when I read your letter that I think links back to the questions of belief and culture. For all the critical thinking about the Anthropocene and the desire as you put it to have more entangled human/cyborg/ machine identities- it strikes me that I never really considered the question of our collective humanity. How do we describe what it means to be human? Is this just a taken for granted category that our common genetics helps us pass? I am reminded that within

some mystical spiritual traditions like the Gnostics the word Anthropos signals something we as humanity are yet to fully become. That it signals a wholeness that continues to evade us through our outworn and fatalistic separatist focus. It asks questions about what humanity and humaneness is with the invitation to move more fully into who we are. Seeded within this vision is an optimistic inference that what we have what it takes- a mighty affirmation that requires a pedagogical focus on what it means to work ourselves open towards this.

What if we were to perceive ourselves as the Neanderthals of our age, as archaic humans in some way still becoming more of who we are? How would that help us be with the frustrations and grief that our inevitable gatherings that we must attend to? What if we were to consider all the foolery that ancient rocks have witnessed when it comes to the journey of the human. How would that make us sit with these questions and approach our 'civilisational transformation'. Perhaps we need to laugh a whole lot more about human folly and be more humble, radically generous and kind in the way we invite our regeneration.

Your naming of the alienation that keeps us separate feels to me like an invitation to become more human, it signals that there is still much to realise within and between us despite how progressive we think we are. Maybe we don't know who we are and we need to launch experiments to explore this. The question of whether understanding between us 'would be possible' takes me into the heart of many impasses that I can perceive and have experienced in the context of South Africa where I believe that sometimes the pace to truly sit with and try to understand each other is a capability we often shirk and deride, something despite our deep hurts that we seem to not have enough time, stillness and will for. What seems like an easy task in its naming; 'living together' conceals the deep pedagogical work massaging of ontological shifts beyond what we have been geared towards. How ready are we to die to ourselves in some ways in order to birth what still may lie in exile in our humanity? This is what your letter brought up for me.

Thank you for the ruminations.

All the love!

Injairu

32

Dear Jan,

From where I sit the alienations and dissociations produced by modernity sit squarely in the imaginations of African youth. As I write this I am aware that my nieces of 6, 8, and 10 years old in Kenya are subject to some of the same curriculum content that I was subject to in my primary school years in the late 80's! I watch their Dad (my brother) help them with their homework where they are asked to complete very English similes. Lebohang my niece repeats out loud, as white as snow. As good as... gold. A is for... Apple. These sentences these things, snow, gold, even apples have little to do with her current reality in Kenya and yet it is considered the knowledge that she must know and affirm in chorus. We are often taught to step away from ourselves. That our world isn't THE world that we should strive to be a part of.

All of this compounds in my mind when I consider how much work I have had to do personally to be able to see the environment in my life, to see and nurture my relationship with nature and to read the current 'climate' in the face of this kind of alienation. And it weighs even more heavily when I think about the intergenerational work that sits withing my matrilineal and patrilineal lines in terms of dissociations with land and the ways of knowing that preserve its balance. I have witnessed the pervasive affect of the move away from the earth and in the moments when I get to witness my niece's education I aware of how this phenomenon is still replicating itself.

This year in the face of the pandemic the Kenyan Government has decided to suspend school till 2021 and for the first time ever the girls are at home on a very different schedule listening curiously about what is happening around them. I am interested in what this pause can bring them in their knowledge of themselves and the world around them. This got me thinking about education as an important pause outside of the strident metronome of modernity's idea of time.

Let's fast forward and observe this same phenomenon but at the level that our convening conversation asks of us. The University? What

of that? When one perceives the cumulative impact of public schooling whether in Kenya or in South Africa the ground swell of young people that we know are making their way to Universities as a way of working towards the aspirational values that neo- liberalism inculcates...When we consider what they have gone through to get there(!) and what is waiting for them in these times it all becomes rather paradoxical. In my experience as an extended studies teacher who worked primarily with young students from public schools who didn't quite make the grades for University but are sent anyway in the hope that they can catch up, the alienation was palpable. As well as the hopeful expectation for something to happen: that this education could spell an entry into an alternative future. Despite the demands of sociology and politics 101 curriculum and its inability to meaningfully bring into discussion the realities that people face in their lives, the greatest moments of presence came from taking the pause to unpack and be witness to all who were gathered in that class. Where they come from. What dreams they hold. How are they navigating at the edge of their praxis. What holds meaning for them, and how do we put these intuited feelings in conversation with what is happening in the world. This for me is a process of seeing into how the experiences of many hold within them a deep understanding of the greater dynamics at play.

I feel that the university of the future could be a place to pause and to have the patience to unravel the momentum that brings us to it with such hope. It feels like a place outside of the moving train of aspirational values and upward mobility into a far more subtle and nuanced conversation about our fatalistic programming. A place to recoup from the time that is chasing us, to find other ways of being within and outside pace of modernity. A place to recover the intuition and the skepticism that wants to poke at the underlying nature of things. A place to come back to earth and maybe to experience ourselves as integrated beings with a past and present that have yet to decide truly for ourselves what a regenerative future could be? I am longing for an extended place to catch ourselves and breathe, to think the thoughts that ask us questions about who we think we are in the world and what we count as our relations.

Without this pause I don't know how we can come into the present outside of the conditioning pressures that continue to produce a vision of the future that was never viable. Vulnerable, open, together hanging in the balance -just like every living thing- when can we access the reality of this as an important part of our education. Perhaps this can help us feel into the freedom and possibility to choose what could be

regenerative- beyond the rational logics that assume that there is no other way. I dream of this kind of watering hole for young Africans, for us to detox and come into our wild ways through decolonial rites of our own choosing.

Warmest wishes and thank you reading these rambles,
Injairu

33

.....

First of all I have to apologize for my very late reply. As every year in summer I have been caving high up in the karst mountains of the Picos de Europa in Spain. It is a place where since more than thirty years, within the huge graveyard that karst is – and the huge archive of climate development and forms of life, including that of humans, - I “consider all the foolery that ancient rocks have witnessed” as you so wonderfully phrase it, Injairu. We are exploring deep caves with entrances at high altitudes, sometimes also staying underground for some days. This year I had an accident, a large block falling from high up while I was climbing a rope, no way to escape. Fortunately it only touched me on my knees but it was a big block and I was seriously hurt (even if, happily, nothing was broken). It took some time to get back to the surface and then to recover and get back in the mood and shape to take up ‘work’. I am not only writing this as support for my apologies for not responding earlier and because caves are since long important in my life, but because caves offer us, as Michel Serres indicated, also a particular place and ‘image’ of what our ‘knowing’ (‘science’) and our existence are about. It is not about ‘enlightenment’ by the sun, - the bright light outside the cave being rather more akin to a metaphor for ideology and for the permanent stage on which today we have to ‘increase, enhance, raise our visibility’ as researchers, teachers - but about the little light that enables us attend to something in the dark (cave) that helps us to navigate, to make and find a way. Being dark, being out-of-time (a pause – Injairu), being a graveyard and archive of (not written) traces, but also populated by all kinds of creatures caves almost ‘naturally’ confront us with the question: (not how to profile myself but) “where we are” - ‘où nous sommes?’ Which was according to Simone Weil the crucial question of a *concrete* philosophy, and please note that it is not ‘où sommes nous?’; but ‘où nous sommes?’ implying that it is a question regarding the condition of our existence as always a shared condition, hence also the issue *with whom?* Which also immediately elicits the question: ‘how to live together?’ with all the ‘whom’, with the ideas,

critters, concepts, new life etc. that our study/science dis-closes (or even creates)? With what they have to 'say'?

I think that we could conceive of the university not as an institution, but as a particular pedagogic form (not an ivory tower but a cave indeed) that confronts us with these two questions (Injairu you refer explicitly to this pedagogical focus and the 'living together') and hence can make us think (not only know, see the distinction made by Arendt that Lovisa reminded us of). Hence, what we might need, as Isabelle Stengers suggested, is not so much mission statements, SDG's, or moral/ethical declarations and judgments (going often together with cynicism? - Lovisa), but rather 'technical stories' about concrete practices that make university as a particular way (since it is not "a social service agency" - Noah) to give things the power to make us think, which certainly has to do with "making harmful implications visible" (Vanessa) and "to be able to see the environment in my life" (Injairu). To give them the power to "unblock our ears, our eyes, our hart" (Karen), to create "an important pause of the metronome of time" (Injairu). Hence, not to facilitate but to complicate learning. Technical stories about how to gather "around a (kitchen) table" (Dougald) and how "to be in public talking with strangers" (Keri) - not forgetting that also fossils, viruses and landscapes are strangers to talk with and to be invited.

This is also why I am grateful and really like what we are trying to do here and to what you invited us, Keri – the art of invitation being maybe part of "the art of organising hope" (Ana). Even if I am always slow – and now really too late in responding – I think that it are these kind of practices (somewhat in the dark) that contribute to 'renew' (Isak) the university.

Warm regards and see you soon
Jan

Counting the Conversation

Keri Facer

34

After the letter conversation, we talked once again online in September 2020. By this point our energies were elsewhere, we were regrouping and finding the places where our work was most useful and being dragged or summoned into new ways of being and teaching during the pandemic.

Keri was left looking at the letters, wondering how to make sense of them in the same way that the holder of a conversation might attempt to tie threads together after three days of meetings.

This is what came out. It is a playful short meditation (produced with the assistance of Nvivo) on what was emerging when we attempted to answer the question: What is the role of the university in the era of climate change?

It is not the final word on what we discussed nor the end of the conversation.

Nine loves, five fears, three pleasures

Between us we namechecked:

Nine loves, five fears, three pleasures (why so few?)

We talked five times of 'courage', and eight of 'heart'.

Twenty one hopes (with added exclamation marks!)

But also of moving beyond hope,

against hope

'I don't want someone to tell me this can be fixed in order to give me hope'

We talked of

Ten pain, three suffering, three terrifying, three uncomfortable, six vulnerable, four alienation

And twenty one cares.

Change is called for sixty nine times

This (may be) provisional: 45 mights, 26 perhaps...

Progress (3) is only a fleeting visitor these days

Instead, transformation/transforming/transformed (43) is on our agenda

- even transgression (5)

31 starts, 10 stops, three resistance

We talk of futures (36) more than the past (9),

but heritage, history, histories (11) are still present,

as are grandparents (3).

We are fond of images/inations/inings, re-imagining (42)

of possible/ity (30),

of alternative/s (26).

Impossible (5) is rare

But not idea/s (18) and inspiration (6)
We wonder (10) and talk of visions (7)
Of creativ/ity (32).

Knowledge and knowing (60) matter.
Whose knowledge?
Indigenous (16)?, Disciplinary (15)?
The knowledge of researchers (27), scholars/hip (10), science/tific (26).

Our universities as we talk about them
are still about
Students/studies/study (46)
And about teachers and teaching (18)
– but more than this (numerically at least)
about thought and thinking (58)
and understand/ing (31)

This is not a post-human conversation.
It concerns institutions (31), departments (35), work (33)
people (43) and relating/relational/relationships (41).
It is about society/societal/societies (23).

Above all – it is a conversation worrying away at what it means to be
human/s/humanity (54)
and to be alive/life/living/lives (78)
in a world (59)
in crisis (27).
What does just/ice (38)
look like?

The 'others' are here too, underneath it all.
Earth/the earth (28), water (19) land/landscapes (21) all make an
appearance
4 orca, 7 potato/es, 3 salmon, 3 skies, 5 mountains, 6 plants
– are summoned to the conversation.

New household gods are namechecked like football results:
Arendt 3: Bellacasa 2
De Sousa Santos 5: Latour 16
Bloch 4...

And amongst it all are nestled
Three Apocalypse and eight however's.



Ekoln

The reference in Heila's letter is to:

McGarry, D, L. Weber, A. James, I.Kulundu, T.Pereira, S.Ajit, L.Temper, H. Lotz-Sisitka, T. Macintyre, T.Villarreal, S. Moser, R.Shelton, M.Chaves, K. Kuany, J.Cockburn, L.Metelerkamp , S.Bajpai, S.Bengtsson, S.Vermeulen, E.Turhan and T. Khutsoane (in press) The pluriversity for stuck humans: a queer, decolonial school eco-pedagogy. - In Russel. J. *Queer Ecopedagogies: Explorations in Nature, Sexuality, and Education*. Springer. Springer Press. NYC. (due to be released July 2021)

Please cite as:

Facer, K., Barrineau, S., Andreotti, V., Barnett, R., Chabay, I., Dinerstein, A., Eiríksdóttir, L., Hall, B., Hine, D., Kulundu-Bolus, I., Lotz-Sisitka, H., Masschelein, J. O'Brien, K., Stein, S., Thiel, P., Webster, N., Wright, S (2021) *The Ekoln Letter: A conversation on universities in the era of climate change*, Uppsala: Zennström Initiative in Climate Change Leadership, <https://climatechangeleadership.blog.uu.se/2021/03/23/the-ekoln-letter-a-conversation-about-universities-in-the-era-of-climate-change/>

Our thanks to:

The Zennström Initiative in Climate Change Leadership at Uppsala University for funding the ongoing work in this area. For more information on the Initiative's work on universities and climate change, as well as other climate change related activity, see : <https://www.geo.uu.se/climate-change-leadership>