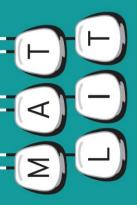Materialidades da Literatura

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The Heaviness of Light
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ABSTRACT

This text explores the material implications of electronic reading and writing in the Anthropocene. It does so by briefly examining the consequences that the production and usage of electronic devices has on ecosystems and social contexts. Different perspectives on how a reader or writer may deal with the negative effects of sociotechnical systems are offered: restraint, pharmacological awareness and togetherness. Such perspectives can be transformed into reading and writing tools for the Anthropocene that may allow readers and writers of electronic literature to integrate the notion of an extended community, that is, an intimate and paradoxical complicity with nearby and remote humans and non-humans, and invite them into the digital text.

KEYWORDS

community; technology; Anthropocene; pharmakon; writing.

RESUMO

Este texto explora as implicações materiais da leitura e escrita eletrónicas no Antropoceno. Faz isso examinando brevemente as consequências que a produção e o uso de dispositivos eletrónicos têm nos ecossistemas e nos contextos sociais. São oferecidas diferentes perspetivas sobre como um leitor ou escritor pode lidar com os efeitos negativos dos sistemas sociotécnicos: contenção, consciência farmacológica e sentido de comunhão. Tais perspetivas podem ser transformadas em ferramentas de leitura e escrita para o Antropoceno que permitam aos leitores e escritores de literatura eletrónica integrar a noção de comunidade alargada, ou seja, de uma cumplicidade íntima e paradoxal com humanos e não humanos próximos e remotos, convidando-os a entrar no texto digital.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

comunidade; tecnologia; Antropoceno; *pharmakon;* escrita.

I. WHERE WE ARE (PART 1)

The insomnia of neoliberal reason produces digital monsters. The *fierce mathematization* of life (Berardi, 2012) began long ago, at the moment when humans assigned a number to each hour of the day, and to each year of their lives (Marcuse, 2010). Yet today, the digitalization of every recess of our existence and coexistence with others has become a suffocating reality. Through *total computability*, numbers have become the ultimate truth: an abstract hegemony that collapses contexts and erodes human languages, imposing upon them combinatorial, connective and operational rules that render them efficient and functional, and transform them into raw data to feed economic transactions. It is precisely upon this scenario where electronic literature takes place. It is precisely in the thick of this increasing abstraction where we stand as a community. However, abstraction, or *dematerialization*, often wrongly identified as the *essence* of the digital, finds its contradiction in an exacerbated materiality that deviously escapes our perception. That which is often described as *immaterial*, in a rather myopic and naive fashion, is only the final manifestation of complex assemblages of all sorts of agents and materials, hidden behind the veil of heavy clouds.

And these clouds taste metallic: 36% of all the tin, 25% of all the cobalt, 15% of all the palladium, 15% of all the silver, 9% of all the gold, 2% of all the copper and 1% of all the aluminum produced each year are used in the manufacturing of our electronic devices (Parikka, 2014). The average smartphone, for example, contains 13.7 grams of copper, 0.189 of silver, 0.028 of gold and 0.014 of palladium per 100 grams of material, together with other significant minerals such as cobalt, lithium, nickel, tin, zinc, chrome, tantalum and cadmium[1]. Yes: mining is experiencing a renewed glory, thanks, in part, to our endless hunger for digital devices, and thanks, also in part, to the way in which we now read, code and write. Here, we click. From beneath the Earth's crust, they extract minerals.

But let's admit that the global mining industry is not renowned precisely for its good practices. Let's look at two examples. In "The Looting Machine," journalist Tom Burgis traced the impossibly dark and twisted pathways of African mining:

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[1] http://www.greatrecovery.org.uk/resources/haute-clutture/ (retrieved 16.05.2017).

Militias and the Congolese army directly control some mining operations and extract taxes and protection money from others. Corrupt officials facilitate the trade. The *comptoirs*, or trading houses of Goma on the border with Rwanda, orchestrate the flow of both officially declared mineral exports and smuggled cargoes. Other illicit routes run directly from mines across the Rwandan and Ugandan borders. UN investigators have documented European and Asian companies purchasing pillaged Congolese minerals. Once the ores are out of the country, it is a simple step to refine them and then sell the gold, tin, or tantalum to manufacturers. The road may be circuitous, but it leads from the heart of Congo's war to anywhere mobile phones and laptops can be found. (Burgis, 2015: 33)

Meanwhile in Mexico, the country where I was born, chemical products used in mining operations are polluting vital water sources, negatively impacting the health of about 70% of the exposed population (Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez, 2014). Mining not only affects the health of humans and ecosystems but, in a truly neocolonialist fashion, it also disrupts the country's economy. After NAFTA, and the subsequent reforms made to Article 27 of the Mexican constitution in 2013 (Guillén, 2014), the activity of foreign mining companies has greatly intensified, bringing an unprecedented plunder. Data compiled by the Red Mexicana de Afectados por la Minería[2] (REMA) reveal that, since NAFTA came into force in the 90s, 450 tons of gold have been extracted from Mexico: almost three times the amount extracted during the 300 years of Spanish domination (Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez, 2014). This enormous outflow has particularly benefited Canadian and North American companies, who hold almost 85% of all private mining concessions, and therefore can be regarded, in practical terms, as a binational monopoly. Yet these companies pay less than 1% of their profits in taxes to the Mexican government, who has actively encouraged and even safeguarded this pillage, by mobilizing military and police forces to protect the interests of foreign mining companies from the active resistance of the affected populations (Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez, 2014).

II. OUR EXTENDED COMMUNITY

But what do these issues mean to us, the electronic literature community? How are we supposed to make sense of such an overwhelmingly complex state of affairs that, nevertheless, presses on us from every side? As we gather here, the clouds gather too, as the poet JR Carpenter has warned us.[3] They loom ever darker over our heads, beneath our screens. They shift shape, morphing from

2 Mexican Network of People Affected by Mining.
3 *The Gathering Cloud* by JR Carpenter. http://luckysoap.com/thegatheringcloud/ (accessed 24.06.2017).

allegory and metaphor into the concrete, breathable *cloudness* of gases and suspended particles. As artist Joana Moll reminds us in her piece CO2GLE,[4] the seemingly harmless act of navigating the digital cloud results in measurable quantities of greenhouse gases, emitted by servers located throughout our planet. So, how do we connect the disruption of the Earth's ecosystems, as carried out by the extractive industries in the Congo, Mexico and elsewhere, or as provoked by our daily online activities, with electronic literature? Let's explore these interconnections together.

But first of all, a warning: this exploration will not be an exercise of self-destructive guilt. It would be absurd to affirm that the damage done by mining and the burning of fossil fuels is deterministically caused by our increasing consumption of energy and electronic gadgets, and therefore that we are to blame. Yes, we do play an active role in this cyclopean mess, but the system is too entangled to establish deterministic causalities. The different sources of materials used in the manufacturing of our devices, for example, are notably difficult to trace. Trying to do so would entail a deep, and perhaps even dangerous research. Furthermore, if the pillaging of the Earth were not enough, there are also other dark clouds: the suicidal suffering of workers who assemble electronic components in Asia under conditions of slavery, or the increasing intoxication that practices carried out by public and private consortia such as covert digital surveillance, massive psychological manipulation on social networks, or the commodification of our data, have brought to our technological environment. We live, work and communicate in a hijacked utopia. Yes, we need justice. But we also need to keep on walking, and for that we need to get rid of the burden of guilt.

Secondly, I will avoid the easy path that leads to the outright condemnation of electronic technologies. Let's not fall prey to reductionist dichotomies, such as *good versus evil*, or *love versus hate*. The aim of the *other* path we are about to take, I want to emphasize, is to come close to a different, more nuanced understanding of technology. It is therefore my intention to propose and discuss a number of questions that may help us move beyond incapacitating entanglements: the question of restraint, the question of cultivating a pharmacological consciousness of technology, and the question of togetherness.

In this text, I will explore these questions from the point of view of the *community*. It has become all-too-common to find the notion of *community* being uncritically summoned as a purifying lotion even in the most unexpected environments, such as corporate marketing or the financial sector. But we must be cautious: it is precisely because this notion is undergoing such a thorough abuse that we run the risk of readily assuming that we know what a community is. But what is a community? Or, perhaps more interestingly, what forms of existence can a community bring forth?

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4 *CO2GLE*, by Joana Moll. http://www.janavirgin.com/CO2/CO2GLE_about.html (accessed 24.06.2017).

Of the many possible definitions of community, the one I prefer is that which says that a community is a group of people who share a common set of symbols, but not necessarily a common set of meanings (Cohen, 1985). Contrasting with other notions of community which focus on social structures, I find that this symbolic approach offers a high degree of flexibility, and therefore allows us to understand communities as ever-shifting spaces of exchange. According to this definition, members of a community agree on common symbols, but are not required to agree on what those symbols mean. Thus, the detachment of symbol and meaning opens up the possibility of thinking about heterogeneous communities, formed by individuals with possibly contrasting views who are, nevertheless, bonded together through mutual agreements that need to be constantly renewed. We, as a community, gather periodically to take care of the symbols we have in common. We also discuss their meanings, and we may agree to disagree without disrupting our common body.

However, this definition of community implies that a community's boundaries are, in turn, defined by the symbols that its members share. Those that do not share our symbols are thus excluded. Yet the *natural* symbolic enclosure of a community is perhaps something we should question, as it runs the risk of defining the boundaries of our affects as well. But, in times of interconnected ecological, economic and social catastrophes, how can communities go beyond their symbolic limits in order to create significant bonds of solidarity with those outside their boundaries? The symbols that we share, as members of the e-literature community, are not even accessible to the miners that are forced at gunpoint down the tunnels of Katanga, in Eastern Congo. Yet we carry the fruit of their toil in our pockets. How can we include them in our own work, not as symbols, but as *comrades*? Can we imagine an *extended community*, in which care and coexistence do not necessarily have to cross through a symbolic border? To think *the extended community*, we must begin to ask many questions: who renders who capable of what, and at what cost? Who are those *invisible presences* that quietly make our own community possible? Are they all human? Where do we draw the boundary that defines who should be included? Miners? Mines? Minerals? Should there be a boundary at all? And what would the agreements that keep the extended community together be?

Too many questions. Such a heavy burden. Let me now try to rewind and unpack.

III. RESTRAINT AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Restraint, and even withdrawal from the production and consumption of electronic literature can be an ethical choice which, despite being essentially individual, may bring about consequences to the entire community. The choice I made a few years ago was to withdraw, and I want to briefly describe this experience.

In 2011 I was shocked upon learning about the human and environmental conditions in which computers and mobile phones were manufactured, so I made a personal decision: to pause my work as a producer of electronic literature rather than continuing to contribute to the destruction. I communicated my decision to the e-lit community, and wrote:

> As of today, I have decided to temporarily stop creating new works of e-Lit. I feel that the issues involved in creating artworks with computers are too important to be ignored. So I call for a truly trans-disciplinary, cross-sector research on electronic literature: one that also involves a profound understanding of its environmental and economic effects. One that doesn't ignore the social and cultural contexts which are being effectively destroyed for the sake of our technology. I am thinking specifically about Africa, and many other places around the world in which land is being grabbed and exploited, and where societies are being condemned to suffer so that we, the lucky ones, can remain connected. (Tisselli, 2011)

My awareness of the destructive effects of our appetite for digital devices was greatly sharpened after a visit to a community in Tanzania that was suffering the consequences of the careless practices of gold mining: waters polluted with arsenic, dying crops and animals, people with skin problems and other strange and unprecedented diseases. Upon seeing all this, I desperately wrote the rather melodramatic note to which the previously cited fragment belongs, and impulsively posted it on Facebook. My intention was to start a conversation about topics which I found largely absent in our writings, conferences and festivals. But my gesture was soon criticized, and rightly so. For instance, in her text "The Peripheral Future," Lisa Swanstrom wrote:

> I don't know Eugenio Tisselli, but I remember being, in equal portions, impressed by the conviction of his stance and irritated by the futility it suggested. Tisselli's refusal to participate, it seemed to me then, was less an act of artistic defiance than a gesture of capitulation to the very aesthetic of erasure he criticized. (Swanstrom, 2016)

I must admit that she was right about the futility of my radical restraint. I soon felt its very contradiction inside myself, tearing at me with force. Although my decision to stop creating e-lit works was more closely related to Bartleby's "I prefer not to" than to defeat, I soon felt the need to go beyond immobility, to untie the knot, to solve or at least fully understand the paradox in which I was immersed. I needed to break the machine in order to see it *as it really was*, to make it *present-at-hand*, as Heidegger would suggest. So I started a detailed research on the enigma of technology. Now, after six years, I have to say that my research is nowhere near its end, and perhaps it never will be. However, my quest so far has given some fruits, which I will now share with you.

IV. THE PHARMAKON

Lately, I have substituted my full restraint for a much more fruitful approach. Following the theories of Bernard Stiegler, I am trying to cultivate a pharmacological attitude towards technology. Stiegler argued that we are living through a multifaceted crisis, largely triggered by a breakdown of the relation between technology and society. Such a crisis brings about a *pharmacological consciousness*, in which we become aware of the toxic nature of technology (Stiegler, 2015). This consciousness quickly becomes more and more acute and widespread, and should eventually give rise to a pharmacological attitude through which, instead of *adapting* ourselves to a technological environment, we become capable of *adopting* it. We often feel that the experience of adapting to the ever-increasing array of technologies is an imposition. According to Stiegler, when I *adapt* myself to a technology, I become *proletarized*, that is, I progressively lose my autonomy and ability, or *savoir-faire*, by delegating significant aspects of my existence to the dark machinations of the black boxes (Stiegler, 2015). But rather than simply rejecting this aspect of technology, I can reverse its *proletarizing* effects by *adopting* it: by becoming one with the wound it inflicts, by recognizing that technology *is* the human wound. Therefore, by refusing to adapt to the toxic religion of Silicon Valley, by leapfrogging the impoverished social rationalism of Facebook, and by dismantling the black boxes of Google, we produce bifurcations: we learn to live with the digital: not against it, but with it, *in a different way*. We *adopt* technologies in order to coexist with them, but *in a different, more intimate and transformative way*. But, above all, cultivating a pharmacological consciousness in our digital world implies both an intellectual and practical journey in search of *the right dose*. In much the same way that pharmacology studies the interaction between the pharmakon and the organism, technological pharmacology investigates the ways in which technological artifacts cure or harm our individual and collective minds, bodies and souls. A pharmakon is, simultaneously, that which allows us to care and cure, and that which we should be careful of. It is a healing power in the same measure as it is a destructive one, and the difference lies in its dose. Thus, a pharmacological attitude is a constant questioning about the right dosage of technology that we need before falling into harm, sickness and death. We need to find the dosage we require to care for ourselves and our extended community, and avoid the dosage above which we become blind to our own pain, blind to the pain of others.

To live our lives in technological balance. To do only what is enough, only what is needed. To decelerate.

V. COEXISTENCE

But there is no *right* dose, in the sense of a universally valid measure of restraint or engagement with technology. The dose, in any case, will always be related to

the plane upon which we stand, as well as the particular, yet interconnected eco-systems we are part of. Therefore, I suggest that the capacity to trace connections of causality between planes of existence is a crucial ability we will need to acquire if we want to follow the pharmacological path and cultivate solidarity with our extended community. I believe that it is precisely such ability what will bring dosages and thresholds into view.

To say that *everything is connected* is meaningless: it has become one of the catchphrases of our time. But should we really assume that connections between every *thing* exist by default, and therefore regard them as a given? Well, I think we'd better not. As Graham Harman put it, *everything is not connected*, which means that things actually withdraw from each other, and mostly tend to avoid making contact (Harman, 2013). Therefore, rather than being self-evident facts, contact, connection and coexistence within *things* are rare phenomena that need to be explored and explained. Things such as a gold mine and an e-poem are apparently disconnected from each other, each of them existing in its own real-ity vacuum, within separate, seemingly unrelated planes and contexts. We could be lazy and just assume that, yes, these two things are somehow connected. But how *exactly*? Perhaps they do make contact, but we need to make the effort of tracing the causal thread between them, to recognize the many other actors and things that exist along that thread. To explain, that is, to disentangle. Not to do so would be the true capitulation, the ultimate surrender to the blindfold of *pro-letarization.*

To explain interconnectedness: this is, perhaps, the sort of mindset that our epoch seems to ask from us.

VI. WHERE WE ARE (PART 2)

But what is this epoch that we're suddenly in? And how are we supposed to make sense of its many complexities? According to environmental scientists Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, the Earth has entered a new geological era: the Anthropocene, in which human agency becomes a tectonic force (Steffen et al., 2011). Supposedly starting at the same time as the Industrial Revolution, the An-thropocene has brought incremental and cumulative transformations on a plan-etary scale, such as anthropogenic climate change. There are, however, con-trasting opinions about the precision and pertinence of the term *Anthropocene,* "the age of *man.*" These differences are not merely linguistic nuances, but actu-ally reveal the great conceptual entanglement that also characterizes our cur-rent epoch, and compel us to carry out a close examination of the convergence of processes, forces and events that have led us to where we are. Stiegler, for example, speaks about the *Entropocene*: the age of entropy, brought about by a thermodynamic understanding of the increasing industrial automatization that started with Taylorism. In the Entropocene, technology plays a paradoxical role

which is coherent with its understanding as a pharmakon: it is both an accelerator of entropy, symbolized by a complete and general automatization, as well as the means to accentuate *negentropy*, that is, the negation of entropy or, in other words, the creation of the order that life needs to sustain itself. Stiegler suggests that the escape from the Entropocene will be the Neganthropocene, in which the time saved by automatization of labor will be invested in new disautomatization capabilities, or the production of negentropy (Stiegler, 2016). Other authors have also proposed alternative names for this new era. Jason W. Moore argued that naming it "The Anthropocene" occluded the contribution of capital and power to the current state of affairs, and therefore spoke of "The Capitalocene," in which capitalism is understood as a world-ecology that unleashes its massive, disruptive force by merging the accumulation of capital, the struggle for power and the co-production of nature (Moore, 2017). In this sense, the planetary changes we see today are not traceable to the invention of the steam engine and its industrial application, but to the very origins of capitalism. Capitalism emerged, to a large extent, thanks to the creation of large-scale farms specialized in the production of cash crops. Such a form of exploitation of the land through monocropping systems, and of people through slavery, is known as a *plantation*. Plantations became the economic basis of the European colonial period, and are still favored today by mainstream agriculture. Donna Haraway invoked the plantation as a symbol to describe the generalized exploitation of humans and Earth for the sake of profit, and thereby proposed the term 'Plantationocene' to describe our era (Haraway, 2015).

The dispute over how to name – and therefore to understand – the new geological era in which we presumably already find ourselves has not been settled. Nevertheless, what these different terms have in common is the feeling that we are experiencing the consequences of the violence that we, as a species, have inflicted upon our extended community. It really does matter why, how and when the violence started, and this is something that needs to be discussed carefully. But, regardless of the term we choose to make sense of the stormy clouds that loom upon us, we need to start realizing that our historical lack of capacity to think about the connections that arise between things, to trace implications and co-implications, to listen to the resonance of other times and spaces, is precisely what has thrown us under these dark, violent skies. And, for us, here, it is crucial to acknowledge that we must count violence as one of the many foundations of our digital literary culture, of our e-literature.

But how do we start the engines of connection in order to begin the task of finding our extended community in the midst of violence? I believe that we should be able to think differently about who we are and what we do. We can achieve such a mindset by turning our attention to our extended community. To imagine a new togetherness, we should think about the *invisible others* not only in a connective way, but also in a *compositional* one, in order to re-compose assemblages of hyperaccelerated molecules, wildly fractalizing cells, fragmented languages, broken affects: our interdependence interrupted by the nightmares

of competition. Re-compose shattered lives, devastated forests, melting glaciers, dying corals.

Re-compose ourselves. But how?

VII.INTIMACY

How do things touch? How do they wake each other up from the deep sleep of de-composition? Timothy Morton suggested that we may find an answer in art, since art can be regarded as an experimental workshop in which the relations of causality that weave things together can be studied and tampered with. Morton argued that to study a thing is to examine how causality itself operates (Morton, 2012). The things we study and play with, an electronic poem, for example, intervene directly on reality in causal ways. And, at the same time, things are traversed by voices, meanings, acts and gestures that become disclosed through artistic practice. To listen to the whispers within and between things is to engage in a sort of relational archaeology, through which the countless awakenings from which those things emerged are laid bare. To explain and expose a thing poetically is to carry out a non-violent political act, in which its coexistence can be seen and traced in detail. It is an act of re-composing the sisterhood of things.

But how can we recognize and nurture the connections between small things (for example, our ever-shrinking mobile phones) and the much bigger ones that challenge our perception precisely because of their magnitude, such as the global networks of extraction, or climate change? Is there a way to bridge the enormous differences of scale between the tiny letters and images we view on our screens, much like fish inside a fishbowl, and the physical unfolding of the vast and complex phenomena that characterize the Anthropocene / Entropocene / Capitalocene / Plantationocene?

Perhaps we don't need to look for bridges, but rather for a new kind of *relational* perception that is open to these phenomena, which Morton calls *hyperobjects*. Hyperobjects are things which are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans, and therefore are impossible for us to perceive directly, as we would perceive a flower or a gust of wind. However, it is actually possible to detect hyperobjects, but only "in a space that consists of interrelationships between [the] aesthetic properties of objects." (Morton, 2013: 1). Hyperobjects can thus become new tools for thinking and critically engaging with beings and things, as they condense the complex phenomena that happen at enormous time scales, together with their relational nature in the form of aesthetic perception and an acute awareness of the extended community:

> The ecological thought that thinks hyperobjects is not one in which individuals are embedded in a nebulous overarching system, or conversely, one in which something

vaster than individuals extrudes itself into the temporary shapes of individuals. Hyperobjects provoke irreductionist thinking forcing us to an "intimacy with non-humans." (Morton, 2013: 23)

Intimacy: no bridges needed. The poisonous fumes of millions of cars and thousands of factories floated directly into my nostrils as I typed this text in Mexico City. Weeks later, when I corrected it, I suffered the hypnotic effects of a rare heatwave in Barcelona, of which the CO_2 emissions of transatlantic flights, such as the one I took between the two cities, were a significant cause. The electrical impulses that run through the circuits of my computer, as I code an e-poem, find their ways through pathways made of minerals that formed as a consequence of the ancient, chthonic flows deep below the lands of Eastern Congo or Mexico. It is all here, right beneath my fingertips: we touch. It all enters and exits my body. Just by sitting in my place, I am involved in an immensely rich and intricate web of aesthetic relations in which I touch and am being touched, both in violent and loving ways. My perception is deeply immersed in hyperobjects.

In a strange but exciting way, hyperobjects may be the answer to the question of how to imagine the extended community. Yes, the hyperobject of planetary collapse can be studied through data and statistics. But it only becomes an intimate presence that we can touch and feel through the ways we relate to each other, humans and non-humans alike. Intimacy speaks louder than numbers and graphs.

Donna Haraway has suggested that this weird form of togetherness is a defining trait of our new era, and therefore she proposed an additional term to name it, one that is much more mysterious and speculative than the ones I have mentioned so far. Haraway is the spokeswoman of the Chthulucene: a time in which we are compelled to fully recognize that we live and die with each other, or not at all (Haraway, 2016). The Chthulucene is an intimate entanglement made up of strange, tentacular, chthonic beings with which we must think, labor, love. For Haraway, the mantra of the epoch is to *stay with the trouble*: despite the looming disasters, the game is not over, and we have nowhere to run to (Haraway, 2016). So, *to stay with the trouble* means to live through global warming, mass extinction, socioeconomic collapse, total war, with neither hope nor despair, yet avoiding cynicism. It means to accept that we will require to become-with each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations. Or not at all (Haraway, 2016). The Chthulucene is perhaps best understood as a conceptual tool that reveals the unprecedented degree of sympoiesis that we need to achieve with our extended community. Sympoiesis, in short, is to "collectively produce systems that do not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries," in which "information and control are distributed among its components." (Haraway, 2016: 33).

If we, as a community bounded together by literature and electronic technologies, wish to reach sympoiesis and *descend* to the level of intimacy required

to stay and engage with the trouble, we have no other choice but to invent new forms of poetry that, instead of creating abyssal distances between us and our extended community, may help us to explore the connections and disconnections that unite and separate us. A new poetry that may assist us in the task of caring for the contradictory and strange beings together with whom we need to become re-composed.

VIII. OUR LABOR

Will we, the e-literature community, be able to stand up to this challenge?

I believe we actually have a very good chance of making it. Our community of e-writers and e-readers already engages quite deeply with the technologies that most intensively condense and represent some of the hyperobjects that creep into our everyday: circuitry, algorithms, server farms, submarine cables, electromagnetic waves. We tinker and play around with tools and means that, more than any other previous invention, enable us to reach out to the extended community. Perhaps the ways in which we become intimate with codes, flows and machines makes us particularly sensitive to the pharmakon, and thus more likely to succeed in the task of finding life-giving doses. Are we therefore closer than other communities of practice to reading and writing in intimacy with *otherness*? Have we acquired, through our work, special skills to weave solid threads of interconnection? I believe we do, and that we are quite well prepared to incorporate a pharmacological attitude in our everyday lives. Yet we must reach a level of awareness that allows us to recognize that, under a pharmacological attitude, through intimacy with hyperobjects, and because of our togetherness with chthonic entities, our work becomes a labor of grief. There is pain in knowing that the neatly ordered world in which we began our practice has disappeared, and that the supposed solidity of the ground upon which our feet used to stand has turned into a raging current of molten lava.

But by grieving and mourning we heal ourselves, we heal each other. We enter the serenity where neither hope nor despair exist, we restore and nurture the bonds that tie us to our extended community: we find the *other* through our work.

And to deal with grief we have irony. Unlike cynicism, which is nothing but an abject and automated exaltation of impotence, irony stands for purposeful complicity and togetherness. The complicity of you, me and all the things we touch and touch us, as we realize that we are up to our necks in this mess, and that we need to swim through its boiling, turbulent waters together. The irony of finding that the traveling companions with whom we have to find our way do not speak our language, or do not even speak in ways we can actually listen to. Yet we must swim on! Irony, in our work, can become a tool for finding better ways to stay with the trouble, to stay strangely entwined, mysteriously bonded, unavoidably interdependent.

We, e-literates, must acknowledge our co-participation with *strange* humans, and recognize our complicity with *strange* non-humans. They all form, with us, the extended community with whose members we must think, speak, read and write. We can welcome them by practicing what Cristina Rivera Garza calls *disappropriation*: instead of veiling our complicity with others behind the myth of the individual genius, we must explicitly in-corporate them in our work, which is both physical and communal (Rivera Garza, 2013).

In-corporating others into open-ended processes of collective writing is just what I have attempted to do in *Sauti ya wakulima,*[5] a project I started in 2011, and that is still alive today. In *Sauti ya wakulima*, small groups of Tanzanian subsistence farmers use mobile phones and an online platform to post photos and sound recordings related to their agricultural practices. The original purpose of *Sauti ya wakulima* was to invite farmers to document their ways of coping with the effects of climate change, in order to better understand their problems and needs. However, shortly after the project started, the farmers decided to transform it into a platform for speaking broadly about their interests and aspirations, and for making their voices widely heard (Tisselli, 2014). Today, the constantly growing body of contents posted by the farmers has become a treasure of collective writing that reflects the richness and resilience of their agriculture.

Figure 1. A participant of Sauti ya wakulima uses a smartphone to record an interview. Chambezi, Tanzania, 2011. Photo by Juanita Schlaepfer-Miller.

5 Sauti ya wakulima (The Voice of the Farmers in Kiswahili) http://sautiyawakulima.net (accessed 24.06.2017).

Figure 2. The farmers who participate in Sauti ya wakulima have transformed the project into a symbol of collective identity. Experimental cassava replication field named after the project in Chambezi, Tanzania, 2016. Photo by Eugenio Tisselli.

Yet, as we welcome *the others* into our writing, we must acknowledge that we sit almost at the top-end of a trophic entanglement. Indeed, we find ourselves in the paradoxical yet privileged position of using devices made of recklessly extracted minerals to tell stories about the reckless extraction of minerals. We cause machines to burp CO_2 into the Earth's atmosphere in order to write about the alarming levels of greenhouse gas emissions. This paradox is hardly avoidable, as it reflects a deep contradiction that lies at the core of culture: to create we must destroy. However, our privileges can be hacked by listening to the call: the call from the hitherto silenced and ignored members of our extended community. There will be no future of writing without *their* writing.

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