# An Invitation to Live Together

## Making the "Complex We"

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> [God] created one man only, dictates Scripture to us, yet if the slightest trait [difference] was enough, there would easily stick out thousands of different species of man: they display, namely, white, red, black and grey hair; white, rosy, tawny and black faces; straight, stubby, crooked, flattened, and aquiline noses; among them we find giants and pygmies, fat and skinny people, erect, humpy, brittle, and lame people, etc., etc. But who with a sane mind would be so frivolous as to call these distinct species?
> —Carl Linnaeus, *Critica Botanica*, 1737

I adhere to this Manifesto. Of course. Written into it are demands that push us to the limit—and that is, precisely, where I want to jump in and push a bit more to provoke a generative tension that connects with the collective experiment that the Manifesto is. Yes, "the Anthropocene" is a place for debate, and as implied in the Manifesto, a place to displace the knowing *anthropos*, to enable knowing-feeling-thinking without it—or, better, not only against it. Perhaps more important: this moment of catastrophe may give us "the courage to question our most basic cultural narratives" as Val Plumwood urged before her death.[1]

I consider *we* a good place to begin my contribution; thus, I have marked it with italics. It is also the first word in the Manifesto, and it is meaningful, for it refers to its writers (and the relations that made them think.) Paraphrasing Zygmunt Bauman I would say that this "we" self-defines a group (intellectuals) that has the prerogative to do so;[2] this seems inevitable, and can arguably be considered innocuous, yet it should matter, for it may practice a hierarchy—even if unwillingly. As an anthropologist, I am very familiar with statements formulated through a division between "we" (or us) and "they" (or them) that is also a relation. Inheriting from early anthropology, its origins in

1. Plumwood, "Nature in the Active Voice," 113.
2. Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters*.

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the study of marked "others," the self-definition implied in this formulation expresses and practices the coloniality of epistemic hierarchy: phrased as "we the knowers, you the believers" *the hierarchy is also racial*—I will refer back to my italics below. Through this exclusionary relation the knowing subjects share little or nothing with their believing "counterparts." Sometimes, as Johannes Fabian reminded us,[3] they do not even share co-evalness: the simultaneous moment of the encounter was and may still be divided into the past (that "they" occupied) and the present (that "we"—anthropologist and readers—occupy.) In this relation the right to exclude is also benevolent enough to grant "them" equality. For example, in the 1940s anthropologies dictated that "their" beliefs were, like ours, logical (Evans-Pritchard),[4] and in the 1980s that their history was our history (Wolf).[5] Steeped in coloniality, the granted equality continued to sustain a defining self that also defined its other both as different from *and* engulfed in itself. It may sound counterintuitive, yet this was a relation where difference emerged from sameness: the knowing self made *its* other with self tools; difference meant belonging, not infrequently hierarchically, in the self-defined humanity extended to "all humans."

I want to suggest that when the writers of the Manifesto declare the need to rethink "the way in which *we* inhabit 'the human' and its place in the history of the Earth" (my emphasis) they also propose to rethink the "we" that writes both the Manifesto and this piece. And this is where I want to contribute. My conceptual and political wager is for a complex "we" composed of an "us" and a "them" occupying (and *being*) in a partially connected time-place while at the same time exhibiting not difference but *divergence*, that is, what makes each (of "us" and "them") be. This "complex we" implodes the possibility of a single locus of enunciation of the "self" because "us" and "them" occupy it, always considering that even in divergence "we" affect each other. Unlike the simple we, the "complex we" *is with* what exceeds what the usual "we" is not. An example may help: the conversations that led to *Earth Beings*, the book that Mariano Turpo, Nazario Turpo, and I cowrote, proposed a "complex we" that included our mutual excesses or forms of being that each of us in the "we" were not. This "complex we" is a shared condition from which "self" and "other" emerge relationally as intra-acted assertions of divergence.

*Divergence*

I borrow divergence from Isabelle Stengers, who explains that practices exist within an ecology as they diverge in assertion of what makes them feel, think, do. Unlike contradiction or difference, which require homogenous terms (to compare or make equivalent), divergence *constitutes* practices *in their heterogeneity* as they become together—through each other even—while remaining distinct. Like orchid and wasp, through *an interest in common that is not the same interest*, practices self-make with others as they diverge in their own positivity (Stengers 2011).

3. Fabian, *Time and the Other*.
4. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft*.
5. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*.

The "complex we" may offer conceptual possibilities to rethink with the Manifesto how "the human" has inhabited the Earth. It may limit the scope of the anthropos, restricting it to the historical province of the "one man" that Linnaeus mentioned in the quote above, and in which he recursively wrote himself: the human that, after injecting coloniality to power-knowledge by self-positioning as a universal individual housing a soul and a mind inside a body placed vis-à-vis nature, became mighty enough to both claim authorship of the currently omnipresent planetary catastrophe *and* make bids to palliate it. Displacing the anthropos through the "complex we," the human may reemerge *with* what the anthropos self-severed from: with nonhumans, and thus, as in the already classic phrase, become "more than human," with both bios and geos alike. It could also—and crucially—choose to emerge with that which exceeds those partitions (bios and geos) and the practice of classification from where they emerge. Hence it would become within the relational condition that I have speculatively conceptualized as the anthropo-not-seen—I will resume this point later.

To continue my argument, a word about classification is in order, for which I offer two reminders. First: "A classification is a spatial, temporal, or spatial-temporal segmentation of the world."[6] Second: "Nothing comes without its world."[7] Combining both reminders (and with apologies for glossing over centuries of history) I want to make a relatively obvious insinuation: the "order of things" that separated humans from nonhumans, life from nonlife, slotted the latter as geos, organized the former (bios) into species, divided them into animals, plants, and humans, and ordered the latter into hierarchies of race, gender, sexuality, class, geography, education; all these came with a specific world: the world implicitly identified with "the anthropos." John Law calls it "the one-world world."[8] Of course, classifications are not inherently good or bad, and it can be said that "all worlds" classify. Yet a classification may impose itself on other classifications. And, today, what the assertion "all worlds classify" may be unable to hide any longer is that the anthropos granted to the classification that made its world the privilege to subordinate all other classifications (or worlds' orders) and silence their worlding capacity.

Avoiding the foundational coloniality of scholarly classifications requires ethico-political awareness and a bold curiosity to open up classifications (and the categories on which they rest) so as not to cancel possibilities of what exceeds them, by which I

6. Bowker and Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out*, 10.

7. Haraway, *Modest_Witness*, 137; also quoted in Puig de la Bellacasa, "Nothing Comes without Its World."

8. Law, "What's Wrong with a One-World World?" In his recent book Arturo Escobar writes, "Perhaps the most central feature of the One-World project has been a twofold ontological divide: a particular way of separating humans from non-humans, or nature; and the distinction and boundary policing between those who function within the OWW from those who insist on other ways of worlding (the many versions of the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy, including civilized and primitive, modern and traditional, developed and underdeveloped)." Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse,* 86.

mean what they (categories and classifications) cannot contain. The Manifesto is written with such awareness as it expresses the will to emerge with what the anthropos refused to be: with nonhumans and become "more than human."[9] Thus, the Manifesto joins the conceptual proposals of feminist scholars such as Deborah Bird Rose and Anna Tsing. The former demands attention to the "situated connectivities that bind us into multispecies communities."[10] The latter suggests that "human nature is an interspecies relationship."[11] Decentering the anthropos, this feminist practice is an invitation to rewrite the categories that sustained it (and that the anthropos sustained) by reconceptualizing the relation between two of them: species and human. And it does so by displacing classificatory plurality (many singular and thus distinct species) with an emphasis on entanglement and multiplicity. Species are complexly multiple, they *are with* what they are not. Donna Haraway, perhaps the most prominent among these rewriters, explains that species "are internally oxymoronic, full of their own others" and that "every species is a multispecies crowd."[12] Her notion of "companion species"—an expression of the "complex we"—foregrounds the "relation as the smallest unit of *being* and *analysis*" and thus presents the rewriting as both analytical and ontic, converging with Tsing and Bird: "we" *are* multispecies. This "we" confuses the requirements of the notion of "species" conceived by Linnaeus and others as a category to classify mutually exclusive groups. Emerging from feminist reconceptualization, human and nonhuman can both include *and exceed* each other: becoming through relations humans-are-with-cows-who-are-with-grasses-who-are-with-soils-who-are-with-water . . . an infinite composition of life, a bios *with* geos intra-connection.

As the quotation opening this piece illustrates, the classification that made species and the human also contributed to what slowly (through historical [ongoing] negotiation of rules of faith and rules of biology) became the racialized hierarchies we currently inhabit. Manifesting that all humans belonged to one species Linnaeus used skin color and geography to organize a classification divided into *Europaeus albesc*[*ens*], *Americanus rubesc*[*ens*], *Asiaticus fuscus*, and *Africanus nigr*[*iculus*]. Considered the basis of the modern notion of race, numerous (actually countless) comments have been written about this classification (and similar ensuing others) considered as founding the color-coded colonial order of the world—Aníbal Quijano features most prominently for South America,[13] and Sylvia Wynter does in the US.[14] The Anthropocene, and most specifically the debate about its origins, has renewed the discussion. Grounding it in the colonial

9. Sagan, "The Human Is More than Human."

10. Rose, "Introduction," 87, cited in Kirksey and Helmreich, "The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography."

11. Tsing, "Unruly Edges," 141.

12. Haraway, *Modest_Witness*, 165.

13. Quijano, "Coloniality of Power."

14. Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom."

establishment of the Americas (as opposed to the European eighteenth century), a conspicuous contributor is Jason W. Moore, whom I quote:

> The abstraction Nature/Society historically conforms to a seemingly endless series of human exclusions—never mind the rationalizing disciplines and exterminist policies imposed upon extra-human natures. These exclusions correspond to a long history of subordinating women, colonial populations, and peoples of color—humans rarely accorded membership in Adam Smith's "civilized society" ([1776] 1937).[15]

Like Wynter and Quijano, Moore signals race as the cornerstone of the colonial order of the world. Inspired by Haraway and others he adds that the division between nature and society served the distribution of human groups hierarchically organized according to distance from and proximity to one or the other sphere. Let me briefly give two examples located at the origins of modern economics and philosophy and still prevalent in the (general and disciplinary) contemporary imaginary: Adam Smith identified economic poverty with savagery and nature, and wealth with civilization and society; Hegel proposed that the distance between man and nature conditioned the emergence of the spirit, and with it of reason, the state, and history, that is, modern society.[16] Were we to juxtapose Linnaeus's color line to Smith's and Hegel's dichotomies, all three thinkers would, perhaps, smile. Like this: Spirit reigns in wealthy and whitish Europe, while poverty looms in blackish Africa where man is almost nature. Divided into whitish, reddish, tawny, and blackish and distributed to make the world through history and geography, this classification was a transformed and secular continuation of the faith-based early colonial hierarchy and its division into God's created nature and humanity.

The power granted to the division into nature and humanity (which the secular state and science sustained at the demise of the knowledge-power of the Pope) enabled race and racism—this is a relatively accepted historical assumption. I want to add that the same (early and late) powers *also* inscribed an antagonism among those who abided by such division and those who did not. In its early modern years, the form of the antagonism was an obvious war: prefaced by the Crusades and perhaps most specifically by the *Reconquista*, in early colonial Spanish America Christian clerics busied themselves "extirpating idolatries" against "devil induced worship." Extirpation required dividing the participating entities into God-made nature (mountains, rivers, forests, oceans) and humans—in the Americas, it included those classified as *naturales* (almost nature) yet with a soul that could be saved from Hell through Christian baptism of individual bodies. The invention of modern politics secularized the antagonism: the war against recalcitrance to distinguish nature from humanity was silenced, yet it continued. Pursued

15. Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?*, 2.
16. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*.

against backwardness and waged through biopolitics, it targeted allegedly inferior humans. Enemies that were not considered such, they were translated into ranked inclusion in humanity and became the object of "improvement" as the destruction of their practices (that did not follow the division between nature and humanity) was translated into an inevitable quest for progress.[17]

Connecting to Moore's quotation above: the divide between nature and society served (indeed) to exclude from the latter (or from culture) those that the notion of race located closer to nature. Yet, race could have also been an efficient tool to *impose* the *inclusion* into such divide of collectives that did not make themselves through it. Paradoxically homogenized through a hierarchical ordering device, the practices of people recalcitrant to the division were deemed dangerous to civilization and therefore deserved destruction: kill their disobedient worlding practice to make man. An unremitting civilizational war became a practice of the modern anthropos.[18] Inverting von Clausewitz's phrase, Foucault wrote, "Politics is the continuation of war by other means."[19] I paraphrase him and say that the *notion-practice of politics* through which the not-seen war continued had as a condition of possibility the secularization of the division of the one-world world into nature and humanity previously effected by Christianity. The difference that secularity brought about required a rational denial: *excesses* to such division *were not*; they did not even count as not counting and neither did their destruction.[20] Silencing and veiling the excesses (as well as their denial) was an onto-epistemic practice that performed for history the impossibility of practices that did not abide by the divide that founded both the Christian world and modern politics. Race enabled such onto-epistemic practices ranking humanity and thus participating in the one-world-making division. It partnered with "culture"—a conceptual tool without which "race" never was—to translate excesses as beliefs and rank them as distance or proximity from nature or humanity. The resolve of the translation was to cancel those excesses: as beliefs they were false, and as false they were pernicious. Race-culture was in genealogical continuity and political coincidence with the church and God.

Undoing the hierarchies of race is important indeed—yet addressing the inequalities that this regime enabled might be insufficient for the ranking that race affected also imposed a *homogeneous* humanity onto divergent peoples whose worlds (and everything that made them) were made equivalent to each other (and thus the same) following their distance from nature (an imposed homogeneous condition relation as well.) With this consideration, scholarly practices that decenter the anthropos by bridging

17. De la Cadena, "Indigenous Cosmopolitics."

18. Several years ago, and perhaps expressing ideas that he no longer espouses, Latour referred to these wars as "latent," "never declared," "considered simple police operations." Latour, *The War of the Worlds*, 25, 26, 27.

19. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 14. In his *On War,* the Prussian general Karl von Clausewitz suggested that war is the continuation of politics with other means.

20. See Rancière, *Disagreement*.

the divide between nature and humanity might also be insufficient if they continue the classificatory practices that trap, for example as species, what may be *not only* such because they may also become through practices that exceed nature or Humanity. My proverbial example is Ausangate, an entity that emerges as mountain and earth being.[21] Colleagues provide other examples: jaguars that are also persons,[22] a hunter that is (also) not not-animal.[23] These are excesses in many ways: as earth being Ausangate exceeds geos, the jaguar that is person exceeds animal, the not not-animal hunter exceeds human and animal. They all exceed species (and their required relations) even in its most oxymoronic emergence.

These entities and the relations through/with which they become inspired are what I call the anthropo-not-seen, a concept I mentioned above. A neologism intended as a counterpart to the Anthropocene, it signals the world-making process whereby worlds that do not make themselves through practices that separate ontologically humans (or culture) from nonhumans (or nature)—*nor necessarily conceive as such the different entities in their assemblages*—are *both* obliged into that distinction *and* exceed it. The anthropo-not-seen thus refers to *both* the will (and the world) that obliges the distinction (and destroys what disobeys the obligation) *and* the excesses to that will: the collectives that are composed with entities that *are not only* human *or* nonhuman because they are also with what (according to the obligation) they should not be—humans *with* nonhumans (and vice versa.) The anthropo-not-seen mentions existents that *are* within a historically formulated hegemonic condition of impossibility: they simply cannot be—therefore they *are* not-seen, not-heard, not-felt, not-known. Importantly, they exceed radical conceptualizations like that of the human as more-than-human, or the history of human nature as the history of interspecies relationship: neither geos or bios, the anthropo-not-seen that is all entities that *are* through relations *that cannot be* (to return to my previous example, the hunter through the elk he not not-is) may be dangerously denied being (or benevolently ignored as unimportant) if their possibility is not considered in a "complex we" grounded in divergence (rather than in sameness.) Instead, if replete with monsters—those that cannot be—the "complex we" has the potential both to challenge the destructive imposition of sameness performed by the world that founded the anthropos and to be unafraid of the unknown that their emergence may inaugurate. This is the invitation that the Manifesto has the potential to issue.

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21. De la Cadena, *Earth Beings*.

22. Kohn, *How Forests Think*.

23. Willerslev, "Not Animal, Not Not-Animal."

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