

Writing the {Unwritable}: {Raveling} {Worlds}

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ABSTRACT ORIGINAL

“Are we on track to bridging the gap? Absolutely not.” We are still on target for a temperature rise in excess of three degrees by the end of this century. 3 On August 9, 2021 the human world is in its second year managing a slippery pandemic complicated by extreme weather events causing floods, wildfires, hurricanes, and cyclones on unprecedented scales. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) releases the first contribution by Working Group I: Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis for the Sixth Assessment Report. 4 The message is clear. We will most likely reach two degrees warming by the year 2050 unless global emissions are reduced now. The world as we know it seems to be unraveling. I engage raveling as a figuration to assist me and remind me that doing is also the process of undoing. 5 A ravel is a complication. Its etymological origins in weaving allow it to be at once an antonym and a synonym. To ravel is to entangle and disentangle. Humans ravel their beings and doings into the many beings and doings of the nonhuman world while simultaneously complicating the way the collective world is raveled. The greater effects of the more serious complications by some are now being keenly felt by most. The entangling and disentangling of things as we know them, for example a period of relative climate stability or the very notion of a thing, are being perceived as a kind of coming undone. It is a raveling-out that makes it plain the effects of human complications as we start to experience (individually and collectively) the climate and the world differently. What happens when the familiar is made unfamiliar? One definition for ravel out (although obsolete in current use) is to destroy, spoil or waste while to unravel can mean to free from obscurity or to reveal. 6 I engage the tension between these two intimately entangled meanings to explore the ways different entities can reveal themselves when other entities fall away. When what we know disintegrates and what remains is unfamiliar—a bush-land reduced to a negative space. 7 How might we imagine what can be possible when things feel precarious and unstable? Anna Tsing suggests to “live with precarity” requires a combination of noticing and stretching our imaginations into a “strange new world” to “grasp its contours” and the possibilities within it (2015: 2–3). In this way a disturbance like a wildfire, creates an opening. It beckons, drawing us closer into a place, rather than withdrawing. It encourages a “radical curiosity” and invites the “transformative encounter”(2015: 144, 152). To come closer might be to come alongside like a kind of walking-with or a journeying together. A journey that allows for indeterminacies rather than working to decipher, resolve or solve—processes determined to find an end. Walking-with, working-with, writingwith a companion that is not human, invites us into a new praxis. One that requires a letting go of preconceived notions of space and time attached to human notions of economy and resolution. A companion accompanies, sharing and assisting in company. Writing with a companion requires writing with “response-ability”—a Haraway term that recognizes the asymmetries with companions while allowing the opportunity to close gaps by cultivating a “capacity to respond”(Haraway 2016: 78). Paradoxical as it might seem in the context of this paragraph, a response-ability to ash might be through the simple action of inaction.