LIFE WAS HERE (?)

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ABSTRACT

In my thesis I want to address how ecologies of organic life have become decentered by the major shareholders of Earth, in lieu of profits, power, & belief in fallacies like capitalistic infinite-growth-paradigms.

I will talk about the overwhelming effect of corporate industry on Earth’s (eco) systems and its ongoing efforts to colonize (all levels of) Earthly existence, namely through the factorization of Earth and conditioning of its inhabitants; the persecution of all things *life* and all things non-rational or -utilizable; the agenda against the wild, the free, the unexpected, the gray area, things of feeling, beauty, etc.

I’ll look at the role of corporate industry in the development of the Anthropocene/Capitalocene/ Plantationocene and explore the place of organic life within this timeline, while speculating on the positioning of corporate industry as an antagonistic, anti-life force.

Simultaneously––drawing upon the differences between wo/man and machine, the non-rational and the programmed––I’ll explore the intrinsic similarities between organic Earthlings, while contemplating how *making kin* through situating ourselves within the broader ecological system and recognizing our similarities, shared history and vested interests, could become a crucial step for a successful co-existence in the times   
to come. Finally, I’ll speculate on methods of resistance (to the Anthropocene/Capitalocene/ Plantationocene) and hypothesize about alternative storytelling as a method for opening up other ways of knowing the world.

So far, I’m conducting my research through the following readings: Timothy Morton’s *All art is ecological*, T.J. Demos’s *Against the Anthropocene*, Bruno Latour’s *We have never been Modern*, Manuel De Landa’s *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, Elizabeth A. Povinelli’s *Geontologies: The Concept and Its Territories*, and Donna Haraway’s *Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chutulucene: making kin*, as well as listening to her feature in For the Wild podcast, titled *Staying with the trouble*.

INTRO

"*The stories we are told shape the way we see the world, which shapes the way we experience the world*" (Jensen, 2009).

You might have noticed, but Earth is not for you anymore.

Ecologies of organic life have become decentered by the dominant powers of Earth who, driven by pursuits of profit & power, have harvested Earth’s resources to a point of catapulting its lifeforms into an alternate timeline––

Earth incorporated.

Through exploration of our current geological landscape, the following text will address the overwhelming impact of corporate industry on Earth's ecological systems, as well as its ongoing attempts to commodify and control its native lifeforms. Simultaneously––drawing upon the differences between wo/man and machine, the non-rational and the programmed––it’ll explore the intrinsic similarities between organic Earthlings, while contemplating how *making kin* through situating ourselves within the broader ecological system and recognizing our similarities, shared history and vested interests, could become a crucial step for a successful co-existence in the times to come. Finally, I will speculate on methods of resistance to our *inorganic* landscape and hypothesize about alternative storytelling as a method for opening up other ways of knowing the world.

CHAPTER ONE

In the 4.5 billion years Earth’s been around, the planet has undergone an almost incomprehensible amount of change. So much so, that since humanity entered the picture, we’ve spent a great amount of time trying to understand and categorize said change. Some diligent (human) scientists have taken it upon themselves to divide Earth’s history into units, each signifying the most influential impact on the planet at the time. According to them, a sensible way of looking at Earth’s history would be to divide it up into geological eons, eras and periods, and if we want to factor in the organic inhabitants of the planet––the lifeforms and their ecologies––we can subdivide the shared history into so called geological epochs. If an event has enough impact on the planet that it significantly alters its geological and ecological systems on a measurable level, we can declare the aftermath as a new geological epoch.

Since the first lifeforms had the pleasure of inaugurating the planet, scientists have documented thirty-seven geological epochs on Earth. Seven since the extinction of the dinosaurs and until recently, only one since the development of humanity (the Holocene). In the short timespan humans have existed, we’ve already generated immense changes within the structure of the planet.

“*It's more than climate change; it's also extraordinary burdens of toxic chemistry, mining, depletion of lakes and rivers under and above ground, ecosystem simplification, vast genocides of people and other critters,   
[…] in systemically linked patterns that threaten major system collapse after major system collapse after major system collapse*” (Haraway, 2015).

Forces of human existence have begun to overwhelm all other biological, geological, and meteorological forms and forces and displace the Holocene (Povinelli, 2017), so now we’ve evidently transversed into a new and uncharted geological period––perhaps even, a new epoch. The most commonly used term for the period is the Anthropocene (Anthropo-, a prefix meaning human, humanoid, or human-like). Coined by Paul Crutzen in 2000, it makes the ties between anthropic activities and our environment painfully apparent. However, this term has since been a matter of heated debate within the science community, along with many aspects of the Anthropocene, especially those concerning the catalyst which supposedly pushed Earth into a new epoch.

Some scientists pin the initial event onto the industrial revolution (1760) while others believe that it coincides with the nuclear era (1945). Some say it must’ve begun with the arrival and colonization of Europeans on the Americas (1492), and even then, a few argue that we transitioned away from the Holocene as early as with the beginning of human agriculture (-12000). Finally, there are those who reject the definition altogether and say that since we can’t pin it on a single, quantifiable event but rather, a cascade of smaller events, we can’t name this scenario an epoch just yet––at least not till we’ve seen the full scope of the matter. As of now, the consensus is that we should rather consider the Anthropocene as a geological *event*.

However, regardless of all disputes concerning the terminology behind all this, it’s evident that we’ve entered a new geological & ecological age, one that’s dominated by humanity. To illustrate this, I’ll borrow a short but powerful statement from the organization Globaïa (from ... Welcome to the Anthropocene):

“... *We move more sediment and rock annually than all natural processes such as erosion and rivers. We manage three quarters of all land outside the ice sheets. Greenhouse gas levels this high have not been seen for over one million years. Temperatures are increasing. We have made a hole in the ozone layer. We are losing biodiversity. Many of the world’s deltas are sinking due to damming, mining, and other causes. Sea level is rising. Ocean acidification is a real threat. We are altering Earth’s natural cycles.”*

Welcome to the Anthropocene indeed. Woe is us who’ve caused this damage to our planet. Or––have *we*? Let’s retrace our steps and give even closer inspection to the terminology behind all this. We’ve learned that the actions of humans have pushed Earth into a new geological epoch and indeed, we’ve had enough of an impact on the planet for it to be registered not only in the soil but most natural phenomena on the planet. But who is ‘‘humans’’ and who is “we”? Did I do this? Did you? Unless you’ve taken it upon yourself to over-extract oil and other resources from Earth until you’ve reached a breaking point and multiple lawsuits, pollute and demolish whole ecosystems for gains, commit ecocide, and then extract some more––Then you’re probably not the culprit. Even if you wouldn’t always recycle, if you drove a gas fueled car, travelled with planes etc. It’s probably never going to be you. So, is it fair that an entire geological epoch is in your name? Most definitely not. I’d like to introduce a new term for this period we’ve unfortunately found ourselves entangled in: the Capitalocene.