

CHAPTER 8

The Camille Stories

Children of Compost

And then Camille came into our lives, rendering present the cross-stitched generations of the not-yet-born and not-yet-hatched of vulnerable, coevolving species. Proposing a relay into uncertain futures, I end *Staying with the Trouble* with a story, a speculative fabulation, which starts from a writing workshop at Cerisy in summer 2013, part of Isabelle Stengers's colloquium on *gestes spéculatifs*. Gestated in SF writing practices, Camille is a keeper of memories in the flesh of worlds that may become habitable again. Camille is one of the children of compost who ripen in the earth to say no to the posthuman of every time.

I signed up for the afternoon workshop at Cerisy called Narration Spéculative. The first day the organizers broke us down into writing groups of two or three participants and gave us a task. We were asked to fabulate a baby, and somehow to bring the infant through five human generations. In our times of surplus death of both individuals and of kinds, a mere five human generations can seem impossibly long to imagine flourishing with and for a renewed multispecies world. Over the week, the groups wrote many kinds of possible futures in a ram-bunctious play of literary forms. Versions abounded. Besides myself, the members of my group were the filmmaker Fabrizio Terranova and psychologist, philosopher, and ethologist Vinciane Despret. The version



8.1. *Mariposa* mask, Guerrero, Mexico, 62 cm × 72.5 cm × 12.5 cm, before 1990, Samuel Frid Collection, UBC Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver. Installation view, *The Marvellous Real: Art from Mexico, 1926–2011* exhibition (October 2013—March 2014), UBC Museum of Anthropology. Curator Nicola Levell. Photograph by Jim Clifford.

I tell here is itself a speculative gesture, both a memory and a lure for a “we” that came into being by fabulating a story together one summer in Normandy. I cannot tell exactly the same story that my cowriters would propose or remember. My story here is an ongoing speculative fabulation, not a conference report for the archives. We started writing together, and we have since written Camille stories individually, sometimes passing them back to the original writers for elaboration, sometimes not; and we have encountered Camille and the Children of Compost in other writing collaborations too.¹ All the versions are necessary to Camille. My memoir for that workshop is an active casting of threads from and for ongoing, shared stories. Camille, Donna, Vinciane, and Fabrizio brought each other into copresence; we render each other capable.

The Children of Compost insist that we need to write stories and live lives for flourishing and for abundance, especially in the teeth of rampaging destruction and impoverization. Anna Tsing urges us to cobble together the “arts of living on a damaged planet”; and among those arts are cultivating the capacity to reimagine wealth, learn practical healing rather than wholeness, and stitch together improbable collaborations without worrying overmuch about conventional ontological kinds.² The Camille Stories are invitations to participate in a kind of genre fiction committed to strengthening ways to propose near futures, possible futures, and implausible but real nows. Every Camille Story that I write will make terrible political and ecological mistakes; and every story asks readers to practice generous suspicion by joining in the fray of inventing a bumptious crop of Children of Compost.³ Readers of science fiction are accustomed to the lively and irreverent arts of fan fiction. Story arcs and worlds are fodder for mutant transformations or for loving but perverse extensions. The Children of Compost invite not so much fan fiction as sym fiction, the genre of sympoiesis and symchthonia—the coming together of earthly ones. The Children of Compost want the Camille Stories to be a pilot project, a model, a work and play object, for composing collective projects, not just in the imagination but also in actual story writing. And on and under the ground.

Vinciane, Fabrizio, and I felt a vital pressure to provide our baby with a name and a pathway into what was not yet but might be. We also felt a vital pressure to ask our baby to be part of learning, over five generations, to radically reduce the pressure of human numbers on earth, currently set on a course to climb to more than 11 billion by the end of

the twenty-first century CE. We could hardly approach the five generations through a story of heteronormative reproduction (to use the ugly but apt American feminist idiom)! More than a year later, I realized that Camille taught me how to say, “Make Kin Not Babies.”⁴

Immediately, however, as soon as we proposed the name of Camille to each other, we realized that we were now holding a squirming child who had no truck with conventional genders or with human exceptionalism. This was a child born for sympoiesis—for becoming-with and making-with a motley clutch of earth others.⁵

Imagining the World of the Camilles

Luckily, Camille came into being at a moment of an unexpected but powerful, interlaced, planetwide eruption of numerous communities of a few hundred people each, who felt moved to migrate to ruined places and work with human and nonhuman partners to heal these places, building networks, pathways, nodes, and webs of and for a newly habitable world.⁶

Only a portion of the earthwide, astonishing, and infectious action for well-being came from intentional, migratory communities like Camille’s. Drawing from long histories of creative resistance and generative living in even the worst circumstances, people everywhere found themselves profoundly tired of waiting for external, never materializing solutions to local and systemic problems. Both large and small individuals, organizations, and communities joined with each other, and with migrant communities like Camille’s, to reshape terran life for an epoch that could follow the deadly discontinuities of the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and Plantationocene. In system-changing simultaneous waves and pulses, diverse indigenous peoples and all sorts of other laboring women, men, and children—who had been long subjected to devastating conditions of extraction and production in their lands, waters, homes, and travels—innovated and strengthened coalitions to recraft conditions of living and dying to enable flourishing in the present and in times to come. These eruptions of healing energy and activism were ignited by love of earth and its human and nonhuman beings and by rage at the rate and scope of extinctions, exterminations, genocides, and immiserations in enforced patterns of multispecies living and dying that threatened ongoingness for everybody. Love and rage contained the germs of partial healing even in the face of onrushing destruction.

None of the Communities of Compost could imagine that they inhabited or moved to “empty land.” Such still powerful, destructive fictions of settler colonialism and religious revivalism, secular or not, were fiercely resisted. The Communities of Compost worked and played hard to understand how to inherit the layers upon layers of living and dying that infuse every place and every corridor. Unlike inhabitants in many other utopian movements, stories, or literatures in the history of the earth, the Children of Compost knew they could not deceive themselves that they could start from scratch. Precisely the opposite insight moved them; they asked and responded to the question of how to live in the ruins that were still inhabited, with ghosts and with the living too. Coming from every economic class, color, caste, religion, secularism, and region, members of the emerging diverse settlements around the earth lived by a few simple but transformative practices, which in turn lured—became vitally infectious for—many other peoples and communities, both migratory and stable. The communities diverged in their development with sympoietic creativity, but they remained tied together by sticky threads.

The linking practices grew from the sense that healing and ongoingness in ruined places requires making kin in innovative ways. In the infectious new settlements, every new child must have at least three parents, who may or may not practice new or old genders. Corporeal differences, along with their fraught histories, are cherished. New children must be rare and precious, and they must have the robust company of other young and old ones of many kinds. Kin relations can be formed at any time in life, and so parents and other sorts of relatives can be added or invented at significant points of transition. Such relationships enact strong lifelong commitments and obligations of diverse kinds. Kin making as a means of reducing human numbers and demands on the earth, while simultaneously increasing human and other critters’ flourishing, engaged intense energies and passions in the dispersed emerging worlds. But kin making and rebalancing human numbers had to happen in risky embodied connections to places, corridors, histories, and ongoing decolonial and postcolonial struggles, and not in the abstract and not by external fiat. Many failed models of population control provided strong cautionary tales.

Thus the work of these communities was and is intentional kin making across deep damage and significant difference. By the early twenty-first century, historical social action and cultural and scientific knowledges—much of it activated by anticolonial, antiracist, proqueer



8.2. Make Kin Not Babies. Sticker, 2 × 3 in., made by Kern Toy, Beth Stephens, Annie Sprinkle, and Donna Haraway.

feminist movement—had seriously unraveled the once-imagined natural bonds of sex and gender and race and nation, but undoing the widespread destructive commitment to the still-conceived natural necessity of the tie between kin making and a treelike biogenetic reproductive genealogy became a key task for the Children of Compost.

The decision to bring a new human infant into being is strongly structured to be a collective one for the emerging communities. Further, no one can be coerced to bear a child or punished for birthing one outside community auspices.⁷ The Children of Compost nurture the born ones every way they can, even as they work and play to mutate the apparatuses of kin making and to reduce radically the burdens of human numbers across the earth. Although discouraged in the form of individual decisions to make a new baby, reproductive freedom of the person is actively cherished.

This freedom's most treasured power is the right and obligation of the human person, of whatever gender, who is carrying a pregnancy to choose an animal symbiont for the new child.⁸ All new human members of the group who are born in the context of community decision making come into being as symbionts with critters of actively threatened spe-

cies, and therefore with the whole patterned fabric of living and dying of those particular beings and all their associates, for whom the possibility of a future is very fragile. Human babies born through individual reproductive choice do not become biological symbionts, but they do live in many other kinds of sympoiesis with human and nonhuman critters. Over the generations, the Communities of Compost experienced complex difficulties with hierarchical caste formations and sometimes violent clashes between children born as symbionts and those born as more conventional human individuals. Syms and non-syms, sometimes literally, did not see eye to eye easily.

The animal symbionts are generally members of migratory species, which critically shapes the lines of visiting, working, and playing for all the partners of the symbiosis. The members of the symbioses of the Children of Compost, human and nonhuman, travel or depend on associates that travel; corridors are essential to their being. The restoration and care of corridors, of connection, is a central task of the communities; it is how they imagine and practice repair of ruined lands and waters and their critters, human and not.⁹ The Children of Compost came to see their shared kind as humus, rather than as human or nonhuman. The core of each new child's education is learning how to live in symbiosis so as to nurture the animal symbiont, and all the other beings the symbiont requires, into ongoingness for at least five human generations. Nurturing the animal symbiont also means being nurtured in turn, as well as inventing practices of care of the ramifying symbiotic selves. The human and animal symbionts keep the relays of mortal life going, both inheriting and inventing practices of recuperation, survival, and flourishing.

Because the animal partners in the symbiosis are migratory, each human child learns and lives in nodes and pathways, with other people and their symbionts, in the alliances and collaborations needed to make ongoingness possible. Literally and figurally, training the mind to go visiting is a lifelong pedagogical practice in these communities. Together and separately, the sciences and arts are passionately practiced and enlarged as means to attune rapidly evolving ecological naturalcultural communities, including people, to live and die well throughout the dangerous centuries of irreversible climate change and continuing high rates of extinction and other troubles.

A treasured power of individual freedom for the new child is to choose a gender—or not—when and if the patterns of living and dying evoke that desire. Bodily modifications are normal among Camille's people;

and at birth a few genes and a few microorganisms from the animal symbiont are added to the symchild's bodily heritage, so that sensitivity and response to the world as experienced by the animal critter can be more vivid and precise for the human member of the team. The animal partners are not modified in these ways, although the ongoing relationships with lands, waters, people and peoples, critters, and apparatuses render them newly capable in surprising ways too, including ongoing EcoEvoDevo biological changes.¹⁰ Throughout life, the human person may adopt further bodily modifications for pleasure and aesthetics or for work, as long as the modifications tend to both symbionts' well-being in the humus of sympoiesis.

Camille's people moved to southern West Virginia in the Appalachian Mountains on a site along the Kanawha River near Gauley Mountain, which had been devastated by mountaintop removal coal mining. The river and tributary creeks were toxic, the valleys filled with mine debris, the people used and abandoned by the coal companies. Camille's people allied themselves with struggling multispecies communities in the rugged mountains and valleys, both the local people and the other critters.¹¹ Most of the Communities of Compost that became most closely linked to Camille's gathering lived in places ravaged by fossil fuel extraction or by mining of gold, uranium, or other metals. Places eviscerated by deforestation or agriculture practiced as water and nutrient mining and monocropping also figured large in Camille's extended world.

Monarch butterflies frequent Camille's West Virginia community in the summers, and they undertake a many-thousand-mile migration south to overwinter in a few specific forests of pine and oyamel fir in central Mexico, along the border of the states of Michoacán and México.¹² In the twentieth century, the monarch was declared the state insect of West Virginia; and the Sanctuario de la Biosfera Mariposa Monarca (Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve), a UNESCO World Heritage Site after 2008, was established in the ecoregion along the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt of surviving woodlands.

Throughout their complex migrations, the monarchs must eat, breed, and rest in cities, *ejidos*, indigenous lands, farms, forests, and grasslands of a vast and damaged landscape, populated by people and peoples living and dying in many sorts of contested ecologies and economies. The larvae of the leap-frogging spring eastern monarch migrations from south to north face the consequences of genetic and chemical technologies of mass industrial agriculture that make their indispensable food—the

leaves of native, local milkweeds—unavailable along most of the routes. Not just the presence of any milkweed, but the seasonal appearance of local milkweed varieties from Mexico to Canada, is syncopated in the flesh of monarch caterpillars. Some milkweed species flourish in disturbed land; they are good pioneer plants. The common milkweed of central and eastern North America, *Asclepias syriaca*, is such an early successional plant. Milkweeds thrive on roadsides and between crop furrows, and these are the milkweeds that are especially susceptible to herbicides like Monsanto's glyphosphate-containing herbicide, Roundup. Another milkweed is also important to the eastern migration of monarchs, namely the climax prairie species native to grasslands in later successional stages. With the nearly complete destruction of climax prairies across North America, this milkweed, *Asclepias meadii*, is fiercely endangered.¹³

Throughout the spring, summer, and fall, a large variety of early, midseason, and late flowering plants, including milkweed blossoms, produce the nectar sucked greedily by monarch adults. On the southern journey to Mexico, the future of the North American eastern migration is threatened by loss of the habitats of nectar-producing plants to feed the nonbreeding adults flying to overwinter in their favorite roosting trees in mountain woodlands. These woodlands in turn face natural-cultural degradation in complex histories of ongoing state, class, and ethnic oppression of campesinos and indigenous peoples in the region, for example, the Mazahuas and Otomi.¹⁴

Unhinged in space and time and stripped of food in both directions, larvae starve and hungry adults grow sluggish and fail to reach their winter homes. Migrations fail across the Americas. The trees in central Mexico mourn the loss of their winter shimmying clusters, and the meadows, farms, and town gardens of the United States and southern Canada are desolate in summer without the fitting shimmer of orange and black.

For the child's symbionts, Camille 1's birthing parent chose monarch butterflies of North America, in two magnificent but severely damaged streams, from Canada to Mexico, and from the state of Washington, along California, and across the Rocky Mountains. Camille's gestational parent exercised reproductive freedom with wild hope, choosing to bond the soon-to-be-born fetus with both the western and eastern currents of this braid of butterfly motion. That meant that Camille of the first generation, and further Camilles for four more human generations at least, would grow in knowledge and know-how committed to the on-

goingness of these gorgeous and threatened insects and their human and nonhuman communities all along the pathways and nodes of their migrations and residencies in *these* places and corridors, not all the time everywhere. Camille's community understood that monarchs as a widespread global species are not threatened; but two grand currents of a continental migration, a vast connected sweep of myriad critters living and dying together, were on the brink of perishing.

The child-bearing parent who chose the monarch butterfly as Camille's symbiont was a single person with the response-ability to exercise potent, noninnocent, generative freedom that was pregnant with consequences for ramifying worlds across five generations. That irreducible singularity, that particular exercise of reproductive choice, set in train a several-hundred-year effort, involving many actors, to keep alive practices of migration across and along continents for all the migrations' critters. The Communities of Compost did not align their children to "endangered species" as that term had been developed in conservation organizations in the twentieth century. Rather, the Communities of Compost understood their task to be to cultivate and invent the arts of living with and for damaged worlds in place, not as an abstraction or a type, but as and for those living and dying in ruined places. All the Camilles grew rich in worldly communities throughout life, as work and play with and for the butterflies made for intense residencies and active migrations with a host of people and other critters. As one Camille approached death, a new Camille would be born to the community in time so that the elder, as mentor in symbiosis, could teach the younger to be ready.¹⁵

The Camilles knew the work could fail at any time. The dangers remained intense. As a legacy of centuries of economic, cultural, and ecological exploitation both of people and other beings, excess extinctions and exterminations continued to stalk the earth. Still, successfully holding open space for other critters and their committed people also flourished, and multispecies partnerships of many kinds contributed to building a habitable earth in sustained troubled times.

The Camille Stories

The story I tell below tracks the five Camilles along only a few threads and knots of their lifeways, between the birth of Camille 1 in 2025 and the death of Camille 5 in 2425. The story I tell here cries out for collaborative and divergent story-making practices, in narrative, audio, and visual performances and texts in materialities

from digital to sculptural to everything practicable. My stories are suggestive string figures at best; they long for a fuller weave that still keeps the patterns open, with ramifying attachment sites for storytellers yet to come. I hope readers change parts of the story and take them elsewhere, enlarge, object, flesh out, and reimagine the lifeways of the Camilles.

The Camille Stories reach only to five generations, not yet able to fulfill the obligations that the Haudenosaunee Confederacy imposed on themselves and so on anyone who has been touched by the account, even in acts of unacknowledged appropriation, namely, to act so as to be response-able to and for those in the seventh generation to come.¹⁶ The Children of Compost beyond the reach of the Camille Stories might become capable of that kind of worlding, which somehow once seemed possible, before the Great Acceleration of the Capitalocene and the Great Dithering.

Over the five generations of the Camilles, the total number of human beings on earth, including persons in symbiosis with vulnerable animals chosen by their birth parent (syms) and those not in such symbioses (non-syms), declined from the high point of 10 billion in 2100 to a stable level of 3 billion by 2400. If the Communities of Compost had not proved from their earliest years so successful and so infectious among other human people and peoples, the earth's population would have reached more than 11 billion by 2100. The breathing room provided by that difference of a billion human people opened up possibilities for ongoingness for many threatened ways of living and dying for both human and nonhuman beings.¹⁷

CAMILLE 1

Born 2025. Human numbers are 8 billion.

Died 2100. Human numbers are 10 billion.

In 2020, about three hundred people with diverse class, racial, religious, and regional heritages, including two hundred adults of the four major genders practiced at the time¹⁸ and one hundred children under the age of eighteen, built a town where the New River and Gauley River flowed together to form the Kanawha River in West Virginia. They named the settlement New Gauley to honor the lands and waters devastated by mountaintop removal coal mining. Historians of this time have suggested that the period between about 2000 and 2050 on earth should be called the Great Dithering.¹⁹ The Great Dithering was a time of ineffective and widespread anxiety about environmental destruction, un-



8.3. Monarch butterfly caterpillar *Danaus plexippus* on a milkweed pod. Photograph by Singer S. Ron, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

mistakable evidence of accelerating mass extinctions, violent climate change, social disintegration, widening wars, ongoing human population increase due to the large numbers of already-born youngsters (even though birth rates most places had fallen below replacement rate), and vast migrations of human and nonhuman refugees without refuges.

During this terrible period, when it was nonetheless still possible for concerted action to make a difference, numerous communities emerged across the earth. The English-language name for these gatherings was the Communities of Compost; the people called themselves compostists. Many other names in many languages also proposed the string figure game of collective resurgence. These communities understood that the Great Dithering could end in terminal crises; or radical collective action could ferment a turbulent but generative time of reversals, revolt, revolution, and resurgence.

For the first few years, the adults of New Gauley did not birth any new children, but concentrated on building culture, economy, rituals, and politics in which oddkin would be abundant, and children would be rare but precious.²⁰ The kin-making work and play of the community built capacities critical for resurgence and multispecies flourishing. In particular, friendship as a kin-making practice throughout life was

elaborated and celebrated. In 2025, the community felt ready to birth their first new babies to be bonded with animal symbionts. The adults judged that most of their already-born children, who had helped found the community, were ready and eager to be older siblings to the coming symbiont youngsters. Everybody believed that this kind of symposiosis had not been practiced anywhere on earth before. People knew it would not be simple to learn to live collectively in intimate and worldly caretaking symbiosis with another animal as a practice of repairing damaged places and making flourishing multispecies futures.

Camille 1 was born among a small group of five children, and per²¹ was the only youngster linked to an insect. Other children in this first cohort became symbionts with fish (American eel, *Anguilla rostrata*), birds (American kestrel, *Falco sparverius*), crustaceans (the Big Sandy crayfish, *Cambarus veteranus*), and amphibians (streamside salamander, *Ambystoma barbouri*).²² Beginning with vulnerable bats, mammal symbioses were undertaken in the second wave of births about five years later. It was often easier to identify migratory threatened insects, fish, mammals, and birds as potential symbionts for new children than reptiles, amphibians, and crustaceans. The preference for migratory symbionts was often relaxed, especially since corridor conservation of all kinds was ever more urgent as rising temperatures due to climate change forced many usually nonmigratory species outside their previous ranges. Although their first loves remained traveling critters and far-flung pathways—mostly because their own small human communities were made geographically and culturally more worldly through cultivating the linkages required to take care of their partners in symbiosis—some members of the Communities of Compost committed themselves to critters in tiny remnant habitats, as well as to those whose finicky ecological requirements and love of home tied them tightly to particular places only.²³

Over the first hundred years, New Gauley welcomed 100 new births with babies joined to animal symbionts, 10 births to single parents or couples who declined the three-parent model and whose offspring did not receive these sorts of symbionts, 200 deaths, 175 in-migrants, and 50 out-migrants. The scientists of the Communities of Compost found it impossible to establish successful animal-human symbioses with adults; the critical receptive times for humans were fetal development, nursing, and adolescence. During the times that they contributed cellular or molecular materials for modifying the human partner, the animal partners also had to be in a period of transformation, such as hatching, larval

ecdysis, or metamorphosis. The animals themselves were not modified with human material; their roles in the symbioses were to teach and to flourish in every way possible in dangerous and damaged times.

Almost everywhere, the Communities of Compost committed themselves to maintaining their size or to growing through immigration, while keeping their own new births at a level compatible with the earth's overall human numbers eventually declining by two-thirds. If new in-migrants accepted the basic practices of the Communities of Compost, upon request they received permanent residency and citizenship rights as compostists in inventive and usually raucous kin-making ceremonies. Nonresident visitors were always welcome; hospitality was regarded as both a basic obligation and source of mutual renewal. Visitors' lengths of stay could become a contentious matter and was even known to break up kin affiliations and sometimes entire compostist communities.

If many more in-migrants wanted to join Communities of Compost than were possible to accommodate, new settlements formed with mentors from the seed towns. In-migrants in the early centuries often came from ruined areas elsewhere, and their seeking both refuge and belonging in the Communities of Compost—themselves committed to the arts of living in damaged places—was an act of both desperation and faith. The original founders of the Communities of Compost quickly realized that in-migrants from desperate situations brought with them not only trauma, but also extraordinary insight and skill for the work to be done. Resettlement in still other ruined sites and establishment of alliances and collaborations with people and other critters in those areas required the best abilities of the mentors and the in-migrants. Plant symbionts were not joined to babies in the Communities of Compost for several generations, although recognizing profuse symposiosis—world making—with plants was fundamental for all compostists.

New Gauley decided to emphasize in-migration of people over new births for the first three generations, and after that time there was both more flexibility and the need to recalibrate births and deaths. In- and out-migration tended to equalize as more places on earth restored conditions for modest resurgence and reasons for seeking new homes rested much less on war, exploitation, genocide, and ecological devastation, and much more on adventure, curiosity, desire for new kinds of abundance and skill, and the old habits of human beings to move, including hunter-gatherers, pastoralists, and farm-and-town-living people. Opportunistic social species tend to move around a lot; human beings outside

captivity have always been extraordinary ecosocial opportunists, travelers, and path makers. Added to that, by 2300, more than a billion human beings on earth had themselves been born into new kinds of symbiotic relationships with other critters, in addition to the much older multispecies associations that characterized human people as well as every other sort of living being throughout ecological, evolutionary, developmental, historical, and technological histories.

Before birth, Camille 1 was given a suite of pattern-forming genes expressed on monarch surfaces over their transformations from caterpillar to winged adult. Camille 1 also received genes allowing per to taste in the wind the dilute chemical signals crucial to adult monarchs selecting diverse nectar-rich flowers and the best milkweed leaves for depositing their eggs. Camille 1's gut and mouth microbiomes were enhanced to allow per to safely savor milkweed plants containing the toxic alkaloids that the monarchs accumulate in their flesh to deter predators. As an infant, Camille 1's oral satisfactions with fragrant mammalian milk were laced with the bitter tastes of cardiac glycosides, tastes that the human parent nursing per dared not share. In per's maturing mindful body, Camille 1 had to learn to become in symbiosis with an insect composed as five caterpillar instars before metamorphosis into a flying adult, which in turn experienced seasonally alternating sexually excited phases and sexually quiet diapause. The symbiogenetic join of Camille and monarchs also had to accommodate the diverse parasitic and beneficial associates of the butterfly holobiont, as well as pay attention to the genetics of the migrating populations.²⁴

The compostists did not attempt to introduce into Camille 1's already complicated symbiotic reformatting any of the genes and timing patterns that the butterflies use to utterly disassemble and recompose their entire being in the chrysalis before emerging as winged imagos. Nor did the parents attempt to alter Camille's visual capacities and neural arrangements to perceive physically in the butterfly color spectrum, or to see as if Camille had the compound eyes of an insect. Mimesis was not the point of the alterations, but fleshly suggestions braided through innovative pedagogical practices of naturalsocial becoming-with that could help the symbiosis thrive through five human generations committed to healing damaged human and nonhuman lives and places. In its most reductive expression, the point was to give the butterflies and their people—to give the Migrations—a chance to have a future in a time of mass extinctions.

By five years of age, Camille 1's skin was brilliantly banded and colored in yellow and black like a late-stage monarch caterpillar, increasing in intensity until age ten. But by initiation into adult responsibilities at age fifteen, Camille 1's skin had the muted tones and patterns of the monarch chrysalis. As an adult, Camille 1 gradually acquired the pattern and coloration of a vibrant orange and black adult butterfly. Camille 1's adult body was more androgynous in appearance than that of sexually dimorphic monarch adults.

All of the symbiont children developed both visible traits and subtle sensory similarities to their animal partners in early childhood. Although they should not have been surprised, the consequences of this developmental fact blindsided the adult compostists, as the first serious conflicts in New Gauley erupted in the learning groups of the young. Five youngsters who were bonded to animal symbionts, two children born to dissenting parents, and so not bonded with such symbionts, and five in-migrant children without symbionts made up the first cohort of little ones. The symbiotic young were struggling to integrate mindful bodies unimaginable to their parents. In addition, each symbiosis was the only one of its kind in these early generations.

Camille 1 formed fierce friendships, especially with Kess, the youngster bonded with the American kestrels; but each symbiotic child was acutely aware of their irreducible difference. Kess and Camille gravitated to each other partly because they knew kestrels ate butterflies, and both of their threatened animal symbionts flourished best in fields, meadows, roadsides, pastures, and mixed woodlands full of a myriad of flowering plants. From the beginning, the symbiont children developed a complex subjectivity composed of loneliness, intense sociality, intimacy with nonhuman others, specialness, lack of choice, fullness of meaning, and sureness of future purpose. This landscape of converging and diverging feelings tended to grade into arrogance and exceptionalism toward the nonsymbiotic children, and even toward their parents and other nonsymbiotic adults of New Gauley. Because symbionts were still rare in the overall population of an area in the initial generations after the first Communities of Compost were established, in vulnerable moments nonsymbiotic children and adults could and did feel the symbionts were freaks, both more-than- and other-than-human, and seriously threatening. Remembering that humanity meant humus, and not *Anthropos* or *Homo*, did not come easily in the webs of Western cultures that predominated in New Gauley. Determined to help youngsters through

the mazes of self-preoccupation, social enthusiasm, playfulness, pride in each other, fear, competition, and bullying that they had known in school, the New Gauley adults and their young were faced with quite another challenge in the emerging community of both symbiotic and nonsymbiotic children.

New Gauley compostists soon found that storytelling was the most powerful practice for comforting, inspiring, remembering, warning, nurturing compassion, mourning, and becoming-with each other in their differences, hopes, and terrors. Of course, the Communities of Compost emphasized a deep and wide range of approaches to educating both young and old, and the sciences and arts were especially elaborated and cherished. For youngsters and adults of most species in the communities, play was the most powerful and diverse activity for rearranging old things and proposing new things, new patterns of feeling and action, and for crafting safe enough ways to tangle with each other in conflict and collaboration.²⁵ The practice of friendship and the practice of play, both ritualized and celebrated in small and large ways, were the core kin-forming apparatuses. Libraries in many formats and materialities abounded to evoke curiosities and sustain knowledge projects for learning to live and die well in the work of healing damaged places, selves, and other beings. Decolonial multispecies studies (including diverse and multimodal human and nonhuman languages) and an indefinitely expandable transknowledging approach called EcoEvoDevoHistoEthno-TechnoPsycho (Ecological Evolutionary Developmental Historical Ethnographic Technological Psychological studies) were essential layered and knotted inquiries for compostists.²⁶

Compostists eagerly found out everything they could about experimental, intentional, utopian, dystopian, and revolutionary communities and movements across times and places. One of their great disappointments in these accounts was that so many started from the premises of starting over and beginning anew, instead of learning to inherit without denial and stay with the trouble of damaged worlds. Although hardly free of the sterilizing narrative of wiping the world clean by apocalypse or salvation, the richest humus for their inquiries turned out to be SF—science fiction and fantasy, speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, and string figures. Blocking the foreclosures of utopias, SF kept politics alive.

So storytelling was the seed bag for flourishing for compostists, and Camille 1 was fed on stories. Because the brave young princess loved the

toxic forest beings, especially the despised and feared insects called the Ohmu, Camille's favorite story was *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. Like a turbo butterfly, Nausicaä could fly over the forest, fields, and towns on her agile personal jet-powered glider. The young Camille 1 could never resist that vivid sensation. Hayao Miyazaki's manga and anime story is set on a postapocalyptic earth menaced by the toxic forest's critters, who were defending themselves and taking revenge for the natural world's relentless destruction at the hands of militarized, power-mad, technological humans. Evil rulers continued to promise ultimate destruction in their drive to exterminate the toxic forest and extract the last drams of resources for the walled cities of privilege and exception. Through her study of the forest's ecology, understanding of the physiology of the mushroomlike infected poisonous trees, and love for the dangerous mutant giant insects and their larvae, Nausicaä triumphed in her efforts to save both the people and the forest. She discovered that the trees purified the toxins and drop by drop were forming a vast underground aquifer of pure water that could regenerate the biodiverse earth. Attuned to the languages of the plants, fungi, and animals, Nausicaä could calm the incomprehension and fear of the people who were poisoned by the toxic emanations of the disturbed forest. She could propose peace between humans and other-than-humans because she befriended the toxic forest, a practice that reached deep into the young Camille 1's psyche. In the dramatic concluding scenes of the story, at great risk to herself, Nausicaä rescued a threatened larval Ohmu and so stopped the stampede of its giant adult conspecifics in their rage at the humans' capturing and wounding of the youngster.

Camille 1 learned that there were many inspirations for Miyazaki's story,²⁷ including a Phaeacian princess from Homer's *Odyssey* named Nausicaä, who loved nature and music, cultivated a fervid imagination, and disdained possessions. Along with European medieval accounts of witches' mastery of the winds, Master Windkey from Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* also infused the Nausicaä tale. The adult Camille 1 thought that the most generative inspiration, however, was a Japanese story from the Heian period, called "The Princess Who Loved Insects."²⁸ The princess did not beautify herself by blackening her teeth or plucking her eyebrows, and she scorned the idea of a husband. All her passions were for the caterpillars and creeping crawling critters disdained by others.²⁹

Nausicaä had a companion animal, really a symbiont, a fierce and gentle little fox squirrel. In per's memoir, the elder Camille 1 described

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind as a fable of great danger and great companionship. Unlike conventional heroes, Nausicaä accompanied by animals, is a girl child and healer, whose courage matures in thick connection with many others and many kinds of others. Nausicaä cannot act alone, and also her personal response-ability and actions have great consequences for herself and for myriad human and nonhuman beings. Nausicaä's connections and corridors are practical and material, as well as fabulous and enspirited in bumptious animist fashion. Hers are the arts of living on a damaged planet. This twentieth-century Japanese anime child sustained Camille 1 in symbiosis with the monarchs for a lifetime.

CAMILLE 2

Born in 2085. Human numbers are 9.5 billion.

Died in 2185. Human numbers are 8 billion.

At initiation at age fifteen, as a coming-of-age gift the second Camille decided to ask for chin implants of butterfly antennae, a kind of tentacular beard, so that more vivid tasting of the flying insects' worlds could become the heritage of the human partner too, helping in the work and adding to the corporeal pleasures of becoming-with.³⁰ Proud of this vibrant sign of the lived symbiosis now in its second generation, once the procedures were complete the adolescent Camille 2 undertook a trip to the overwintering habitat of the eastern migration to meet with indigenous people and campesinos who were rehabilitating damaged lands and waters along the transvolcanic belt between the states of México and Michoacán.

Camille 1 had been Camille 2's mentor, and over the first fifteen years of the new child's life Camille 1 tried to prepare the second-generation New Gauley human-butterfly symbiont for sustained visiting as the guest of the diverse communities of Michoacán. But Camille 1's life-work had been almost entirely along the corridors and in the towns, fields, mines, woods, coasts, mountains, deserts, and cities of the great eastern and western monarch migrations that are north of Mexico, into southern Canada on the east and into Washington and the Northern Rockies on the west. Camille 1 worked, played, and struggled primarily with midwestern and southern farmers, agribusiness scientists, energy companies and their ruthless lawyers, mine workers, unemployed peo-



8.4. Monarch butterfly resting on fennel in the Pismo Butterfly Grove near the entrance to Pismo Beach State Park, November 15, 2008. Photograph by docentjoyce/Wikimedia Commons.

ple, nature lovers, gardeners, corridor ecologists, insect specialists, and climate scientists, as well as artists performing with and for nonhuman critters. Although based in New Gauley and attuned especially to the ravaged landscapes and peoples of coal country there and across the continent,³¹ Camille 1 also sojourned with the insects and their people in the winter homes of the western migration of the monarchs, especially along the Monterey Bay of Central California. So per understood the biological, cultural, historical worlds of these clusters of monarchs clinging to their local Monterey pines and crucial (if never really accepted by ecological nativists) Australian gum trees.

Both sym and non-sym people across this vast expanse of land experienced the sympoises of the Children of Compost primarily through their *biological* semiotic materialities. Of course, as an important component of per's education and working alliances as both child and adult, Camille 1 had studied with Native American, First Nation, and Métis teachers, who explained and performed diverse practices and knowledges for conjoined human and other-than-human becoming and exchange. But

Camille 1 had never deeply questioned the settler practices or categories of nature, culture, and biology that made per's own transformative sympoiesis with monarchs comprehensible to herself. For practical and political, as well as ontological and epistemological, reasons, Camille 1 recognized the urgent need both to deepen and to change the terms of the exchanges and collaborations with people, peoples, and other-than-human critters in the southern migrations and residencies of the monarchs in Mexico.

And so, although well read in decolonial and postcolonial literatures and engaged in lifelong correspondence with Mexican comrades, several of whom had personally made the journey to New Gauley and to California's Santa Cruz to meet with the Communities of Compost there, Camille 1 died before encountering monarch sympoiesis in material semiotic forms other than symbiogenesis. Then, on the first Día de los Muertos of per's first sojourn in Mexico after coming of age, Camille 2 was introduced to the Monarcas returning to their winter mountain home in November as the souls of the Mazahua dead. The Monarcas did not *represent* the souls of the dead; they *were* syms of the living butterflies and the human dead, in multinaturalist worldings that Camille 2 had studied but could barely recognize and did not know how to greet.

There were Communities of Compost in Michoacán and all over Mexico that had birthed symbiogenetic children for the work of rehabilitating ruined lands and waters through the coming generations. Mexicans were as much at home in the extended apparatuses of naturalcultural, biological knowledges and practices as their northern comrades. But none of the Mexican Communities of Compost, no matter their settler, mixed, or native heritages, had joined a human baby to migrating endangered critters that were themselves the visiting ancestors. The consequences of Camille 2's powerful introduction to the Monarca sympoiesis that joined the overwintering winged insects and the visiting ancestors reshaped the fabric of work for ecojustice that joined New Gauley and the communities of the transvolcanic belt for the coming three hundred years. Searching for a term they could share, Camille 2 and per's Mazahua hosts decided to name this kind of becoming-with "symanimagensis." The corridors, migrations, and contact zones of the monarchs collect up many ways of living and dying across the Americas!

Thus the Mazahuas of central Mexico (México, Michoacán, and Querétaro) became vital to Camille's story from the second generation on. Decolonial work on all sides of the border had to be intrinsic to every

form of sympoiesis with the monarchs.³² Struggling with the consequences for the Communities of Compost of practices of conservation and restoration inherited from Anglo and Spanish settler colonialism and of both the Mexican and U.S. states' ongoing suppression of and extraction from indigenous peoples, Camille 2 no longer could not know about the Mazahuas' land and water struggles, migrations to near and distant cities for ill-paid work, customary and illegal forest cutting, charcoal making, history of acting to preserve the trees and woodlands before the butterfly migration became an international issue, history also of old and new indigenous and outsider exploitation of the forest and the watershed, and resistance to U.S. and other foreign scientists and Mexican state regulations and bureaucrats that criminalize local subsistence practices in the butterfly preserve that became a World Heritage Site.

In Camille 2's first weeks in Mazahua monarch country, the women of the communities in and around the butterfly reserve took per in hand.³³ When the young sym arrived in autumn of 2100, the radical Mazahua women were celebrating the ninety-sixth anniversary of the founding of their movement. In 2004, "symbolically armed with farming tools and wooden rifles, they formed el Ejército de Mujeres Zapatistas en Defensa del Agua and pledged a strategy of non-violence."³⁴ The Zapatista movement had begun with a transformative armed uprising in Chiapas on January 1, 1994, but the Zapatistas' most important contribution to the ongoing strategies of the Mazahuan communities was their development of vigorous nonviolence in a broad, multigenerational opposition front.³⁵ Communities of Compost all over the world studied Zapatista-held municipalities called *caracoles* (snail shells).

Initiating the visiting New Gauley sym into intense relationships with the living dead was the Mazahua women's first priority. Politely resisting the temptation to thread their fingers continuously though the sensitive tentacular organs of their oddly bearded visitor, they were charmed by the butterfly antennae on Camille 2's chin and by per's vividly colored adult skin patterns that had gradually replaced the dramatic caterpillar skin banding of the younger child. The Mazahuas were confident that these markings signified that the adolescent would become an apt student of their own human-butterfly worldings, and so a useful ally. To join in the work of human and other-than-human rehabilitation and multispecies environmental justice in indigenous territory, which had been dominated and drained for centuries by the state and other outside

forces, Camille 2 had to study the resurgence of peoples that ignited in the early years of the twenty-first century.

On the night the monarchas returned in November 2100, the women taught Camille 2 a poem, “Soy Mazahua,” composed by Julio Garduño Cervantes, which remained vital to their work for the dead and the living. The beautifully dressed people at the fiesta were singing the poem in the midst of extravagant fireworks, feasting, and greeting returning kin. The poem commemorated a Mazahua leader who had been murdered in 1980 on the way home from a cemetery on el Día de los Muertos. All over Mexico, this killing outraged indigenous pueblos and ignited a movement that was stronger than ever by the time Camille 2 visited. The women of El Ejército de Mujeres Zapatistas en Defensa del Agua taught that butterflies drank the tears of those who mourned the murdered, raped, and disappeared ones of every land.³⁶

I AM MAZAHUA

You have wanted to deny my existence

But I do not deny yours.

But I exist. I am Mazahua.

...

I am made of this land, the air, water and sun.

And together we repeat, We are Mazahuas

...

You have enslaved my ancestors and stolen their lands. You have murdered them.

...

I build the house but you live in it.

You are the criminal but I am in prison.

We made the revolution but you took advantage of it.

My voice rises and joins with a thousand others.

And together we repeat, We are Mazahuas

Our hands sowed for everyone.

Our hands will struggle for everyone.

I am Mazahua.

—Julio Garduño Cervantes

Camille 2 found it difficult at first to grasp how active the dead were across this region and how critical to the work of compostists to restore damaged land and its human and nonhuman beings.³⁷ Camille 2 had to

learn to let go of colonialist notions of religion and secularism to begin to appreciate the sheer semiotic materiality of those who came before. Until sympoiesis with the dead could be acknowledged, sympoiesis with the living was radically incomplete. Visiting urbanites from Mexico City were no better at seriously engaging the epistemological, ontological, and practical demands of this aspect of indigenous cosmopolitics than Camille 2 was. Modernity and its category work proved terribly durable for hundreds of years after the withering critique conducted in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries had made explicit adherence to the tenets of philosophical and political modernity unthinkable for serious people, including scientists and artists. Modernity was driven underground, but remained undead. Making peace with this vampire ancestor was an urgent task for the Communities of Compost.³⁸

In the early weeks of Camille 2's sojourn, the teenage Mazahua women of El Ejército de Mujeres Zapatistas en Defensa del Agua undertook the task of teaching the sym about the struggle for water and forest eco-justice in the region. Throughout the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in immense water transfer projects, Mexico City drew this precious fluid from the lakes, rivers, and aquifers that reached across the mountains and into the basins occupied by indigenous peoples and other critters to the north and west.³⁹ This practice was immensely destructive, a fact highlighted in a 2015 report of the Union of Scientists Committed to Society, which argued, "Transferring water, moving large volumes from one basin to another, is not only unsustainable and affects the environment in the medium and long term, but also causes forced displacements that destroy towns and communities and marginalize people, who are obliged to move to the poverty belts of the large cities."⁴⁰ By the time of the birth of Camille 1, the Cutzamala System already pumped 127 billion gallons per year to Mexico City and its twenty-seven municipalities, while the Mazahua communities did not have potable water. El Ejército de Mujeres Zapatistas en Defensa del Agua carried out relentless demonstrations and actions in Mexico City and elsewhere and won many partial victories. The struggle continued throughout Camille 2's lifetime and after. In sympoiesis, the monarch critters, human and other-than-human, drank from the healing tears of the living and the dead.⁴¹



8.5. Mural painted by youth in La Hormiga, Putumayo, in southwestern Colombia depicting landscapes before and after aerial fumigation during the U.S.-Colombia "War on Drugs." Photograph by Kristina Lyons.

CAMILLE 3

Born in 2170; human numbers are 8.5 billion.

Died in 2270; human numbers are 6 billion.

By this generation, two-thirds of the residents of the Communities of Compost around the world were symbionts engaged in intense work and play for sustaining vulnerable beings across the hardest centuries of planetary crisis and widespread human and other-than-human suffering. A significant number of syms had decided to leave their compostist communities, surrendering residency rights for citizenship in other political formations. Some humans, both in-migrants and non-sym offspring born in the new towns, became solid compostists without ever wanting to engage personally in symbiogenetic kin making. Allied with diverse non-sym peoples, compostist practices of living and dying flourished everywhere, and the people in the emerging epoch of partial healing felt deeply entangled with the ongoing tentacular Chthulucene. There had been great losses of kinds of living beings, as rapid climate change and interlocked ecosystem collapses swept the earth; and the mass extinction event of the Capitalocene and Anthropocene was not over.

Still, by the time Camille 3 was fifty years old, it was clear that human numbers, while still too heavy in most places for the damaged natural, social, and technical systems of earth to sustain, were declining within a deliberate pattern of heightened environmental justice. That pattern emphasized a preference for the poor among humans, a preference for biodiverse natural-social ecosystems, and a preference for the most vulnerable among other critters and their habitats. Much of the most inventive work over the 150 years since the first compostist communities appeared was developing the linkages of this pattern. That work required both powerful recognition and strengthening of inherited Chthulucene practices that had not been fully obliterated in the Capitalocene and Anthropocene, and also newly invented ways of linking the three critical preferences to each other. The wealthiest and highest-consuming human populations reduced new births the most, with the support of the Communities of Compost; but human births everywhere were deliberately below replacement rates, so as to slowly and effectively reach levels that made sense for distributed and diverse

humanity as humus, rather than as end points of nature and culture. Practices of making kin, not babies, had taken hold inside and outside the Communities of Compost.

Against all expectations in the early twenty-first century, after only 150 years sympoises, both symbiogenetic and symanimagenic, seemed to be making a difference in holding open time and space for many of earth's most vulnerable, including the monarch migrations and their diverse human people and peoples. Forests in the transvolcanic belt of Mexico were resurgent, and water had been restored to the pillaged aquifers. People had worked out robust peace with the critters and scientists of the Biosphere Reserve, as greater control was relocated to campesino and indigenous organizations for environmental justice. Migrations north of Mexico now could count on larval and adult food as nonmonocropping organic agriculture, ubiquitous gardens, and species-rich roadside verges filled the landscape. Devastation of habitats for people and other critters caused by Big Energy and Big Capital was not finished, but the tide had definitively turned.

Humus-friendly technological innovation, creative rituals and celebrations, profound economic restructuring, reconfiguration of political control, demilitarization, and sustained work for connecting corridors and for ecological, cultural, and political restoration had all made an impact and were growing in force. While Camille 3 could not forget the monarchs, per's attention was turned to the fact that syms needed to take stock of themselves collectively in unprecedented ways.

The major events of Camille 3's life were travels to gatherings around the world of sym and non-sym humans in the face of general recognition that both humanity and animality had been fundamentally transformed by compostist practices. Of course, many peoples of earth had never divided living beings into human and animal; nonetheless, they had all ordered things differently from what was plainly happening everywhere by 2200. It was also inescapably clear by 2200 that the changes were not the same everywhere. Sym worlding was not one thing, and it was diverging and adapting exuberantly in EcoEvoDevoHistoTechnoEthnoPsycho fashion. The recognition was turbulent, exhilarating, and dangerous. The crises of bullying among the children in Camille 1's generation were nothing to the terrors of transition in the third generation of the Communities of Compost, who would in a few more generations become the majority of people on earth. Inventing earthwide cosmopolitics between



8.6. Kenojuak Ashevak, *Animals of Land and Sea*, 1991, stonecut with stencil, 25 × 30 in. (paper). Courtesy of Dorset Fine Arts.

and among syms and non-syms was the daunting task of Camille 3's generation.

Peoples from every fold of earth had long been both generated and nourished by stories, myths, performances, powers, and embodiments of entities not divided into categories recognizable to most conventional Western philosophy and politics. Such stories and embodiments were also deeply embedded in the practices and accounts of both recent and long-established peoples living throughout what was once called the West. Camille 3's generation found biologies and storytelling to be the richest veins for weaving the needed fabrics to bind syms and non-syms together.

Coming-of-age stories in SF, from Joanna Russ's Alyx in *The Adventures of Alyx* to Julie Czerneda's decidedly nonhumanoid young female entity Esen-alit-Quar in her *Web Shifters* series, entranced many in Camille 3's generation, and these tales had been carefully maintained in the

compostist archives. Camille 3 was especially drawn to Philip Pullman's twentieth-century stories about the young girl Lyra Belacqua and her daemon, Pantalaimon.⁴² The animal daemons of human beings were capable of multiple transformations until the time of human adolescence, when the animal stabilized into a single morph. Pullman imagined the daemons as expressions of a tripartite human person, rather than as distinct beings; but compostist syms had other and better resources for understanding the join, which did not rely on the trinary soul/body/mind heritage that Pullman used in his war against both monotheism and the Authority. Compostists understood the daemons in less ontologically purified ways, more entangled with situated animisms in diverse modern and traditional, past and present worlds. The bonds between human and daemon were very close to the symbiogenetic linkages forged for the young in compostist communities. Severing such bonds threatened persons at the deepest core of their being. Living-with was the only possible way to live-well. Heartened by these stories between and during endless meetings among quibbling and not infrequently fearful syms and non-syms, the critters of earth were forging planetwide ontological revolutions for making kin.

CAMILLE 4

Born in 2255. Human numbers are 6.5 billion.

Died in 2355. Human numbers are 3.5 billion.

After decades of heartening progress, new viral diseases afflicting soil-based fungal symbionts of food plants needed by many species in the subfamily Danainae to fight off their own protozoan parasites emerged earthwide too quickly for response.⁴³ The monarchs joined the myriad kinds of beings that disappeared in the ongoing great extinctions that had been unloosed by the Plantationocene, Anthropocene and Capitalocene. Near the end of life, witnessing the loss of the great monarch migrations across the Americas, and with them the loss of the patterns of living and dying they sustained, Camille 4 knew that mentoring Camille 5 would take other paths than those that had guided Camille 3's teaching of Camille 4.

In a diary archived by the compostists, Camille 4 wrote about per's wrenching feelings in 2340 at the age of eighty-five, while watching the



8.7. The relations of infectious disease and parasitism are not the enemies of earth's critters; the killing of ongoingness—double death—is the crime. “When monarch butterflies are heavily infected with the protozoan parasite *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha*, they can sometimes get stuck to their chrysalis. In this case, a paper wasp takes advantage of the situation.” Photograph and description by Jaap de Roode, Emory University.

celebrations for fifteen-year-old Camille 5's initiation into full sym responsibilities. Involved for decades in research on the ecologies of the insects in their human and nonhuman holobiomes, Camille 4 had been studying the reports from all over the earth about the rapid population crashes of moths and butterflies, especially among the Danainae. Although widespread and diverse, monarchs would be among the first to disappear; and no one yet knew why. It was not clear that total extinction would result, but it was clear the migrations were doomed. Holding open space would involve much different work for Camille 5 than for the previous generations, and it was Camille 4's hard task to take the young sym through another sort of initiation before dying in 2355. Of course, Camille 4 had a great deal of experience to draw from with other syms who had lost their critters.



8.8. Make Kin Not Babies. Design by Elaine Gan for the exhibit *dump!* at Kunsthall Aarhus, 2015.

There were thousands of Speakers for the Dead around the earth by 2300, each tasked with bringing critters who had been irretrievably lost into potent presence for giving knowledge and heart to all of those continuing to work for the still diverse earth's robust and partial recuperation.⁴⁴ Over three hundred years, the Communities of Compost had built a potent earthwide network of refugia and foci of resurgent naturalcultural diversity. The Speakers for the Dead teach practices of remembering and mourning that enlist extinct human and nonhuman critters in the ongoing work of cutting the shackles of Double Death, which strangled a vast proportion of ways of living and dying in the Plantationocene, Anthropocene and Capitalocene.⁴⁵

For help in preparing Camille 5 to take up the tasks of a Speaker for the Dead, Camille 4 turned to the Canadian-Nunavut, nontraditional, young Inuk woman throat singer Tanya Tagaq and her 2014 album *Animism*, which had been so powerful in strengthening Inuit and also other situated resurgence in the twenty-first century. Tagaq practiced what a twenty-first-century anthropologist, Susan Harding, tentatively called "experimental animism."⁴⁶ In *Animism*, Tagaq and her partners,

violinist Jesse Zubot and drummers Jean Martin and DZ Michael Red, performed a musical argument for and about continuities, transformations, contradictions, and SF visual and acoustic kinetic interconversions of human and animal beings in situated worlds. Hunting, eating, living-with, dying-with, and moving-with in the turbulent folds and eddies of a situated earth: these were the affirmations and controversies of Tagaq's singing and website texts and interviews. Tagaq embraced oppositions and conflicts, not to purify them, but to live inside complexities of shared flesh, casting herself for some worlds and not others. At her Polaris Music Prize performance in September 2014, the names of murdered and missing Aboriginal women scrolled behind Tagaq. The last track of *Animism* was titled "Fracking"; the first was "Caribou." She wore seal fur cuffs during her Polaris performance; she affirmed the natural world and hunting by her people. Her risk-taking animism performed materialist worlds—gone, here, and to come. Proclaiming, "I want to live in worlds that are not supposed to be," she affirmed that such worlds already are, have been, and will be.⁴⁷ The music was utterly contemporary, and many mobile identities were in play and at risk. The work reached out to unexpected techniques and audiences; and it was unapologetically rooted in specific places, peoples, and critters.

Tagaq's practices of transforming sound, flesh, and kind were animist in old and new Inuit terms and in the related sense proposed by the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. Viveiros de Castro studied with Brazilian Amerindians, with whom he learned to theorize the radical conceptual realignment he called multinaturalism and perspectivism. "Animism is the only *sensible* version of materialism."⁴⁸ It matters which concepts conceptualize concepts. Materialist, experimental animism is not a New Age wish nor a neocolonial fantasy, but a powerful proposition for rethinking relationality, perspective, process, and reality without the dubious comforts of the oppositional categories of modern/traditional or religious/secular. Human-animal knots do something different in this world.

It matters which worlds world worlds. It matters who eats whom and how. It remains a material question for cosmopolitical critters in the Communities of Compost. For these reasons, Camille 4 invoked Tanya Tagaq to share her power more than two hundred years after her death.

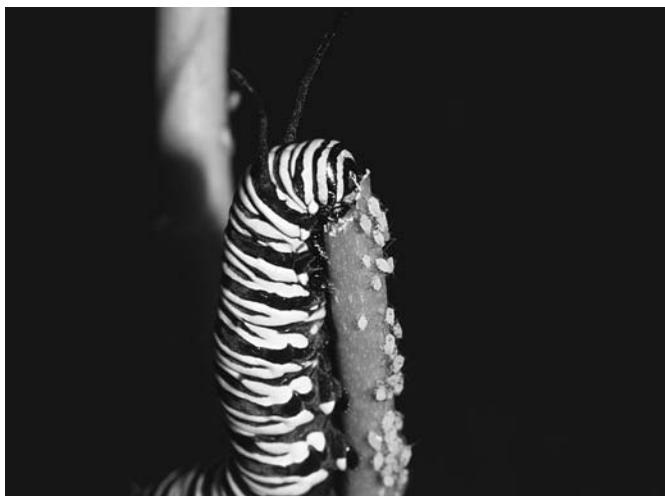
CAMILLE 5

Born 2340. Human numbers are 4 billion.
Died in 2425. Human numbers are 3 billion.
One billion human-critter symbionts inhabit the earth in 2425.
Two billion humans are not syms.
Over 50 percent of all critter species living in 2015
have vanished by 2425.
Millions of kinds of critters are syms with humans.
The animal sym partners remain unaltered by human genes.
The human syms take on ever more properties
of their animal partners.
Many humans are syms with extinct partners.

STARHAWK'S SONG, TAUGHT BY THE SPEAKERS FOR THE DEAD

Breathe deep.
Feel the pain
where it lives deep in us
for we live, still,
in the raw wounds
and pain is salt in us, burning.
Flush it out.
Let the pain become a sound,
a living river on the breath.
Raise your voice.
Cry out. Scream. Wail.
Keen and mourn
for the dismembering of the world.⁴⁹

And so the fifth Camille inherited a powerful task from per's mentor—to become a Speaker for the Dead, to bring into ongoing presence, through active memory, the lost lifeways, so that other symbiotic and sympoietic commitments would not lose heart. Crucial to the work was not to forget the stink in the air from the burning of the witches, not to forget the murders of human and nonhuman beings in the Great Catastrophes named the Plantationocene, Anthropocene, Capitalocene, to “keen and mourn for the dismembering of the world.” Moving through mourning to represencing, to the practice of vital memory, was the work of the Speakers for the Dead. Their task was to strengthen the healing that was gaining momentum across the earth. The fourth and fifth Camilles both



8.9. Monarch butterfly caterpillars regularly have to share their milkweed food plants with oleander aphids (*Aphis nerii*).
© Jaap de Roode, Emory University.

traveled widely, drawing from their heritage of monarch symbioses, to teach and learn how to practice healing and ongoingness in the cyclones of continuing damage and partial resurgence.

Before taking up the tasks of the Speaker for the Dead, remembering the bonds formed more than two hundred years earlier, Camille 5 again sought help from the evolving, historically situated, symanimagenic kin-making practices of twenty-fourth-century Mazahuas. Camille 5 began per's work with a year-long residence in Michoacán studying with the overlapping indigenous-scientific-activist communities that continued to heal damaged lives and lands there. The Mazahuas also mourned the loss of the living monarchs, and they were deeply worried how this extinction would reshape their own symanimagenic relations with their dead. By Camille 5's generation, there were millions of vanished species, vanished kinds of critters both human and other-than-human, and so much for the Speakers for the Dead to do to replenish heart and mind for and with those who continue to stay with the trouble. And to stay with the ragged joy of ordinary living and dying, up to and beyond the year 2400. The monarchs' people decided that this Speaker for the Dead should itself be a new kind of sym, joining the symbiogenetic Camille 5 with symanimagenic persons from the transvolcanic belt. Such persons had

been friends and coworkers before; now they were to undertake another experimental and risky sympoiesis for unfurling times.

The Speakers for the Dead are also tasked with bringing into mind and heart the new things of earth, not only the symbionts and sym-animants and their communities and corridors, but also the emerging kinds of beings and ways of life of an always evolving home world. The Speakers for the Dead seek and release the energies of the past, present, and future Chthulucene, with its myriad tentacles of opportunistic, dangerous, and generative sympoiesis. The Children of Compost would not cease the layered, curious practice of becoming-with others for a habitable, flourishing world.