



## Walking Together in a Pandemic: Reflections on a Semester of Place, Decolonization, and Classroom Community

ELA PRZYBYŁO

Illinois State University, USA

EDCEL J. CINTRÓN-GONZALEZ

Illinois State University, USA

SERENAH MINASIAN

Illinois State University, USA

SHAWNA SHEPERD

North Carolina State University, USA

NATALIE JIPSON

Bradley University, USA

ANNA ORTIZ

University of Arizona, USA

CHARLEY KOENIG

Illinois State University, USA

FAITH BORLAND

Lehigh University, USA

**ABSTRACT** *In this co-authored reflection by seven graduate students and one instructor, we revisit the “Apocalyptic Feminisms” graduate class taught in Fall 2020, at the height of the pandemic, in which students were asked to engage with interdisciplinary writing on the Anthropocene and to hone their own feminist praxes through going on and documenting their walks. We reflect on the “Walk and Movement Reading Instagram Engagements” assignment, exploring what walking can offer to deepen theoretical, methodological, and praxis-based approaches to environmental and place-based learning. We do this by writing from a cascading voice approach, where each reflection stands on its own and together builds into a whole greater than its parts. Following on an introduction to the course and assignment, we begin with a conceptual*

*Correspondence Address:* Ela Przybyło, Department of English, Illinois State University, Normal, IL, USA 61761; email: [emprzy1@ilstu.edu](mailto:emprzy1@ilstu.edu)

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*outlining of the meanings of place, decolonization, and academic community. Next, each of the graduate student collaborators responds to the following prompt, “How did the walking project on IG [Instagram] influence how you thought about questions of place, decolonization, and classroom community during a pandemic?” Each co-author develops a robust engagement with this question drawing on their own pandemic Fall 2020 semester, their photographs from the course, and the insights and practices they developed in conversation with each other throughout the span of the semester. Together, this reflection offers thoughts on the feminist and place-based utilities of walking pedagogy as well as, through collaboration, challenges the very way in which academic scholarship is done at the site of the late capitalist academy and its topos of success, competition, and meritocracy.*

KEYWORDS walking methodologies; collaboration; Anthropocene; environmental education; politics of place; pedagogy; graduate seminar; education of place

### **Introduction** (by Ela Przybyło)

It is Fall 2020, and I am sitting in my mother’s yard in Edmonton, Treaty Six Territory, on the lands of Nêhiyaw (Cree), Dene, Anishinaabe (Saulteaux), Nakota Sioux, Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Métis, Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), and Inuit. My mother, an elderly Polish woman who makes magic with her garden, picks the seeds from recently flowered annuals and gathers them in paper bags. Soon it will be my turn to contribute to the garden by climbing the lone straggly apple tree to pick baskets of Norland apples that will last into the winter. Later in the day we will walk the working-class suburb together, following the designated walking path that consists of a sidewalk lined with poplars and pines laid over a natural gas pipeline. If you walk long enough, you end up at a little ravine, once connected to the major city river, North Saskatchewan (in Cree, Kisiskâciwani-sîpiy – swift current – and Omaka-ty – big river – in Niitsitapi), cut off these days from its home waters by cement, city, and a golf course.

While quarantining with my mother I am also teaching online, including the graduate class known simply as “Apocalyptic Feminisms,” which has 13 graduate students strewn across several U.S. states – the co-authors of this piece. They are white, Puerto Rican, Armenian, Latina, Black, queer, parents, disabled and able-bodied, graduate workers, and are Masters and PhD students in English, many in their first year. I am a white Polish-Canadian in my second year of a tenure-track job in English and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at a university in Illinois, home to over 35 Indigenous Nations and groups (D. Allred & L. Pappenfort, personal communication, April 16, 2024). The course draws on Environmental Humanities (EH) and Black and Indigenous feminisms to ask students to grapple with the apocalyptic effects of climate catastrophe on poor, Black, and Indigenous people, People of Color, women, queer and transgender people, and people from low and lower-middle-income countries (LMICs), acknowledging that while apocalyptic framings of

our environmental future are rampant, many marginalized communities have *already* experienced the apocalypse under colonial rule, occupation, white supremacy, and settler colonialism (TallBear, 2023).

In what follows, we undertake a collaborative reflection on the “Walk and Movement Reading Instagram Engagements” assignment, drawing on student experiences and reflections on the assignment and their time in the course in Fall 2020. The assignment invited students to engage in a walk or equivalent movement practice as a form of feminist praxis, place-based learning, and a dialogue with the readings, reflecting on their walks in visual and text-based form on the platform Instagram (IG). Importantly, we identified “walks” as any form of movement, to resist ableist limitations of what can count as a walk and also to grant students full autonomy in how they wanted to move through the readings. Also significantly, during COVID-19, not everyone had the same access to walking, including in terms of bodily vulnerability and in terms of the spike in aggressive anti-Asian racism that made walking unsafe for many (Hong et al., 2021).

We begin this piece with a literature review exploring how walking can deepen ideas of place, decolonization, and classroom community. Next, in the bulk of the piece, seven of the graduate students from the course (all students from the course were invited to contribute but only seven decided to do so), respond to the following prompt, “How did the walking project on IG influence how you thought about questions of place, decolonization, and classroom community during a pandemic?” This question was developed by the co-authors in the process of writing the piece as broad enough to galvanize reflections on the course and assignment. Each of the co-authors develop a robust engagement with this question drawing on their own pandemic Fall 2020 semester and the insights and practices they developed in conversation with each other throughout the span of the course. As we will discuss, we have adopted this multi-voiced, cascading approach not only to center student experiences of the learning process, but also to continue to challenge the very way in which academic scholarship is done at the site of the late capitalist academy and its topos of success, competition, and meritocracy. This cascading voice approach, as we understand it, allows for distinct and multiple perspectives to coexist in a publication, each contributing place-based knowledge that cannot culminate in a singular thesis or argument.

### **Why Walk? Place, Decolonization, and Classroom Community** (by Ela Przybyło)

Walking was a central practice of the Apocalyptic Feminisms class and is at the center of this analysis for students and instructor. Through walking, students were encouraged to leave their home bubbles in ways that felt safe and doable during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to think about themselves as feminist scholars in dialogue with their surroundings. Walking

became part of the biweekly practice of the course, something that encouraged slowness and reflection, as well as deepened student analysis of the theory they were navigating in the class. The walking assignment was directly inspired by Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman's (2018) "walking methodologies" and was adapted for a pandemic online learning context to include Instagram reflections. It was also informed, more broadly, by feminist approaches to embodied pedagogy (e.g., Batacharya & Wong, 2018). Until recently with scholarship on walking pedagogy such as Springgay and Truman's (2018), the tradition of walking reflection was connected to white cisgender male colonial norms and ways of seeing – Charles Baudelaire's flâneur (1964), Michel De Certeau's "Walking in the City" (1988), or Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* (Benjamin & Tiedemann, 1999) – peppered with the possibility of remaining an invisible viewer of the cityscape and with discovery (Bartlett, 2020). The tradition of walking we drew on in the class, however, did not visit these canonized ways of walking and centered Springgay and Truman's (2018) walking methodologies as it follows feminist, Indigenous, of Color, and queer manners of walking in art, research, and pedagogy. In recent years, walking has become central to environmental education for its ability to tap into sensorial ways of knowing, moving through space, and relating to one another. In this section we talk about the three themes that arose for us in relation to walking – place, decolonization, and community – making a case for how inviting asynchronous walks from a classroom community can deepen the work of feminist theory and praxis (e.g., Bartlett, 2020; Gray & Colucci-Gray, 2019; Sharanya, 2017; Solnit, 2014; Springgay & Truman, 2016, 2018). In dialogue with discussing these themes and specifically in relation to the theme of community, we will also talk about our approach to writing this piece and its commitments to feminist principles of slowness and resourcefulness against a backdrop of academic grind culture.

In undertaking biweekly walks throughout the span of the 16-week semester, students were invited to think about the place they were writing from – their surrounding environments. Place is a complex term, for feminist and Indigenous authors in particular, and it blurs and overlaps with concepts of space. Donna Haraway (1997) discusses space as a "power-laced process" often symbolized with "fetishes" such as maps that seek to edit out process, making space into "nontropic, real, literal things" (p. 136). Space, Doreen Massey writes, is made through interactions, is always under construction, and makes multiplicity possible (2005, p. 9). *Place*, on the other hand, often refers to the specificity of a particular location and its accompanying politics (Massey, 1984), though like space it is not neutral or fixed (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 14). Comparing space and place, Edward Casey writes that "we do not live in space. Instead, *we live in places*. So it behooves us to understand what such place-bound and place-specific living consists in... we are tied to place undetachably and without reprieve" (2009, p. xiii). Concepts of space and place were used more or less interchangeably throughout the class and our discussions leading up to the writing of this piece, yet most of what we were

getting at referred to the specificity of the locations we were walking during the pandemic and the implications of being in, with, and walking through places that are, like us, entangled in the histories and presents of settler colonialism and Indigenous land theft.

Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie (2015) discuss how a focus on place can challenge both the globalizing tendencies of theory, locating its specific contexts, as well as the presumed neutrality of writing from “nowhere” (Haraway, 1988). “Places have practices” they write, “in some definitions, places *are* practices” (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 14). Yet, importantly, Tuck and McKenzie (2015) also challenge the settler colonial assumptions that go along with assertions of place. Attachment and entitlement to a place or series of places, for settlers, can amount to an erasure of Indigenous stewardship of a particular place. Further, place is conceived of differently in Western and Indigenous worldviews (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 17). In the first instance, place is often deemphasized in Western thought, “place has been undermined by and sub-ordinated to space and time,” in favor of universal approaches (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 622). When, in Western approaches, place is present, it is instrumentalized in service of settler colonial expansion and myths of discovery. Conversely, in Indigenous worldviews place is who and what one is as well as a central part of the fabric of one’s society through language, culture, and how and with whom relations are formed (Larsen & Johnson, 2017, p. 13; Watts, 2013). At its most basic, Indigenous can indeed mean “to be of a place” (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001, p. 31). Places and ecosystems themselves are part of Indigenous societies, “meaning that they have ethical structures, inter-species treaties and agreements, and further their ability to interpret, understand and implement. Non-human beings are active members of society” (Watts, 2013, p. 23). In the special issue of *Environmental Education Research* on Indigenous approaches to place in environmental learning, multiple scholars stress this interconnectedness of place with self and society for Indigenous Nations (e.g., Bang et al., 2014; Paperson, 2014; Sato et al., 2014; Tuck et al., 2014).

Place has received centralized attention in environmental pedagogy as a practice of awareness and environmental care and preservation (e.g., Gruenewald, 2003; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). David A. Gruenewald (2003) discussed the importance of place in education, arguing for places as “profoundly pedagogical” (p. 621) in the way that we always learn from our surroundings. He calls for educators to more deliberately center place in education and to develop a critical pedagogy of place, especially as “ecological issues can easily become abstractions from the immediacy of the places where we live” (p. 633) and because an investment in place can restore a sense of what one is fighting for.

In this sense, place and pedagogical walks are perfectly matched, since walks encourage us to build relationships with places. For Springgay and Truman, and other walking scholars and pedagogues, “place-making is produced by walking, and the ways that walking connects bodies, environment, and the

sensory surrounds of place ... walking is a way of becoming responsive to place; it activates modes of participation that are situated and relational” (2018, p. 4). Walking, in this way, can hone the type of educational practice that cultivates teaching and learning “with the environment” rather than merely about the environment (Russell & Bell, 1996, p. 176). Yet environmental pedagogy has not always recognized the divergent understandings of land and place for Indigenous and settler worldviews and how the recentralization of connection to place can be at the expense of Indigenous futurity. As Bang et al. (2014) write, “the constructions of land, implicitly or explicitly as no longer Indigenous, are foundationally implicated in teaching and learning about the natural world, whether that be in science education, place-based education or environmental education” (p. 39). Thus “settler colonialism is entrenched and reified in educational environments” including in those pertaining to environmental and feminist education (p. 40). The editors of the special issue of *Environmental Education Research* make exactly this point (Tuck et al., 2014), arguing that place-based education as well as environmental education more broadly are saturated with settler colonial ways of knowing that do damage to Indigenous lives, histories, and knowledges while continuing Indigenous displacement.

This leads to a second theme that arose for us as co-authors when discussing the walking assignment throughout and after the semester: decolonization. As is known, decolonization is a term commonly misapplied to other social justice struggles including feminisms and antiracism, and in academic contexts is too often co-opted to simply reference anything that is transgressive or challenging of the norm. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang in their famous piece, “Decolonization is not a Metaphor” (2012), challenge such abstracting of decolonization, asking that it be returned to its true sense of the term as commitment to rematriation of land into Indigenous hands from whom it was and continues to be stolen. It is possible to undertake a reading of Indigenous texts in a class without actually engaging in decolonization. In the context of environmental place-based education, this can take the shape of a focus on the harmful trope of the mythicized “Ecological Indian” (Friedel, 2011) and an abstract yearning for “learning from” rather than with Indigenous approaches to the so-called natural world (Tuck et al., 2014, p. 10). As la paperson writes of environmental learning tendencies, “settler environmentalism describes efforts to redeem the settler as ecological, often focusing on settler identity and belonging through tropes of Indigenous appropriations” (2014, p. 121). How can instructor and students, then, work together to challenge “settler environmentalism” (paperson, 2014, p. 121) when many – if not all – of us are settlers benefiting from places that feel like are our own but are not? Is it even possible to hone a decolonial environmental learning through university institutions directly benefiting from colonialism? Further, “recognition of land theft, while important, is discursive and thus remains limited” as Sheila Batacharya and Yuk-Lin Renita Wong (2018, p. 5) speak to, making our discussion of decolonization more metaphorical than anything else.

Attending to place, as we did in our walks, asked that we remain critical of our own sense of being of a place and the Indigenous erasure this might entail. A crucial benefit of walking for pedagogy is that it hones placedness and place-making, it connects one at a personal level to the seeing, feeling, breathing context one is in. Likewise, it has the potential to build kin with the more-than-human world around us: specific species of trees, mis-attributed designations of “weeds,” birds, pollinators, and so forth (Kimmerer, 2013). Through these practices, it is also possible to build accountability to specific places and more-than-human life as environmental educators advocate for (Gruenewald, 2003; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Yet this cannot be done at the expense of failing to recognize that many of the places we are building relationships with are places stolen, remapped by colonialism, from which Indigenous people have been unsuccessfully deracinated. Drawing again on Tuck and McKenzie (2015), a walking-based practice that is grounded in a critical place inquiry begs an understanding of place that, among other things, “addresses spatialized and place-based processes of colonization and settler colonization, and works against their further erasure or neutralization through ... research” (p. 19). It must likewise be committed to Indigenous presence and futurity (Tuck et al., 2014, p. 11).

One of the most exciting aspects of assigning walking to graduate students, from an instructors’ perspective, is how it thwarts Western postsecondary traditions of assessment. A walk is not easily graded, measured, or assessed. Indeed, notions of success and achievement are irrelevant when assigning walking to students, since a walk is more about experience, inner change, observation, and attunement. Indeed, one of the main goals of the walking assignment was to ask students to think differently about what it means to be an academic, including a graduate student. Postsecondary education is steeped in its histories of enslavement, ableism, settler colonialism, and sexism. Universities in North America, in particular, seized claim to Indigenous land, functioned as outposts of empire, enslaved Black and Indigenous people, and reaped direct benefits from plantations (Wilder, 2013). Enslavers and their descendants are the social classes that have historically had entry to and benefited from the bounty of universities. Rather than cultivating neutral knowledge for all, knowledge in universities is built on the backs of the exploited: People of Color, Indigenous people, Mad and disabled people, the poor, women (Dolmage, 2017; Wilder, 2013). While this is common knowledge, too often students and faculty, both, continue to be attached at some level to myths of the university as a space of equality and merit, even while the university continues to be racialized as white and upheld as an able-bodied space (Inoue, 2015, p. 167). Assessment and performance-based assignments, in turn, are part of the logic of maintaining access to knowledge for some – the best suited successors of academia (Inoue, 2015). Atypical, non-assessment-based assignments, are thus potential doorways into shifting the logics of academia, using the academic space for mischief, or in the words of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney of “steal[ing] what one can” (2013, p. 26)

from the university. I am not saying a walking assignment can transform academia or rematriate land stolen from Indigenous Nations, but I am suggesting that in assigning walking, reflection, and slowness as part of the graduate classroom, students can do the work of rethinking what it is they want academia to do for them. This is where community comes in.

Inspired by the work of feminist experiments in alternate graduate pedagogies and collaboration, such as that of the Athena Co-Learning Collective (2021; Rice et al., 2021), this piece is an effort to render our experiences of walking together through what felt for many like an apocalypse. As the pandemic presented us with what felt like unprecedented restrictions on movement, being with others, and on learning environments, walking together but separately emerged as a possibility for making the most out of a surprising situation. In walking separately, but sharing our walks together on Instagram through photos and reflections, we were able to build what felt like a community. Keeping in mind that no community is without conflict or dissonance, this walking assignment allowed for low stakes ways of learning about and from each other in ways that were place-based, aspired to fostering decolonization, and luxuriated in collectivity amidst radical isolation (for some) and surprising living arrangements (for others, myself included).

Writing this piece together, we are striving to provide a sense of that learning moment by also modeling our writing on it. As with the walks – done individually but in the spirit of a collective feminist classroom practice – we have decided to have a separate section devoted to each collaborator’s reflection, creating a cascading voice approach, where each voice builds on another without striving for univocal agreement or desiring that a perfect argument be formed. This nonlinear approach to writing from many vocalities is intended to challenge, as the Athena Co-Learning Collective (2021; Rice et al., 2021) and others have done, the pressures of individualistic productivity and competition in academic contexts at the cost of friendship and collaboration. As we know, graduate school is not only about what one learns but also how one learns; we learn how to operate, flourish, or survive in spaces of scarce jobs and limited resources against a backdrop of a white habitus that elevates Western white cisgender male canons (Inoue, 2015). Through writing this piece we are part of educational efforts that challenge these values and commitments and that strive to rethink what we can each “steal” from academia and how we can do mischief (Moten & Harney, 2013, p. 26). The final product is a multi-voiced account of how one semester of student scholars survived the pandemic while compiling a “feminist toolkit,” as Sara Ahmed (2017) writes, for also surviving academia.

Writing and walking collectively aims to cultivate principles of slowness, attention, and community (Springgay & Truman, 2016, 2018). In our piece and throughout our walk-based semester, we strove to cultivate slowness in the face of the unending grind of academic work. As Alison Mountz et al. write, “the neoliberal university requires high productivity in compressed time frames” (2015, p. 1236). Working with graduate students offers opportunities for

changing the imbedded patterns and hidden curricula of academia, facilitating collectivity, community, and slowness. By creating a framework for slowness in a graduate classroom, the goal is to expand the frame of who can practice slowness in the academy in the first place. In their foundational piece on slow scholarship, Mountz et al. (2015) recognize that they are all tenure track faculty but that it is possible to use their positions of relative power for “supporting – and facilitating, where possible – slowness among our students and tenured, untenured, and contingent colleagues [because] collaborative, collective models of community and solidarity work can resist neoliberal regimes and their framings of our daily lives” (p. 1249). Working and writing together does not do away with university hierarchies but it does present a way to use the classroom as a space for hacking how and who gets published, teaching graduate students about a publishing process that will become central to surviving in academia, if that is what they pursue. Further, walking and writing together also aim to teach a non-coopted form of self-care, in line with Audre Lorde’s (1988) and Sara Ahmed’s (2014) thinking, of “self-care as warfare,” in an academic context that wants to squeeze every last ounce of our labor juices. In this sense, taking time to walk invites the honing of a labor practice that prioritizes times of rest as resistance.

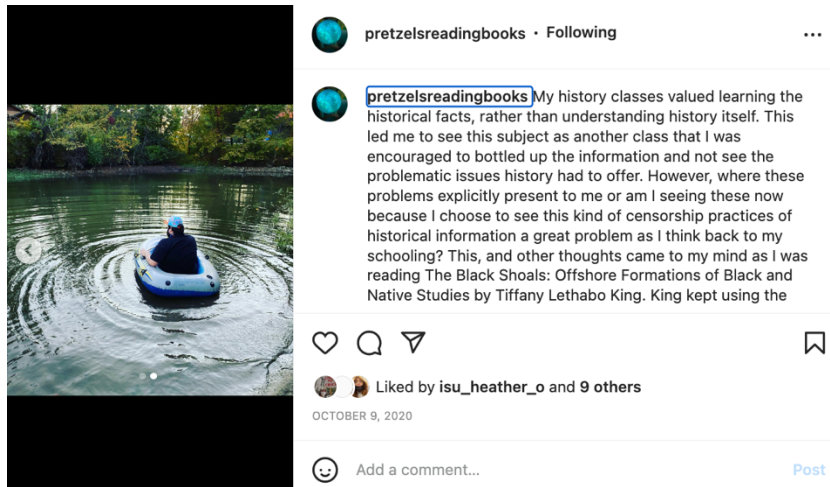
In what follows, each co-author takes some time to reflect on the walking pedagogy assignment in light of the general question that was posed: “How did the walking project on IG influence how you thought about questions of place, decolonization, and classroom community during a pandemic?” As mentioned, the piece strives to be reflection-based, striving to hone alternate, slower, and perhaps kinder ways of writing through a practice of walking and writing collectively.

### **Hurricanes and Quarantine: Movement as Transfer in the Anthropocene** (by Edcel J. Cintrón-Gonzalez)

Within the span of four years (2017 to 2020), my body, mind, and well-being have experienced two catastrophic events that likewise changed the ecological structure of my home landscape of Puerto Rico and its people. I still carry a lot of trauma from my experiences of living through the destruction left behind from Hurricane Maria back in September 2017. Having survived this event alongside my mother and grandmother, it provided me with some space to think about life beyond academia and the working world. A space where all communication was lost from the outside world and our only tool for survival was the trust we would place in our own community.

As Sheila Watt-Cloutier mentions in her book *The Right to be Cold* (2018), climate change is a reality we all experience, there is no room for debate whether this is a real phenomenon or not. In fact, “more and more studies suggest that climate change will be the economic ruin of our world – it will cost us much more to address the damage done by climate change and to adapt

to a devastated environment” (p. xxi). These are feelings I carried with me after having experienced first-hand what environmental devastation looks like and how it changes your perspective on life. With the onset of the worldwide pandemic, this sensation returned to me, manifesting as physical reactions intertwined with recurring thoughts about how to endure this moment when I believed I had no access to a community.



*Figure 1.* In an inflatable raft at Lake Evergreen-Comlara Park IL. The IG screenshot features a photograph on the left and text on the right. The photograph is of a person in a black T-shirt in a light blue raft making ripples on the dark water with trees in the background.

Thinking back to my lived experiences with Hurricane Maria and how essential community was for me, I wanted to figure out if community engagement or creating a human connection was possible, even though we could not do any form of gatherings because of the COVID-19 restrictions. Thankfully, within safety protocols, a friend and I joined together to participate in the walking assignments. Before heading out together to find a space to do the assignment, we talked about the book we were reading in class together using text messages and zoom. During these discussion sessions, we expressed our thoughts on the impact the readings had on us, while also building an understanding of what we can do to collaborate as people to support each other during these difficult times. Walking alone helped me gather my own thoughts and reflect on how my body and mind play an important role in the environment. Walking with another person gave me the opportunity to articulate these thoughts and receive feedback from them.

For my IG assignment, my most reflective moment was my trip to Bloomington Lake, where I experienced the sensation that my body was back in Puerto Rico enjoying the sun, ocean water, and sands from the beach.

Although here we have cold lake water, sandy and muddy ground, and colder weather, I could still feel the connection my body and mind were making with the environment. Specifically, I was thinking about the transfer of different spaces my body goes through, not only as a queer person of Color, but as a bigger person as well. In Figure 1 you see me rowing a cute small inflatable raft that I used to move around the water surface of the lake.

I'm reflecting on how Puerto Ricans who have survived Hurricane Maria will always carry this experience with us and how our stories will remain stuck in an in-between space where we were kept in silence, our experiences discounted by dominant narratives of US saviorism. The walking assignment provided avenues for processing displacement, US-Puerto Rican relations, and the devastation of American apathy. It also provided a reminder of the importance of building and rebuilding community, across territories and contexts.

### A Romanticist's Anthropocene (by Serenah Minasian)



Figure 2. On a Kayak in Lake Evergreen-Comlara Park, IL.  
The IG screenshot includes a lime green kayak on choppy waters with a tree in the background alongside a text-based reflection.

Logging onto the Zoom Meeting for the ENG 460 course, Apocalyptic Feminisms, in Fall of 2020, I had no idea what course I had enrolled in but was filled with excitement to finally be taking a graduate course on feminisms. As

a Romanticist, or an individual engaged with 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century British literature and ideals of the sublime, nature, imagination, and the Divine, any engagement with nature was right up my alley and up until this course I had never engaged in both walking and thinking about literature simultaneously, and did not know how much this way of learning would impact my studies. When completing the assignment, I was immersed in a lake with nothing surrounding me but the water and the shore (see Figure 2). In the 80-degree, crisp breeze, sun-filled day I was engulfed by the serene outskirts of Lake Evergreen and the feeling of escaping the Bloomington-Normal city where our university is based. While paddling around, I thought about space. Space was around me, in me, and affecting me. I was thinking about how much space my body was taking up in my kayak, how much space my kayak was taking up in the lake, and how much space the lake in Comlara Nature Park was taking up in the town I was in. I was now a part of a space within myself, the kayak, the lake, and the world around me. I realized how much impact I had on the space around me, such as Erle C. Ellis writes in the *Anthropocene* (2018), a text introducing the science of the most recent geological era. Ellis writes: “perhaps the best studied of these is the claim that humans are now ‘overwhelming the great forces of nature...’ Moreover, these anthropogenic changes have the potential to produce even more rapid, surprising, and potentially catastrophic consequences...” (2018, pp. 83-84). Ellis is pointing out that humans are a very prominent factor in our environment. Humans have contributed tremendously to the current climate catastrophes and most often impact our world in a negative manner. As I paddled through the lake, I thought of the impact I was making in this current space as I was able to see the destruction we, as humans, have caused and take a step back from that within what felt like an untampered nature scene.

As I kept paddling, I was thinking about the work, Watt-Cloutier’s *The Right to be Cold* (2018). The land and lake I was taking up space on was not land that belonged to the people that trample on it today. I began to think about the history of this land and this lake and the importance of decolonization. Watt-Cloutier describes a similar situation by writing:

The Arctic may seem cold and dark to those who don’t know it well, but for us a day of hunting or fishing brought the most succulent, nutritious food. Then there would be the intense joy as we gathered together as family and friends, sharing and partaking of the same animal in a communal meal... Like generations of Inuit, I bonded with the ice and snow. (Watt-Cloutier, 2018, pp. xvii-xviii).

Watt-Cloutier (2018) describes the background of the land she is on and how this land is deeper than what we are seeing now. Such as the lake and land I was taking up space on, which had been more than it is now and that deserves to be acknowledged as land of the Illini, Peoria, and Myaamia, and later due to displacement, the Fox, Potawatomi, Sauk, Shawnee, Winnebago, Ioway, Mascouten, Piankashaw, Wea, and Kickapoo Nations.

During a pandemic, the walking assignments were a way to escape isolation, reality, and anxiety. I looked forward to the upcoming week and deciding where I would venture out to next with my dog, Tinley, a five-year-old Maltese-Havanese rescue who enjoys kayaking by my side. This assignment provided me with a sense of community with the nature around me and my dog, and built a new community made up of me, my dog, nature, and literature.

### Thoughts on the Tentacular (by Shawna Sheperd)

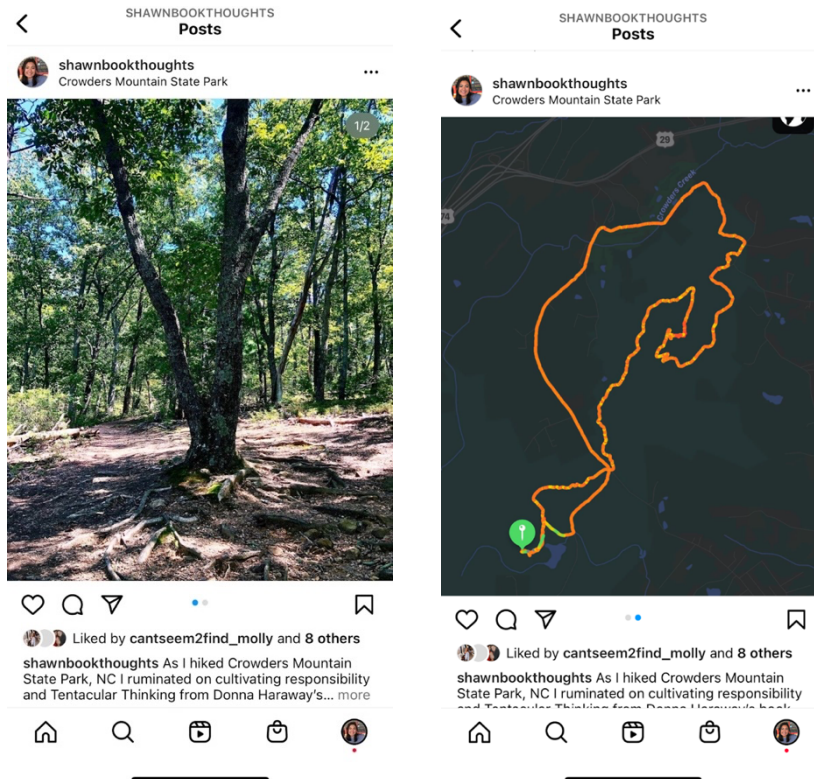


Figure 3. IG screenshots. Left: a tree with thick roots. Right: Map of the trail walked in Crowders Mountain State Park, NC.

As I write, I'm recovering from COVID-19. I am a disabled woman of Color sitting on the ancestral territories of the Shakori, Occaneechi, Cheraw, Skaruhreh/Tuscarora, and Lumbee in Durham, NC. The timing of my illness has serendipitously granted me the spacetime to write and reflect on our innovative classroom community engagement amidst the pandemic. Our Instagram assignment cultivated a virtual space of engagement that allowed

me to relate to my peers, as developing friendships as an out-of-state student via zoom proved challenging. However, the personal engagement Instagram's platform allowed in this classroom led to the cultivation of valuable friendships I carry with me today.

In my classwork, I found this idea of tentacular touching an engaging way to organize how I approached my walks. Donna Haraway writes, "the tentacular are also nets and networks, IT critters, in and out of clouds. Tentacularity is about life lived along lines – and such a wealth of lines – not at points, not in spheres" (2016, p. 32). The tentacular is a move away from Western philosophies of individualism and towards a futuristic sense of collective relating to others, beings, and the surrounding space (Haraway, 2016). For myself, in the space of our current socio-political hellscape, the reach of the tentacular informs how I continue to cultivate response-ability in our environments and relationships with those around me (Haraway, 2016, p. 11). The tentacular related to Springgay and Truman's walking methodologies, became a guiding concept in navigating my relation to decolonial and traumatic histories during walks (2018, p. 139). Tentacular touchings are "an ethics that is 'about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which we are part'" (p. 139).

In my first Instagram post for the walking assignment, I ruminated on stolen lands of Crowder's Mountain State Park in North Carolina once held by the Esaw, Catawba, Sugagree, and Cherokee Nations (see Figure 3). Natural to this hike is the "tentacular touching" that occurs on the trail, embodied by leaning, pausing, and cherishing the trees as we walked, especially at the 336 wooden steps at the top of the trailhead (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p. 139). Walking with Haraway's book, one of her quotes on resilience, strength, and adaptation, struck me. Haraway writes, "diverse indigenous peoples and all sorts of other laboring women, men, and children – who had been subjected to devastating conditions of extraction and production in their lands... innovated and strengthened... to recraft conditions of living and dying to enable flourishing" (2016, p. 37). The quote drew me to touch the strong roots that surrounded the trails I occupied. I thought of this, as you see in the image I took of a tree with expansive roots and felt the tentacular roots that were underneath my boots as representative of the "wealth of lines" that connected my current human activity of hiking to the human and nonhuman activities of the Nations that stewarded this land for millennia (Haraway, 2016, p. 32).

The walking-writing I experienced "extend[ed] beyond an embodied and sensuous description of how a body encounters a place" and grounded me "in the present" where the "queer self-touching perversions of which we are all a part" became central to my experience (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p. 139). Through the touching of the roots, I felt I had acknowledged the past, appreciated the land, and become more cognizant of my relationship to the space I occupied. This pondering troubled my hike, as I soon found myself lost, turning a three-mile hike into 10 miles. My encounters with the environment were soon erased to focus on my own anxieties and fears. Significantly, this

metaphorically represents how the practices of erasure can quickly consume, such as histories written of state parks often erase or employ reductionist practices to the existence of Indigenous communities. Realizing this in retrospect, this walk soon became a touchstone to my decolonial practice of future hikes, as I continue to “stay with the trouble,” cultivate response-ability, and wrestle with my place as a hiker benefiting from the traumatic pasts of the lands I occupy (Haraway, 2016).

**Community and Collectivity Through a Global Pandemic** (by Natalie Jipson)

The fall semester of 2019 was my first as a graduate student. Because of pandemic job loss, I wasn't residing in the state of Illinois, but instead was living in a new location (Eau Claire, Wisconsin) during a time of extreme isolation. Instead of the usual bonding events with fellow graduate students, we were attending school via Zoom and existing in what felt like an entirely digital space. The walking Instagram assignment was one of the few activities that helped me experience a sense of embodied place and space in a world that felt cold and uninhabited. This activity and the ability to visually experience my classmates' walks helped me to feel less disconnected. It also enhanced connection between myself and my dog friend, Blaise.

Every other week during the fall semester Blaise and I would head out on a walking adventure where he would smell the animal scents and I would ponder the book we were reading and my interconnectedness with natural spaces. The first book we read was Ellis' *Anthropocene: A Very Short Introduction* (2018). My walk while considering this text took place at Lowes Creek County Park, but the lands this park exists on are the ancestral lands of the Menominee and Ojéhéthi Šakówiŋ. Not only was the land I was exploring stolen, but it had been altered to be accessible only to able-bodied people, and also required a fee to enter which created barriers to low-income community members. Being able to pursue a walk in park spaces like Lowes Creek was a privilege, one I hadn't realized I had benefited from. The communities who face barriers to access safe and enjoyable natural spaces are the same communities who are disproportionately being impacted by climate change and environmental hazards: minority communities, low-income communities, women, and disabled communities (Pellow, 2016, p. 223). Through these walks I processed and reflected on the ways in which barriers to natural spaces act as gatekeeping mechanisms and the ways these have been imposed institutionally through state and county park systems.

In addition to considering the histories of the lands we walked on, one of my take-aways from the assignment was an increased awareness of how natural spaces are curated and altered by humans to allow for walking, biking, and paddling. Ellis describes humans as the ultimate (but far from the only) “ecosystem engineers” (2018, p. 76). While the park where I took the

Instagram photo below (see Figure 4) didn't have paved paths or other obvious human interventions, the trails are always mowed for foot traffic. The pine branches are cut to allow for wider paths. In order for settlers to access natural spaces, those spaces are scoured and slashed to make room for us. The sap bleeds from the excised limbs of the trees to allow us to pass unmolested by sharp branches. Questions of who has a right to access natural spaces and how we can make them traversable while also maintaining an ethical commitment to the land have stayed with me.



*Figure 4.* Screenshot of one of my IG posts.

The photograph at the top is a close-up image of a pine tree with a cut branch that is dripping sap.

While many of the changes humans have made have damaged the planet, I found hope that our species of ecosystem engineers, as described by Ellis, possess the possibility to create “good Anthropocenes,” or ways in which we can affect the environment for the better (2018, p. 156). The return of native

pollinator gardens, erosion prevention, and sanctuary spaces for non-human animals are all good Anthropocenes. In a collaborative effort towards a good Anthropocene, our classroom community also created grant proposals to the campus Sustainability Fund which were fueled by our embodied experiences and pondering apocalyptic feminisms. Collectively, we brought metal straws, reusable all-gender menstrual products, and a Black wellness series to campus. Community engagement was possible, even from different states and countries through the methodology of walking slowly together throughout the semester.

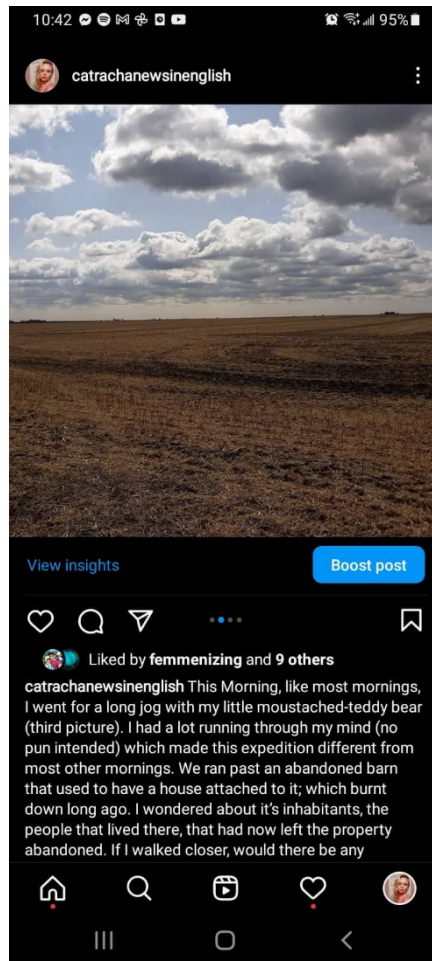
### **Foraging Through Fields of the Past** (by Anna Ortiz)

When I began the Apocalyptic Feminisms class, there was a lot going on in my life. The ravages of the pandemic had separated me from my partner for four months, due to international border closures. He was stranded in Honduras, and I, with our newborn, in the United States. This trauma was only exacerbated by the postpartum depression I had suffered from giving birth, that at the time I was still recovering from. By the time the class had started, my partner was able to reunite with my child and me, but we were still learning how to be a family again. In many ways, I felt like a walking open wound, trying to heal. For this reason, I felt as though the walking IG project aided my healing process. The walking project helped me focus on my natural surroundings – which I learned helped me center myself, and gave me peace. It also made me think of how the now barren cornfields and desolate country roads I jogged on every day were once inhabited, to the best of my knowledge, by the Kickapoo, Peoria, Kaskaskia, Sauk, Myaamia, and Ochethi Sakowin Peoples. I came to understand the land that my father makes a living from, as a farmer, as land stolen and robbed territory. I shifted my realization to understand the privilege and benefit I received as a result of the settler colonialism that Native and Indigenous folk endured.

During my runs, while meditating on our readings, I was guided to ask more specific questions of the land around me, such as: *What individuals called this once rolling prairie land home? Who ran freely and enjoyed this land's big skies, cloudy days, and bright sunsets? What stories can be found in the earth if one digs beyond these forced points of erasure?*

For me, excavating the past of the land around me correlated directly to Alexis Pauline Gumbs' *M Archive* (2018). Gumbs sets her work in a post-apocalyptic world, and in many regards that is what I felt I was living through during the pandemic. In my grappling to try and trace the Native and Indigenous life that once flourished around me in the wet, barren, muddy cornfields that I now inhabited, Gumbs' imagery came to mind: "mud matters – close to the core of the earth where the planet is more alive, soft, hot, and in production. You can see the churning planet making herself brown" (2018, p. 12). I had a feeling that a forced erasure could not negate the Indigeneity that the earth around me held, as it had a muscle memory that remembered what it

had lost. Engaging with Gumbs' (2018) work forced me to look at the space I currently inhabit, and wonder how, like the Indigenous Nations that once lived amongst the fields around me, we might continue to inhabit a space once we are no longer physically here. Folx in many Indigenous Nations were forced to the West in the 1830s and the death of many more Indigenous lives were due to wars with occupiers. *What do we leave behind for others as they breathe in what was our existence and begin to contemplate it through examination? How is the ground of our ancestors engaged with, walked with? How might we breathe in their beautifully crafted worlds to furnish our own with grace, delicacy, and beauty?*



*Figure 5.* IG screenshot featuring a photograph of barren cornfields stretching for miles underneath a cloudy sky.

I was able to process the use of land, and the current space I occupied on my daily runs (see Figure 5). These runs were mainly the times I used to contemplate work such as that of Gumbs (2018). Running was the only time I could clear my head, I also found this as a healing time for myself as a new caregiver. Slowly, daily, I was able to use my readings as a jumping-off point to connect to the land around me and understand my space in this place as an accomplice, and a caregiver.

### **Kinship as Unconventional Classroom Community** (by Charley Koenig)

In Fall 2020, on a particularly gloomy and rainy day on the lands of the Kiikaapoi (Kickapoo), Peoria, Kaskaskia, Myaamia, and Očhéthi Šakówiŋ, I sought a moment of calm and relative quiet so I could focus on my assignment. I had finally gotten my very reluctant five-month-old to sleep, just in time for the dogs to sound the alarm over something outside. It was all I could do to settle them down before they could wake the baby or disrupt my partner's work call. Making peace with/within the grumpy, crowded chaos of my house seemed often unattainable.

When reading Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble in the Chthulucene* (2016), my contribution to the walking assignment involved staying inside and doing yoga. So much of that semester took place in isolation, but I felt the most isolated for this particular Instagram post (see Figure 6) – at least, at first. I was cut off from anyone besides those I lived with (whom I simultaneously loved and was exhausted by/alongside), including anyone I might encounter while out walking, human or non-human, and cut off from the slightly less human-engineered parts of the world that existed outside of my suburban neighborhood. I had my pilea plant but little else in the way of greenery. When the weather disrupted my plans to move (safely) beyond my pandemic bubble, I felt stuck in my house. But moving my body and more deeply ruminating on the text I had just read in critical and embodied ways allowed me to feel much less alone.

Kinship stands out to me, not just as a takeaway from Haraway's (2016) book, but also as a takeaway from our Apocalyptic Feminisms course. At the time, I thought about how Haraway (2016) proposes defamiliarizing and redefining the word kin to essentially include all the connections one builds in a life, with all kinds of critters, including humans that are both biologically and not biologically related. Looking back, I see that we, the collective of our Apocalyptic Feminisms course, were working at a version of Haraway's (2016) "making kin" – cultivating community and support to develop alternative bonds of intimacy and reciprocity. As I meandered through the course in my own corner of central Illinois at varying degrees of distance from my instructor and classmates, I always knew there were other people moving and reading with me and sharing their own situated experiences in multimodal Instagram posts, providing a space for us to make deep, resonating

connections. For our digital classroom, the walking assignment provided an unconventional community through kinship. And reading and moving together, however far apart we actually were, reminded me that I was not alone but rather joined with others who were reading and moving toward not just completing a course but making kin with me.



*Figure 6.* A screenshot of an Instagram post featuring an image of a small potted pilea plant set near a sliding glass door.

This understanding of kin also has strong roots in Indigenous knowledges, which consider relations beyond blood relatives and are inclusive of more-than-human kin like plants and rocks, and in queer studies, where scholars write of and experience chosen, rather than imposed, families (TallBear, 2018).

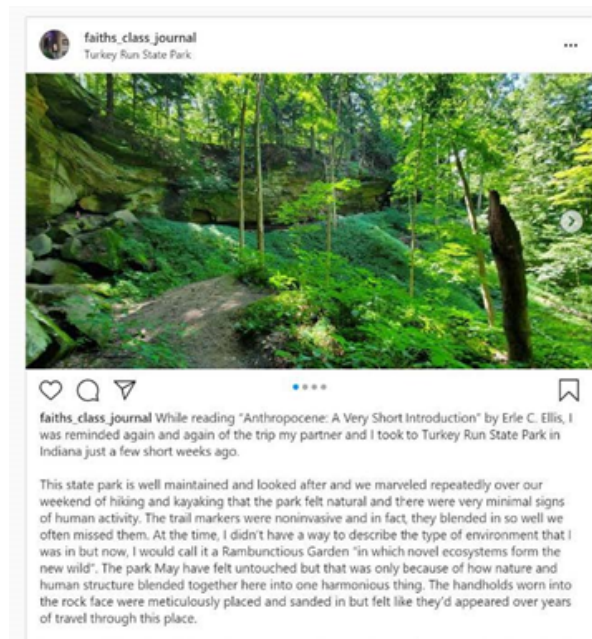
Kin is so much more than traditional, patriarchal, heteronormative, institutionalized, or state-sanctioned definitions of family, intimacy, and relation. As we invest so much labor and resources into our academic pursuits alongside similarly invested peers, this expanded concept of relationality can be applied to academic colleagues, moving us from the competitive, individualistic, and even exploitative relationships and commitments typically perpetuated within academia toward curating rich, supportive, loving communities that engage in feminism, antiracism, and solidarity (Sister Scholars, 2021). As an aspiring accomplice to these efforts, I actively endeavor to advocate for marginalized peers and take part in the intimacy and care that comes from deep, responsive academic friendships. Those alternative bonds of intimacy and reciprocity that we developed through our Apocalyptic Feminisms course, and especially the practice of connecting through reading and moving together while separated, has become one such effort, a process first of rethinking notions of relationality and then of making kin ourselves. Thinking of kinship in this more dynamic, entangled sense, not only have I been able to recognize, reconceptualize, and reconnect with the many relations in my own life, but I have also been able to continue the unconventional kin-making started with my colleagues in that Fall 2020 course. Together, we walked toward a kinship I would have thought impossible in our fraught (academic) pandemic apocalypse, but which is evidenced in this multi-voiced piece by true community, collectivity, and collaboration.

**A Rambunctious Graduate Garden: Breaking Preconceptions of Community** (by Faith Borland)

I had really hoped to be taking our course leader's Apocalyptic Feminisms class in person and back on campus in the fall of 2020. Like many, I wasn't doing a great job of taking care of myself during the pandemic. But the walking Instagram project that accompanied each of our class readings was a lifeline that *made* me take a step outside and forced me to listen to my body as well as the living planet around me. It also allowed me a window into all my classmates' worlds; seeing what these folks were doing, what they were seeing and thinking, and watching them express the places they loved going made me feel as though I had a better understanding of who they were outside of the academic persona I would have encountered in the classroom. In reflecting on these experiences nearly two years later, I've found that one of my largest takeaways from the walking IG project relates back to my musing on Ellis' *Anthropocene: A Very Short Introduction* (2018) and the concepts of the "rambunctious garden" (p. 117) and the "pristine myth" (p. 105).

The pristine myth would have us believe that there is some "perfect" natural space untouched by humans when the reality is that because of our actions, all of nature has been altered in one way or another. While humans think we can see this pristine myth in the land around us if we just get far enough away from

civilization, that “places without humans today represent an ecology without prior human influence” (Ellis, 2018, p. 108), what we are really seeing is a new wild, a place formed by both human and natural hands: a rambunctious garden. Living in the Anthropocene though means recognizing that we live in a rambunctious garden rather than within the pristine myth. As Heather Davis and Zoe Todd point out in “On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene” (2014) the exchange of plants and animals between Europe and the Americas irrevocably changed the lands of both places. Living in the epoch that we are in, means recognizing the impact of colonization on not only the history and peoples but on the literal makeup of the planet.



*Figure 7.* A screenshot of an Instagram post featuring green trees and shrubs with a sandstone cliff on the left side.

In the same way that we uphold the pristine myth, I realized I had been holding on to this myth of what a graduate class should be – everyone in a physical classroom, connecting with classmates and discussing the class materials. Like the idea of a perfect natural space that we cling to, academia has also been wrestling with the myth of an ideal classroom experience in our pandemic world. We’ve been holding tight and fast to the myth that there is a natural class space in which ideal learning can be done. In reality, our classroom and community lived in a rambunctious graduate garden – a digital space, a combination of traditional discussion with a window into each other’s lives (see Figure 7). If the idea of a pristine earth is nothing but myth, why

would I think that a connected grad community could only exist in one ideal way?

Every reading and subsequent walk that I meditated on through the semester kept me coming back to the idea that I needed to challenge my preconceptions. Tiffany Lethabo King's *The Black Shoals* (2019) made me reckon with the inherent biases in things we tend to take as fact, such as maps. She points out that maps were commissioned and that "it's from their perspective that the map of territory and possession is viewed" (p. 88). Cultural institutions, like maps and universities, erase othered voices and present one dominant set of values and standards that have become intrinsic in our lives. We need to question the truth and motives of everything, like the pristine myth or what graduate classrooms look like, in order to gain new perspectives and stop the erasure of cultural differences. The pandemic forcing graduate classes to operate online and in different spaces really evolved the ways in which I understood how and where I can learn. In the spirit of interconnectedness, walking with these readings out in the world around me began to show me the inherent biases in institutions and their reliance on physical space, and my community in the Anthropocene.

### **Walking in the Academic After** (by Ela Przybyło)

It has now been several years since we met together in *Apocalyptic Feminisms* and there have been several face-to-face iterations of the course since then. While the pandemic cannot be said to be over and the virus continues to shape our lives, affecting the vulnerable, including older adults and immunocompromised people most of all, much of our lives has returned to some version of normal. Normal is clearly a version of disintegrating and genocidal colonial capitalism that many of us are not honored by, as we marvel at teaching in too small, unventilated classrooms where few students wear masks. Remarkably, Normal is also the name of the town in which our university is located. The fraught gifts Fall 2020 offered us, of stillness, slowness, staying in place, unpredictability, and living under duress, have all but faded with the push toward productivity, finishing degrees, completing coursework, teaching semester after semester of classes. Even so, the pedagogy of walking has remained with us as an embodied, praxis-based, and low stakes way of engaging with the complexities of how we find ourselves to be here. Observing how little academia has changed and how much we have, we are called, to ask: "how could academia be *more* like a walk?" – slower, less productive, more-than-human, in relation, attentive.

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