

The Disappeared Future of Arts-Based Research, Parts I–VI: Towards a Reality-Without-Givenness

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Prognosticated in the speculative thought of Jean Baudrillard (2005), it might be conjectured that today, the planet has been remade as a work of art. This transformation, Baudrillard suggests, marks the revolutionary pinnacle of contemporary artistic thought characterized by the transaesthetic metamorphosis of reality, or rather, a commitment to the idea that all objects, fragments, and details might exert a force of aesthetic attraction and enigma reserved previously to the idealized aristocratic forms of the modern period. Precognitive of contemporary fashions in arts-based research and theory, Baudrillard speculates on the now transpired event of arts' invasion into every sphere of reality by which the world has been redrawn along a vector of its becoming-art. Irrespective of their banality, every object, detail, and fragment will be liberated and ascribed its moment of aesthetic valourization (Baudrillard 2005). This transaesthetic

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recreation of reality has made manifest a world of flows, of molecules, and organs without bodies—a world of seemingly vital objects liberated from semiotic and material overdetermination through relational interplay and the complex connectivity of rhizomatic thinking. Herein, arts-based research rejoins today with the revolutionary impulse of contemporary art in its liberation and combinatorial novelization of social sign systems.

While such directions have undoubtedly catalysed an alternative to the problem of representation suffusing the orthodoxies of the academy, the liberation of the object lauded via the becoming-art of reality obfuscates a darker scenario in which art and object have become indexed to one another in an act of general equivalency. However, occulted and distant the object might be, it is nevertheless made to refer to the idea of art and its corollaries of artistic genius, human creativity, and productive vitality. Alongside the critique of representation and methodological dogmas well underway in arts-based research then, the transference of reality into aesthetics commences a collusion whereby all that transfigures, denies, and exceeds art becomes absorbed by the idea of art, and its assimilative commitment to the a priori aesthetic becoming of reality. Aesthetics, or rather, transaesthetics, has become a strange attractor towards which the whole of reality is drawn.

PROLOGUE: THIS CANVAS EARTH

Baudrillard's (1998) weird science-fiction speculation on the transference of reality into art might today be thought alongside the contemporary geological epoch provocatively dubbed the Anthropocene. Characterized by the inscription of human creation and invention upon the geological record, the Anthropocene is an index of anthropocentrism through which the planet has been ostensibly recast in conformity with human desire and will. From the liberation of earth-locked oil, the manipulation of chemical, genetic and atomic processes, and transformation of ecologies for agricultural production and resource extraction, the materiality of the planet has become transformed in relation to its meaning, utility, and aesthetic reference for us. This is to say, if not hyperbolically, that the Earth has become the ultimate aesthetic product of human activity, terraformed in the image and purpose of a distinctly Western teloi.

Corollary to the anthropomorphic manipulation of the planet for us insists what Baudrillard (1998) refers to as the art of disappearance. While contemporary fashions in arts-based research and theory reserve special

status for production and praxis as dominant modes of being, Baudrillard's (1999) speculative weird fiction controverts this fascination by attending to the collusion of art and disappearance. That is, the aestheticization of reality proselytized by Baudrillard prefigures a scenario in which the world is proffered to human taste and desire, if not more generally a meta-physical presumption that the world is given to its a priori resemblance to human life. By extension, we might suggest that the lauded status of artistic praxis and production in arts-based research found particular conditions of obfuscation. Specifically, the transferential elevation of the world as a sensible and cognate order for-us occludes the noumenal or occulted regression of things from phenomenal excavation. Simply, the desire to produce and semiotize the world intimate to much arts-based research is imbricated with the disappearance of an occult and unfathomable world outside the interests of human life. This act of disappearance marks both the contemporary trajectory and highest function of art, which aims not only at the disappearance of reality qua simulation but also at the masking of such disappearance (Baudrillard 1997).

The art of disappearance extends into contemporary fashions in arts-based educational research (ABER),¹ where the world is often vitalized but for-us, or otherwise, in the image of anthropic aesthetic countenance in which the vitality² of the creative human manifestor and its sensible semio-aesthetic productions constitute a new privileged metrics for registration of meaningful work, if not 'life itself'. Throughout the field of ABER is commenced the liberation of the world unto art and aesthetics by which the world itself is ostensibly elevated via its synthesis with creative human labour and production. Herein, the object appears always-already indexed to its givenness as either actually or potentially aesthetic. More generally still, the object appears as if its significance was predicated on its discovery and adumbration by human creators, through which its attributed qualities and contents reflect in our own concerns. What has disappeared in this scenario but the part *maudite* (accused share) of ABER's liberatory project? Today, it seems that the pulse of the field remains committed to the aesthetic reterritorialization of the world into networks of interminable exchange and commutation that the surplus value of the sign might be plumbed *ad infinitum* (Baudrillard 1993). Everything is not only made to mean but also to produce meaning interminably. Against such optimism, Baudrillard eulogizes that the adventure of art is over. In lieu of art's capacity to negate reality or palpate the unreal, Baudrillard contends

that there is now only the semio-urgy of the world's disclosure and the submission of reality to aesthetics, culture, and museumification (p. 17).

The presumption of the world's prior givenness to aesthetics seems to constitute an engrained feature of the field's dominant methodologies, premised as they are on an uncomplicated transference of things unto both aesthetics and aesthetic meaning for us. Herein, the very idea of arts-based research is founded upon disappearance. In commitment to the aesthetic becoming of reality, objects are disappeared via the presumption of their becoming-art, where what resists in such transference is evacuated as to indexically substantiate the correspondence of objects and aesthetics, objects, and their human manifestors. Simply, the field is undergirded by the presumption that everything is on its way to becoming-art. Such a scenario is already anticipated by art's transaesthetic proliferation across the social field. This is to say that the ease with which arts-based research conceptualizes the becoming-art of the world is forestalled by the fact that everything has already become aestheticized.

All objects, details, and fragments are made to be seen, narrativized, and revealed in their meaningfulness, or otherwise, stripped of their secrecy and illusion and rendered as value (Baudrillard 1997). The decentering of the field, and its subsequent potentialization of all resources conceptual and material, denotes that nothing is beyond redemption. Yet, as the familiar claim goes, the proliferation of art portends its end, for where everything is or becoming-art signals an acceleration towards banality. This scene characterizes the contemporary state of art, where the banality of the object is elevated to the banality of the given world (Baudrillard 2005). Yet, not even banality figures as a contemporary impediment to art or arts-based research. Today, art is played out in dromological terms of productive and combinatorial speed (Virilio 2002). As art disappears into the rhizomatic delirium of financial capitalism, so too has ABER become a fetish commodity proliferating under an accelerative logic of capture evidenced in the abundance of academic and populist books, educational resources, academic tribes, and ABER/ABR public-relation gurus that have emerged on the scene in the past decade.

There is, of course, nothing scandalous about the philosophical presumptions of the field. Where everything is already given to aestheticization, we are quite beyond good and evil, much less beauty and ugliness (Baudrillard 1997, p. 20–21). This said, we might rejoin with the particular challenges of the Anthropocene in order to palpate a wholly other dimension of disappearance. For where the field appears to presume the world's

givenness to art, it is in the geological event of the Anthropocene and the planetary repercussions of climate change that we might vaguely detect a general reversal of our contemporary commitments. Foremost in this reversal is an encounter with the outside of arts-based research in which the world does not simply recede from its becoming-art but also supersede its transaesthetic mutation through the violence of ecological transformation where the expenditure of inhuman energies fatally intervenes against both the anthropocentric givenness of the world and its aesthetic anthropomorphization. Such intervention is, as Baudrillard (1999) develops, the event of the object's revenge in which the part *maudite* or accursed share reverses the metastases of the object's over-representation or liberation into all-too-human systems of circulation and exchange that remain a central feature in the productivity of arts-based research.

The revenge of the object intimate to the geological event of the Anthropocene portends a moment in which the very theorization of the object, its aestheticization, and meaning for us becomes exhausted. In lieu of another theory of the object, Baudrillard elides, what is required today is kind of oppositional theory-object in which the object avenges itself by escaping systems of de/coding and interpretation (Baudrillard 1999, p. 20). Here, the revenge of the object palpates an alien 'problematic field' through which the future of arts-based research might be speculatively re-evaluated. Such revaluation should not be confused with novelty, for the reorganization of the planet ushered by the Anthropocene necessitates an encounter with a litany of dizzying prospects, from the transpiration of a world out of synch with human will and desire, the introjection of indifference and nihilism against the fashions of optimism and hope, through the question of how art will be seen but from an inhuman perspective after the extinction of human life, where it will insist as a stratum in the geological record (Colebrook 2014).

PART I: AFFIRMATIVE REDEMPTION AND MEANING 'FOR US'

If the revenge of the object proselytized by Baudrillard (1999) has general implications for ABER, it is in the revelation of an outside thought to the fundamental philosophical commitments of the field. Of foremost concern herein is its presumption of the world's givenness to aesthetics, and corollary belief in the redemption of the world through art. Here,

the interdisciplinary decentering of ABER and its subsequent proliferation across disciplinary domains stands as a prime example, where the field's cutting-edge theoretical and methodological compartments are made to permit virtually everything within their scope of rehabilitation (Baudrillard 2004). Simply put, everything becomes both permitted and submissible to aesthetic interpretive representation. Such a commitment extends today into the materiality of the world itself, where objects are made to reflect according to a distinctly human vantage by which they are made to appear given for us. As it is in the vogue emergence of vitalist thinking with ABER scholarship, the world is so often reduced to a world anthropomorphized to reflect those qualities that human life likens best to itself.

While premised on the idea of creative invention and liberation from enunciatory stagnation, the commitment to redemption where everything is made to fall within the scope of ABER harbours a horrific dimension. That is, where everything is presumed redeemable, the very notion of an outside unremitant to aesthetic representation or artistic sense is annihilated. Put otherwise, iterations of arts-based research nascently premised on the idea of the world's givenness to artistic representation eradicate a particular strategy of disappearance that is not yet to be recuperated via production, but rather, marks a reversal in which the object becomes radically antagonistic to interpretive capture or dialectical submission to meaning or sense. Such radical antagonism denotes a mode of irreconcilability and metamorphoses antithetical to human desire, prefiguring in this way the fatality or exhaustion of contemporary human thought (Baudrillard 1999, p. 18).

The notion of a radically antagonistic object scarcely enters into the domain of arts-based research and for good reason, for where the field has become entwined with the idea of the world's redemption, the presumption of a bright and hopeful future for-us has become an overwhelmingly prevalent sentiment. Concordant with the field's presumption of a friendly future is its general comportment to only happy or affirmational affects in which the field's image of creative transformation is in many iterations inscribed. This affective commitment not only assures the contemptible status of negative critique and the misanthropic refusal of community happiness, but more significantly, cancels out a field of virulent affects as much part of this world as happiness or hope. For ABER, it seems that Hell no longer exists, or, rather, there is no Evil beyond recuperation into the radiant universe of positive creation and semiotic expressive potential. Such general evacuation of Evil from arts-based research is perhaps

unsurprising insofar as the field is antedated by the domestication of horror within the happy consumer simulacrum of contemporary art and its attendant markets.

For its implicit fidelity to happiness, friendly futures, and good thoughts, the whitewashing of negativity perpetuated via the commitment to redemption commences an unanticipated horror. For where ABER presumes the givenness of the world to redemption, creative liberation, and positive invention, it coincides with an image of human production as a privileged mode of being, and hence predestines the world to reflect anthropomorphically. Accelerated further, the idea of the world's liberation into aesthetic meaning for-us obliquely coincides with the end-game of modernity; that is, the evacuation of the world's reversibility in order that it be made to submit to the meanings and forms attributed to it anthropocentrically.

PART II: THE ECOCATASTROPHE OF ALL-TOO-HUMAN CREATIVITY

Today, we are living out the horror of an aspiration that the world be remade into a work of art. The face of human creativity modern art desired to project upon the planet returns in monstrous contortion, manifest today in the form of plastiglomerate shoreline flotsam, redrawn contours of planetary ecologies, and bioaccumulated plastics, chemical toxins, and heavy metals in organic and inorganic life. Astride unprecedented rates of ecological and species collapse, unabated material and animal exploitation, and the acceleration of human population growth, mounting scientific consensus predict unalterable ecocatastrophy by the year 2040. Gaia hypothesist James Lovelock (2007) has described this ecocatastrophy in terms of revenge, in which the ideal environmental conditions for human life intimate to the Holocene are catastrophically transformed. As we have begun to fathom, the Anthropocene era marks the rise of an inhospitable planet no longer resemblant with the desire or will of the human species. We no longer live on the utopic blue marble captured in Apollo 8's famous image of the Earth entitled 'Earthrise'. As McKibbin (2011) elides, in an era of mega-fires, drought, and acidifying³ oceans, it is apt to rethink the planet in a manner that no longer evokes a sense of familiarity or nostalgia for-us. In lieu of the 'Earth', McKibbin defers to the neologism EAARTH.

What might the Anthropocene and the limit it portends for human creativity entail for ABER? We might begin to redress this question with the rather pedestrian if not horrifying observation that the problems advanced by the Anthropocene have been scarcely detected within ABER scholarship. While the field is by no means beholden to take up the challenges advanced by this emerging geological epoch, it is generally evident that ABER scholarship labours in overt acquiescence to an image of the world overdetermined by the nostalgic idealism of the 1960s Green movement, circumventing by way of this commitment an encounter with the dark realities of present planetary transformations. This criticism might be aimed most obviously at the a/r/tography movement and the image of a holistic natural world privileged throughout its corpus. As nascently developed in *Arts Based Research: A Critique and Proposal* (Jagodzinski and Wallin 2013), a/r/tography not only advances an image of the natural world cleaved from culture but also posits through much of its work the idea of nature as a backdrop submissible to the 'living inquiry' or praxis of its proponents, who often discover in nature meaning for-us and in our image.

More directly, the natural world a/r/tography advances presume an image of nature that reflects the lauded humanistic virtues of holism, equilibrium, balance, and contemplation. Herein, the claim that a/r/tography posits a mode of working alongside nature becomes suspect, in that the image it produces anthropically reduces the world to repeat in accordance to its key methodological signifiers. As an art of disappearance, the world is not only brought into general equivalency with a/r/tographical praxis but also obfuscated in the simulation of ecology suited ideally to human life. This, Thacker (2011) advances, constitutes an act of anthropic subversion whereby the world is remade in stealth fidelity to human desire and will. This is, of course, to disappear the dark ecologies of fragmentation, putrefaction, and sickness radically out-of-step with the idealism of the 1960s Green Movement, as it is to occult the wide reaching challenges of the Anthropocene for ABER scholarship. Further, anthropic subversion recedes from a host of metaphysical, ontological, and philosophical challenges coextensive with the climatological and geological upheavals of the Anthropocene. The anthropic conceit that the world is for us is herein confronted with the horrific thought of an impersonal planet in which human life and vitality no longer figure as privileged modes of being (Thacker 2011).

Revenge is, of course, an all-too-human sentiment. It is perhaps more suitable to suggest that the Anthropocene palpates a mode of pessimism in which we are confronted not with the vengeance of an anthropomorphized planet, but more horrifically, a planet indifferent to the transcendent status and primacy ascribed to human life. Herein, the Anthropocene constitutes a mode of reversal in which the planet for-us is thrown into metaphysical contortion. Such upheaval introduces a new problematic for ABER scholarship wed to the humanistic virtues of holism and equilibrium, if not the privileged position attributed to human creativity and artistic genius more generally. For what the Anthropocene portends is the emergence of an object that no longer finds equivalency in human creative desire, but rather, detaches along an unfathomable vector without-us (Thacker 2011).

That arts-based research frequently situates itself in relation to social, political, and ecological backdrops is, of course, not errant. Rather, if we might entertain an error, it is that ABER does not yet go far enough. For what remains intimate to much contemporary ABER but the latent presumption that the world conforms to human thought, or rather, that the world exists by dint of our ability to think and create it? The revelation of the Anthropocene is that this presumption no longer holds, or rather, that this presumption has been reversed with fatal consequence. The acceleration of carbon emissions, toxification of planetary oceans, and radical transgression of ecological carrying capacities⁴ have already inexorably altered the planet (jagodzinski 2014). As accounts on planetary transformation from the Stockholm Resilience Center report, it is too late to go back (Adam 2008; jagodzinski 2014). Here, ABER's indexical relation of the planet to human creation and vitalism constitutes a disastrous contemporary delusion insofar as it disappears an inexorable encounter with the limits of human creation, meaning, and vitality. Where ABER demonstrates an often obsessive preoccupation with the question of how we might live, it disappears an encroaching confrontation with how we might die. The savage conditions advanced by the Anthropocene call for new modes of 'believing in this world', where belief itself is recapitulated alongside pressing questions of death and extinction, or as Cioran (2012a) posits 'it is too late to relearn...dying out?' (p. 155).

PART III: ALLEGIANCES TO ‘LIVED ORGANICITY’
AND AN ESSENTIALLY HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The challenge of the Anthropocene for contemporary arts-based research emerges again in relation to what Colebrook (2014) dubs the triumph of lived organicity. While the field has long demonstrated fidelity to the role of the body in meaning making and non-representational artistic production, this commitment is today accelerated through the recuperation of vitalist materialist thought and naïve modes of relational analysis. Where contemporary trends in ABER scholarship are marked by a return to life as an affirmation of affect and material difference, such a presumption potentially maintains that both ‘thinking and theory are primarily organic’ and further, always-already correlative to the ‘raw life’ (zoe) of the organism (p. 38, 70). Not only does this commitment privilege vitalism as a primary condition for life, but fails to question why artistic thought should be made to return to affective and embodied forms of existence in the face of non-human, or rather, non-organismic vectors of planetary transformation, geotrauma, and extinction coextensive of the Anthropocene (p. 40). More pointedly, the correlation of life and vitalism in ABER labours in anthropic subversion of the inhuman, and in particular, of ‘life forms’ that do not reflect the ideals of human consciousness and productivity. As Cioran (2012) sombrelly elides ‘life is only a prejudice’ (p. 90). The ascription of human vitality to the meaning of ‘life’ herein functions to perpetuate a romantic ecological ideal that falls short of apprehending the dark ecology of a planet both composed of dead matter and populated by ‘things’ possessed of an unfathomable will occulted from rehabilitation into human systems of significance (Thacker 2015).

This general critique rejoins with a horrific prospect of the Anthropocene. In an era of mass extinction and encroaching ecocatastrophy that speculatively foretells a future without human life, or rather, human life as it is presently organized, the generalized return to organicity, and the raw life of the organism as a foundation for sensation and thought appears anachronistic. As rates of species extinction accelerate to the number of 100 extinctions per million species a year (De Vos et al. 2014), the return to inter-relational vitalism disappears as the bleak reality of species loss and the speculative moment when the (human) organism will no longer insist to either passively ‘think’ or sense the world. As Colebrook (2014) sombrelly elides, ‘[t]here was a time, and there will be a time without humans’ (p. 32). For Colebrook (2014), the encroaching event of extinction makes

apparent that ‘what we are is not something essential’ (p. 13). Starkly put, the necessity of prolonging the ‘human’ or organism as an image of thought implicitly worth preserving must be put to question, as it is in Weisman’s (2007) *The World Without Us*, where the ‘liberation’ of forces from under patterns of human representation is imagined from the vantage of the world-without-us (Colebrook 2013).

Only ‘after the death of man’ as a transcendent index for meaning might ‘we’ fathom the always-already inhuman queerness of a planet receding from human will (Colebrook 2011, p. 11). Here, the Anthropocene portends a time when we may no longer be either human or organism, but rather, as geological or technological strata persisting after our disappearance as organisms. Herein, Colebrook levies an implicit reversal of ABER’s commitment to vitalist thought, for though we are living out a moment in which lived organicity is again valorized, there persists nevertheless the impossible question of how we are and will be thought from a vantage outside the human. Such a question not only pertains to the ways in which we have become epigenetically and physiologically ‘thought’ by chemo-toxic, radioactive, heavy metal ‘actants’, but more expansively, how our productivity and consumption will be ‘thought’ as a geological marker imprinted upon the planet. This speculative scenario posits a limit that no longer presumes thinking as organic, but rather, via an impersonal vantage through which human life might nevertheless be ‘read’ and ‘envisioned’.

What ABER’s return to the organism as a privileged mode of artistic being disappears is the becoming-imperceptible of organic life, or rather, the radical becoming of organic life along a vector of its own disappearance. It is this very omission that is today reversed insofar as the Anthropocene deviates from the conceit that the world is for-us. Linked directly to effluent runoff, resource extraction, and climate change, scientists have today identified over 400 planetary dead zones or hypoxic ecologies incapable of supporting life (Zielinski 2014). Palpating an image of the planet without-us, these and other contaminated zones such as Chernobyl, Fukushima, and the future Northern Alberta suggest a fatal reversal of our presumed ontological immortalism (Thacker 2011). Extending into a host of speculative fictions concerned with the imaginary exploration of the world after man,⁵ the Anthropocene marks a geological moment in which the vaunted position of human vitalism and embodiment become subverted in lieu of more horrific and uncertain horizons for thinking.

Constituting a bleak reversal of organicity proselytized by the world without-us, the Anthropocene suggests a vector of becoming that eclipses

the fundamental givenness of subject and organism that continue to found much arts-based educational scholarship. Even the vogue uptake of the posthuman and its contingent attachment to the decentred (human) organism has scarcely begun to imagine the indifference of either the inhuman or impersonal outside vantage beyond the gaze of the organism. Herein, the prospect of extinction short circuits the readymade link between perception and organism, dehabituating thought from organismic survival and the paralyzing familiarity of all-too-human ‘life’ (Colebrook 2014, p. 61). In lieu of founding arts-based education research in the perception of the organism, the vectors of extinction wed to the Anthropocene engender the question of how we will be seen from the vantage of no one and nobody (Colebrook 2014). This implicates how art might be read as a stratum of planetary transformation, and further, how it might be thought from the vantage of a time ‘beyond human reading’ (p. 23).

PART IV: THE EXHAUSTIVE COLLAPSE OF HUMAN MEANING MAKING

Extinction pertains not simply to organisms, but to meaning itself. In the wake of the Anthropocene, orthodoxies of human meaning making have begun to collapse into conceptual exhaustion. ‘[T]he environment’ venerated from the vantage of human aesthetic and biological value, ‘nature’ as a romantic essentialism distinct from economic and cultural milieu, and ‘human adaptive optimism’ as the conceit of limitless human adaptation have become obsolete (Oreskes and Conway 2014). Beyond the problematics the Anthropocene poses for ABER’s veneration of the world’s givenness to art, its idealization of ‘green’ ecology, and reification of the organism as a fundamental metric of meaning making, exists a darker scenario in which we are confronted by a world receding from human meaning making more generally. As an overarching commitment, the labour of arts-based research pertains overwhelmingly to the representation of the given world as it is according to the phenomenal experience of human activity. Accelerated via the vehicles of narrative inquiry and autoethnography, the field today reflects a preoccupation with the representation of experience, but from the perspective of a single species. While such experience is of course varied and differing, the commitment nevertheless suggests complicity with the Anthropocene’s synonymous designation—the homogenocene. For where ABER’s critical-analytical commitment lies in

the excavation of interior human experience externalized in the phenomenal world of humans, it nascently suggests that there is but the readymade conceptual affordances and interpretive indices of the given world.

While the Anthropocene etymologically refers to ‘the age of humans’, the reversal of human interest and *telos* it commences suggests a concomitant era of misanthropic subtraction, where the orthodoxies of human conceptual systems and modes of knowing are confronted by the emergence of hitherto occulted worlds non-resemblant to the world presumed by humans (Thacker 2011). As Eluard portends, ‘there is another world, and it is this one’ (Wark 2014). Eluard’s insight prefigures the contemporary speculative work of Anthropocene climatologists, who suggest that the death of the world as we know it will not be the death of the world *per se*, but rather, that in the wake of ecocatastrophe, new worlds may begin to flourish (Wade 2015). This posed, a prominent insight emerging from the Anthropocene pertains to the fact that other worlds have always-already flourished irrespective of their registration by humans.

The faint detection of such worlds has long been the fascination of the weird and science-fiction genres, the very function of which has aimed to dehabituate thought from the image of a given world. Herein, ABER’s compulsive drive to represent, or better, over-represent reality through the varied vehicles of representation it mobilizes confronts a horrific limit. Specifically, where the Anthropocene’s reversal of human exceptionalism palpates the prospect of unfathomable non-human worlds, ABER is confronted by the noumenal pessimism it implicitly disappears in its presumption that the world-for-us is contiguous with the world-in-itself, or rather, that the world is but the externalization of interior processes, and the *a priori* givenness of the world to rational sense (Thacker 2015a). Here, ABER’s commitment to multiple-representation and semiosis appears as a panicky evasion of exhaustion prefigured by noumenal transpiration of the non-human. Put differently, where we are now confronted with worlds that recede from those systems of knowing and representation that continually attempt its capture, we are confronted by the inconsolable realization of the poverty of thought.

That ABER’s commitment to meaning making now extends along every possible vector of representation and aesthetics implicitly contends that there must be more (Thacker 2015a). Astride this gambit, however is a scenario in which we have already realized a limit. As Baudrillard (1990) elides, with modernity we have already realized the overproduction of ‘signs, messages, ideologies, and satisfactions’ (p. 2). More significantly,

the attempt to represent and excavate reality today points to our inability to do so. In the face of complex geotraumatic upheaval, the presumption that there must be more is beset by the prospect that current fashions of thought have reached a terminus outstripped by the vast inhuman complexities of geological and ecological change. Already, the fields of cosmology, geology, and population biology register a finitude to human immortalism that is concomitantly a finitude of thought itself (Thacker 2015a). This begets the question of what should be done with thought and representation in the face of their exhaustion and extinction as a relic of a bygone era?

Canadian literary critic, environmental activist and novelist Margaret Atwood, speculates that the time for producing ‘realistic fiction’ is over (Neary 2015). In an age of tumultuous social and planetary change, Atwood contends that fiction must be delinked from the demand that it reflect reality. For as Atwood asserts, there no longer exists sufficiently stable ground on which to base realistic fiction. While enigmatic, Atwood’s gambit might be expanded in a manner that commences new metaphysical conditions for believing in the world. Such an upheaval constitutes an immediate challenge for ABER, for where much of its fictional work aspires to reveal the reality of social structures and events for humans, the revelatory function of such work often reproduces the general schema of the given world, arriving at an image of reality that looks much like the one it began with (Thacker 2015a).

In the wake of the Anthropocene and its derealization of human scale, time, and history, we have perhaps begun to witness the ‘futility of the realist impulse’ (Thacker 2015a, p. 150). As the planet recedes from the image of the world’s givenness to human thought and analysis, realism becomes exposed as the ambit of human philosophical privilege, and the attempted disappearance of what realism cannot fathom; that is, the gap between the given world and the world occulted from human thought (Thacker 2015a). That arts-based research might recommence a belief in a world not yet stricken by the poverty of all-too-human thinking necessitates the counter-actualization of those theoretical systems, ‘hallowed texts’, and consecrated masters received and championed in the academy (Wark 2014, para. 6). Such a commitment not only necessitates acknowledging the ‘conservative habits’ of critical thought,⁶ but the doomed future of ‘answering... contingencies with... old quotations’⁷, interpretive schemas, and disciplinary dogmas (Wark 2014, para. 6).⁸ In the face of encroaching conceptual exhaustion, the task of critical thought and

research must involve the dismantling of habitual ‘discursive games’ and dilated beyond the scope of the given world (para. 8).

Here, we might rejoin with the ‘detotalizing capacity of speculative imagination’ to not only postulate vectors of the future, but as Reed (2014) argues, to map such vectors upon the present (p. 530). This tactic palpates the question of how ABER might be reoriented in a manner adequate to not only the acceleration of planetary change (the question of what accelerates), but the encroachment of speculative, post-Anthropocene futures from which we might mobilize new dispositions for living and dying. For with the introduction of new problematic fields, speculative thought produces conditions for the dehabitation of thinking and action insofar as they are opened to ‘what awaits at the edge of epistemic certainty’ (p. 530). Put otherwise, it is in fabulation that we might eclipse the axioms of the given, rehabilitating futures disappeared in their dogmatic tethering to the anthropomorphized image of the world and its grounding in the humanist conceit that the world-for-us constitutes the horizon for all potential worlds (Reed 2014). This is indeed an escape, where what is evaded is the reduction of thought to an existent set of analytic and conceptual affordances.

PART V: EPISTEMOLOGICAL MISTAKES AND TOPOLOGICAL EXPERIMENTS

ABER claims to bring together scholarly inquiry and creative processes for the purpose of exploring questions and expressing knowledge not necessarily accessible or re-presentable through other means. As we have seen, however, ABER’s supposed liberatory project continues to operate through the deep-seated anthropocentric assumption that the world can be correlated and interpreted through all-too-human regimes of representation. As a result, ABER propagates the uncomplicated transference of the world, even in its current state of degradation, unto both aesthetic redemption and the production of knowledge that is always-already correlated to meaning made for us. The epistemological assumptions operating in and through arts-based scholarship must therefore be questioned, particularly given the geological events of the Anthropocene and the planetary repercussions of the impending ecocatastrophes that have come to characterize our contemporary existence. In order to overturn these common-sense assumptions about knowledge, it is therefore necessary to experiment

with alternative epistemological speculations where knowledge is instead understood in terms of its power to eclipse the axioms of the given world, thus repositioning ABER as a 'problematic field' through which the future of educational research might be speculatively re-evaluated in terms of its capacity to rehabilitate otherwise disappeared futures.

The epistemological limits portended by contemporary approaches to ABER ultimately work to disappear the inherent noumenal or occulted regression of things through coding mechanisms that can be interpreted and understood by the so-called human subject. As we have seen, this 'art of disappearance' (Baudrillard 1998) hallows the world's givenness to art through the idealization of epistemological modes such as those propagated through 'green' ecological thinking and an unquestioned fidelity to the reification of the human body as a fundamental mode of meaning making. This disappearance, in turn, gives rise to particular methodological and epistemological commitments that operate through the ongoing aesthetic reterritorialization of the world through organizations of interminable exchange and correlation, which at the same time, disappear the limits and boundaries between disciplines and fields of study while habituating conceptions of knowledge to the image of a given world. In educational domains, for instance, the increasing promotion of arts-integration across the curriculum operates as both a technique for generating intellectual challenge, inquiry skills, and initiative, as well as a mode for reproducing the vocational knowledge and skills that have been recognized as integral for participation in today's globally-connected economy (April 2010; Elkins 2008; Eisner 2002; Trilling and Fadel 2009). Likewise, in the world of business, artistic practices are now recognized as popular technologies with which we can better approach the 'creative economy', offering business leaders important lessons on how to take criticism, increase motivation and audience engagement, and produce bigger, better solutions to business problems (Pink 2005; Bell 2008). This transaesthetic metamorphosis of all disciplines under the seemingly affirmational project of 'art' provides a means to an end; that is, an end wherein human subjects can accumulate and apply the necessary skills and knowledge recognized by the interconnected global project of designer capitalism.

At first glance, this metamorphosis, and its necessary disappearance of boundaries and constraints, may seem fruitful in terms of thinking knowledge and its limits in alternative ways. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that this art of disappearance effectively reproduces homogenous epistemological definitions overcoded by pre-existing

images of what has been considered ‘useful’ or ‘good’ by dominant social, political, and economic organizations of the past-present. Such epistemological commitments, which are now characteristic of arts-based research approaches more generally, fail to recognize how these assumptions about knowledge perpetuate the compulsive drive to correlate and over-represent reality through the limiting boundaries and categories produced by the human species. It is this correlationist tendency that ultimately works to limit how knowledge is, or might be conceptualized otherwise.

The legacy of correlationism is a key factor in the way ABER continues to operate. Quentin Meillassoux (2008) articulates this legacy in *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, in which he outlines the problem of correlationism as the philosophical commitment that access to the world is only ever access to the correlation between thought and its object. As Meillassoux writes, the thesis of correlationism asserts ‘the essential inseparability of the act of thinking from its content [such that] “[a]ll we ever engage with is what is given-to-thought, never an entity subsisting by itself” (Meillassoux 2008, p. 36). In ABER, the problem of correlationism therefore pertains to a presupposed philosophy of access that assumes that reality exists only to the extent that we, as humans, are able to think it. This correlationist legacy is apparent in Baudrillard’s concept of transaesthetic metamorphosis, operating through the veneration of the world’s givenness to an art that always-already exists. Likewise, through the idealization of ‘green ecologies’, and the drive to redeem the world through art, credence is given to images of thought that have been considered ‘good’ in the past, in turn essentializing those images of thought as fundamental realities. In light of the growing warnings of anthropogenic climate change and planetary degradation, however, it has become clear that what has been considered ‘good’ in the past fails to respond to the real, material conditions of the present. The fidelity to lived organicity (Colebrook 2011) within ABER, for instance, has positioned the human body as a fundamental and essential correlate with which meaning making can and should occur. This reification of human exceptionalism, and the corollary preoccupation with the representation of sense experiences from the perspective of the human species, fails to recognize the other flows of life that flourish irrespective of their registration by human subjects. In brief, the correlationist legacy through which ABER continues to operate produces a poverty of thought in terms of how knowledge itself is conceptualized.

How, then, might arts-based research be able to produce knowledge that is more adequate to the challenges raised by the Anthropocene? In his discussion of the nature and origin of the mind, Spinoza (2009) posits that in order to understand what constitutes knowledge we must distinguish between adequate and inadequate ideas. For Spinoza, sense perception; that is, one's individual and phenomenological experience of the world is an inadequate idea due to the fact that this representation is unavoidably coloured by the lens of one's own body (Spinoza 1989). As Spinoza writes: '[i]t follows,[...], that the ideas which we have of external bodies indicate the condition of our own body more than the nature of the external bodies' (Part 2, PROP. 16, Corollary 2). Put otherwise, even through sense experience itself, which in arts-based research practices assumes a direct access point to the world, knowledge is obscured by the correlation of experience to the limits of our own bodies. Similar to the myth of the given world, this epistemological mistake; that is, the idea that the immediacy of what is known can be correlated to the cause of that knowledge, assumes that the body can experience the world in a way that is unaffected by other factors, and thus the world can be accessed as it is given. The myth of the given has been long underscored by the notion that our sensory experience is itself a kind of reliable given, a thought that has come to define both artistic production and reception. In ABER, this unquestioned correlation between the world and sensory experience has been taken as the basis for its own disciplinary development, with the advent of approaches such as a/r/tography, which advances an image of the natural world that is divorced from culture, but nevertheless submissive to human phenomenological inquiry. This epistemological mistake has, in turn, led to the faulty conclusion that it is the critical stripping of art's disciplinary norms, its boundaries and constraints, in favour of a perceptual purity or lived organicity that produces art's own potential for critical development. It is this privileging of human experience that fails to acknowledge the inadequacy of sensory perception as a mode of knowledge production, especially in the face of the continued non-human planetary transformations taking place around us.

In addition to the assertion that sense perception only ever offers an indirect access point to the world, Spinoza also asserts that this mode of knowledge production is also limited in terms of how it understands relationships between bodies, including their effects and causes. As Spinoza writes, 'the knowledge of an effect depends upon and involves the knowledge of its causes' (Part I, Axiom 4). At the same time, however, the mind

cannot process or contain all of the possible causes of a given body, and thus the mind's ideas of external bodies, whether physical or conceptual, are all inadequate. It is through this mode of knowledge that we distinguish, categorize and order things without perceiving the multitude of causes that determine them to be. In this way, the only sort of falsity ideas are capable of is revealed in their inherent incompleteness. In the case of arts-based educational scholarship, the epistemological assumptions through which the field operates are, therefore, only false insofar as they are unable to perceive the connections to other ideas and ways of knowing that constitute these assumptions in the first place. By relying on necessarily limiting correlationist tendencies, arts-based research continues in spite of its own inadequacy, thus limiting conceptions of knowledge production to those which can be correlated to images of thought that always-already exist. In order to recognize its own inadequacy, it is therefore necessary for arts-based research approaches to analyse their own given myths and axioms, particularly in relation to the correlationist legacies and anthropocentric perspectives that have come to dominate both thinking and action in the field. Such analysis necessitates the reformulation and reorientation of knowledge categories, sites and topologies themselves.

As explored above, dominant approaches to arts-based research are founded on a correlationist legacy wherein limits and categories are produced through a priori indexes where knowledge is always made to produce meaning 'for us'. The Earth, for example, has been mapped upon the modernist index and aspiration that it be developed and modified according to distinctly human will and desires. Likewise, distinctions between human and non-human species, between so-called culture and nature, have been produced through particular mappings wherein bodies are categorized based on pre-determined divisions and correlations. In this way, it is the map itself, that is, the human indexes and regimes of representation that have come to create the territory. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write, maps have traditionally functioned to produce representations, significations, and layers of readability, such that the subject may inhabit that territory, calling it its own.

Within ABER, it is the map of the world made to mean for us, the given world that has indexed knowledge to this givenness, ultimately impacting the epistemological categories and connections that can and cannot be made. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write, however, there are other ways to map a territory. Referring to their concept of the rhizome, the duo posit that, unlike the Cartesian map, which presents itself as a completed

image of any given territory, ‘the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entranceways and exits and its own lines of flight’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 21). Put otherwise, mapping can operate through the familiar process of starting from a series of axioms (a grid), and organizing bodies based on these re-established categories and limits, or mapping can unfold as a nomadic and referential process wherein territories are created through dynamic vectors that are associative while also non-commutative. This alternative conceptualization of mapping offers a more topological approach to the understanding of relationships; that is, this operation conceptualizes relationships not as given states, but for what these relationships can possibly become, where notions of scale and measurement are replaced by concepts of thresholds and trajectories.

Transposed to the site of epistemology, and ultimately ABER, a topological approach would therefore radically extend knowledge from the strictures of correlationist representation, allowing it to explore the elasticity of contexts and thresholds of processes. It must be noted, however, that this extension is not the same as Baudrillard’s (2008) conception of a transaesthetic metamorphosis, characterized by the disappearance of boundaries and limits. Instead, a topological conceptualization of knowledge production asserts that generalizations and categories can indeed be created, but only by dropping the assumption that observable qualities, such as those created through sensory perception, always commute. Put otherwise, this epistemological position is constituted through limits and boundaries that offer dynamical modes of circulation and transformation between images of thought, while also acknowledging the inadequacy of its own knowledge production based on the assertion that these relations are never completely contingent. In this way, a topological understanding of knowledge moves away from the postmodern paradigm of ‘anything goes’ by revealing the inadequacy of our models to think through both our epistemic panic and normative paralysis, thus providing us with the necessary tools to trigger new dynamics that are capable of responding to the pressing challenges characteristic to the era of the Anthropocene. It is these new dynamics in thinking, brought about by alternative speculations and experimentation with the limits and definition of knowledge itself, which might reposition ABER as a radically antagonistic and ultimately productive field of scholarship.

PART VI: THE BETRAYAL OF AFFIRMATION

In characteristically pessimistic fashion, Cioran (1999) writes that hope is a contradiction of the future (p. 83). As a prescient caveat on the encroaching uncertainties of the post-Anthropocene and the prospect of an inhuman world-without-us, Cioran symptomatizes hope as a modern form of delirium. In lieu of an encounter with the ruins of thought, of extinction, and exhaustion, hope becomes a vehicle for lying to ourselves (Thacker 2015a, b). Against ABER's pulsional motors of affirmation, this disposition is undoubtedly unfashionable if not outright repugnant. For evidenced in the privileged position accorded to the limitless creative potential of the subject, the necessary production of newness, and distrust of negativity, the field of arts-based research inheres a fundamental commitment to affirmational affects and thought (Noys 2010).

Where negativity insists, it is today recuperated within an affirmational model of life, and subsumed within a broader calculus of positivity and potential (Thacker 2015a). This scenario characterizes the fate of *Arts Based Research: A Critique and Proposal* (2013), the betrayals of which have been largely recuperated within the field, or otherwise ignored as an act of ignoble or treacherous negativity. This posed the commitment to affirmational affects in the field of arts-based research obfuscates its own betrayal. That is, this affirmational tendency has become a privileged mode of production, one premised on the negation of negation, and as a result the problematics of non-being and non-existence that are corollary to the post-Anthropocene horror of decay, extinction, and thought's absence, are simply not considered. For what the field of arts-based research often dubs 'affirmation' is but the articulation of tolerable thought selecting for the positive (i.e., adaptation, creation, becoming, and evolution) as a claim to 'how things really are' (Thacker 2015a, p. 158). This is to disappear the question of how negation exceeds subjective creativity, newness, and happy affects; or rather, the question of how the Anthropocene might subvert the abuses of romanticism coextensive to the celebration of hope and living well (Cioran 2012). This is to expand those tendencies of doubt already at work within the field by accelerating the question 'where does doubt stop?' (Thacker 2015a, p. 158, added emphasis). As it pertains to the limits of doubt, the field of arts-based research maintains a familiar horizon in self-consciousness, identity production, and creative becoming. There is, of course, nothing errant in this, and certainly, every thinker participates in their own practices of negative non-affirmation. Rather, it

is simply to say that within the field, the commitment to affirmation has disappeared the acceleration of doubt into nihilism, or rather, the ‘disenchantment of the world’ via the revelation of what it cannot or dare not say (pp. 162–163).

The challenges of the Anthropocene and encroaching events of a post-Anthropocene future necessitate less a new line of flight for arts-based research than a style of non-philosophy through which we might begin to rethink arts-based research in a manner that does not begin with arts-based research (Laruelle 2012). What becomes of arts-based research, for instance, if we begin not within its conceptual affordances or methods, but with a speculative reorientation irredeemable, if not violent, to its habits and prejudices? Ultimately, such a question is less remote to arts-based research than it is the horrific inversion of its key commitments. Within contemporary approaches to ABER, where the fashions of limitless human creativity, meaning making and vital living production have reached their terminus in the Anthropocene, such commitments are confronted by the terrible repercussions of their inertia and intensification brought on by the drive to terraform and correlate the whole of reality under the image of human expressive potential. If the ‘revenge’ or reversal of contemporary planetary-becomings portends anything, it is a style of disappearance, but from the vantage of the object, or better, the inhuman vantage of a world-without-us. Put differently, both the Anthropocene and encroaching post-Anthropocene moment is a becoming-imperceptible of the human, if but to reveal the dark side of things, or rather, the contortion of metaphysics from the impersonal perspective of no one (Colebrook 2014). This is not the end of arts-based educational thought, but a potential beginning that faces up to an encroaching future in which art and its reasons will necessarily undergo metamorphosis, though not necessarily of its design or will—the vigil of the inhuman over all present ecstasies.

POST-SCRIPT: NOTES ON THE FUTURE(S)

If the Anthropocene can be thought alongside Baudrillard’s (1999) advocacy for an oppositional theory-object, such a thought might constitute a sufficient reorientation to the meta-philosophical correlationism and philosophical self-presumptions⁹ of ABER (Laruelle 2012). As we have attempted to explore in this chapter, it is via the albeit speculative inhuman vantage of the Anthropocene that we might begin to discern the limitations of ABER vis-à-vis its ways of knowing, and further, by attending to

what such knowing cannot know. Elsewhere, we have dubbed this a matter of disappearance, knowing full well things disappear only as a special effect of correlationism, or rather, the presumed adequation of thinking to the Real (Laruelle 2012). This is not a petition to somehow create a more adequate account of reality, but rather, to palpate the realization that the dominant orientations of ABER need to mutate for particular things to be thought at all (Mullarkey 2013).

ABER's familiar presupposition that reality is given to art and artistic thought suggests a stance that must be put on trial in order for its material tendencies to be re-directed from the authoritarianism of the creative-genius, the correlative presumption of reality's becoming-art, and those reflexive mirror games that condition thought to an image of what-is—as if the horizon of ABER was simply to repeat an image of reality already given to thought (Maoilearca 2015). Against these dogmas, we have aimed herein at reversing the automatic adequation of artistic and philosophical thought to the Real by palpating a style of thinking directed from the Real to artistic and philosophical thought (Mullarkey 2013). To accomplish this reorientation, we need not necessarily evoke the conditions of a planet out-of-synch with the presumptions of ABER, although a critique of ABER's presumed adequacy to the realities of immanent ecological catastrophe remains a quite necessary project. The point is simply that there is no thought adequate to reality, and for this fact, thought must be made to mutate in a manner immanent to the Real, or rather, the flatness of all ontologies without singularity and exclusivity (Mullarkey 2013).

If the arguments advanced in this chapter have general import, it is in their demonstration of thoughts (and not necessarily human ones) for which ABER's dominant positions are inadequate. The aim herein is not to inspire a new form of relationality, which might very well amount to those modes of correlationist adequation from which this essay seeks to escape. Rather, and not without difficulty, we have sought instead to articulate a reorientation capable of negating ABER's presumed sufficiency of thought (Maoilearca 2015). It is important to note that this is not tantamount to an assertion of ABER's end. Instead, it is to advocate a re-direction of arts-based educational thought immanent to the Real—a project that necessitates the radical mutation of its material resources towards realities-without-givenness (Laruelle 2012).

NOTES

1. We switch between ‘arts-based educational research’ and ‘ABER’ as it has suited the flow of the chapter.
2. The ascription of human vitality to the meaning of ‘life’ labours to perpetuate a romantic ecological ideal that falls short of apprehending the ‘dark ecology’ of a planet both composed of dead matter and populated by ‘things’ ostensibly possessed of their own unfathomable will (Morton 2010; Thacker 2012). As Thacker speculatively contends via the petrol-horror fiction of Fritz Leiber’s ‘Black Gondolier’, the vaunted position of human vitalism and embodied affect might be subverted that other horizons for thinking such as Leiber’s speculation on the unfathomable prospect that ‘oil discovered man’ might be mobilized (p. 175).
3. Recent geochemical studies on rates of oceanic acidification suggest that current rates of carbon emission parallel those of the Permian Extinction event, which saw 90 % of the planet’s species extinguished (Clarkson et al. 2015).
4. The planet has already eclipsed its regenerative ‘carrying capacity’ by a stupefying 30 %.
5. The frozen images of London in Danny Boyle’s (2002) *28 Days Later*, the desolate rendering of the Sydney Opera House in Juan Carlos Fresnadillo’s (2007) *28 Weeks Later*, and the decay of New York City figured in Francis Lawrences’s (2007) *I Am Legend*, each pertain to thinking the end of the human species from an inhuman vantage beyond organicity or reference for any *body* (Colebrook 2013, p. 26).
6. Where critical thought has become habitually oriented to the critique of superstructure and rise of capitalism as its main objects of critique, Wark (2014) elides, it remains all-too-human in its fidelity to human scales of production and time.
7. ABER and curriculum theory are replete with their own prophets and territories-of-use overdetermining in advance what is possible to think.
8. The Marxian assertion that humans ‘alone create their environment’ harbours a stealth anthropocentric commitment (Morton 2010, p. 72). By extension, the analysis of superstructure intimate to much educational research belies the fact that all variety of forces (leaf

cutting ants, corals, chthonic upheavals) are at work in producing life (Morton 2010; Wark 2014).

9. Here, we have in mind ABER's treatment of the subject as the privileged site for the manifestation of difference.

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