

Love Hurts: Ecopedagogy between Avatars and Elegies

By Richard Kahn

In a true fairy tale everything must be marvelous...everything must be animated. Each in its different way. The whole of nature must be mixed in a strange way with the whole of the spirit world. Time of general anarchy—lawlessness—freedom—the *natural state* of nature—the time before the *world* (state). This time before the world brings with it as it were the scattered features of the *time after the world*—as the state of nature is a *strange picture* of the eternal kingdom. The world of the fairy tale is the *absolutely opposite* world to the world of truth (history)—and just for this reason it is so *absolutely similar* to it—as *chaos* is to *accomplished creation*. (On the *idyll*).

In the *future* world everything is as it is in the *former*—and *yet everything is quite different*. The *future* world is *reasonable* chaos—chaos which penetrated itself—is inside and outside itself—*chaos* squared or infinity.

The *true fairy tale* must be at once a *prophetic representation*—an ideal representation—an absolutely necessary representation. The maker of true fairy tales is a prophet of the future.

...In time history must become a fairy tale—it will become again what it was in the beginning.

—Novalis (1997)

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I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do

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not even want to accuse those who accuse. *Looking away* shall be my only negation.
And all in all and on the whole: some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer.
—Nietzsche (1976)

It is hard to know where to turn in an age increasingly constituted by sociological no exit and ecological endgame. To today's globalization of highly integrated quasi-fascist administrative complexes, those of us interested in working for an ecopedagogy for sustainability must attempt to imagine orders of planetary community. Yet, such community has not fully arrived in the concrete, and so we must look critically to alternative ideas and practices as possibly anticipatory of a qualitatively different form of society. The critical dimension is crucial to this work—for, since current ideas and practices are anticipatory at best of a more sustainable world, it means that they take place within limit situations that must themselves be named, reflected upon, and acted against in order to articulate and re-affirm contemporary liberatory tendencies.

Clearly, a major imaginary at work in sustainability politics is that of “rootedness,” which is often connected to vernacular, local, or place-based movements for revitalization of the public sphere and/or commons. On the other hand, since we have moved beyond a moment in which local struggle can be thought as developing free from transnational capitalist (as well as other powerful global) forces, we must engage with multiple visions of alter-globalization as a kind of rosetta stone for the kind of planetary community which we seek. The dialectical tension between these two corollary valences is often captured by “local/global” cosmovisions, the most radical of which may correspond to what Wolfgang Sachs (1992) coined as “cosmopolitan localism” (112), Homi Bhabha (2001) termed “vernacular cosmopolitanism,” or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2003) simply identified as “planetary.” In my book, *Critical Pedagogy, Ecoliteracy, and Planetary Crisis* (2010), I provided critical analysis of the emancipatory sustainability work of the Shundahai Network in the occupied territory of the Western Shoshone people (what is now called “the Nevada Test Site”) as a potential example of what such planetary looks like in practice. While perhaps not the only way to interpret the Network's praxis, I further argued that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's concept of the “multitude” (2004) provides a fertile imaginative ground from which to understand the way groups such as Shundahai manifest as planetary in place.

According to Hardt and Negri (2004) the “political project of the multitude... must find a way to confront the conditions of our contemporary reality” (352) and this project is characterized fundamentally by love—one which is capable of creating a “new science” (353) of life for a radical earth democracy, which also entails the revelation of what they term “a new race” or “new humanity” (356).¹ It is my contention that the material, intellectual, and spiritual turns necessary to more fully realize a new science of the multitude—both ontologically and epistemologically—constitute a distinctly *educational* vocation. As Guevara (1965) put it, “Society as a whole must be converted into a gigantic school” (202). Of course

it was in this same famous letter, in which Ché described how a socialist revolution desires the ever-birth of “the new man and woman” in terms of both emancipated consciousness and material practices, that he also importantly mused, “At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by feelings of great love” (215).

It was undoubtedly with these comments in mind that Paulo Freire (1998) himself remarked that “I do not believe educators can survive...without some sort of ‘armed love,’ as the poet Tiago de Melo would say....It is indeed necessary that this love be an ‘armed love,’ the fighting love of those convinced of the right and duty to fight, to denounce, and to announce. It is this form of love that is indispensable to the progressive educator and which we must all learn” (40-41). In the context of a multitudinous new science of planetarities, however, in a time when our historical challenge is to undertake the humanist *aufheben* (sublation) of the “human” itself as a hegemonic category, we will need more than simply the armed love of classroom teachers or civic educators. Instead, we need to learn to anticipate adequate visions of a multiple-armed love—the image of the Mahākālī Kali comes to mind—if we are to forge a truly planetary community. Such love is literally and figuratively monstrous.²

As I have argued previously, the central concern for the Frankfurt School of critical theory remains a foundationally necessary task for ecopedagogy generally: to understand the domination of nature in all of its complexity and totality as part of an ongoing transformative inquiry (inclusive of both theorization and transgressive action) into the possibilities of achieving a fully liberated world. Just as critical theorists previously explored the manner in which the reification of the human enlightenment project resulted in the cold heart of authoritarianism and the false pleasures of industrial capitalism, as well as the closure of reason generally by irrational forces, so too is ecopedagogy concerned to illuminate ways in which the global ecological figure of the “human” stands as arguably the great sociopolitical (and hence educational) challenge of the 21st century along similar lines.

Rather than the biopolitical love of the sovereign leader for totalitarian power over all existence, the capitalist love of profit, or the many other forms of socially antagonistic sadism that are reproduced every day across the stage of transnational Empire, ecopedagogy as I understand it argues that it is legitimate to retain hope for a coming community of cosmic zoöphilia.³ Such would be a re-enchanted planetary home of peace, biodiversity, and freedom; a virtuous state of being that could significantly heal (if not resolve) the historical terrors of the three-headed hydra of human civilization which unfolds into the endgame of genocide, ecocide, and zoöcide respectively when revitalized organizations of zoë are popularly absent (Kahn, 2010). Yet, as this hydra is the condition of our contemporary reality it means that outpourings of zoöphilia today are always limited and contradictory. Still, the ancient goddess/god of love⁴ was also the lover of war (Burkert, 1991). While this delineates exactly our contradictory problem in one respect, it may also

be the wise oracular truth that beckons us toward the necessary acceptance of the present moment's revolutionary fate (*amor fati*).

But there is also of course the omnipresent eventuality of *kulturkampf*, culture war. Accordingly, in my work with Tyson Lewis (2010), we have engaged with the alternative aesthetic registers of posthuman cultural figures—such as the feral, the alien, and the faery—in order to reveal how they demonstrate monstrous tendencies alive within the larger public's "common" sense that should be taken seriously by those who presently work for radically democratic sustainability education. For, on the one hand, these imaginaries are positively anticipatory of a moral destabilization of bourgeois humanism in which ideological boundaries are politically reconstructed as the democratic multitude that is the evolving "mangle" (Pickering, 1995) of earthlings with each other and the planet. On the other hand, a failure to critically interrogate these cultural forms by the public-at-large potentially allows for the terrible return of the repressed elements within such culture (e.g. the nonhuman; nature as both alien state of otherness, or as the outer environment) resulting in a cataclysmic social threat—perhaps as an anthropogenically-induced mass extinction event or via nature's cultural re-appropriation by the larger hegemony in the guise of the naturalization of primary accumulation strategies.

For this reason, the idea and practice of zoöphilia itself demands critical evaluation lest ecopedagogy be committed to a highly limited form of education of irrational (and possibly fascist) mythologies of the primeval, or to reactionary combinations of either nature/culture or human/nonhuman that work curricularly throughout society to re-inscribe the domination of nature proper. In other words, I do not imagine zoöphilia as a form of monstrous love that occurs through immoral consubstantial identifications with an essentialized nature by those who would claim the right to authoritarian violence as spokespersons on its behalf.⁵ Likewise, though, I also cannot envision a working vivisection laboratory itself as a sensible example of an ethical space inhabited by a liberatory zoöphilia, even though it might be acknowledged that it (as with any place) could possibly serve as a future home for ethical zoöphilic returns. Simply crossing ideological borders is not necessarily evidence of progress or transformatively educational. Such action may be a challenge to hegemonic norms from below, but it may also be a colonialist invasion from above. A critical reading of the myriad interactionist (Tuana, 2008), intra-actionist (Barad, 2003), and trans-corporeal (Alaimo, 2008) contexts is demanded by the desire to know more about how zoöphilia is socially situated in any given instance.

The ancient philosopher Heraclitus was therefore correct: "Nature loves to hide" (Kahn, 1981, 33). Knowledge of nature is always mantic—it neither declares nor conceals itself absolutely, but rather takes the form of an enigmatic sign that demands our diagnostic critique. Accordingly, ecopedagogy looks to emergent subcultural valences and avant-garde representations to critically listen for novel generative themes that might be the germinative subjects of multitudinous dia-

logues—Haraway’s (2008) “otherworldly conversations” (174)—on behalf of a new science of life. But ecopedagogy also reads global popular culture against the grain after the manner of a critical public pedagogy (Giroux, 2000; Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2009) in order to isolate and inveigh against dominator values, norms, ideas, and their various mainstream commercial representations. In this manner, then, ecopedagogy seeks to mount a form of posthuman cultural studies in accordance with the normative demands made by a revolutionary zoöphilia.

Avatar:

A Prophetic Representation of Planetary Zoöphilia?

[T]he Great Refusal: refusal to accept separation from the libidinous object (or subject). The refusal aims at liberation—at the reunion of what has become separated.

—Herbert Marcuse (1966)

The basic word I-You can only be spoken with one’s whole being. The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me; can never be accomplished without me. I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You. All life is encounter... In the beginning is relation—a category of being, readiness, grasping form, mold for the soul.

—Martin Buber (1970)

The word “avatar” has Vedantic origins meaning something akin to the “descent” or “manifestation” of a divinity in bodily form. It is the embodiment of the Holy Spirit (or in a non-monotheistic culture, spirits). In light of the cyberpunk generation, an avatar can now also be one’s own digital representation—whether a representative icon for one’s tweets and other social networking posts or an entire virtual person one can live through in cyborg media environments like *Second Life* or *Rock Band*. Of course, *Avatar* is also the blockbuster film released in late 2009, which has gone on to be far and away the largest grossing movie domestically and worldwide (as of the time of writing: \$2,716,433,508). In its blending of ambivalent meanings connoted by the concept of avatar, the movie self-consciously attempts to pitch for a monstrous pedagogical engagement of each with each in order to mediate and ultimately sublimate the tension between the organic and the machinic (or the Epimethean and the Promethean⁶) traditions. In this it must be considered alongside trilogies such as *The Matrix* and the first three released episodes of *Star Wars*. By self-consciously taking up themes from these and other motion pictures, as well as present day popular concerns about the planetary ecological costs of modern industrial society, *Avatar* ultimately poses the question whether it is a case of art imitating art, art imitating life or, in the case of audiences moved to want to embody some of its characters’ seemingly zoöphilic virtues, life imitating art.

In many respects, *Avatar* is the pre-eminent megaspectacular⁷ representation

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of revolutionary zoöphilia to date, as it offers a bold allegory of current threats to sustainability and peace now posed by the military industrial complex along with a hopeful ending that the love of *zoë* will always result in the preservation of renewal within a community of integrity. The film, whether seen in 3-D or not, displays a richly romantic vision of the alien nature of the Alpha Centauri moon Pandora, which is populated by an indigenous race (the Na'vi⁸) that is very much its wise and sustainable guardian. *Avatar* centers upon a particular clan living in a giant "Hometree"—a veritable tree of life. Two other trees serve as sacred *axis mundis* for the Na'vi, a Tree of Voices, in whose shelter they can listen to their departed ancestors, and the Tree of Souls, that amounts to something like the primary hub coordinating and concentrating the biology of the planetoid's supra-consciousness called "Eywa."⁹

The Na'vi themselves are a large humanoid race, though with distinctive feline features that also suggest their monstrosity. If in *The Matrix* members of the Nebuchadnezzar could "jack in" to bring their consciousness to bear on the stream of digital data being arranged by the machines to constitute a virtual world designed to pacify human agency, in *Avatar* the Na'vi (like other native species on Pandora) possess a tendril-like, braided organ that connects to their brain. By connecting this up with those of other flora and fauna, they achieve something akin to complete cognitive intimacy with their lifeworld partners and so ritualistically establish the ethics of sustained relationship that is constitutive of Pandoran life. Thus, life on Pandora is presented as rooted in a relationship-based ontology and, epistemologically, the Na'vi understand life as an unending series of dialogue and common bonding of the past with the present or the self with another. It is unsurprising, then, that the movie draws directly from Buber's *I and Thou* (1970, 70) for the manner in which they greet one another—"I see you," they say and thereby convey that in the relationship they perceive the zoöphilic unity of one with all.

Avatar's script turns on the problem, then, that when human colonists colonize Pandora—in the form of a technocapitalist transgalactic corporation named Resources Development Administration (RDA), which includes armed soldiers, bureaucratic administrators, scientists and anthropologists, and other personnel—the Na'vi and Eywa become caught in a contradiction. Should they refuse the colonists outright as wrongful invaders? Considering that RDA is shown as desiring to lay waste to Pandora, dominate the Na'vi, and subject the mind-matter of Eywa under the Tree of Souls to primary accumulation in order to profit from it as an energy commodity named "unobtainium," a total resistance strategy could be justified. However, to do so would violate the ontological basis of relationship that constitutes the meaning of life on Pandora and the Na'vi's own comprehension of what it means to be a people. In other words, it would reproduce an ideology of Other-as-pathogen that is the biopolitical hallmark of fascism and which comes close to RDA's own relational position as regards the moon's *zoë* in the film. For example, in explaining the corporation's intentions to the Na'vi, the double agent protagonist of *Avatar*,

Jake Sully, declares, “This is how it’s done. When people are sitting on shit that you want, you make ‘em your enemy. Then you justify taking it.”

Yet, if the Na’vi were to simply accept RDA on its own terms then they would voluntarily make themselves into a kind of *homo sacer* (Agamben, 1998) and sacrifice their zoöphilia through a Stoic’s act of suicide. Thus, they undertake a mediated political position of liberal tolerance, with the important exception that they decide further that Jake Sully’s Na’vi avatar will itself be incorporated into the tribe and taught its ways. The character of Sully therefore becomes the location of a potential “engaged pedagogy” (hooks, 2010) within the larger ideological drama, and by refusing the Manichean biopolitics and zero-sum game of RDA, the Na’vi attempt to retain their integrity and plant a seed to enlarge the *zoë* community on more Pandoran terms.

As many commentators have noted, despite *Avatar*’s supreme fantasy, its emplotment of the narrative of colonization—especially of indigenous peoples—could easily have been ripped straight from the headlines. In a certain sense, RDA symbolizes Columbus and the Na’vi are the peaceable Caribs (until Columbus started chopping their hands off in search of gold). The synthetic personage of Jake Sully, a Marine transformatively turned into a diplomatic representative who might ethically speak for the Na’vi over the course of the film, represents a kind of Bartholomew de Las Casas figure. Certainly, though, de Las Casas never himself went Croatan, nor was he perceived as a fated clan leader by the indigenous populations that he recognized were the terrible objects of imperialist domination. Thus, in resolving itself by having Jake Sully reborn under the grace of Eywa as his Na’vi avatar in order to be a true avatar for universal peace, the movie *Avatar* makes something of a hegemonic caricature of Hardt and Negri’s call for a new human race based in a science of love.

Avatar ultimately devolves in this way into a conservative white dream of zoöphilia on its own privileged terms—yes, it is the dominant Empire that is wrong; but it is in the end the dominant Empire that will make history right. Moreover, the movie suggests that Empire will be welcomed by *zoë*’s multitudes and even crowned for its pedagogical achievements amongst them. For sure, there must be a type of ecopedagogy of the oppressor just as there is necessarily one for the oppressed, but *Avatar* likely overemphasizes the necessity of transforming the consciousness of the average white male capitalist—or the ideological position occupied by such—in order to achieve a meaningful revolution for earth democracy and beyond. For the dominant society, such revolution takes the form of what Tyson Lewis and I (2010) have elsewhere called “UFOther,” the conscious perception of a kind of alien invasion phenomenon. What is beyond the margins of the permissible will erupt into the center. It is less a matter of those at the centers of power administratively managing to teach and learn equally at the margins.

Perhaps the worst failure of *Avatar* as an artifact of public pedagogy, though, is that while viscerally transcoding increasingly global fears about modern society’s

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tendencies towards genocide, ecocide, and zoöcide, as with *The Matrix* series and other similar movies like *District 9*, it suggests to paying audiences that a spiritual world of social justice and biodiversity can be theirs' if they will only take the first step of purchasing a movie ticket (along with whatever other necessary items from the concession stand), suspend their will to disbelieve, and so engage in the repressive desublimation of an enchanted cinematic fairy tale complete with Hollywood happy ending. As noted by the social theorist and cultural critic, Slavoj Žižek (2010), the truly awful irony about the type of awe inspired by films such as *Avatar* is that similar indigenous struggles to that which it describes still go on today in places such as central India (or throughout Latin America, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Australia, Oceania, and yes—North America too!), but relatively few seem to notice or care, much less get involved.

In other words, the movie appears enough for most—which results in teaching the opposite of undertaking a monstrous relationship to society. Instead, viewers are ultimately repacked as pacified consumers and sent home to the sounds of the syrupy ballad, *I See You*—a snapshot in words of *Avatar*'s pedagogical misadventure. As with all aspects of the film, here the lyrics too are decidedly ambiguous, potentially as much about a pathological relationship of self-flagellating masochism and internalized colonization as liberation:

Walking through a dream, I see you
My light and darkness breathing hope of new life
Now I live through you and you through me, enchanted
I pray in my heart that this dream never ends.
Now I give my hope to you, I surrender —
I pray in my heart that this world never ends.
I see me through your eyes
Breathing new life, flying high
Your love shines the way into paradise —
So I offer my life —
I offer my love for you.

The philosopher of education Maxine Greene (1995) has written, “informed encounters with works of art often lead to a startling defamiliarization of the ordinary” (4). As I have attempted to illuminate through this critique, *Avatar* is not a true fairy tale (i.e., a faery narrative) until it re-presents itself as dialogical material for a critical ecopedagogical encounter. When this is done, its prophetic joy can be reclaimed in the form of an apophatic liberation theology in which moviegoers (as proxies for the larger project for all citizens) refuse to accept scripts as handed to them and so write themselves back into the work of art as a necessary and proper response to their being in the world—an educational twist on the standard genre of the monster movie.

From a Culture of Silence to Silence in Common

[T]he time of prophecy lies behind us. The only chance now lies in our taking this vocation as that of the friend. This is the way in which hope for a new society can spread. And the practice of it is not really through words but through little acts of foolish renunciation.

—Ivan Illich (2005)

You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law....Do you understand your rights as they have been read to you?

—Miranda Warning¹⁰

If the Na'vi people of *Avatar* held the Tree of Voices to be their oracular temple, let me suggest that the words in the Miranda warning constitute something like the fundamental oracular maxims of our society. In many ways, they are the present age's version of the Temple of Apollo's "Know thyself"; "Nothing in excess"; and "Make a pledge, mischief draws nigh" that were the philosophical underpinnings of Ancient Greek society.

The truth of such oracular statements manifests in the interpretive form of a fundamental ambivalence. Is it that the Delphinian sibyl sought to teach a moral code counseling the need for individual self-reflection ("Know thyself"), temperate behavior ("Nothing in excess"), and order over chaos ("Make a pledge, mischief draws nigh")? Or did she suggest the impossibility of ever knowing oneself (the self is the knower and not the known); that this implies a void beyond existence (nothing by definition lacks both qualification and quantification); and so our sworn vows in the corporeal order of things will thus forever be undermined by the very nature of their own impermanence (promises are built on hubris). Oracular teaching implies both—it asks that one who would learn its secret strive for an attitude akin to what the poet Keats termed "negative capability," in which one bears life's "uncertainties, Mysteries, and doubts," as he called them, without either reaching an emotional condition comprised by irritability or the need to resolve paradox.

In this respect, let me suggest that the oracle of Miranda, then, may be the foolish wisdom that can illuminate the lived tension that conditions us now as: On the one hand, worldly creatures whose common integrity emerges from an authentic relationship to what the composer John Cage termed the "roaring silence" of existence and, on the other, our market fashioned identities as consumer-citizens of a global police state, whose ministers seek to institute and preserve what Paulo Freire called an authoritarian "culture of silence" across the entirety of the democratic political realm. Both of these are Miranda's warning.

For decades, teachers have drawn upon a Freirian legacy of critical pedagogy as a kind of "talking cure" against the caesuras of political voice imposed by hegemonic power. Obviously, this body of work has achieved a great deal. Still, even one of its leading theorists, Peter McLaren (2009) has recently remarked how his

work must in some sense be considered a failure when put in the context of the growth of global capital that has taken place during his career. For this reason, my own work in ecopedagogy has increasingly sought to restore the wisdom of an Illichian tradition of critical pedagogy that has arguably been unfortunately silenced within teacher education circles for years (Kahn, 2009, 2010). His powerful essay, “Silence is a Commons” (1983), is worthy for discussion here. Let me summarize some of its key points.

Illich begins by hailing a new field of “political ecology,” which he notes uses the trope of biological ecology to characterize the study of how “a broad politically organized general public analyzes and influences technical decisions.” As a member of this public himself, he wants in the essay to examine how the rise of a global network society is a techno-managerial change of the human environment that can only be thought convivial if it is democratic in both means and ends. What results is his polemic against the Techno-Moloch of a rising information-communication order that seems all the more relevant with each passing day. In this respect, his words uttered in 1983 are simply startling, as it must be remembered that his essay hailed from a time which was still pre-World Wide Web by some ten years and when Apple corporation announced a revolution in personal computers with its Apple IIe—a clunky, boxy system whose 64kb of random access memory is some 15000x less powerful than the average computer of today.

The basic point of Illich’s essay is that “computers are doing to communication what fences did to pastures and cars did to streets.” That is, they represent the ongoing enclosure and destruction of the commons, moving society from a sufferable subsistence-orientation predicated upon the bare necessities into a commodity-orientation predicated upon people’s need to provide wage labor in order to acquire supposedly scarce resources because they have learned to feel that they will otherwise suffer terribly without them. Thus, the mass consumer society—to which the concept of commons is an outrage.

As Illich relates, this analysis corresponds with a modern history of the primary accumulation of nature and the domination of place under capitalism. But Illich additionally points out that the transmogrification of commons into its perverse identification as an exploitable resource was allowable only because an epochal shift had taken place in the human spirit as well. To his mind, this topsy-turvy revolution in the human heart inaugurated a “new ecological order” in which people could no longer understand that a good society had become transformed from a limited but dignified existence in which people had a stake in determining their own lives into one in which people’s dehumanized lives were determined by the unsustainable amount of steaks they had to consume on a regular basis in order to be happy.

A global communications network is the latest and greatest outcome of a move to naturalize the institution of horror and darkness upon the land, Illich muses. For when people become utterly dependent upon machines to communicate, they can by definition no longer properly analyze technocapitalism—literally, they have

become it. Moreover, they also lose a vantage point from which a political voice could emerge capable of influencing how technology is organized socially, ecology is organized technologically, or society is organized ecologically. Instead, politics devolves into mere commercial competition for ever more powerful loudspeakers by which to silence others and so be heard. This is therefore consonant with the enclosure of wisdom itself by a class of experts—and it is worth noting that schools of all levels (habitats for many loud speakers) cannot make you pay for a commons of silence, only for the resource of people who might choose to teach about it.

Therefore Illich ends his piece with a pedagogical warning. Perceiving the rise of a surveillance society and the mass production of a monoculture of silence—the fascism of a totally administered planet—he emphasizes that the only possible defense can be to renounce working for a political ecology of sustainable resources in favor of one based in and for the commons. Issuing a wide call for what Madhu Suri Prakash and Gustavo Esteva (2008) have called “grassroots postmodernism,” Illich says that such “constitutes the crucial public task for political action during the eighties”; which he says is especially urgent because once commons become resources defended by police, their recovery and reclamation is “increasingly difficult.”

Again, this was 1983. Reaganomics was just getting started. The “Sixth Extinction” (Leakey & Lewin, 1996) of life on earth would not be named for over another 12 years. On the other side of the timeline, the landmark event of the Chipko movement, in which Indian peasant women successfully practiced satyagraha by hugging the trees of their commons in the face of bulldozers and commercial axes in order to prevent their deforestation and resourcification, this was not yet a decade out. Now, Arundhati Roy (2010) tells us that the only sane option for many of these same villagers is to pick up guns and ally with the guerilla Maoists for one last stand.

I raise this because I think it points to an Illichian teaching that is the shadow side of an autonomous grassroots commons-based alternative as idealized in *Avatar*. It is not just a question of defending the commons as place, especially in our time when the environmental and cultural commons are increasingly as common themselves as a passenger pigeon. The terrible truth is that we historically progress deeper and deeper into cataclysm. Terror of this order of magnitude, Illich thought, could only be met by silence on the part of the wide awake individual—it is the last uncolonized refuge, a place from which one might bear moral witness when there is finally no place left to hide.

Such common silence should be pedagogically supplemented by a move from Promethean prophecy to Epimethean elegy. As Illich declared in 1992, “I must accept powerlessness, mourn that which is gone, renounce the irrecoverable.” Carl Mitcham, who we read too infrequently in education circles I fear, speaks movingly of the importance of elegiacs as a learning opportunity in the book *The Challenges of Ivan Illich* (2002). I would like to quote him at length in concluding here:

The English “elegy” comes from the Greek *elegos*, a song of mourning, a lament—originally without reference to metrical form...The Greek word is derived

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from the phrase *e e legein*, meaning “to cry, woe, woe,” and is associated with *aluros*, indicating the absence of accompaniment by the sweet lyre, therefore accompanied by the mournful flute. *Elegos* likewise named the haunting songs of the nightingale and the kingfisher.

To mourn has even more universal roots: the Middle English *mournen*... from the Old English *murnan*, to care for, be anxious about, lament over; the Old High German *mornen*, the Gothic *maurnan*, the Old Norse *morna*, to pine away; the Indo-European (s)mer-, to care for, be anxious about, think, consider, remember; the Latin *memor*, mindful, and *memoria*, memory; the Avestic *mimaria*, mindful; the Greek *mermeros*, causing anxiety, mischievous, baneful, and *merimna*, care, thought, and more.

The elegy mourns and remembers, but in mourning remembers in a special way. It remembers not simply what has been but what has been lost, that which is absent but might very well have been present—except for some untoward happening. One does not mourn simple change or loss, such as the disappearance of the sun at night or the cascading of water down a stream. The great elegies are not for the deaths of old men or women who have fulfilled their days, but for the deaths of the young and unfulfilled, for the passing of orders and goods and beauties that need not have passed away, for the disappearances in which we may well be implicated.

In the presence of mourning one is invited not just to remember but to take care, to rethink what one does, to alter or moderate one’s actions, to act more cautiously, with a new sense of human limitations, and to respect what has been. The elegy implicitly calls upon us to be still and savor the tragedy—as well as the comedy—of the human condition. (18-19)

Recently, listening to a story by outdoor educator Nathan Hensley, I was overcome with an elegiac memory of the spring peepers (*Pseudacris crucifer*) of my New Hampshire youth—how I would commune with them every summer and care for them in a sacred wooded grove where I perhaps did not belong, but which by grace had been welcomed. Having returned to this place in recent years with my 4-year old son, the tiny frogs which once populated the area in numbers upwards of thousands are now gone. Vanished, the lost peepers are thus symptomatic of the rapid disappearance of amphibian kind generally. In this, they are an indicator species that teaches us that our world is terribly out of balance and requires another way of living within it—what the Hopi people called “Koyaanisqatsi.” So, I cannot share with my son the joy and the wonder of earth communion that was so precious to me as a child. Instead, all I have is the sweet pain of the memory, which I can pass on.

Predominantly, the United States is biologically and culturally a nation of pastures. Things are missing here too. Perhaps never to return are the seemingly endless fields of native tall and mixed grass prairie, the country’s most precious ecological heritage, now 99% eradicated. Also disappeared are the ever-cascading herds of wild bison, the largest of all North American land animals, who roamed the prairies by the tens of millions prior to the industrial age. Moreover, the peoples whose cultures honored the power of these flora and fauna in a cosmologically profound manner, they too

now are largely absent in a terrible way. Yet, even 150 years ago things were not in the state that they are today. While the passage of centuries amounts to a long time, it is not so long as to stop us from remembering—if we want to do so.

Questions: What do you mourn? How do you make yourself lovingly responsible to a moral situation of grief? However we decide to think, act, or feel, let us at least not forget the nightingale's song too often quieted by our common work as professional educators. The immortal lesson of her message: *Memento mori* (remember death). Such voice is the evocation of a roaring silence of both laughter and tears, too great for words.

Notes

¹ Whether the monstrous figure of a new humanity such as this essay takes up is best analyzed in terms of reconfigurations of race, class, gender, species or other social analytics is perhaps our primary educative problem posed to us by the present moment. Can planetary community emerge within the category of class, or race, or gender, or species? Or does it emerge through their reconstruction and abolishment? Without dismissing single-issue political approaches *in toto*, the dialogical and dialectical nature of ecopedagogy seeks to create emancipatory relationships between single-issue groups or theorists. It thereby craves a utopian alliance politics that aims for “total liberation” (Best, 2006; Kahn & Humes, 2009). As an aside, while he never used the language of total liberation, this form of pedagogical approach appears to have typified a Freirian critical pedagogy (Freire, 1998) as well.

² Here I am thinking of the musings on “the monster” by Jacques Derrida:

... Monsters are living beings. The monster is also that which appears for the first time and, consequently, is not yet recognized. A monster is a species for which we do not yet have a name, which does not mean that the species is abnormal, namely, the composition or hybridisation of already known species. Simply, it shows itself [*elle se montre*]—that is what the word monster means—it shows itself in something that is not yet shown and that therefore looks like a hallucination, it strikes the eye, it frightens precisely because no anticipation had prepared one to identify this figure....the future is necessarily monstrous: the figure of the future, that is, that which can only be surprising, that for which we are not prepared, you see, is heralded by species of monsters. A future that would not be monstrous would not be a future; it would already be a predictable, calculable, and programmable tomorrow. All experience open to the future is prepared or prepares itself to welcome the monstrous arrivant, to welcome it, that is, to accord hospitality to that which is absolutely foreign or strange, but also, one must add, to try to domesticate it, that is, to make it part of the household and have it assume the habits, to make us assume new habits. This is the movement of culture. (in Weber, 1995, 387)

³ While my claim is that zoöphilia acts as an educative force, this essay's social focus on the pedagogy of love moves beyond teacher-student or school-focused discussions offered by theorists such as Cho (2005), Garrison (1997), Darder (2002), and hooks (2010; 2004). While my conception has not been consciously developed out of their positions, the approach to educational love offered here shares sympathies with the larger cultural and political treatment given by Burch (2000) and hooks (2009), as well as Freire (1998).

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⁴I anticipate that the reader may wonder if it is altogether fair, much less scholarly sound, to associate the form of love denoted by the concept “*philia*” (e.g., zoöphilia) with mythic figures such as Aphrodite or Ishtar. Suffice it here to say that while the Greek “*philos*” is often translated to mean the love inherent in friendship, this disguises the polysemic range of emotional meanings actually identified by the term. In truth it characterized everything from a mode of formal address to fellow citizens to the love of one’s family and that which one held most dear, as well as the amorous feelings for a mistress or life mate (in current parlance, one’s “significant other” is definitely a *philos*). It is also the distant root of the concept of “affiliation,” and I therefore seek to use the idea of zoöphilia inclusively as a cognitive space in which the multitude of qualities common to the act of love can be affiliated with one another through theoretical reflection—if you will, *zæffiliation*.

⁵The work of Slavoj Žižek (2008) on “divine violence” deserves consideration in this regard.

⁶The name Pandora references the Greek myth of Epimetheus and Prometheus. Notably, this myth is the concluding centerpiece of Ivan Illich’s famous work, *Deschooling Society* (1970), in which he called for the return in a new age of Epimethean individuals whose values would align with what we now imagine as sustainability. For Illich, we needed a turn away from the dangers and toil wrought by Promethean culture (akin to Marcuse), but Epimetheans distinguish themselves all the same by practicing collaboration with their Promethean counterparts even in their stark differences. While Pandora is often considered one who looses great sin and plague on the earth by foolishly opening her box containing them, Illich celebrates that from an Epimethean standpoint her name means “All Giver,” and that her box was really a womb or sanctuary conserved to contain only “hope.” On these terms, the meaning of the myth is to teach Promethean culture the true nature of hope, which is not in Illich’s opinion the production of unquenchable needs, but the dignified joy found in a philosophical state of necessity (see Kahn, 2009).

⁷On the concept of megaspectacle, see Kellner (2003).

⁸Na’vi is a phoneticization of the Hebrew word for “prophet.”

⁹*Avatar* endows the Na’vi with an idealized form of, what in indigenous educational circles is called, “Traditional Ecological Knowledge” or TEK (see Berkes, 1993). Indeed, a study of the cultural understandings and practices of the Na’vi in light of the book *Power and Place: Indian Education in America* (2001) by Vine Deloria and Daniel Wildcat would prove fruitful. Deloria and Wildcat suggest therein that indigenous cultural systems almost universally predicate themselves on a cosmological understanding of what they call “power”—an all-pervasive spiritual force that in this book we identify as “zoë.” For Deloria and Wildcat, such power is always in relation to a place, and when emplaced it takes the form of a particular “personality”—a *bios*, or biography. Such personalities exist collectively over time in the lived form of what they further term, the “habitude” of a people. Yet, make no mistake, I am not arguing here that *Avatar* is an appropriate representation of TEK. As I suggest, the film clearly activates a social critique based on the Rousseauian “noble savage” and so is more akin to a white liberal colonial fantasy of TEK’s zoöphilia in many respects than an accurate biographic portrayal of indigenous spirituality. In this it links up with a variety of New Age appropriations of indigenous education and culture, which can be called “plastic shamanism” (on TEK in contemporary contexts, see Kahn, 2010).

¹⁰See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miranda_warning.

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