The stories presented in our article can be viewed online.1

Worldmaking happens through storytelling. But what use is worldmaking in overdeveloped, overresourced parts and populations of the world? Braidotti (2020) characterizes overdevelopment through the convergence of posthuman hostilities: the rapid compounding of postindustrial capitalism in the epistemic North that culminates in previously unthinkable technological innovations, an urgent planetary-level climate crisis, and a devastating human-made global pandemic. In the face of overdevelopment and overconsumption by the privileged, a wave of resistance builds with the exigency of Indigenous resurgence, Black Lives Matter, and young people’s climate action among other powerful movements marking these extraordinary—and extraordinarily troubled—times. For disabled folks, whose realities intersect with each of these experiences and more, the insidious notion of “progress” linked to overdevelopment and overconsumption of the “haves” has long propelled what Agamben (1994/1998) calls bare life and Berlant (2011), slow death of the “have nots.” Both historically and in contemporary neoliberal-ableist contexts (McRuer, 2016), disabled people are targeted as a population that can be both worn and weaned out: “we are all in slow death, but for some this is more apparent” explain Goodley et al., (2015), referring to disabled people and their/allies struggling to survive overdevelopment (p. 981).

Alarmingly, in the Canadian province of Ontario where our inquiry takes place, disabled people’s slow death is being jolted toward speedier death sanctioned by COVID-19 triage protocols that outline who will, and will not, receive treatment when hospitals fill to overcapacity. While disabled people are oftentimes in closer proximity to death than others—the possibility of our living and dying has been historically and obscenely debated in the eugenics-dominated fields of philosophy and medicine that still dominate our knowledge paths (Kelly, Boye, & Rice, 2021; Kelly et al., in press; Kelly, Manning, et al., 2021; Malacrida, 2015)—we now find ourselves on the brink of necropolitical governance that, in the face of devastating overdevelopment and lip-service to social, economic, and environmental justice, cleaves vulnerability onto disability and weaponizes that vulnerability to offer us early death. In the current COVID context, naturalizing disabled and aged people’s vulnerability to premature death becomes a way of masking oppressive histories and intensifying inequities that cast our forms of interdependency (acknowledging

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that all of us are dependent on others albeit in different ways) as signifying our less-than-human status. By erasing how triaging policies combined with austerity politics, warehousing practices, and other transinstitutional modes of governance exacerbate disabled people’s vulnerabilities, naturalization also weaponizes vulnerability to both produce and rationalize the disproportionately higher rates of COVID-19 and untimely death evident in our communities (Changfoot et al., under review; LeBlanc Haley & Jones, 2020; Rice et al., 2021). These discursive-material practices accomplish the “vulnerabilization” of targeted groups by redirecting responsibility for our well-being away from the collective and back to the individual, thus resituating vulnerability within unwanted bodies rather than in the intersections of those bodies with our sociomaterial worlds.

In this article, we argue that one way we can collectively resist a world that invites us to our early death is through iterative engagement with multimodal story-making. Such storytelling about our lives envelops the digital/human overlap of Braidotti’s (2019) affirmative ethics through worldmaking on a different wavelength than the urgent, worldly happenings that goad us toward bare life and early death. We assert that slow, multimedia story-making opens a threshold space filled with complex, relational, lively collaborations, which, borrowing from Haraway (2019), can kindle the slow burn of digital composting to offer “a way out of the state of exhaustion, anxiety and fear” that characterizes these troubled times (p. 154). Haraway recasts autobiography as “composting life-and-death stories,” seeing the stories we tell about our lives as always “situated, not global even as they compose an earthly difference” (p. 570). For her, these “compost stories live in the wake of history, never clean and original, always for some worlds and not others” (p. 573). Following the Re•Vision Centre for Art and Social Justice’s (University of Guelph) tradition of rethinking storytelling as methodology that entails radical, co-created story-making processes encompassing collective meaning-making in refusal of single-story individualism (Rice & Mündel, 2018, 2019), we continuously assemble, unravel, and reassemble our methodology in ways that recharacterize the processes and stories produced as “compost stories.” Such compost stories draw attention both to the slow decomposition process and to the layered, mixed up, messy nature of the stories we (re)compose; the stories we tell are both ours and not ours, filled with the mess and stink and promise and possibilities of other lives and worlds.

Quick Constructions of Vulnerability, Slow Resistance

Immediately following the World Health Organization’s announcement declaring COVID-19 a pandemic, Ontario Health (state agency) released its “Clinical Triage Protocol for Major Surge in COVID Pandemic” (March 28, 2020), outlining who would, and would not, receive treatment when hospitals reached overcapacity. In providing a framework guiding medical providers’ decision-making about whose access to life-saving treatment would be prioritized, the protocol cites the use of consequentialist ethics of utility (allocating resources for the greatest benefit), proportionality (ensuring triaging practices do not adversely affect more people than would be affected if a “first come, first served” approach is used), and fairness (using clinical criteria rather than money or power to allocate resources) (Changfoot et al., under review, p. 3). Largely because of resistance from disability organizations, the policy was rescinded; however, a second triage protocol titled “Adult Critical Care Clinical Emergency Standard of Care for Major Surge” (January 13, 2021; see also Ontario COVID Command Centre, 2021) was subsequently leaked to the press (Gray, 2021). This second protocol prioritizes emergency care for those who physicians deem likely to survive beyond 12 months of onset of a critical illness and allows physicians to remove treatment without patient consent in the instance where patient numbers exceed resources.

Although Ontario Health insisted the protocol would not be used except when hospitals exceeded capacity, it nonetheless solidified vulnerability as inherent in disabled (and aging) bodyminds. Such necropolitical governance targets the management of both living and dying by producing and weaponizing vulnerability, vulnerabilizing certain devalued populations as a way of deflecting responsibility away from social unto individual bodies for their untimely death (Changfoot et al., under review; Rice et al., 2021). Drawing on disability-as-tragedy tropes (Garland-Thomson, 1997), Kumari Campbell (2015) points to our cultural propensity toward juridically sanctioned discrimination vis-à-vis medical interventions that construct and then aim to eradicate the faulty disabled subject. She explains,

The fixity of disability (which is assumed to be a pregiven property of human bodies) within both legislative and case law not only establishes the boundaries of permissible inquiry; in addition, it establishes the legal fiction of “disability” in the first place. (Kumari Campbell, 2015, p. 113)

In other words, while we recognize that vulnerability is necessarily inherent to all life forms, Kumari Campbell reminds us that neither the category of disability nor its conflation with vulnerability are natural states-of-being; rather, these are politically produced negations of our capacity to act politically (Butler et al., 2016). Ontario Health’s triage protocols aim to secure the well-being of the general population and, in so doing, surface the fiction of the contemporary disabled subject as one that is not only inherently, but principally and predominantly vulnerable.
The conflation of disability and vulnerability is constant, direct, and dangerous. As Syrus Marcus Ware put it during a 2021 online discussion called “Death by Coercion” in response to the legal expansion of Medial Assistance in Dying (MAiD) legislation in Canada, the state offers up opportunities to die rather than to live well. The message, Ware says, is brutal in its bluntness: “This is no life, so just end your life.” In the wake of this message, we enlist imagination and affirmative ethics to remind us that where vulnerability is found, resistance is always nearby—vulnerability may even be one of the conditions that make resistance possible (Butler et al., 2016). In this threshold space between vulnerability and resistance, or perhaps more precisely, resistance through and against vulnerability, we use slow multimedia story-making to “reworld” the urgency of emergency scenarios where our vulnerability has been rapidly configured as an eligibility for death while simultaneously pausing to take in the ethical, thoughtful, and affective virtual spaces that we might together create (Asberg & Braidotti, 2018). In the threshold realm of multimedia story-making, we intentionally slow down by curbing our pace, we gradually deepen space for critical, online multimedia production as embodied and felt inquiry that enriches our understandings of the dynamics of vulnerabilization in unprecedented times.

**Slow Story-Making as Methodology**

The well-documented necessity of slowing down with the desire, need, pull to engage in compos(t)ing together is a lesson we carry forward through the development of slow digital story-composting (Carr & Gibson, 2017; K. Douglas & Carless, 2020; Zaragocin, 2019). Since 2012, the Re•Vision Centre has led hundreds of digital/multimedia storytelling workshops with minoritized and majoritized groups (for some of these iterations, see P. Douglas et al., 2021; Friedman et al., 2020; Rice, Dion, Fowlie, & Breen, 2020; Rice, Dion, Mündel, & Fowlie, 2020; Rice et al., 2015, 2018; Rice, Pendleton Jiménez, et al., 2020; Viscardis et al., 2019). Recently, Re•Vision has advanced this method by emphasizing “multimedia story-making,” as “multimedia” encompasses diverse media forms and “making” emphasizes the storied nature of knowledge claims (Rice & Mündel, 2018). In 2020, in response to COVID-19, Re•Vision researchers developed a prototype for online storywork to assess and rebuild models of multimedia story-making for folks under lockdown who wished to stretch their story-making by producing shareable multimedia stories with embodied (felt, experiential) and embedded (place-based, contextual) knowledge from their home spaces. Following feminist ethics of care, we orient to this making process as a relational praxis that happens as we move through uncertain subjectivity-shifting that Braidotti (2020) calls “platforms of becoming”—that is, a new and different co-constructed praxis that centers our collective mourning and regeneration as the world changes (p. 5).

Although some disabled people report already having extensive experience of isolation (Kuri et al, in press), particularly when they are living in institutions and already experience variant styles of lockdown, the shift from in-person to at-home story-making is a new “platform of becoming” for those of us less experienced at sheltering at home. This move from in-person collaboration to at-home media-making demanded a careful reassessment of the troubling conditions of knowledge production under which we work, specifically around the pace of story-as-knowledge production (Ahmad, 2020; Hartman & Darab, 2012; Mountz et al., 2015; Rice et al, under review). Haraway (2016) urges “staying with the trouble” in urgent times, resisting the pressure to address trouble through “making an imagined future safe . . . clearing away the present and the past to make futures for coming generations” (p. 1); for Haraway, rather than require that we enter such a deferred relationship to time, staying with trouble requires that we slow time down, planting ourselves firmly in the thick present, “not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings” (p. 1). Following Haraway, we wanted to watch ourselves as we moved our story-making online—ask what is lost, what is gained, what exists in the silences and gaps, and glitches on the Zoom screen. We wanted to create space for telling into the urgency of the moment while also slowing down the process so we could make space for the felt contradictions and unfinished configurations to surface. We wanted to bring our “places, times, matters, meanings” into the frame. We were explicit in talking about our initial workshop as an experiment exactly so that we could explore, produce, and unpack the process together, to allow our process to unfold in the thick present and remain in the generative discomfort of the threshold.

To stay with the trouble, as Haraway (2016) notes, is to embrace nonlinear, slow scholarship lived out through cript time (Kafer, 2013); resistance to colonial pacing (Stanton, 2014); concepts of the “future-perfect” (Rice et al., 2017); queer disruption of popular, positivist knowledge systems (Halberstam, 2005); and the possibilities of speculative design. Slowness is rooted in a radical realigning of values, including giving more weight to traditionally undervalued types of work within university systems (Bergland, 2018). As we engage in slow, online story-making, TallBear (2014) urges us to think about the ethics of accountability in digital worldmaking: “whose lives, lands, and bodies are inquire into and what do they get out of it?” (p. 7). The contours of this question demand that we take colonialism’s overdevelopment into account and uphold nascent, co-created online methodologies that go beyond universal design’s stale call...
to make things “better for everyone” (disappearing minoritized perspectives to recenter the interests of the majority; Hamraie, 2017). A universal approach does not fit, as not everyone experiences a similar imposition of closeness to death as disabled, aged, and other devalued people living under necropolitical vulnerabilization do. Instead, we draw on a feminist posthumanist approach that “brings things together, new stories and modes of worldly relationality, allowing for their reconfigurations and reconstitutions” (Asberg & Braidotti, 2018, p. 3).

**Digital Composting**

When challenged to consider what we “get out of it,” we return to Braidotti (2020), who cautions that theorizing about (and amid) catastrophe risks unethical neutrality. She writes, “We need to mourn the dead, humans and non-humans and not build theories on their dead bodies—that would be a shameless abuse of intellectual power” (p. 2). With this directive in mind, we turn toward compost writing as an alternative to theory building. Metaphorically, composting offers a generative approach that attends to cycles of story-making: the seeding of an affect-idea both in-person and digitally; the rotation between writing, translating, filming, and imagining the affect-idea in new forms; the ever unfinished commixing of forces (the technologies, people, places, meanings, things, and timings) that come together in the compos(t)ing of the affect(s)-idea(s) into story; and collaborative sharing of stories as they continue to grow and evolve (Mangini, 2014). Digital composting via storytelling also draws on Haraway’s (2019) compost writing, wherein “bios, zoe, and poesis are undone and redone because dying and unforming are as elemental as living and forming” (p. 567). That this form of story-making acknowledges dying and living as inseparable from the nature–culture continuum is significant in an era of overproduction thirsty for alternative subject formations, including new formations of disability that offer something other than vulnerability (Braidotti, 2019). To compost digital, multimedia stories is to leave them to ruminate in the complex entanglements of posthuman existences. It is also to extend the nature–culture continuum to consider technological mediation as a new “founding principle” in critical spaces of thinking and doing, and to inquire about the ethics and politics surrounding such “medianaturecultural” relations and forces as these become together (Braidotti, 2016, p. 380).

Jackson and Mazzei (2011) advocate for an approach to methodology, to the practice of knowledge making, that resists the pull toward totalizing theories. They write,

A focus on the macro pulls us out of the threshold—that dynamic space that is always becoming—and locks us into more of a territorialized place of fixed, recognizable meaning. The micro of the folding that we attempt produces a “dynamic and shifting entanglement of relations.” (p. 12)

Thinking with Jackson and Mazzei, we might consider Re•Vision’s composting methodology as creating at least two threshold spaces: the making space that asks storytellers to put experience into conversation with subjugated/liberatory knowledge to (re)make meaning of specific moments and happenings in their lives, and the analytic space that asks researchers to string the makers’ offerings together through proposing new/old experiential–theoretical connections that offer alternative patterns for understanding and possibilities for living in the world. Seeing our researcher and storyteller selves “as immanent to the very conditions [we] are trying to understand, change or resist” requires that we think critically and carefully in the “story-as-threshold space” about the “different speeds and territorializations of both knowledge and subject production” with an aim to affirm difference and support life’s flourishing (Braidotti, 2019, p. 47). At the same time, we continue to wonder about our access to the resources, the time, the money, the community, the tools, the energy, the passion, that has allowed us to stay with rather than get stuck in debilitating conditions—to stay in the sense of moving with and remaining alive to trouble. We acknowledge the privileges associated with slowing down even as we push into the urgent need for new practices, methods, and theories that meet and respond to the egregious conditions of the present.

**Slow Story-Making as Method**

Between May 2020 and August 2020, Re•Vision Centre for Art and Social Justice collaborators developed, tested, and responded to feedback about a fully online digital story-making module series through a 16-participant study that sought to rethink and redevelop (rather than mirror) in-person multimedia story-making in favor of digital composting. Digital story-making in this way involves an in-depth framing of the issues that bring storytellers together through multiple steps: story circles where participants share ideas; writing exercises to develop scripts and storyboards; tutorials on using audio, video, and editing software and equipment; and full technical, writing, and conceptual support through workshop collaboration (Rice & Mündel, 2019). These steps were flexible, intersectional, and open to multimodalities at every stage, including listening, reading, and speaking in non-normative ways, and engaging in silence (Jones & Cheuk, 2020). Uniquely different from its face-to-face counterpart (digital storytelling), digital composting through online multimedia story-making merges local knowledges with technologically informed, nontraditional ways of knowing rooted in flexible and critical access practices (Hamraie, 2017). Ultimately, digitally composting multimedia stories from home emerged as a useful mode of worldmaking under strange, new circumstances: in isolation, entirely online, as the world transforms around us.
The Experimenters’ Workshop was made up of storytellers at multiple intersections who also occupied roles as researchers (at four different institutions), research assistants, research project managers, postdoctoral fellows, Re•Vision staff, and storytelling facilitators (Rice, Harrison & Friedman, 2019). We were becoming online researchers/experimenters together. We were also becoming differently positioned people-in-a-pandemic together. The researchers in the “room” were each leading story-based research projects in collaboration with Re•Vision when the pandemic hit—so we were co-constituting an alternative method together with an eye to the particularities of each of the research projects/communities that would later be using the online method. The stories were our way of theorizing/thinking/doing/becoming with this process together. We worked on how to think about access through online meeting platforms and tools such as Zoom and Padlet, and we deconstructed our 3-day workshop process and reimagined it as a 3-week process to make room for interruptions, for reconfigurations of our home spaces, for our multiple caregiving responsibilities, and for our own unpredictable body-mind vacillations and vagaries in these unprecedented times.

Three Stories From the Threshold

Our approach to thinking methodology from the threshold within the gaps and fissures of our own knowledge also emerged in the stories themselves. We were all grappling with the chaos and uncertainty of the early days of the pandemic and we used the story-making research experiment to ask questions of the thick present: What was sustaining us and/or unsettling us in this moment? The workshop became a moment in the unfinished story of moving and being online together, of story-making online, of the conditions and constraints of academia, of particular research questions and communities, of the horrifying and stark inequities produced by colonial neoliberalism and exposed anew by the pandemic, of our own performances of self-hood and care and anxieties, of the ways in which the pandemic has exposed the always already inequities operating on and felt by particular bodies—along lines of gender, disability, body size, race, and so on.

Below, we explore the compostable nature of three of these stories wherein we find the “collaborative narrative materialities needed on a vulnerable planet now” (Haraway, 2019, p. 566). Rather than trying to smooth over the turbulence of the times and the roughness of our emerging online methods, we saw our task as that of making and “staying with the trouble” while co-constructing a soft place to land; in other words, our collective job was “to stir up potent responses to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places” (Haraway, 2016, p. 1). We analyze videos made by three experimenters who express the turbulence they were living through storywork marked by their unique yet entwined vantage points. For us, the weaving together of their individual voices into a collective arrangement recalls Braidotti’s (2020) invocation that “we” can only intervene in the crisis of capital and COVID by “acting collectively,” the “We-who-are-not-one-and-the-same-but-are-in-this-convergence-together” (p. 469).

The first video Beneath the Surface, created by disability scholar-activist-artist Patty Douglas, features newspaper headlines reporting COVID’s disparate impacts on disabled and old people, and on their modes of resistance and affirmation in the face of systemic vulnerabilization. Douglas chose to accompany this image-scapes with an original score she composed in the tradition of sacred music, thus evoking a radically relational ontology that locates the divine in the ordinary and the abjected everyday. In How to Confront All Your Issues in Seven Easy Steps, embodiment, identity, and care scholar May Friedman references the well-known opening credits of the hit political TV series The Good Fight, thus imagining the affective impacts and afterlife of “failing” to meet the many demands placed on her gendered, racialized, never-not-mothering body. In reciting her failures even as she affirms the necessity of vulnerable relationality for life itself, she gestures toward the broken structures that we urgently need to mend through invoking a Black feminist politics of love. We end with fat and disability activist-artist Tracy Tidgwell’s Music for the Milk Moon, which in conjuring the phases of the moon to mark the passage of time evokes a different timescape than that of the Anthropocene or the Capitalocene—the timescales typically used by White male thinkers to mark this crisis period of worldly devastation to which they seem newly attuned despite long-standing warnings from Indigenous and other minoritized groups (Braidotti, 2019). Turning to the messy, fertile, overflowing generativity of her back garden, Tidgwell evokes a cyclical timespace more akin to the “Chthulucene,” Haraway’s conceptual frame for thinking and acting with humans and nonhumans in times of heavy losses in life and quality of environment; an alternative, decolonized feminist framing of the present as a precarious period located in the somewhere between hope and despair, in which “the world is not finished and the sky has not fallen—yet” (Haraway, 2016, p. 55).

Beneath the Surface

Education Professor Patty Douglas’s story Beneath the Surface opens us to the ways in which the pandemic has exposed the always already inequities impressed on particular bodies, centring gendered, disabled, aged, and impoverished ones (to view go to: https://revisioncentre.ca/slow-story-making-in-urgent-times; password “slow”). The song that Douglas composed, sung, and mixed in her basement becomes the audio track for the film, bringing us into
the affective experience of the early moments of the pandemic in the overdeveloped world; her words and voice are layered by a constant stream of news headlines, with breath, with the acknowledgment of all that feels and floats and does and undoes us “beneath the surface.” Douglas intones, “Saw her face, saw her hold herself. Saw her say ‘outbreak. Beneath the surface, I can feel it. Can you feel it too? Watched her grieve. Watched her disappear. We die this way, the ones unwanted. Beneath the surface, I can feel it. Can you feel it too?”” An experienced choir singer and practicing musician, Douglas wrote these lyrics and score in the classical style of sacred music as a choral composition with layered parts, each of which she sung and then harmonized using digital technology with electronic instrumental accompaniment. In her juxtaposition of the genre of the sacred with secular headlines outlining the violent and deadly effects of COVID under capitalism, and the creative resistances of “unwanted” bodies under its necropolitics, Douglas sounds another story, surfacing the presence of spirit not just in any materiality but much more urgently, precisely and specifically, in very bodies considered “throw away” under Ontario’s necropolitics. The headlines read,

“COVID-19 / 12 residents of Lundy Manor in Niagara Falls have died”

“COVID 19 renews the struggle for anti-capitalist care models”

“So much innovation is driven by disabled people/ Poet Kyla Jamieson on illness, isolation, and how a concussion prepared her for this moment”

“Ontario Disability funding should match COVID-19 benefits”

“8 arrested as Victoria police enforce order to clear tent encampments”

A SURJ Disability Justice response COVID-19 reads “We reject any approach to this pandemic that decides who lives and dies based on who we are”

“Meet the experts in virtual performance: for theatre artists with disabilities, it’s ‘been there done that’ as COVID-19 forces work online”

These literal snippets of faces, and voices, and news headlines expose the layers and mixing of a digital compost story seeded in the early moments of the declaration of the COVID-19 outbreak and initial lockdowns. There isn’t one story here—this is a story of despair, of reckoning with the crisis, of grief and death. It is also a story of breathing and moving through and the not quite yet of a world we already have the tools to fight for. Douglas’s story suggests that perhaps the ones unwanted are also the ones who have the very tools for navigating the pandemic, for creating and building community through isolation, and for imagining another world and being/becoming ready to fight for it (Roy, 2020): the poet recovering from a concussion, the theater artist with disabilities, the singer songwriter with a brain injury.

How to Confront All Your Issues in Seven Easy Steps

May Friedman, a Communications, Culture and Social Work Professor, whose research focuses on unstable identities, social media, motherhood, and fat, gendered and racialized embodiments, and who herself identities as a racialized fat woman, stories the contradictory affects of love and failure as these show up in her daily life. In How to Confront All Your Issues in Seven Easy Steps, Friedman takes inspiration from popular culture, in this case from the memorable opening credits of the satirical political TV series The Good Fight (to view go to: https://revisioncentre.ca/slow-story-making-in-urgent-times; password “slow”). These credits feature exploding objects symbolic of wealth, power, and celebrity—luxury handbags, expensive high heels, big screen television sets, computers, a judge’s gavel, and occasionally the 45th United States President hugging the American flag—in a slow-motion firework horror show that recreates the beautiful carnage that is America before our eyes. Here, she references the global political crises brought on by the rise of ultra-masculinist nationalistic neoliberal regimes that exacerbate pandemic conditions for people like her: for racialized people, for feminized people, for working people, for parenting people, for daughtering and childing people, for immigrating and refuging people, and for all those called upon to do the unnoticed, unaccounted for care-work that sustains our world. In this, she draws us into her own intimate “good fight.”

The impossibility of meeting the multiple pushes and pulls on her time and attention as a busy professor teaching, researching, and writing about “good” care while attempting to care for aging parents and four school-aged children, Friedman describes her ongoing felt sense of failure. In the upbeat, how-to style of the hyperindividualistic self-help genre, she satirically seriously lists how her efforts to “have it all,” a demanding, rewarding job and a large loving family, generate deeply contradictory affects, ones that cannot be resolved on an individual level, perhaps that can only be understand through staying and moving with the contradictions. The effects and affects of the conflicting demands faced by her never-not-mothering body show up in the video’s visuals: Having no time to spare, Friedman selects and strings together stock images and clips of everyday objects, a house of cards, an hourglass, a bunch of Q-tips, pieces of glass as they fall, fall apart, shatter; these she intersperses with visual clichés signifying love, a lit match, a heart drawn in the sand. In reciting her failures to meet the many
Friedman stays with the trouble of caring too much, of feeling too much, of loving too much, of hurting too much in a present thick with pain and joy, not through committing to totalizing visions of “reconciliation or restoration” but instead to caring and loving vitally if imperfectly, to the “more modest possibilities of partial recuperation and getting along together,” to redoing our “ways of living and dying attuned to still possible finite flourishing, still possible recuperation” (Haraway, 2016, p. 10).

Music for the Milk Moon

In *Music for the Milk Moon* activist-artist and former Re•Vision staff member Tracy Tidgwell takes us into her backyard, a place of refuge and quiet, a place of wildness and unpredictability, a place nestled in a dense urban environment (to view go to: https://revisioncentre.ca/slow-story-making-in-urgent-times; password “slow”). Tidgwell’s story is spatially small (literally unfolding in her backyard, “outdoor space in a concrete jungle”), yet layered with connected links outward, to Ishtar, the Mesopotamian goddess associated with love, beauty, sex, war, justice, and political power, to Irene’s “wild and overgrown garden,” and downward and inward to the “many creatures” who make their homes in the garden, a tiny multitude. Tidgwell’s existing relationship to her backyard space takes on a new resonance during the pandemic: “The pandemic has made our backyard even more of a shelter. The only outdoor space that allows me to breathe easy.” By anchoring herself in her backyard space, Tidgwell is reminded about the pandemic that “this too is a season. Part of a cycle.” A digital compost story unfolding and layering with what has gone before, Tidgwell’s film finds us asking, “What possibilities might be seeded here?”

For Tidgwell, the full moon in May, called the Milk Moon in anglo-western cultural traditions, holds metaphorical promise for orienting differently to the living and dying of bodies in time. Feminist theorists have long theorized how both milk and the moon are associated with the feminine and the abject body—linked with female-coded bodies, bodily fluids, and uncontrollable aspects of bodily life that continue to be cast out of cultural consciousness because they defy hypermasculinist ideals of self-mastery and bounded individualism (Rice, 2014). Yet, in Tidgwell’s storywork these sites of abjection become fertile grounds for imagining nature–culture relations anew. Eschewing bounded individualism with its myth of invulnerable independence and human exceptionalism with its myth of superiority, Tidgwell attends to the “oddkin” she discovers in her garden, to the “unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles” that she, and we, require to “become-with each other or not at all” (Haraway, 2016, p. 5). By tending to these oddkin, she stays and moves with the COVID-capital-colonial crisis from her embodied and embedded place, perhaps implicitly recognizing how imagining ourselves “alone, in our separate kinds of expertise and experience, we know both too much and too little, and so we succumb to despair or to hope, and neither is a sensible attitude.” In “tun[ing] to the senses, to mindful matter, to material semiotics, to mortal earthing in thick copresence,” Tidgwell calls forth the “Chthulucene.” This third frame for conceptualizing the current period departs from notions of Anthropocene and Capitalocene, which Haraway (2016) argues, give over “too readily to cynicism, defeatism, and self-certain and self-fulfilling predictions” (p. 56).

The Chthulucene, alternatively, lends itself to multispecies stories and practises of becoming-with... where humans are not the only important actors with all other beings able simply to react. The order is reknitted: human beings are with and of the earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of this earth are the main story. (Haraway, 2016, p. 55)

Conclusion

In these troubled times, Braidotti (2020) writes, “it is time to organize, not to agonize” (p. 467). As we make stories of vulnerability and resistance in threshold spaces and consider where these stories and spaces go from this time-space, we do so with close attention to the ongoing vulnerabilization that directs us toward death. A death-driven directive characterizes the posthuman, necropolitical point-of-no return that flashes before us in the glare of overdevelopment amid flagrant inequities. The accelerating posthuman convergence with its discursive-material practices that hasten the death of debilitated lifeforms in this complex space-time, we resist by slowing down. In the fashion of composting—an altogether slow endeavor—the entanglements of death, devalued life, and digital activism necessarily morph into something new (after all, researchers predict, among other devastations, another pandemic in the next two decades; this is not over; Shea, 2021). The era that we are living through is the “trouble” we stay with through digital compos(t)ing as a form of worldmaking. The experimenters’ online story-making is a way of worldmaking, or organizing, that brings our “places, times, matters, and meanings” into frame against a backdrop of urgency and necropolitical vulnerabilization.

Jackson and Mazzei (2011) draw on Šišová to suggest that one pathway for re-worlding involves remaining in the
threshold as resistance “reside[s] in the middle of things” and as within-ness allows us to sense not only how structures define, regulate, and limit life, but more so, to trace where the structural stress points manifest and might be broken up (p. 39). Produced in an experimental digital compos(t)ing threshold space, the stories presented here are situated “in the middle of things.” Online storywork from home reaches out to the collective and speaks from inside the digitally flattened yet lively personal spaces of people’s bedrooms, kitchens, basements, in ways that both disconnect and deeply connect, co-creating uneasy, potent intimacies across public/private, individual/collective, human/nonhuman, life/death divides. These snippet stories weave together moments, relations, activist impulses, and felt inquiry in ways that resist the “grand theorizing” that Braidotti cautions us against. This new digital composting praxis takes up Braidotti’s (2019) call to oppose the violent necropolitical logics undergirding COVID responses in the fight for justice—urging the kind of micro-reworlding that emerges from within the very tissues and forces that make death and life in this moment (p. 155). Thinking with micro-stories resists generalizing and totalizing impulses while still finding ways to make relational meaning. The experimenters’ videos tell small, situated stories that centralize the embeddedness of our embodiments, working in and at the threshold of tensions between activist/academic, experience/theory, structure/agency, and so on, blurring binaries to experiment with making different patterns in the world.

How might these digital compost stories offer a way out of the fixings of meaning and with it, of truth and reality? What kind of activist possibilities emerge when we resist the closure of knowledge and possibility in favor of making space for an ethics of care, discomfort, uncertainty, and changeability? How might staying with this sort of trouble allow us to better reckon with the persisting inequalities built into ourselves and our institutions? And how might this trouble give us clues to what we might need to live and die well in all of our differences? In a context where the stories we tell matter to the ways in which we experience these troubled times, to compost multimedia stories is to ruminate in the complex entanglements of posthuman existences: in the threshold gathering together, affirming our differences, sowing the small stories, and nurturing the vulnerable-relational feelers that are needed to compose a larger story for collective mourning and regeneration. These digital compos(t)ing stories, in the end, return us to Haraway’s (2016) space of possibility, her threshold of transformation (p. 101), to how it “matters which stories tell stories, which concepts think concepts,” and to how “we need stories (and theories) that are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections.”

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Note
1. Go to: https://revisioncentre.ca/slow-story-making-in-urgent-times. Following the prompt, type in the password “slow.” Please note these videos are intended for personal and classroom screening only.

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