

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

2021

Lifeglows Through the Anthropocene: Development of the Radical Imagination and Response-Ability Within Superhero Comics

Reed G. Puc

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>



Part of the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#), [Other Film and Media Studies Commons](#), and the [Visual Studies Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Puc, Reed G., "Lifeglows Through the Anthropocene: Development of the Radical Imagination and Response-Ability Within Superhero Comics" (2021). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 11703.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/11703>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

LIFEGLOWS THROUGH THE ANTHROPOCENE:
DEVELOPMENT OF THE RADICAL IMAGINATION AND RESPONSE-ABILITY
WITHIN SUPERHERO COMICS

By

REED GANSEY PUC

Bachelor of Arts, University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island, 2019

Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts
in English Literature

The University of Montana
Missoula, MT

May 2021

Approved by:

Scott Whittenburg, Dean of The Graduate School
Graduate School

Dr. Kathleen Kane, Chair
English

Dr. Louise Economides
English

Dr. Sara Hayden
Communication Studies

Dr. Stephanie Burt
English, Harvard University

Lifegloves Through the Anthropocene: Development of the Radical Imagination and Response-ability Within Superhero Comics

Chairperson: Dr. Kathleen Kane

Scholars such as Amitav Ghosh, Timothy Clark, and Timothy Morton emphasize the importance of *and* challenge within the task of representing the power, scope, and scale of climate change in art and literature. These interrogations often emphasize the failures of extant works to animate their viewers towards action in a time of environmental crisis, but struggle to find any work that meets their expectations. This ‘game-over’ attitude, I argue, is the direct result of the cruel optimism present in the current scholarship’s attachment to ‘traditional’ forms of art and literature. By interrogating the conclusions Ghosh reaches about the novel’s function as a regulatory imaginative framework, I argue that the novel cannot represent the Anthropocene nor animate its readers to action because it produces an *unradical* imagination, thus limiting readers’ ability to imagine futures outside the current hegemonic order. Instead, I propose to develop a form of critique that refuses the ‘game-over’ attitude. Invoking Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure* and abolitionist theories, I argue that we must resist the urge to become stuck in the cruel optimism of the search for the ‘perfect’ Anthropocene novel. I argue this by moving the critical eye to sites of enchantment within the superhero comic.

To further argue that the superhero comic is a site worth ecocritical focus, I develop a method of reading the superhero comic as a successor to the epic. By emphasizing its hypo- and hypertextuality, I trace how the superhero comic not only radically imagines new worldings and kinship formations between the human and non-human, but arrives there through a collaborative process. This process knots together artists, writers, editors, fans, critics, and history in the creation of comics. In doing so, this transforms practicing the radical imagination from an individual act into a discursive collective experience. If the task is, as Haraway proposes, to become entangled together, imperfectly, then I argue that superhero comics allow us to do so in the making and reading of them. I conclude with a study of the *X-Men* as a site of collective radical imagination on formal and textual levels.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	1
Introduction: Comic Books at the End of the World	2
Cerebro Interlude: Mapping Mutants	13
Chapter 1: Cruel Optimism, Hopeful Failures	15
Chapter 2: The Epic's Not Dead	30
Chapter 3: Our Selfriends, Ourselves	46
Conclusion: Hope You Survive the Experience!	73
Works Cited	77

Acknowledgments

I started writing this paper at the beginning of March of 2020 in my beloved, cramped office on the University of Montana's Missoula campus, surrounded by zines, comic books, and theory. Less than a month later I was packing up my zines, my comics, and my monographs – it would be the last time I was on campus at all. Completing a Masters thesis any year is daunting. Completing a Masters thesis the year a pandemic revealed the global structures of violence for what they are is even more so. I clawed my way through this project, and when I couldn't find the next step, there were many people who came to my aid – even if their support was mediated through Verizon's cellular network, iMessage, Zoom, Discord, and WhatsApp.

Innumerable thanks to: the superior Jack and the rest of Gay Zoom for the restoration each week; Ben, for the edits and the motto *bangers only*; Jolliff, for the abolitionist, trans hyperpop (stream "Sertraline Gang"); and R.W., for the pride and our morning/afternoon co-working sessions.

I have amassed quite the debt of gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Katie Kane. Thank you for sticking this one out with me in the most difficult of years, despite being on opposite ends of the country for most of it. This is a debt I feel honored to have accrued during my time at the University of Montana. Thank you for letting me steer the ship and for being excited by what excites your students.

Several multiverses' worth of thanks to the Mutant Revolution: to Jay, for the panels, zines, friendship, and for not saying "No thanks, let's not be friends," after I got sick at your apartment; to Dr. Stephanie Burt, for being an inspiration, the poems, and for joining my committee; to my *Masks* game, for reminding that comics are fun every single week; and to each and every mutant I know – you're going to survive the experience, we'll make sure of it.

Thank you to Dr. Louise Economides and Dr. Sara Hayden for rounding out my thesis committee. Your presence and input remains, as ever, invaluable. Additional thanks to Dr. Erin Wecker for the opportunity work on and develop my own comics pedagogy, both seated in the classroom and in front of it.

And finally, to my best friend, who will never read this because she is a cat: thank you for sitting on my computer lots.

“We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know;
we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we
want the poetry of life...”
– Percy Bysshe Shelley

“We are in an imagination battle.”
– adrienne maree brown

Introduction: Comic Books at the End of the World

“Humans of the planet Earth,” *House of X/Powers of X* begins, “While you slept, the world *changed*” (Hickman, et. al. 2). Though it comes from a comic book about mutant superheroes, this axiom is, in many ways, is the call of the Anthropocene. Humanity has been asleep to the world. We have not paid any attention as we have stripped the planet of its resources, its biodiversity, its clean air and water; all while producing more and more people, industries, things, and waste. The invocation of the Anthropocene tells us that while we were asleep, the world changed. Initially coined in 2000 by the atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen, the term “the Anthropocene” has always been an interruption to slumber. Its first utterance by Crutzen occurred in the middle of the International Geosphere-Biosphere’s annual meeting: “Stop using the word Holocene. We’re not in the Holocene anymore. We’re in the... the... the Anthropocene” (Horn & Bergthaller 1)! This interruptive utterance has shaken all corners of scholarship. The humanities have joined the sciences in attempting to address the Anthropocene’s call. “More than just a *crisis* which may come to an end at some point in the future,” write Eva Horn and Hannes Bergthaller, “the Anthropocene—the ‘new’ (καινός) brought about by the ‘human’ (ἄνθρωπος)—designates an ecological *threshold*” (1-2). Therefore, this threshold asks

not just for scholars to determine *when*, *how*, and *why* the Anthropocene began, but also: what are we going to do about it?

While the Anthropocene, as Horn and Bergthaller suggest, represents a large-scale turn in the academy to considering the environment, ecocriticism has been developing within literary scholarship since the late twentieth century. As Cheryll Glotfelty identifies in “Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” by the early nineties, ecocriticism was solidifying as a field in literary scholarship, its birthing concluding with the founding of *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* in 1993 (122). In Glotfelty’s taxonomy, she identifies the first stage of ecocriticism as the images of nature stage, likening it to Elaine Showalter’s first stage of feminist criticism, the “images of women” stage, which is “concerned with representations [...] by locating absences, questioning the purported universality and even the aesthetic value” of types of representation rooted in patriarchal power and “Analogous efforts in ecocriticism study how nature is represented in literature” (125). In a staged model, ecocriticism has developed subsequent stages that are invested in concerns other than and in addition to representations. However, I find that Anthropocene studies is still, on the whole, functioning within this first stage. Scholars such as Timothy Morton, Timothy Clark, and Amitav Ghosh work to interrogate the ability of texts to not only respond to the call of the Anthropocene, but to carry the call to their readers. Works that try to represent the Anthropocene’s challenge must struggle to overcome the gap of taste, according to Clark. He questions such work’s ability to be ‘interesting,’ *en masse*:

[...] not just for a small number of critical specialists, but for most human beings – for art and literature are nothing without a significant audience. Yet, as a profound source of emotional engagement, how feasible is [this]? Or is the goal of instilling a widespread, deeply internalized and consequential engagement with the Anthropocene through cultural artifacts [...] hopeless (176)?

This question is at the heart of Morton's *Hyperobjects* as well. Within the book, Morton suggests that there artistic forms outside of literature or art – in both the formal and avant-garde senses that Clark examines – that might best address the Anthropocene, such as shoegaze music (29). For Clark and Ghosh, who throw their weight behind more formal institutions of literature and art, the situation is dire. I take issue with both the pessimism enfolded into Clark's inquiry and the privileging of institutions of art and literature that have for too long held too much of the critical floor, such as the novel. Instead, I advocate that the failure of the novel to address the Anthropocene speaks to a larger issue within our cultural imagination that reinforces those capitalist structural hierarchies that have lead to the crisis-threshold of the Anthropocene. Alternatively, I privilege the superhero comic as a site of radical imagination on the formal level and on the textual level through the lens of Marvel's *X-Men*.

One of the many questions invoked by Amitav Ghosh in *The Great Derangement* is “Is it the case that science fiction is better equipped to address the Anthropocene than mainstream literary fiction” (71)? For Ghosh's purposes, the answer is *no*. Though Ghosh understands and sees the what his reader might answer *yes, obviously*, within *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh is invested in what is implied within that *yes* about literary fiction – hereby referred to as “the novel” – and its ability to address the Anthropocene. Ghosh's assessment of why the novel fails the Anthropocene is compelling and fully conceived. Ghosh cites the novel's point of origin –

modernism and its investment in representing the ‘everyday’ – with its inability to speak to or represent the Anthropocene. “Thus was the novel midwifed into existence around the world, through the banishing of the improbable and the insertion of the everyday” (17). These “moments of non-being” – to use Woolf’s language – do not, according to Ghosh do as Woolf promised. Modernity’s focus on the minutiae of every day life does not reveal “a pattern [hidden] behind the cotton wool” (Woolf 73). Instead this focus, Ghosh argues via Franco Moretti, reinforces bourgeois values and narratives. This “is the irony of the ‘realist’ novel: the very gestures with which it conjures up reality are actually a concealment of the real” (23). Because the Anthropocene has ushered in a period of what scholar Timothy Morton calls “hyperobjects” – things too vast, too far-reaching, too unwieldy to fully conceptualize – to put the surreal reality of climate change on the page, Ghosh argues, would be impossible:

[Writing the Anthropocene into the novel is] to court eviction from the mansion in which serious fiction has long been in residence; it is to risk banishment to the humbler dwellings that around the manor house – those generic outhouses that were once known by names such as ‘the Gothic,’ ‘the romance,’ or ‘the melodrama,’ and that have now come to be called ‘fantasy,’ ‘horror,’ and ‘science fiction’ (24).

As a hyperobject, climate change is too big to fit in the mansion of the real. It is an object so “massively distributed in time and space that [it makes] us redefine what an object is” (Morton 167). It is too onerous. The mansion of the real and its vassal outhouses collapse under its weight. Ghosh draws our attention to the novel’s earliest predecessor – the epic. The novel, by Ghosh’s analysis, needs stability at all costs: stability of events, stability of character, and stability of setting. Events have to be ‘probable,’ they cannot be too big or too outlandish. Characters have to be believable to their reader. Settings must be grounded and concrete. These stabilities create, then, a stability of time. In the writing classroom, this is often called *scope*. The

stabilities generated in novels, as Ghosh has argued, are not the lived reality of the many – they are the lived reality of the elite. The nature of capitalism is to generate the stability of the elite by placing the poor and the marginalized in perpetual precarity. Thus, novels are discontinuous with the world. “Unlike epics, which often range over eons and epochs, novels rarely extend beyond a few generations. The *long durée* is not the territory of the novel” (59). But the Anthropocene’s call moves us to consider *deep time*.

As Dipesh Chakrabarty remarks in “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” it is crucial for humans – both scholars and non-scholars – to move away from ‘shallow’ histories that emphasize an anthropocentric definition of time, such as relying on the advent of Christianity to mark time. “Without such knowledge of the deep history of humanity it would be difficult to arrive at a secular understanding of why climate change constitutes a crisis for humans” (213). The epic, in Ghosh’s reading, is a form that sprawls. Like deep time, it moves in large, broad ways; it is not reliant on stability. Epics “bring multiple universes into conjunction,” their settings can transcend “their context in the manner of, say, the Ithaca of the *Odyssey* or the Ayodhya of the *Ramayana*” (Ghosh 59). Ghosh, however, writes of the epic if as we have abandoned it entirely. Yet, I argue, the epic has a successor: the superhero comic. The superhero comic, as published by DC and Marvel, are sprawling, self-referential tales that not only collapse genres by having time traveling knights fighting alongside twentieth century mutants and space aliens; they join multiple universes (sometimes literally, such as in Marvel’s *Secret Wars*); while also retaining the ambiguities and conflicts that any multi-authored, multi-decade work has. Just as there is no stable canon of the myths of Ancient Greece and Rome, there is no stable

superhero comic canon. Nowhere is this more evident than Marvel's *X-Men* comics, which have been subject to an untold amount of retcons and reinvention due to the intersecting aims of fifty-plus years' of writers, artists, and corporate input. The twisting, improbable narrative of the *X-Men* double-, triple-, and quadruples-back onto itself frequently enough that the podcast *Jay and Miles X-Plain the X-Men* has, over seven years and 325 episodes, only covered the first 32 years of *X-Men* storylines. In addition to literally being cosmic stories that contain multiversal characters and stories, the *X-Men* comics require collaborative thought and an understanding of scale in their creation, on the formal level. Therefore, I argue, that comics must be part of our study of the Anthropocene. As Ghosh and others have interrogated the novel's ability to address the crisis of the Anthropocene, I aim to interrogate the potential of *X-Men* comics as an avenue into thinking through – and even potentially *past* – the Anthropocene.

This paper's second epigraph is taken from adrienne maree brown, Octavia Butler scholar and pleasure activist. In the introduction to her book, *Emergent Strategy*, she argues that part of the struggle for justice for both the human and the nonhuman lies in the realm of imagination. Imagination is at the heart of Ghosh's concern about the novel's ability to address the Anthropocene. The novel's reinforcement of bourgeois worlds speaks to how imagination functions as a regulatory frame. As Justin Paulson explains, "Imagination begins in experience; it is here that the conditions of possibility are shaped and determined" (33). The challenge is that "if imagination begins with experience, *unradical* imagination never leaves it; when it acts on the world, it changes it, but only into something already recognizable" (33). This unradical imagination produces "borders, gives us superiority, [and] gives us race as an indicator of

capability” (brown 18). This is why the science fiction author Ursula K. Le Guin names the authors of contemporary fiction “so-called ‘realists.’” The manor house of the novel is an unradical imaginative space, one that ignores and maligns the materiality of the Anthropocene because, as Ghosh suggests, to make the Anthropocene part of ‘reality’ means to welcome in the unrecognizable. The hyperobject of climate change is utterly foreign to the gentrified mind of the contemporary novel. It produces a world that burns so intensely that smoke from California reaches the Atlantic. It produces floating islands of plastic in our oceans. Industrial sites that look, on first glance, like an alien planet. Within the regulatory frame of contemporary fiction, these images are foreign, new experiences and therefore, they are shunned and pushed away to other genres, ones that we do not expect to portray the ‘real,’ such as fantasy, science fiction, and the epic. Then forever associated with what is not ‘real,’ these genres are maligning and written off as ‘unserious,’ compared to the ‘seriousness’ of the novel. To see these images would invoke what Donna Haraway calls “the SF game of response-ability” (11). As always, Haraway’s play with language here is intentional. SF invokes for her “science fact and speculative fabulation, [...] speculative feminism [...] and string figures” and her bifurcation of ‘responsibility’ is important. It invokes a call and response, the ability *to respond*, not just, as the Oxford English Dictionary defines responsibility as “being in charge of or of having a duty towards a person or thing.” By Haraway’s own definition, “Response-ability is about both absence and presence, killing and nurturing, living and dying – and remembering who lives and who dies and how in the string figures of naturalcultural history” (28). Another way of figuring ‘response-ability’ might be through Emmanuel Levinas’s notion of the face:

The approach to the face is the most basic mode of responsibility [...] The face is not in front of me (*en face de moi*), but above me; it is the other before death, looking through and exposing death. Secondly, the face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice in his death (Levinas 23-4).

Haraway takes this notion and pulls it outside the *anthropos* and into the wide, tangled network of the world, giving Levinasian faces to people, flora, fauna, technologies, and invisible-to-the-naked-eye protozoan creatures. To allow the spectre of climate change into the imagination of the public as Ghosh desires, would be to invoke these faces, this response-ability in the reader. To do so would be a direct contradiction to the regulatory frames built into the public imagination by the forces of capitalism that animate the Anthropocene. The frames cannot be demolished from the inside – nor will they adapt to engage the crisis of the Anthropocene in a wholistic way. One only has to look towards the success of greenwashing to see this in action. The so-called ‘Zero Waste Movement’ moves under the guise of the present system trying to respond to climate change, however, what it actually does is place the burden on the individual. As consumers are told to buy reusable straws and to advocate for local and chain restaurants to ban plastic straws, there is no public attention to or mass-grassroots pressure placed on the largest producers of plastic waste: industrialists. The public imagination cannot conceptualize systemic change – only individual change. This matters when we consider what narratives and what genres build our collective vision and imagination. My goal is not to claim that an endeavor to bring climate change into the definition of the ‘real’ set out by the imaginative borders of the novel, such as Ghosh’s, is worthless. But I do want to question its use. What does it accomplish for us, readers who are trapped in these imagination battles, to bring the emergency of the Anthropocene into a

bourgeois or neoliberal imagination? What might become of us if we turn away from wanting to recover, rectify, or save a form that is regulatory?

This question is at the heart of my research. I am interested in what happens when we allow a form to fail us without trying to rescue it, to instead seek out the places where the strange, unusual, and uncanny thrive – where imagination can be practiced without limits.

By contrast [to the unimaginative], *radical* imagination negates experience, in whole or in part – which is to say, it negates the necessity of experience, and suggests as possible that which feels at some level inconceivable. It has to rupture the barrier of positivism, the artificial walls that bound what is and is not ‘realistic’ (Paulson 34).

Radical imagination is a challenge to possibility in all its forms: it is a challenge to the possibility of the future just as much as it challenges the possibility of the present. It is a challenge to orders that are considered ‘natural,’ stable, and fixed. It is a place where past, present, and future work with and – to use a Harawaian turn of phrase – entangle with each other. These temporal entanglements of possibility are described by Alex Khasnabish and Max Havien in the introduction to *The Radical Imagination: Social Movement Research in the Age of Austerity*:

The radical imagination is the ability to imagine the world, life and social institutions not as they are but as they might otherwise be. [...] It’s about bringing those futures ‘back’ to *work* on the present, to inspire action and new forms of solidarity today [...] about drawing on the past, telling different stories about how the world came to be the way it is, and remembering the power and importance of past struggles and the way their spirits live on in the present (3).

Using this definition as a guide, we can see that the radical imagination sprawls across time, and even, one might argue, “bring multiple universes into conjunction” to transcend present ontological and epistemological modes (Ghosh 59). Not unlike the epic; not unlike SF comic books. brown writes, “Science fiction is simply a way to practice the future together” (19). She

makes this argument by invoking authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin and Toni Cabe Bambara, whose visions of their task as writers was to “Make just and liberated futures irresistible” (19). Science fiction is the first tool brown identifies in her toolkit. “Emergent strategies,” she writes, “are ways for humans to practice complexity and grow the future through relatively simple interactions” (20). brown first began to imagine emergent futures through reading the work of Octavia Butler. Her characters taught brown the need for adaptability and interdependency in organizing. Butler’s work acts as a crucible for brown’s activist strategy. The importance of imagination to the development of a politics is noted by Hannah Arendt in “Understanding and Politics:”

Imagination alone enables us to see things in their proper perspective, [...] to be generous enough to bridge abysses of remoteness until we can see and understand everything that is too far away from us as though it were our own affair. This distancing of some things and bridging the abysses to others is part of the dialogue of understanding (323).

Bridging divides is the task asked of us by the Anthropocene: to find a way to join together humans and the nonhuman around us so that we might both live. This is also, incidentally, the work science fiction can accomplish. Worldings developed in the realm of science fiction, I argue alongside brown, provoke political thought and make political ethical demands of the reader by revealing the Levinasian face in radical imaginative encounters. It is therefore important and productive to raise up and consider science fiction as an alternative to addressing climate change in literature and art, rather than falling prey to the cruel optimism of the aims of Ghosh and his contemporaries, who seek to develop an aesthetics of ecological crisis in contemporary fiction. After a brief introduction to the language I will be using in this project, I argue in my first chapter, “Cruel Optimisms, Hopeful Failures” that there is something to gain in allowing the

novel to fail. Allowing the novel to fail releases us from an affective attachment to an unradical imagination and, in turn, opens up new epistemologies of knowledge. These new epistemologies take us to my second chapter, “The Epic’s Not Dead,” where I attend to the worldings offered in the imaginative space of science fiction and propose an new approach to reading the superhero comic. This approach recognizes the superhero comic as an epic form and through its form, a discursive practice in the radical imagination. My third and final chapter, “Our Selfriends, Ourselves” takes the theoretical work I have done in this project’s first half to show how SF superhero comics holds the capacity to open up imaginative spaces for rendezvous and identification with the Other by resisting the unimaginative regulatory frame of contemporary fiction. I do this through an examination of the several key characters and relationships that, through the *X-Men*’s publication history, have created the status quo-shift developed in *House of X/Powers of X*. The *X-Men* and its companion series, I conclude, are particularly well-suited to addressing the challenges presented to us by the Anthropocene because they allow its readers to develop Donna Haraway’s practices of “becoming with” through the social model of mutant identity, and “staying with the trouble,” through the collaborative exchange between comic artists, authors, fans, and history that occurs when a comic is created and read.

Cerebro Interlude: Mapping Mutants

In the beginning, being a mutant in the Marvel Universe was to be a genetic accident – a mutation on the human genome that was a consequence of the nuclear age. This mutation – later called the “X-gene” for short – is a branching off point on humanity’s genetic family tree: *homo sapiens superior*. Mutation – being a mutant; being *homo sapiens superior* – has become a metaphoric vessel of massive and often frustrating proportions. The status of the ‘Mutant Metaphor,’ has been subject to fan and scholarly discourse for years.¹ While it remains useful to debate the success of the Mutant Metaphor’s ability to represent the lives of marginalized people within the pages of comic books and on film, there has been little study done exploring the difference between ‘*homo sapiens superior*’ and ‘mutant.’ *Homo sapiens superior* refers explicitly to a species designation – humans, born with a mutated X-gene. This definition of ‘mutant’ is the source of most of the *X-Men*’s political narratives. Humanity is threatened by “mutantdom [as] the natural evolutionary successor to humanity” (Hickman et. al. 381). Therefore, humans endeavor to eliminate mutantdom. However, what remains under-theorized, is that when the X-Men call themselves mutants, not every X-Man is a *homo sapiens superior*. As this study will reveal, some mutants are not humans at all. Yet, they occupy space within mutantdom; they are respected, loved, and even treated as sacred. What this suggests is that X-comics contain two models of mutation: a species model, based on *homo sapiens superior*, and a social model, based on community identification.

¹ See: Darowski, *X-Men and the Mutant Metaphor: Race and Gender in the Comic Books*; Edidin & Stokes, “Jay & Miles X-Plain The X-Men #164 This Is the Mutant Revolution: Live at Rose City Comic Con;” Fawaz, *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics*; Miller, “Mutants, Metaphor, and marginalize: What X-Actly Do the X-Men Stand For?”

I establish a difference between these models through a crip theory framework. Like disability has a medical and a social model, mutantdom has a species and social model. Mutantdom's social model – just as with disability – is distinct and different from the species model. In crip theory, “The social model is distinguished from the medical or individual model. Whereas the former defines disability as a social creation – a relationship between people with impairment and a disabling society – the latter defines disability in terms of individual deficit” (Shakespeare 216). Being a *mutant* makes the central experience of mutation cultural: when characters do not – for whatever reason – align with their home naturecultures and are ostracized, often violently, from them, they become mutants. Under the species model, mutantdom is an individual and medicalized relationship of biological difference. The social model of disability's introduction by scholars and activists such as Mike Oliver, creates a political and collective power in disabled identity, as opposed to the medical model's stripping of agency and community. Similarly, I argue, the social model of mutation generates a productive, collective political space to develop radically imaginative sense of response-ability and entanglement with the more-than-human.

Chapter One: Cruel Optimisms, Hopeful Failures

It is necessary, before moving forward, to spend further time with Ghosh, his attachment to the novel, and the cruel optimism of this attachment. At the beginning of *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh identifies that “the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus, of the imagination” (9). Much of Ghosh’s work within *The Great Derangement* is dedicated to discovering *why* the climate crisis has generated a crisis within ‘serious’ fiction. The blame, Ghosh concludes, lies at the feet of the novel as a regulatory frame: that we live in “a time when most forms of art and literature [are] drawn into the modes of concealment that [prevent] people from recognizing the realities of their plight” (11). Ghosh’s examination of the novel’s limits – which we have already begun to examine and re-affirm – are thorough. Where he fails, I argue, is in his response to this failure. Instead of responding to his discovery that the failure of the novel to address climate change stems from its regulatory form with inventiveness and a willingness to entangle with the new and strange, he succumbs to the unradical imagination. As a novelist himself, Ghosh’s own attachment to recovering the form makes a degree of sense – however, this hope to articulate a “future of the novel” outside of genre and ‘after’ the epic, I argue, is a cruel optimism (83). The aim of this chapter is to first, explore the attachment Ghosh has to the novel through the lens of affect theorist Lauren Berlant’s theory of *cruel optimism* and meditating on the state of imagination and art under neoliberal capital. My analysis bridges Berlant’s theory with Sarah Schulman’s meditations on the relationship between capital, gentrification, and creativity as developed in *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination*. The chapter’s second note will be to argue towards the abandonment of this

sentimental attachment to the form of the novel. Doing so will require thinking through the limitations of the novel laid out by Ghosh through a different set of theoretical lenses. In particular, this work will rely on Jack Halberstam's work on failure and its potential from *The Queer Art of Failure*, with support from Rebecca Solnit and several abolitionist thinkers and collectives. Following Halberstam, I argue that the failure of the novel presents opportunities to find new ways of learning and thinking, which can then lead to new practices in creation and world-making. The task I charge the reader is to push past critique that sees failure as a stopping point in critique or a call to attempt to rework existing institutions, such as the novel, that have not worked. By abandoning the hope of salvaging the novel, I suggest that the genre Ghosh writes off – science fiction, and within this work, especially science fiction comics about superheroes – may, in fact, be a more generative space than he gives credit to.

While Berlant notes that all optimistic attachments' "*affective structure* [...] involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that *this* time, nearness to *this* thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way" (2). All forms of optimism are forms of hope; all suggest the ability to try again. What makes an optimistic attachment cruel is that it is "a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be *impossible*, sheer fantasy, or *too* possible, and toxic" (24). It is a re-doubled commitment to the attachments that have been spoon fed to us regardless of our countries of origin – as filmmaker Bong Joon Ho says, "Essentially, we all live in the same country called Capitalism." For Berlant, cruel optimism is the defining affect of neoliberalism in the twenty-first century. Due to capitalist globalization and imperialism, there is

no escape from the logics of capital – it is why Bong’s 2019 film *Parasite*, struck viewers globally, despite Bong’s intent to “express a sentiment specific to the Korean culture” (Bong). Identifying the *cruelty* in this optimistic attachment – rather than inconvenience or tragedy – is essential to understanding its reach. The cruelty inherent to this form of optimistic attachment is that “where cruel optimism operates, the very vitalizing or animating potency of an object/scene of desire contributes to the attrition of the very thriving that is supposed to be made possible in the work of the attachment in the first place” (Berlant 24-5). It is a desire to maintain a relationship with an idea or fantasy that has a veneer of progress or joy, but that progress or joy never comes. Like the *Nepenthes rafflesiana* attracts insects by mimicking the sweet scents of non-carnivorous flora, cruel optimisms lure in citizens of the country called Capitalism. A crucial example is the cruel optimism of the liberal attachment to ‘American democracy,’ as critiqued by the late anarchist anthropologist David Graeber in *The Democracy Project*: “Liberals tend to be touchy and unpredictable because they claim to share the ideas of radical movements—democracy, egalitarianism, freedom—but they’ve also managed to convinced themselves that these ideals are ultimately unattainable” (150-1). Graeber’s own body of work is a testament to the cruelty of neoliberal optimism: *The Democracy Project* was published in 2013, yet the chokehold neoliberalism has on American politics has only intensified. The liberal imagination and its values – a democratic nation of equality – is always in the state of being treated as objects that can be conceded. Cruel optimism is the affective structure of Paulson’s unradical imagination.

At stake within my work is not, however, the liberal attachment to policy or the formal American political arena and its (in)abilities to address the Anthropocene. What is at stake here is the battlefields of the imagination: the affect cruel optimism has on the art and aesthetics of the Anthropocene, and what to do about it. These stakes are felt across the grounds of the manor of the real and its genre outhouses. As Ghosh states in the opening pages of *The Great Derangement*, “Let us make no mistake: the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination” (9). Where Ghosh and the unradical imagination diverge from Haraway’s “SF game of response-ability” and radical imaginative generation, is a concern with fitting the hyperobject of climate change into the container of the novel. To do so is to make the uncanny fit into ‘probability’ – something that is inherently incompatible with the form. “What is distinctive about the [novel’s] form,” writes Ghosh, “is precisely the concealment of those exceptional moments that serve as the motor of narrative” (17). ‘Exceptional moments’ – *uncanny moments* – are too large, too unwieldy for the container made by the novel’s formulaic constraints. Thinking of the novel as a container of what is allowed to be thought of as possible is essential to understanding the cruel optimism of the attachment to the novel displayed by Ghosh. He argues that novels should bring “the uncanniness and improbability, the magnitude and interconnectedness of the transformations that are now under way” into their scope, despite having argued that this very thing cannot fit within the container of the novel, per its framework (72-3). Berlant explains, “The object of cruel optimism here appears as the thing within any object to which one passes one’s fantasy of sovereignty for safe-keeping. In cruel optimism the subject or community turns its treasured attachments into safety deposit object” (43). The sovereignty one places into the novel for safe-keeping under the sign of the Anthropocene is a

sense of human stability and agency against the nonhuman world's agents as they react to ever-increasing damage and exploitation perpetrated by humans.

Though this desire for sovereignty that is stored in Ghosh's hopes for an ecologically-minded novel is a benevolent one, it still relies on a form that cannot address the climate crisis. "The modern novel imagines 'the real'—a make-believe modern microcosm in this world—based on the epistemic regime of the modern era" (Adeney Thomas, et. al. 945). The novel and the modern era's condition are yoked together. Crucially, Eva Horn and Hannes Bergthaller remark that "Linking the Anthropocene to modernity also means, conversely, that the history of modernity—most often understood as an era of liberation from religious dogma and feudal hierarchy—must be rewritten as a history of energy regimes and ecological transformations" (27). In the rewriting of this history, we must also acknowledge the epistemic impacts this historical reframing has on our understanding of art forms that come out of the modern period. Ghosh makes an attempt to do this kind of historical literary reckoning, acknowledging that, "settings [within the novel] become the vessel for the exploration of that ultimate instant of discontinuity: the nation-state" (59). I propose a different way of articulating this: that as the novel's regulatory frame was built with the development of the modern era, the novel became a force to give the "imaginary ideas [of liberal capitalism and the modern nation] real power" (Haiven and Khasnabish 6). This is why framing Ghosh's hopes for the novel as an attachment of cruel optimism is essential, because as Paulson reminds us this regulatory frame is "*not* unimaginative; it's just not radically imaginative" (33). Instead, it is unradically imaginative.

Continuing to invest ourselves within the unradical imagination has dire consequences on our ability to think through problems as urgent and large as the Anthropocene in the realm of the imagination. As the scholar and critic Sarah Schulman notes,

The long-term effect of such a condition is that gatekeepers (producers/agents/publishers/editors/programmers/critics, etc.) become narrower and narrower in terms of what they are willing to present, living in a state of projected fear of ever presenting anything that could make someone uncomfortable (91).

In other words: the long-term impacts of creating art in form that only offers an unradical imagination permanently damages our ability to imagine radically. This is the cruelty of the optimistic attachment: its damage is two-fold. It damages our personal and collective ability to engage in truly liberatory politics, but it also has a permanent impact on what kinds of art is made. At the heart of Schulman's work is a concern that gentrification – which is “a feature, not a bug” of capitalism – has created a crisis of creation (Stein). That through the dominance of the unradical imaginative forms, we are being “trained to be narcissistic and unimaginative, even if [we] could be productive creative thinkers” (90). This then, I argue alongside Schulman, profoundly hinders our ability to only create art that is politically motivating *and* our ability to practice political imagination, thought, and action. This damage to our collective imagination must be taken seriously because “when one looks at the existing world imaginatively, one is necessarily looking at it critically; when one tries to bring an imagined society into being, one is engaging in revolution” (Graeber 88). In losing our ability to look at the world critically in our imaginative capacity, such as through our art, we have developed what the writer Rebecca Solnit identifies as a problem with the narrative of political engagement in contemporary American life.

Activism is not a journey to the corner store, it is a plunge into the unknown [...] A game of checkers ends. The weather never does. That's why you can't save anything. *Saving* is the wrong word, one invoked over and over again, for almost every cause. Jesus saves and so do banks: they set things aside from the flux of earthly change. We never did save the whales, though we might have prevented them from becoming extinct. We will have to continue to prevent that as long as they continue to not be extinct, unless we become extinct first (61).

A journey to the corner store is the kind of ordinary, stable narrative that appears within the frame of the novel. As Jesus and banks save, their stories attempt to force a stability on the nonhuman world for the ease of the human. This is the material consequence of the power the unradical imagination has on us. Our ability to address the Anthropocene is reduced to what is imaginable within the regulatory frame. We save the whales once, only for them to die later.

How might we, then, release our cruelly optimistic attachments? To release an attachment of cruel optimism is painful. As Freud remarks, "people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them" (244). Ghosh's perplexing refusal to engage science fiction is such an example of this unwillingness; but Ghosh is not the only scholar trapped within this cruel optimism. Timothy Clark's work on art and literature in *Ecocriticism on the Edge* bleeds forth from this deep vein. He asks in his chapter entitled, "The tragedy that climate change is not 'interesting'":

are there limits of imaginative engagement emerging in these novels, poems, piece of music, and in painting, sculpture, cinema, art installations and so on, merely the limits of now anachronistic cultural conventions capable of reinvention. Or, more profoundly, does the Anthropocene form a threshold at which art and literature touch limits to the human psyche and imagination themselves (175-6)?

What follows in the chapter is a circular, often vexing critique of a slim variety of art and literature – all examples that Clark finds wanting. While critique is vital and useful to developing

a body politic of the Anthropocene, I argue that we must find a way to move past negativity, to not see a negative critique as the end point of discussion and instead find what doors negativity can open. To reach past negativity in Anthropocene studies, however, is not to say that we must become “postcritique.” Critique is a vital and vibrant part of our artistic and political development; negativity, I argue is not a bad thing – in fact, I argue that a practice of negative thinking is essential to moving forward in Anthropocene studies. The call to move past negativity is to argue that we should not *stop* with a critique that finds everything wanting. Instead, what I suggest is that to move past negativity is to practice a form of Haraway’s concept of “staying with the trouble.”

In urgent times, many of us are tempted to address trouble in terms of making an imagined future safe, of stopping something from happening that looms in the future [...] Staying with the trouble does not require such a relationship to times called the future (1).

Haraway’s instruction to abandon the desire for a stable, knowable future is the refutation of cruel optimism necessary in the Anthropocene. She tells us that to stay with the trouble, we do not need to have a relationship to the future that seeks sovereignty over it. Other forms of social critique can offer guidance on how to stay with the trouble in literary criticism. How might debates in ecocriticism develop and change if they took notes and guidance from prison abolitionist critique? The most core tenant of prison abolition can be defined as a conviction that carceral logics do not create safety (and in fact, generate further harm) and that “the most difficult and urgent challenge of today is that of creatively exploring new terrains of justice, where the prison no longer serves as our major anchor” (Davis 21). Yet what is embedded within that principle is filled with theoretical potential and the promise of staying with the trouble:

... the result is complexity. We are none of us one thing, neither good nor bad. We are complex surviving organisms. We do appalling things to each other, rooted in trauma.

We survive, we learn, we have agency about our next steps (brown 322)

Abolitionist theory is a theory that, when asked open-ended questions, responds *both, yes, and*. It is the refusal of simple or formulaic answers. It recognizes that an institution such as the prison cannot be replaced with another easily, because “part of the problem with the prison [...] is that it treats harm uniformly” (Kaba 297). The recognition of something’s multivalency is a portal into an ecocriticism and an imagination past negativity. Applying this theory of *both, yes, and* to literature is not easy – no liberatory task is – however, Alexis Pauline Gumbs’s forward to *Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement* offers a path towards this form of critique:

Let this book be with you, like air is with you on a screaming planet. Not clean, but necessary. Not comfortable, but supportive. Let this book be with you like our ancestors are with us, not perfect, but instructive. Not finished, but full. Let this book be with you like I am with you. Curious and unrealistic, like you are with yourself. Problematic and prophetic and possible (3).

This is the practice of staying with the trouble, a practice characterized by Haraway as “yearning toward resurgence, [that] requires inheriting hard histories for everybody, but not equally and not in the same ways” (89). Critique past negativity – abolitionist literary critique; staying with the trouble in critique – might be a way for scholars such as Ghosh and Clarke to recover the novel, if not for the novel’s status as an institution. With its institutionalization as a regulatory frame of our imagination, the novel must be interrogated using abolitionist logics. The abolitionist organizer, educator, and curator Mariame Kaba asks, “What is the alternative to exploitation? [...] yes, we don’t want to exploit people! That’s the alternative but that’s not an institution” (297). In staying with the trouble with art and literature under the sign of the

Anthropocene, we must ask what is the alternative to exploitation of the nonhuman? Abolitionist literary critique reminds us that the alternative is not the institution: not the novel. The way forward is to allow the novel to fail.

Allowing the novel to fail means understanding that the Anthropocene challenges our fundamental understandings of the world as a stable and fixed place, which “radically alters our perspective on the object of investigation, puts previous knowledge into a new constellation, and thus opens up a new epistemological field” (Horn and Bergthaller 19). This paradigm shift in our understanding then reveals what Jack Halberstam argues are the “certain circumstances [in which] failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (2-3). To accept and acknowledge the Anthropocene is to accept that times are dark; that the wild populations of birds, fish, mammals, and reptiles have decreased by an average of 58% in 40 years; that due the acidification of oceans, dramatic coral reef loss “indicate that the system is unable to maintain biomass replacement levels” (WWF 12, Renato et. al. 1515). The novel has failed to draw out a politic that imagines a bridge over – or a world without – Bruno Latour’s Great Divides between the human and the nonhuman; the Subject and the Other (97). To get away from the novel, we must practice “negative thinking, the radical element of the imagination, [which is] always antagonistic toward reification” (Paulson 35). One such way of practicing negative thinking is Halberstam’s theory of failure. What failure can offer us, he argues, is “the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes win the toxic positivity of contemporary life” (3). If the affective structure of unradical imagination is that of cruel

optimism, then perhaps the affective structure of radical imagination is what Halberstam lays out in *The Queer Art of Failure*. There is a “particular ethos of resignation to failure, to lack of progress and a particular form of darkness, a negativity really [that] can be called a queer aesthetic” (96). The queerness of this aspect is nonnegotiable. Queerness is a ‘failing out’ of heteronormative life; it is a challenge to the societal orders assumed to be natural, stable, and permanent.² The trans historian and theorist Susan Stryker writes, “Transsexual embodiment, like the embodiment of the monster, places its subject in an unassimilable, antagonistic, queer relationship to a Nature in which it must nevertheless exist” (248). This destabilization makes kin out of queers and monsters, out of queerness and darkness. The threat this kinship generates – a destabilization of the presumed-Natural Order – is embedded in every aspect of queer marginality. Cruel optimism manifests in the assimilationist turns in mainstream LGB politics – the decontextualization of marriage equality from the violence of the AIDS crisis; the rapid and widespread growth of trans-exclusionary lesbian movements – but what Halberstam argues is that the kinship made through this threat creates a different episteme. Failure and darkness, when they are lived in every day, become less frightening. An episteme of failure generates, via Halberstam’s analysis, a different way of approaching both politics and problems:

counterintuitive modes of knowing such as failure and stupidity [...] *failure*, for example, as a refusal of mastery, a critique of the intuitive connections between success and profit, and as a counterhegemonic discourse of losing. *Stupidity* could refer not simply to a lack of knowledge but to the limits of certain forms of knowledge and certain ways of inhabiting structures of knowing (Halberstam 11-2).

² Though Halberstam enfoldes trans- or trans-adjacent embodiments into his queer theory; trans theory and studies has developed into its own vibrant field; however, there is an inextricable tie between the two that has been explored and debated for decades (Stone, “The *Empire* Strikes Back,” (1991); Chu and Drager, “After Trans Studies” (2019); *TSQ* vol. 7, no. 3, “Trans* Studies Now” (2020)). For my purposes here, the link between the two matters significantly more than the divergences.

To accept the episteme of failure in ecocritical scholarship and critique, is to abandon a fear of failure. This is one of brown's core principles of emergent strategy, "Never failure, always a lesson" (41). When failure is rendered into kin, the darkness capitalist logics project onto it are transformed. Within *Hope in the Dark*, Solnit pushes out for the reader to take the unknowability of dark times as *potential*; that darkness means the future is not yet made, and that if there is the capacity for a dystopian future, then there is the equal capacity for a future shaped out of the radical imagination. "Dark," Rebecca Solnit writes, "[...] as in inscrutable, not as in terrible" (1). This is the queer art of failure – the affective structure of radical imagination. Deprivileging – and perhaps, releasing entirely – the novel in ecocritical scholarship's search for how to speak through, against, and past the Anthropocene may, I argue, open up a critique past negativity. In other words: accepting the novel's failure, structurally, to produce a radically imaginative response to climate change opens up new theoretical avenues. For example, if under the episteme of failure, stupidity becomes a different way of knowing, then we are pushed to reconsider forms and mediums that have been (until recently) excluded from the academy's gaze. Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* is a text devoted to 'low theory,' "a kind of theoretical model that flies below the radar, that is assembled from eccentric texts and examples and that refuses to conform the hierarchies of knowing that maintain the *high* in high theory" (16). For Halberstam, this appears in theoretical examinations of children's animated films and television, alongside queer art, literature, and stoner comedies. Within this paper, this manifests in science fictive worldings, and particularly, those made produced in *X-Men* comics.

Stupidity is not – generally – a characteristic I would give to *X-Men* comics. However, superhero comics *have* had greater difficulty breaking into the realms of scholarly thought than what Hillary Chute calls “the literary graphic novel,” which she posits as opposing superhero comics, continuing, “[it] might be called anti-superheroic” (75). Though Chute does work with superheroes in *Why Not Comics?* the status of comics in scholarship still largely follows the auteur model, privileging the literary graphic novel – such as Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* or Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* – which not only has a sole cartoonist and author, but tend to embody themes and affects that match up onto the same modernist values that shape the novel. As Stephanie Burt writes in “Why Not More Comics?,” “Academics tend to highlight shock—uncomfortable realization, alienation—and the acquisition of knowledge” (574). Superhero comics, while containing moments of alienation and unsettling moments of awareness, more often than not enchant us. Reading comics is pleasurable, exciting, fun. Comics contain a “capacity for allegory, for absorption in an ongoing story, for refuge and wonder, for seeing oneself anew” (Burt 575). Experiences of pleasure are devalued within the academy because of pleasure’s association with the body. To speak of pleasure in the ivory tower is to challenge its foundations. Formed by “the philosophical context of Western metaphysical dualism, many of us have accepted that there is a split between the body and the mind” (hooks 191). Pleasure, enchantment, eros, fun – these are reader responses, themes, and affects that are dismissed as vapid – or, to use Halberstam’s word, *stupid* – under “the legacy of repression and denial that has been handed down to us by our professional elders, who have usually been white and male” (hooks 191). Allowing the novel to fail ‘out’ of its role as the sole hope for addressing the Anthropocene allows, in turn, for the superhero comic to fail ‘up’ into the fore. “Such an

approach could emphasize immersion, identification, and community, as well as consolation and escape” (Burt 575). The potential in this approach as highlighted by Burt, is the practice Haraway speaks to as necessary to survival in the Anthropocene: “I—we— have to relearn how to conjugate worlds with partial connections and not universals and particulars” (13). The task is to (re)learn how to be tangled up with others – human and not – how to see kinship and difference as a way to make community, and how to build a world where those skills are practiced as part of every day life. To cultivate this methodology, literature that is *fun* must be privileged.

The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference (Lorde 31).

Science fiction, superhero comics, *X-Men* stories hold this type of pleasurable capacity.

Through our attachments to conventional and well-established forms of art in high theory (as opposed to the low theory practiced by Halberstam), we enter into relations of cruel optimism with these artistic forms. “Optimism is cruel,” Lauren Berlant writes, “when it takes shape as an affectively stunning double bind: a binding to fantasies that block the satisfactions they offer and a binding to the promise of optimism as such that the fantasies have come to represent” (51). In art and literature, cruel optimism functions as the affective structure of the unradical imagination because cruel optimism generates attachments to institutions, such as the novel, that have no ability or obligation to provide opportunities for liberation. This is the affective relationship that characterizes several ecocritical discourses – in particular, the discourses developed by Amitav Ghosh in *The Great Derangement* and Timothy Clark in *Ecocriticism on the Edge*. In this

chapter, I have proposed that there is no way to escape this relation of cruel optimism in Ghosh's call to redevelop the novel's form so that it might be able to address the Anthropocene. Due to the novel's formal development with the modern era, it is unable to be extrapolated from the imaginative frame of capitalism that it developed alongside. Rather, I have argued that we must use the failure of the novel to address the Anthropocene as a sign to look at and examine other forms of art and literature that exist either partially or wholly outside these regulatory, unradical imaginative frames. Though queer and abolitionist theories, failure becomes transformed into opportunity and encourages us to stay with the trouble of this moment. Bringing abolitionist theory into ecocriticism makes it possible to develop negative critique's productive capacity in scholarship. Failure, like darkness, is transformed from something terrible into something inscrutable. The form my work looks to address is the science fiction comic book, with Marvel's *X-Men* being my entry point. Superhero comics' ability to produce pleasure alongside shock, speaks to the form's ability to reach across the despair of the Anthropocene. The enchantment produced in readers by superhero comics makes practicing the radical imagination an experience of joy, challenging the notion of encountering the uncanny as an experience of fear and anxiety. Utilizing pleasurable reading experiences allows for us to inhabit spaces filled with the capacity for radical imagination, which in turn develop our ability to conceptualize present moments and future worlds filled with liberation from structural hierarchies that impact humans and nonhumans alike.

Chapter 2: The Epic's Not Dead

This chapter is a study of scale, possibility, and collaboration. Scale is a chief concern of many ecocritics writing on representations of the Anthropocene. It is through this inquiry on scale – and whether there are possible ways to depict the scale of the Anthropocene – that Morton comes to develop his theory of hyperobjects. They are not accessed “across a distance, through some transparent medium. Hyperobjects are here, right here in my social and experiential space” yet they are also across the world, or deep in the soil (Morton 28). It is the scale of the climate crisis that Ghosh sees as something the novel’s form would find improbable. That “Probability and the modern novel are in fact twins, born at about the same time, among the same people, under a shared star that destined them to work as vessels for the containment of experience” (Ghosh 16). As I have previously discussed, the novel exists as a regulatory framework through which the ruling classes can determine what kind of worldings are possible to imagine. With that understanding guiding him, Ghosh seems to approach the edge of his own logic in his critique of the novel. If “it was in exactly the period in which human activity was changing the earth's atmosphere that the literary imagination became radically centered on the human,” then that suggests a limitation of form (Ghosh 66). Therefore, as I have argued in Chapter One, if the form has a limit, then the form cannot transcend its limits. At two points, Ghosh attempts to address alternatives: science fiction and the epic. Science fiction, he dismisses rather easily; the epic, Ghosh seems to treat as though it is a dead form, like the Ancient Greek Homer used to record the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is a dead language. However, I will argue that the epic is *not* dead. While we have already begun to look at science fiction’s potential as an animating force of

radical imagination through its ability to enchant readers, this chapter will first examine how science fiction's universe of possibilities create openings for stories where darkness is not terrible, but inscrutable. This analytic will build towards the chapter's second section: my discussion of the epic, and in particular, how to read superhero comics as a development of the epic that brings speculative, science-fictional worldings into spaces grand enough to begin to think through the hyperobject that is the Anthropocene. The section will argue towards the treatment of the superhero comic-as-epic on multiple levels by working through the definition of the epic formulated by Isidore Okpewho. This is possible by attending to the comic's collaborative nature: the way one comic synthesizes the work of multiple creators; the way fans and fandom transcend the division between artist and audience; and the nature of the superhero comic as a self-referential intertext. Science fiction makes radical imagination possible; the process through which a superhero comic is made turns the radical imagination into an experiential process.

The imaginative scope of science fiction is unfathomable. Science fiction is a place where anything is possible. The scale of science fiction's imaginative space is unnavigable – it holds too many potential worlds that intermingle, connect, contradict, invert, subvert, collide, and elide with each other. What this means materially is that there is great deal of science fiction to sift through. Further complicating such a task is the prevalence of dystopian science fiction: this is the explanation Ghosh offers for his dismissal of science fiction. In his scant few sentences on science fiction's ability to address issues of the Anthropocene he writes,

After all, there is now a new genre of science fiction called “climate fiction” or cli-fi. But cli-fi is made up of mostly disaster stories set in the future, and that, to me, is exactly

the rub. The future is but one aspect of the Anthropocene: this era also includes the recent past, and most significantly, the present (71-2).

Futuristic stories of disaster and dystopia emphasize the privileged themes of shock and knowledge. “Contemporary dystopias,” writes Ursula K. Heise on *Public Books*’s website, “[...] aspire to unsettle the status quo, but by failing to outline a persuasive alternative, they end up reconfirming it.” These narratives are a reminder that the unradical imagination can sink its tendrils into all places. In the solar system of our collective imagination, unradical and capitalist imagination extorts a staggering gravitational pull. “Capital is, rather, among the most imaginative and creative forms of social organization the world has seen. But it tries to pull all imagination into its orbit” (Paulson 34). It can – and does – trap even those who seek to subvert it. What Ghosh correctly identifies is that disaster and dystopian science fiction stories frequently foreclose the possibility of worlds and lives where the future is not dark as in terrible, but dark as in inscrutable. These stories produce an attitude Haraway describes as “game-over” in *Staying With the Trouble*, that “imposes itself in the gale-force winds of knowing, that human numbers are almost certain to reach more than 11 billion people by 2100” (4). There is a certain understandability to this dismissal by Ghosh – dystopian science fiction is inescapable. The pervasiveness of the dystopia leads Heise to conclude, “dystopias, far from unsettling their readers, have become familiar and comfortable.” Familiar is a useful word here – comfortable, however, is difficult. Dystopians do not comfort readers, but we can become complacent to them. What Heise speaks to, by calling dystopias comfortable, is the pull of unradical imaginations, as capitalist logics dictate that “art must become something that does not make people uncomfortable, so that they will spend money” (Schulman 90). Dystopias make for successful

movie franchises and televisions. They activate the game-over attitude that the unradical imagination has instilled within us, by giving us stories and futures where the dark is only terrible. As over-exposure to violence in news media engenders “a diminished physiological response as well as a higher threshold at which to label something as violent and a greater tendency to think of violence as simply part of the everyday fabric of society,” we begin to accept that a dark, inescapable future is inevitable (Scharrer 301). Therefore, the dominance of the dystopia in the mainstream cultural landscape desensitizes us to it. Unable to see the scope, Ghosh falls into the falsehood that the unradical imagination seeks to establish about science fiction. But science fiction’s reach is wide. Without the regulatory frame of the novel, science fiction is rife with possibility. Through science fiction’s ability to break free of the unradical imagination, Ursula K. Le Guin identifies what becomes possible in her essay “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction:”

If, however, one avoids the linear, progressive, Time’s-(killing)-arrow mode [...] and redefines technology and science as primarily cultural carrier bag rather than weapon of domination, one pleasant side effect is that science fiction can be seen as a far less rigid, narrow field, not necessarily Promethean or apocalyptic at all, and in fact less a mythological genre than a realistic one.

It is a strange realism, but it is a strange reality (356).

Le Guin suggests that science fiction is especially suited to puzzling through this strange world because in it, time can be destabilized, narratives of technology and science can be uncoupled from domination, and heroic narratives rethought. By engaging in a practice of radical imagination within science fiction, the genre’s creators and readers stretch their collective capacity to see the dark as inscrutable. This is how Brown reaches the conclusion that “science fiction is simply a way to practice the future together” (19). Untethered by regulatory frames,

science fiction's large reach brims with potential worldings. In the case of *X-Men* comics, reading stories about the X-Men not only places us within the science fictional imagination to practice the future by being pleasurable, it begins – in its own small way – to bridge between the division between the mind and the body.

Using pleasure to resist despair and bridge across Latourian divides, the superhero comic also suits Ghosh's needs *as a form*, specifically as a hypo- and hypertextual successor to the epic. Coined by French theorist Gérard Genette, a hypotext is "a text whose form and/or content inspires – or is reflected in – a later text or hypertext" (Martin 100). They are works that have "a relationship uniting text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (5). Genette identifies, for example, the *Aeneid* and *Ulysseys* as hypertexts of the *Odyssey*. Within *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh dangles the epic in front of his reader as a form that, unlike the novel, "ranges widely and freely over vast expanses of time and space. It embraces the inconceivably large almost to the same degree that the novel shuns it" (61). This, given our understanding of the Anthropocene as a hyperobject – that massively invisible thing that, by its very nature "one only sees pieces of a hyperobject at any one moment" – lends incredibly interesting potential to the epic in representing the Anthropocene (Morton 3). The difficulty with the epic in *The Great Derangement* is that Ghosh shies away from this form too, though for a different reason than his dismissal of science fiction. For Ghosh, the epic as a form is lost – as though the epic has not been changing and adapting since Gilgamesh's story was first recorded, as though Derek Walcott did not win the Nobel Prize in Literature for *Omeros* in 1992. Or as

though the epic and science fiction are mutually exclusive genres. In the preface to *The Cambridge Companion to the Epic*, Catherine Bates writes,

Nor does epic as a genre show any signs of decay, for it is constantly being updated and revived for a modern audience, a flood of new, often celebrated, translations making the texts newly available and accessible to a general readership, while cinematic remakes and the perpetuation of epic motifs in contemporary blockbusters and computer games ensure that the form remains ever present in the popular consciousness (i).

Comics, too, should be included in this expansive definition of the ever-mutating epic. Homer's works have been adapted into literary graphic novels (*The Iliad* (2019) and *The Odyssey* (2010) by Gareth Hinds; Marvel put out its own serialized versions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* from 2007-2009) and transformed through the medium of comics, such as Matt Fraction and Christian Ward's much-celebrated *ODY-C*, which re-contextualizes the life of Odysseus within a queer, genderweird space opera. While Roger B. Rollin makes a useful and vital analysis of the superhero as epic hero in "The Epic Hero and Pop Culture," I instead wish to focus on the superhero comic's *form* as a growth of the epic form in the modern period. Just as the movies and games Bates evokes in her preface, superhero comics, such as *X-Men*, are especially suited to the epic form. They are as expansive, far reaching, and as trope-filled as the epic poem. In *The Epic in Africa: Toward a Poetics of The Oral Performance*, Isidore Okpewho concisely defines the (oral) epic:

An oral epic is fundamentally a tale about the fantastic deeds of a man or men endowed with something more than human might and operating in something larger than the normal human context and it is of significance in portraying some stage of the cultural or political development of a people. It is usually narrated or performed to the background of music by an unlettered singer working alone or with some assistance from a group of accompanists (34).

Through these core components, we can trace the mutated genes – the X-gene, perhaps – of the epic in the superhero comic. Central to the narrative of every superhero story is the hero or heroic group who, endowed with incredible power, do the fantastic. In other words, they are about people endowed with great power – which comes with great response-ability. Their worlds are bigger than ours: superheroes travel across planets and galaxies; they brush up against gods and magical forces; they even, on more than one occasion, crash against each other. Following Okpewho, they also operate as nexuses of political thought and culture for Americans (and those subject to American cultural dominance, which is to say the entire tangled web of the world). Ramzi Fawaz argues this specific thing in *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics*, that over the course of the twentieth century superheroes acted as everything “from a nationalist champion [in WWII] to a figure of racial difference mapping the limits of American liberalism and its promise of universal inclusion in the post-World War II period” (16). The X-Men exemplify this argument – and, in fact, Fawaz spends a great deal of his time with the X-Men in his monograph, even taking the title from the franchise’s second-ever teen-focused series. Beginning with questions about assimilation in the 1960s and moving to some of superhero comics’ very first attempts to wrestle with gender, racial, and sexual diversity under Chris Claremont, X-comics have always been the bellwether staging ground for American cultural concerns. Yet the similarities between superhero comics and the definition of the epic provided by Okpewho do not end with the text itself.

In Okpewho’s definition, the oral and the performative components are essential. This is, of course, partly due to his scope and interest in *The Epic in Africa*. However, these components do

suggest something that is important to *all* epic forms: collaboration. For the Homeric epics, that collaboration is in the life of the text before the text – its legacy as oral traditions. Homer’s writing – if it even is the writing of just one author – is the layering of stories told time and time again, each version a little different depending on who told the story, when they told it, where the story was told, and who listened. For Apollonius Rhodius, Vergil, and the other epic poets who come after Homer, they are, in turn, collaborating with Homer by building outward from *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. As the epic transforms and turns again in the Renaissance, Dante layers his epic over Vergil’s-over-Homer. The *Rāmāyana* has hundreds of versions, in multiple languages. These are hypo- and hypertexts at play. Okpewho highlighting the importance of collaboration in the African epic suggests the vital role collaboration plays in the epic form. For Okpewho and many other scholars of the epic, this is chiefly understood as the relationship between orality, performance, audience, and writing. Superhero comics are, likewise, a team sport. Originally, comics creators received little – if any – credit for their work. Selling a comic was to sell the copyright to the publisher, and the stories and characters therein would become Intellectual Property – this is still, predominantly, how DC and Marvel operate. Illustrators and writers were, instead, paid by page produced (Simon). Character creators might have their names on books bearing the faces of characters they created, such as Batman creator Bob Kane, whose name appeared on Batman stories, even when they were not drawn by him until 1964 when artist Carmine Infantino successfully argued that Kane’s name should not appear on pages illustrated by him (Brooker 63). At the height of comics’ Golden Age, publisher’s bullpens were crowded with artists’ stations. “Day and night. It was like a shirt factory, piecemeal. Instead of a needle, instead of thread, pen and ink, pen and ink, pen and ink” (Hassen). To hit mass production

quantities, publishers split the labor. Writers wrote the dialogue and captions; pencilers illustrated the pages; inkers inked over the pencils; and colorists colored over the inks. In the Silver Age, though production was not at the same frantic pace, this collaborative method took on new developments at Marvel. The famous ‘Marvel Method’ of comic-making begins with an illustrator and a writer. “[They] would start out by chatting, perhaps making notes. The artist would draw the story and flesh out the plot, and [the writer] would add captions and dialogue” (Burt). The relationship between author and artist is paramount to the development of a superhero comic. When one is out of sync with the other, the storytelling falls apart.

However, that is not the only collaboration that happens with the form. The very concept of who ‘created’ a comic was developed in collaboration. Will Brooker postulates in “Fandom and Authorship,” that as the superhero comics industry opened its proverbial doors to fans through letters columns and pages that, “Through the discourse between fan and editor, then, comics ‘authorship’ was created and debated” (62). This Brooker credits to the fact that due to the medium’s collaborative nature of creation,

the ‘creator’ of a comic book – that construction of words, pencils, plots, inks, colors, letters, and editing—is especially hard to pin down, and comics fandom, unlike film scholarship, rarely takes the easier option of singling out a single individual from the creative team for sole praise or blame (62-3).

In Brooker’s analysis, he tracks the debates over authorship that occurs in fan letters to DC and DC fanzine in one hand and the emergence of the appearance of full credits in DC comics in the other, noting that “it was the fans who created the cult of authorship around recognizable styles and creative traits, and the editors who seem to follow” (65). This, too, is significant. Through

the pleasure of reading – and loving – the superhero comic, fans managed to practice what adrienne maree brown calls “science fictional behavior,” collectively acting in a way that makes a future built on equity and liberation (16). Fans’ excitement over artists and writers then generated a shift to the form where these individual artists were given, if not a monetary compensation adequate to their contribution, at least recognition for the physical and intellectual labor they contributed to the books. Fan involvement in comics’ creation is not just external, however. Within the world of comics, fans become artists, writers, and editors of superhero comics such as Jim Shooter, who would go from selling DC Superman stories at age 14 in 1966 to editor-in-chief of Marvel Comics 10 years later (Shooter ix-xv). In fact, it is nearly essential that those who make superhero comics are fans of the books they work on. They need the level of knowledge, excitement, and attention to detail that comes with fandom.

Part of what makes superhero comics work is the way that the stories layer on top of each other. Characters rarely (if ever) age; they do not even stay dead. Furthermore, the characters are rarely given the chance to mature emotionally (and if they do, they are often returned to their original state a year later). Meanwhile, “new” characters have limited staying power.³ Therefore the writing (and reading) of a comic must not only include what is on the page – the panels, the layout, the text, the image – but what has come on the pages of the comics written before.

³ On the permanence of character development: One example might be the X-Man Laura Kinney. A clone of Logan Howlett (codename: Wolverine) introduced in 2003, she took on the codename Wolverine after his death in 2014. Despite a three year long stint with the title and repeated explanations on her part that her former title, X-23, was filled with traumatic associations. Upon Logan’s return from the dead, Laura became X-23 again at the order of Marvel HQ. On the staying power of new characters: For example, the Spider-Man Miles Morales, despite being a longtime cult-favorite, has only reached mainstream recognition after nearly 10 years of comics’ publication, thanks to the Oscar-winning film *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*.

Jonathan Hickman's 2019 X-line re-launch exemplifies this particular collaborative aspect of superhero comics-as-epic. The book, *House of X/Powers of X*, takes this unspoken rule of superhero books and exploits it. Hickman pulls at threads that have been written and re-written over the fifty-plus years of *X-Men* comics and expands them exponentially. His comics move from an action sequence where mutant terrorists are intercepted by the Fantastic Four to a dossier for an in-universe corporate entity, or from the introduction of a story's antagonist to a protocol sheet containing information from an in-universe scientific study conducted after a major X-comic event – world building through an academic prose that is self-referential, critique, reinvention, and generates a sort of in-universe theory. To make and understand stories – *epics*, more accurately – that are so metatextual requires active engagement. It means staying with the trouble; it means saying *there is always more story to tell, to read*. The continuation of superhero comics – and, in particular, to continue to tell X-Men stories in the way that Hickman and his collaborators do in *House of X/Powers of X* – means rejecting the idea that a story ends. *House of X/Powers of X*, for example, takes the trope of resurrection in X-comics and makes it a feature. The abilities of “the Five” to generate new bodies for Xavier to ‘import’ the psychic consciousness of deceased X-Men not only makes the impermanence of death in superhero comics something ‘real’ rather than confusing, it also challenges and speaks to the numerous critiques launched at the X-line over the years about *which* characters die (Hickman, et. al. 271-278). In the run of *Uncanny X-Men* leading up to the release of *House of X/Powers of X*, writer Matt Rosenberg and illustrator Carlos Gomez killed the New Mutant Rahne Sinclair in a poorly and thinly-veiled metaphor for trans panic murders. Which in turn, produced a serious discussion around the limits of the Mutant Metaphor from critics and fans alike and activates the

collaborative construction comics again (Pfau, Puc). Nola Pfau pinpoints this collective process between fans, critics, and creators past and present in “Adoption Papers for Rahne Sinclair,”

When I say that Rahne Sinclair belongs to the trans community, what I mean is that, for better or worse, *you put our eyes on her*. We will, forever and indelibly, associate her with one of the darkest crimes that is visited upon us. We will watch her character progress like a hawk, and we will have very, very strong opinions about that progress, because, even though she’s fictional, she has been made to share our trauma, to live our experience, and thus she deserves a place among us.

Reintroducing Rahne to the line, showing how this death has been – and will be – acknowledged and that Rahne has more life to live yet, speaks to comics’ power as both collectively constructed works *and* to their status as hypo- and hypertexts. The game-over attitude is impossible to maintain both in the creators’ and readers’ imaginations. In the creation and reading of comics, through its relationship to the epic form, we stay with the trouble – committing to the tangled webs that make superhero stories possible. Making and reading comics in this way places the response-ability of radical imagination onto a collective, rather than an individual. It is a response-ability that relies on “collaboration: between words and images, between writers and others, between artistic and commercial imperatives” (Burt 575). The potential of this approach is that through pleasurable engagement, we might begin to imagine futures without the discursive limits of what is considered ‘possible’ by the mainstream.

The scale of such an approach is staggering. Stories about the X-Men have, since the line’s revival in the 1970s, already dealt with alternative timelines and inter-galactic travel, “negotiating competing affiliations with nations, minorities, and war-ravaged alien civilizations” (Fawaz 202). Scholars such as Fawaz establish the *X-Men* as space opera:

First, it visualized Earth within an infinitely vast universe whose contents were unknown and potentially threatening to the survival of mankind; second, it employed the limitless geography of outer space as a backdrop for epic struggles between competing forces—alien, human, or cosmic—and a metaphor for the psyche as both a void of loneliness and potential connection, contemplation, and insanity; and third, it used superhuman figures to mediate between space and Earth as bodies whose powers allow them to physically traverse these locales and survive their harsh conditions and also symbolically straddle the social worlds of humans and aliens and the shifting scales of earthly and cosmic conflicts (204).

However, I contend with Fawaz's idea that X-stories are space opera. Instead, as I have argued, they are *epics*. Unlike this definition of the space opera, X-books do not contain anxieties about the survival of mankind. Instead, mankind is often embroiled in the threat posed to our protagonists. Furthermore, the mutants of the *X-Men* do not straddle the social worlds of humans and aliens: they forge a new world between the two. In the aftermath of *House of X/Powers of X*, X-comics, also, transcend the sheer geography of space and instead reach out into deep time. The second half of the book, *Powers of X*, is inspired by a short documentary video by Charles and Ray Eames released in 1977 entitled "Powers of Ten" (Hickman). The 9-minute film is described by the Eames' as "an adventure in magnitude." The film begins by expanding out a single shot of one meter by factors of ten every ten seconds until the Earth itself becomes nothing more than a speck. Then, the film scales down returning to Earth by ten meters every two seconds until reaching the proton of an atom ("Powers of Ten"). Hickman takes this idea of exponential scaling in *House of X/Powers of X* and transposes it to time itself, setting up in its second issue, "X⁰: The X-Men. Year One. *The Dream*. / X¹: The X-Men. Year Ten. *The World*. / X²: The X-Men. Year One Hundred. *The War*. / X³: The X-Men Year One Thousand. *Ascension*" (Hickman, et. al 48). By the third issue, "The Uncanny Life of Moira X," the full scale of Hickman's re-contextualization of the comic line only just begins to enter into our focus. Retconning Moira

MacTaggart, the once-human ally of Charles Xavier into a mutant, whose power is reincarnation – with full cognizance of her previous lives from birth – Hickman concludes the chapter with a chart (entitled “The Many Lives of Moira X”) of Moira’s lives that, at full size, spans six pages, with two timelines extending off page into the unknown future (Hickman, et. al. 119-124). With this scale, the comic-as-epic performs exactly what the novel cannot. It reaches out, touching and joining multiple universes together speaking directly to the Anthropocene’s “essence [which] consists of phenomena that were long ago expelled from the territory of the novel—forces of unthinkable magnitude that create unbearably intimate connections over vast gaps in time and space” (Ghosh 62-3). Through this imaginative space, the reader can begin to play in the unknown of the future. In her third life, Moira develops the cure for the X-gene. Before she is able to release it, however, she is stopped by the mutants Mystique and Destiny – a shapeshifter and her precognitive wife. Destiny notes that she cannot see Moira’s future, and Larraz



FIGURE 1: Hickman, Jonathan (w) and Pepe Larraz (p). *House of X/Powers of X*. Marvel, 2019, pp. 101.

emphasizes this with a completely dark panel, marked only by Destiny's speech balloon (*FIG. 1*). After her third life, Moira's lives become dedicated to saving mutants from extinction at the hands of human oppression. Her mission has failed, five of six times. Her tenth life and sixth attempt – the attempt the X-line will follow after *House of X/Powers of X*, is charted as a black line in “The Many Lives of Moira X” (Hickman, et. al 119-124). Dark, as in inscrutable. Dark, as in part of the future that is being made.

We are all agents in the making of comics, both formally and informally, as fans become creators and creators respond to fans, who both respond to the fans and creators who came before. The responsibility of radical imagination is distributed across the superhero comic's life: it exists in its creation and in its reception, an ouroboros of possibility. This hypo- and hypertextuality, I have argued, makes superhero comics – and specifically X-comics – extremely well-situated to do the work Ghosh is looking for in *The Great Derangement*. They function on scales few other works do: in linear time, as creators layer stories and narratives on the work done by their predecessors, both the past and the present creators interlocked in conversation with fans about the stories they are telling; in the fictional timescapes themselves, as comics such as *Powers of X* think about narrative and time on exponential levels. If, as Ghosh writes, “Within the mansion of serious fiction, no one will speak of how the continents were created; nor will they refer to the passage of thousands of years: connections and events on this scale appear not just unlikely but also absurd within the delimited horizon of the novel,” and science fiction makes this kind of absurdity possible, then superhero comes exist in the direction we should look. In Chapter One, we examined why the novel should be allowed to fail out of our critical horizons, here I have

furthered my criticism past negativity and using the lessons the failure of the novel has offered me, argued towards science fiction's – and the *X-Men*'s – strength as a radically imaginative space for us to stay with the trouble. Comics' palimpsestuous nature refuses game-over attitudes because there is, somehow, always the desire for *more*: more comics, more stories, more dark futures to escape, and more bright futures to build.

Chapter 3: Our Selfriends, Ourselves

Though Fawaz only makes a brief mention of the emergence of the environmentalist movement when discussing the Silver Surfer – another Marvel character who has crossed paths with the X-Men before, but is not a mutant (or a *homo sapiens superior*) – he gives equally brief attention to the ways twentieth century ecological anxiety informs the creation of the X-Men. Public anxieties about mutation and its dangerous consequences characterized the 1950s in response to the nuclear fallout experienced in both atomic testing and after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Fawaz, however, highlights the significance that 1962 saw both *The X-Men*'s first year of print as well as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and emphasizes Carson's discussion of the potential effects radiation could have on the human genome. "Resignifying the meanings attached to mutation, the meanings attached to *mutation*, *The X-Men* fused real-world anxieties about the disabling effects of radiation exposure," and the idea that it could accelerate human evolution to create a *homo sapiens* genetic successor (220). Fawaz's claim is that "Simultaneously the series revalued physical disability and visible difference from ordinary humanity as the ground upon which new forms of social and political community could be articulated" (220). Due to the Mutant Metaphor's "elasticity," he argues the X-Men became "a potent popular fantasy for vitalizing Marvel Comics' cosmopolitan ethos at the level of both comic book content and public reception" (221). The X-Men, he and others such as Burt and Edidin, argue therefore become interesting and relatively successful ways of forming not just queer and/or disabled identities, but also building solidarity across marginalities. All of this is true. Equally true, however, is that Fawaz's focus on anthropocentric justice movements means

he falls prey to the Great Divides, seeing only the human-focused potential in the radical imagination of *The X-Men*. He does not consider how X-comics become “Figures that help [us] grapple inside the flesh of mortal world-making entanglements [called] contact zones” (Haraway 4). By *figures*, Haraway means that *The X-Men* is not just a collection of “representations or didactic illustrations, but rather material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another” (3). The collaborative creation of a response-able radical imagination that happens within comic-making and comic reading, knot together the material (us, our actions, the nonhuman world around us) and the semiotic (the text and image of the comic). Even as Fawaz leaps over this, he writes “[The X-Men] proposed an alternative to the seemingly all-inclusive sign of ‘universal humanity’ in the form of a cross-species kinship network more properly described as a ‘queer mutaninity’” (223). Fawaz’s concept of queer mutaninity is similar to my own concept of a social model of mutation – both speak to intra-species kin ties and families made by choice rather than by blood similar heteropatriarchal norms. The difference is in our arrivals to the openness of mutant identity: Fawaz arrives through queer theory; I arrive through crip theory. What is significant is how X-characters “become with” each other. In *The X-Men* the collective radical imagination reveals a way “to be a much richer web to inhabit than any of the posthumanisms on display after (or in reference to) the ever-deferred demise of man” (Haraway 17). Haraway’s concept of becoming with is a precursor to her concept of “making oddkin.” In the introduction to *Staying With the Trouble*, she explains: “Staying with the trouble requires making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot composite piles. We become-with each other or not at all” (4). Through the way the X-Men develop a social definition of mutation, being a mutant

becomes a path towards making oddkin. In the collaborative experience of this world-making, *X-Men* becomes a place for the radical imagination to stretch its muscles, revealing possibilities about the way the world could be, if we chose different modes of affiliation and kinship to stay with the trouble.

This chapter will explore the development of four specific characters and three relationships that occur over nearly the full span of *X-Men* comics. First appearing in 1975, the sentient island Krakoa has moved from antagonist to ally in liberation. As a sentient landmass, Krakoa invokes Haraway's images of the "chthonic." "Chthonic ones are beings of the earth, both ancient and up-to-the-minute. [...] replete with tentacles, feelers, digits, cords, whiptails, spider legs, and very unruly hair" (2). Rather than read Krakoa as a simple representation of the environmental anxiety that characterized the seventies, I argue that as a nonhuman mutant, Krakoa's appearance is the first time we see the social definition of mutant developed and used in X-comics. By transforming our understanding of Krakoa as a metaphor for human fears into a metaphoric way of refusing human exceptionalism. Through Krakoa – and, particularly, through Krakoa's development over their publication history – *X-Men* comics pose potential answers to Haraway's question of "What happens when human exceptionalism and bounded individualism, those old saws of Western philosophy and political economics, become unthinkable in the best sciences, whether natural or social" (30)? Krakoa is the first character I explore in this chapter. The watershed moment for Krakoa's shift from antagonist to ally in the understanding of both comic creators and comic readers comes in the form of an encounter between the teenage mutant Quentin Quire and another, younger, Krakoa in *Wolverine & the X-Men*. This section will study

how by developing a relationship of response-ability with each other, Krakoa and Quire become with each other, fundamentally changing each other through their kinship. Their kin connection is an emotional one, developed as both are faced with Levinas's face of the other, modeling that "Outside the dubious privileges of human exceptionalism, thinking people must learn to grieve-with" (Haraway 38). The chapter will then move to a discussion of the alien mutant Warlock, whose personal pronoun is "self," but is actually a part of many wholes. Warlock is technarch, an alien species that is capable of forming a hivemind, but he is also a mutant, a part of the X-Men, which is another whole. Warlock's interactions with the young students of the Xavier School in *The New Mutants*, in particular, have a great deal to say about what it means to become with, to be companions. The mediating force in the joining of Warlock to the New Mutants – and the X-Men as a larger whole – is this chapter's fourth, and final, mutant: Doug Ramsey. With the mutant ability to understand and communicate in any language, auditory or semiotic – he is equally fluent in sarcasm and binary, for example – Doug's mutant name is Cypher. The final relationships this chapter will consider are the relationships Warlock and Krakoa form with Cypher. Through their relationships with Cypher, both Krakoa and Warlock reveal how "Partners do not preexist their relating; the partners are precisely what come out of the inter- and intra-relating of fleshy, significant, semiotic-material being" (Haraway 165). The transformations Krakoa, Quentin Quire, Warlock, and Cypher undergo through their processes of becoming with each other reveal the potential of staying with the trouble. They model for us *how* to regard the face of the other and, in response to it, become response-able. Under the social definition of mutant, the radical imagination is remade with the messy web of entanglements that we must learn not simply to live with, but become with and make oddkin out of. These care collectives

that develop give mutants strength and agency, even when responding to dark times. Through their kin relationships developed in the social definition mutant, the X-Men are able to resist hegemonic, anthropocentric oppression. In the networks of care and affection that develop among the X-Men, they transform dark times from terrible to inscrutable. X-comics – *Giant-Sized X-Men*; *Wolverine & the X-Men*; *The New Mutants*; and *House of X/Powers of X* in the scope of this paper – are then, I argue within this chapter, epic forms that instruct their reader through the pleasurable act of radical imagination to practice a collective ethic of care in moments where the unradical imagination would inspire doom. “Hope,” writes Mary Gray, “stretches the limits of what is possible” (6). As the X-Men stretch and develop our radical imaginative power, better worlds enter into our grasp.

In *Giant Sized X-Men*, Wein and Cockrum introduced a new team of X-Men – a team that was interracial and international – as well as a new villain for the new class of X-Men to defeat, alongside the original five X-Men: Krakoa. Billed as “THE ISLAND THAT WALKS LIKE A MAN,” Krakoa is a living island with thought, limited telepathy, and seemingly limitless strength (*FIG. 2*). The island, unlike the *homo sapiens superior* sent to destroy it, was not a mutant born. Instead, Krakoa’s genesis is credited to nuclear experimentation in the Pacific Ocean (32). Krakoa is the ugly stepchild of the Children of the Atom, the golem of a burgeoning environmental movement. Part of what *Giant Sized* asks is: What happens when we harm nature and it reaches back? To examine Krakoa’s reach, we must first discuss the physicality of its form – a part that is essential to, though not the whole locus of, its agency. Its body, constructed out of monstrous, acidic green flora, calls to the anxieties that underpin Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*

Chthonic ones are monsters in the best sense; they demonstrate and perform the material meaningfulness of earth processes and critters. They also demonstrate and perform consequences. (Haraway 2).

For Haraway, chthonic ones are manifestations of the webs of entanglement that are outside human control and agency. Chthonic ones have a similarity to Morton's hyperobjects in that they express impossible scale in both space and time, as Krakoa does. However, Haraway's chthonic ones have an active agency Morton's hyperobjects do not. They are what reaches back – these beings make up responses and consequences of the Anthropocene. Krakoa is not a humanoid form made solely of tangled vines and bark: it is the *island itself* given collective consciousness. Its psionic powers do not just mean that the plants can reach and touch, nor does it mean that the animals can act in murmurations even when it is not 'natural' for them to do so: it means that Krakoa can also make others part of the whole. This is, in part, what Krakoa does when it captures the original five X-Men. Though it wants to feed on their "mutant energies," is that not a way of bringing others into the whole? This is Haraway's theory of composting: a vision of becoming with the nonhuman that is post-human exceptionalism, but not necessarily posthuman. Like different compostable materials break down and become one soil to give way to new growth, Haraway's theory of composting sees the need for decay, intermingling, and growth tangled together. Krakoa is "rich in humus, ripe for multispecies storytelling," as the shifting role Krakoa occupies in the *X-Men* canon will come to show. Yet even as an adversary, the X-Men's relationship to Krakoa is more complex than a simple hero-villain relationship. Krakoa's chthonic nature joins the X-Men in mutant identity, opening up avenues for cross-species kinship and identification, both within *Giant Sized X-Men* and beyond.

Karkoa, even as the antagonist of *Giant Sized X-Men* is a mutant. The winged X-Man Angel identifies Karoka as something *like* himself, rather than an other. This is not the first time the X-Men have fought a mutant – at this point in the comics’ narrative, Magneto is still a rather uncomplicated villainous antagonist – but it is the first time they have fought a mutant who is decidedly not human, not *homo sapiens superior*. The threat Krakoa poses to the X-Men is not mutant supremacy, but that its mutation grants it a sentience and agency that threatens our heroes – its hunger forces it to seek out other mutants and feed off of the energy generated from their mutations. Even in the 1975 comic, *Giant Size* therefore challenges who (and what) is considered a mutant. Throughout the original run – a total of 66 new issues, before the comic went into reprints – the word *mutant* was synonymous with *homo sapiens superior*. The species designation was generally understood as a means of differentiating the X-Men from their superpowered contemporaries, such as the Fantastic Four, whose powers come from accidental exposure to “cosmic rays” (Kirby & Lee 9-13). Where Wein and Cockrum diverge is, as Angel remarks, “Haven’t you realized yet? We came to this island to look for a mutant... *but the mutant is the island itself* (31).” This fundamentally alters the definition and use of the word ‘mutant’ in X-comics. Anyone and *anything*, now, could be a mutant. What happens, both for the X-Men and the reader when they are confronted with Krakoa, chthonic and entangled, in *Giant Sized* is that they are confronted with Foucault’s “metaphysics of the object, or, more exactly, metaphysics of that never objectifiable depth from which objects rise up towards our superficial knowledge” (266). What should be an object – an island, and therefore, other – is given collective agency, and it demands a response. It challenges conventional definitions of who is, and who is not, a mutant. What is significant is not only the agency given to Krakoa, but the way

that it is so quickly enfolded into – and therefore creates – the social model of mutation. This is how I argue that despite the character's origins in the climate anxieties of the seventies, Krakoa refuses to be a vessel in which to store sovereignty. As a figure in a radically imaginative contact zone, Krakoa does not become a site of cruel optimism. Subdued, not defeated, Krakoa would linger on the peripheries of the Marvel Universe for decades. By comics' nature as an epic hypotext, Krakoa's shunt off-screen and into space as it is literally hurtled off planet by the combined efforts of both old and new X-Men, this opens up new spaces within *The X-Men's* radical imagination for future comic creators to stay with the trouble, practice response-ability, and make oddkin.

In the 2011 debut of *Wolverine & the X-Men*, author/artist team Jason Aaron and Chris Bachalo brought Krakoa back to the pages of the X-line. While Krakoa has appeared in a few Marvel books since *Giant Size* – most notably *Deadly Genesis* – its appearance in *Wolverine & the X-Men* is the beginning of a semi-regular engagement with Krakoa by the writers, illustrators, and editors of Marvel's X-Office that has continued into the present line up of X-comics. What makes this return especially significant, is the status quo shift that happens with its appearance. Krakoa appears beneath the Jean Grey School to wreak havoc on the youngest mutants and their caregivers. The only hope these future X-Men have is the sullen, sardonic teenage telepath Quentin Quire. He is the only one with strong enough telepathic abilities to break through the hivemind. This Krakoa, however, is not *The* Krakoa, instead this one was grown in a laboratory. Through a telepathic exchange between Quire and this Krakoa, we – alongside Quire – are exposed to the face of the other:

I see. You're not the *original* Krakoa. No, more like one of his *grandkids*. You were grown in an artificial super garden. By some arrogant little twerp of a boy scientist. A young Dr. *Frankenstein*? Can that be right? You've been beaten and abused your entire life. Trained only to hate and rage. I get it, you're *angry*. Is that all you got (10)?

This version of Krakoa's primary experience is one of trauma and victimization. Interestingly enough, the source of this victimization is a version of Frankenstein – Maximillian Frankenstein, the last living descendant of the Marvel Universe's version of Victor Frankenstein. Shelley's doctor, Stryker argues, is a symbol of the "contemporary reordering of knowledge brought about by the increasingly compelling truth claims of the Enlightenment" (247). Frankenstein is indicative of the ways human exceptionalism attempts to conquer nature. In his creation of the monster, Victor Frankenstein attempts to claim sovereignty over the natural order. Within the pages of *Wolverine & the X-Men*, Maximillian Frankenstein attempts to claim sovereignty over nature through his creation of Krakoa (Aaron, et. al. 10). Stryker makes kin with Victor Frankenstein's monster, recognizing that "the consciousness shaped by the transsexual body is no more the creation of the science that refigures its flesh than the monster's mind is the creation of Frankenstein" (248). Rather than 'subdue' a threat, Quire makes kin with Krakoa through the marginalizing experience of mutation, rather than of gender. Through telepathic communication, Quire *becomes with* Krakoa, rather than launching a psionic assault (as attempted by Charles Xavier in *Giant Size*). By becoming a companion of Krakoa's hive mind through his telepathic powers, Quire is faced with the other, whose ethical demands becoming response-able to it:

Okay, so you're incredibly *strong* as well. But extremely *lonely* too, am I right? It's no fun being lonely, is it? You do things you regret when you're lonely. Act out. Try to hurt people. You're not a bad soul. I can see that. You just don't know quite how to *express* yourself. You're different. You're a *mutant*. Nobody understands you. Sometimes you don't even understand yourself. If only I knew someone *else* who was like that (11)?

This – though it is couched in humor – is a radical act. What Quire offers Krakoa is entry into a community and an identity. This is not a perfect union – it is tangled and messy. Quire has a history of being a “mutant terrorist.” His enrollment in the school is an attempt at offering him a chance to start again, to be a hero rather than a villain. Quire’s private, telepathic kin-making is the first time the reader sees his vulnerability; sees him be genuinely kind to someone else (even if he is still glib). The entanglement that Quire enters into with Krakoa (and therefore, Krakoa with mutant identity), is a place where each party learns how to respond to Levinas’s face of the other and the ethical imperatives within it. As Levinas writes, “My ethical relation of love for the other stems from the fact that the self cannot survive by itself alone [...] To expose to myself the vulnerability of the face is to put my ontological right to exist into question” (24). In this interlocking, Krakoa and Quire’s common enemy is revealed: the young Frankenstein and his friends, who have harmed both Krakoa and the school – the enemy is the oppression of mutants, rather than individual violence (Aaron, et. al. 14). When the fighting stops, Krakoa begins to communicate not only with Quire but with Rachel Summers, the adult telepath on staff, and asks if he can become an X-Man (see *FIG. 3*). From this point on, Krakoa is not longer treated as an antagonist – he is not only an ally, but a



FIGURE 3: Aaron, Jason (w) and Bachalo, Chris (p). *Wolverine & the X-Men* v1 #3 (2011-2), Marvel Comics, pp 12.

member of the X-Men, and above all else, a mutant. What this exchange reinforces is Haraway’s

claim in *When Species Meet* that “responsibility is a relationship crafted in intra-action through which entities, subjects, and objects come into being” (71). Krakoa changes; it becomes invested in the school, in the mutants who live there, and – especially – its best friend, Quentin Quire. Likewise, the intra-action chances Quire: it is this moment where the reader is shown where his selfishness collapses into *selflessness*.

While the Krakoa that joins the X-Men in *Wolverine & the X-Men* is not the Krakoa from *Giant-Sized* and *House of X/Powers of X*, this development is important to discuss before returning to the original Krakoa again. Without the reinvention of the relationship the X-Men can have to Krakoa developed by Aaron, Bachalo, and their collaborators, what Hickman accomplishes in *House of X/Powers of X* would not be the same. In *Wolverine & the X-Men*, Krakoa becomes the grounds the mutants’ school is located on and becomes part of the school itself. Hickman revisits this idea in *House of X/Powers of X*, making Krakoa not only the homeworld for all mutants, but an active participant in the world-making. There is perhaps no better metaphor for kin-making *than* Krakoa’s relationship with the X-Men and to mutant identity. For Krakoa is not only a chthonic one but the very contested ground upon which previous climate anxiety-fueled conflicts have played out. The incorporation of mutant identity into Krakoa’s sense of self is a tentacular entanglement, “the relentlessly contingent SF worlding of living and dying, of becoming-with and unbecoming-with, of sympoiesis, and so, just possibly, multi species flourishing on earth” (Haraway 40). To then bring Krakoa further into the fold of mutant identity and then, to world-make with it is to stay *with* the trouble. However, to reach that moment of world-making, we must examine two more mutants: Warlock and Doug Ramsey, Cypher.

Krakoa is not the only non-*homo sapiens superior* mutant. Before Krakoa's return to main X-comics, writer/artist team Chris Claremont and Bill Sienkiewicz introduced the character Warlock to pages of *The New Mutants*.⁴ Unlike Krakoa, Warlock is not a mutated creature. Warlock is a member of the Technarchy, an alien race of shape-changing mechanical lifeforms. Warlock arrives at the Xavier School while fleeing his father, Magus, who seeks to initiate the ritual combat between them that serves as the Technarch's coming-of-age fratricide ritual (Claremont & Sienkiewicz 12). Through a series of events that can only be adequately described as hijinks, the New Mutants meet Warlock, who is near death, and desperately in need of food, but is unwilling to harm the New Mutants and feed off of them. Like Krakoa, Warlock's body is not a stable thing (see *FIG. 4*). Sienkiewicz's art is essential to this. His Warlock plays with positive and negative space. In a panel on page 33 of *The New Mutants #21* Sienkiewicz uses a black panel with white spaces cut from it to make Warlock's face. His hair is always wild, unruly; he always has one eye that is bigger than the other. His expressions are hyper exaggerated. His limbs, when he tries to reach for things in *#21*, snake out, tentacular. Haraway's chthonic ones are of the earth – Warlock is not. Yet, still, there is an affinity with Warlock and the images she creates when asking her reader to think about using entanglement to stay with the trouble: “stinger-endowed, unfurling, grasping, tentacles of the ink-spurting, disguise-artist, hunting critters of an ongoing past, present, and future” (71). The contact zone of entanglement

⁴ *The New Mutants* was an attempt by Marvel to re-introduce the concept of “The Xavier School for Gifted Youngsters” to X-comics. Under Claremont's direction, the main X-book, *Uncanny X-Men*, had moved away from being a story about teenaged mutants learning to control their gifts to a fully-fledged adult team of heroes. At the direction of Marvel HQ, *The New Mutants* was developed: a story focused on young mutants, students of Xavier.

Warlock presents to the New Mutants is visually represented within his form. With Sienkiewicz illustrating the pages, Warlock's visual presence, too, invokes the radical imagination.

As an invasive species, members of the Technarch survive by infecting living creatures with the transmode virus

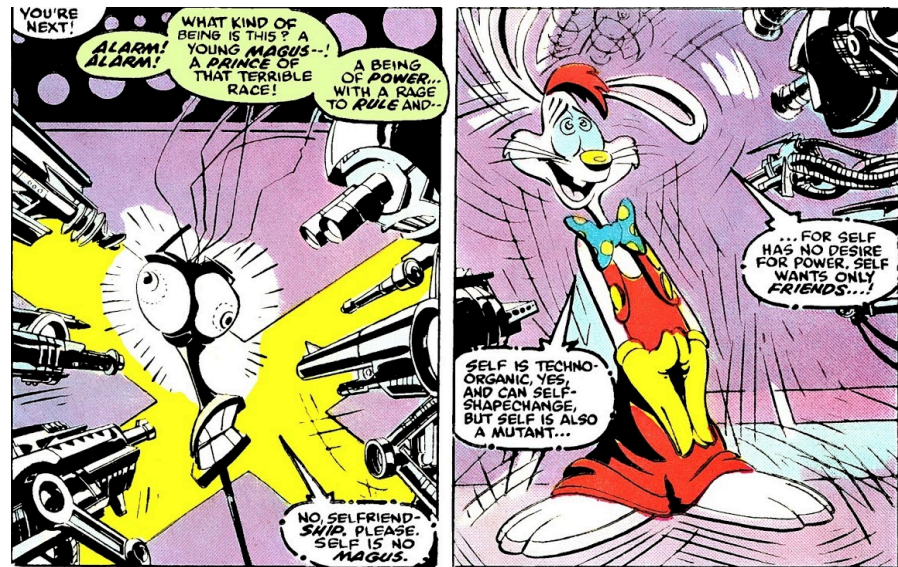


FIGURE 4: Simonson, Louise (w) and Blevins, Brett (p). *The New Mutants*, v2 #74 (1987-9), Marvel Comics, pp 17.

– a techno-organic virus that turns organic material into mechanical material – to drain the “lifeglow” of the infected creature as food. Instead of being mutated or a genetic mutant (like *homo sapiens superior*), Warlock is a mutant through radical difference of disposition. Warlock's first appearance in *The New Mutants* #21 follows him as he attempts to find a way to survive without harming any of the students – accidentally or otherwise – or taking more energy than he needs from another piece of inorganic life. Warlock's mutation is that he, unlike the rest of the Technarch, has no interest in killing (FIG. 4 – Blevins & Simonson 17). Instead, Warlock has a profound respect for all things – those that we humans might see as living and those we might see as not. In *The New Mutants* #26 when the teenagers travel to Scotland, illustrator and Warlock's co-creator, Bill Sienkiewicz, places into the background of page 9 a horrified-looking Warlock, moving through 5 of the page's 6 panels. As the teens and their chaperones walk away

from the plane on which they arrived, a speech balloon appears above Warlock's head in the shape of a music note. Warlock – who has yet, at this point, to learn much English – runs through the background of the four following panels, a series of interconnected speech balloons trailing after him, each in the shape of a bird. The New Mutant Danielle Moonstar realizes, “There's a pattern to Warlock's chirping. *The Blackbird!!*” and runs off after him. What she finds, on the next page, is Warlock addressing the X-Men's version of the SR-71 Blackbird airplane:

Self wishes to express thanks to you, noble entity, for transporting self and companions to this habitat. It is a shame you cannot change shape like self and accompany us further. Self will visit you from time to time, if you like... so you will not be lonely. Goodbye, Blackbird —goodbye (Claremont, et. al. 10)!

Warlock brings together Haraway's theories of kinmaking with Jane Bennett's vibrant materialism, where “thing-power arises from bodies inorganic as well as organic” (6). Though Warlock's desire to prevent the Blackbird from being lonely is puzzling and amusing to the New Mutants, the scene can, I suggest, be location that might call to the reader to consider the agency of the inorganic in a similar way to how Bennett writes of litter commanding her own attention. “[In] being *struck*, I realized that the capacity of these bodies was not restricted to passive ‘interactability’ but also included the ability to make things happen, to produce effects” (5). The litter made Bennett look, by interacting with the street, the day, the other litter beside it. Warlock makes us look by the playfulness and tenderness of his affect, borne out of his mutation. Warlock is a mutant because he is not drawn to violence and domination; he is drawn to kinship and affinity.

Warlock's entry into mutant society and identification – into the X-Men – is mediated by the mutant Cypher, whose powerset is one of the most subtle in the Marvel Universe: the ability to speak and understand any language and form of communication. On the night of his unexpected arrival on the Xavier School's campus, the New Mutants are forced to fetch Doug – who is not yet a member of the team, and isn't even yet aware that he is mutant – because they know Doug will be able to communicate with him. Doug and Warlock join the team together, as Doug learns he is a mutant when one of the New Mutant's leaders, Sam Guthrie, picks him up in the middle of the night. It is through Doug that Warlock is introduced to humanity. The first thing Cypher shows to Warlock is an explanation of “the origin and structure of life on Earth. The idea's to show that *we're* the dominant spe—” (Claremont, et. al. 31). Before Doug is able to reveal mankind – or mutantkind's – dominance, however, one of Warlock's tentacular arms reaches out to contact Doug. The mutant technarch is near death, Sienkiewicz draws Warlock as a collapsed, tangled mess of limbs and wires. The contact Warlock makes is to show Doug – and the rest of the New Mutants – why he is here and what he is fleeing. Again, we see X-Men presented with the face of the other. The peril Warlock is in makes an ethical demand of the New Mutants, and Doug and Rahne Sinclair respond with compassion and connection, despite the fact that Warlock has nearly killed them several times accidentally. Using light and sound as “a common basis for a language, then the language itself, so we can talk to him before it's too late” (32). As soon as Warlock begins to pick up English, it is clear how dire the situation is to the New Mutants. To save Warlock, Rahne runs to him and takes his hand – despite the fact that all evidence shows she will become infected with the techno-organic virus – “We canna abandon the lad! He's the same as me —as *all* of us—cast out an' hated by those who raised us, simply b'cause of what we

are...” (33). In the moment their hands clasp, Warlock is able to change the shape of one hand into that of a plug, and plugs into an outlet, saved. Rhane remains herself. Entangling together in a relation of care, rather than domination, Dough, Rahne, and Warlock open up new ways of being with and being in the world. As Haraway writes, “Response-ability is both absence and presence, killing and nurturing, living and dying—and remembering who lives and who dies and how in the string figures of naturalcultural history” (28). To become kin with Warlock, Doug and Rahne accept that to do so prevents the death of Warlock, possibly at the cost of their own lives.

In *When Species Meet*, Haraway writes that transcending Latour’s Great Divides is the process of getting “laptops and lapdogs into one lap” (12). Bringing non-*homo sapiens superior* mutants into the social model of mutant identity is the same project, of bringing all forms of being into one lap. Fundamental to that project is therefore the recognition of the precocity of each other. As Judith Butler writes, “the Other’s face [...] carries the meaning of this precariousness, at once tempts me with murder and prohibits me from acting upon it, then the face operates to produce a struggle for me, and establishes this struggle at the heart of ethics” (135). In *The New Mutants*, as Warlock is the other to the New Mutants, they are the other to Warlock. With Warlock’s unwillingness to harm the teenagers and Rahne and Doug’s willingness to put themselves at risk to save Warlock, they enter into such a relationship of response-ability. Though Warlock does not infect them with the techno-organic virus, “Companion species infect each other all the time. [...] Bodily ethical and political obligations are infectious, or they should be” (Haraway 29). While Butler writes of recognition of percauity as means of developing a sense of ethics, Haraway writes of the importance of grief to developing a sense of response-ability. “Grief is a

path to understanding entangled shared living and dying; human beings must grieve *with*, because we are in and of this fabric of undoing. Without sustained remembrance, we cannot learn to live with ghosts and so cannot think” (39). Understanding how *X-Men* model this particular path into becoming with, we must attend diligently to Cypher and Warlock.

Cypher’s mutation, the gift of languages, is one of connectivity. Language needs interlocutors, language is made together. It is, as I argue later, a possible means of becoming with. In *The New Mutants*, Warlock begins to learn English through Doug – though, Warlock never quite gets pronouns and adds his own affectations to English, such as calling his friends “selfriends.” The pair are more than best friends – they have, throughout the years, shared the same body. When Warlock is near death in *Uncanny X-Men Annual #9*, Doug decides to share his lifeglow with Warlock to save his life – which is understood to be different than their usually intra-species mingling; this has a sense of permanence and weight (*FIG. 5*). This what it means to be response-able to each other, that “To respond to the face [of the other], to understand its meaning, means to be awake to what is precarious in another life, or, rather, the precariousness of life itself” (Butler 134). After the events of *Uncanny X-Men Annual #9*, Doug becomes Warlock’s “selfsoulfriend” and “selfdearestfriend.” These terms establish and formalize for future X-texts the level of intimacy between the two made in this moment. Selfsoulfriend creates an opening into new stories, from different creators, that can continue to push the boundaries of what kinds of becoming with are possible in the imaginative space of X-comics and their readers. As a character with a subtle, noncombatant power set, Cypher can easily be relegated to a

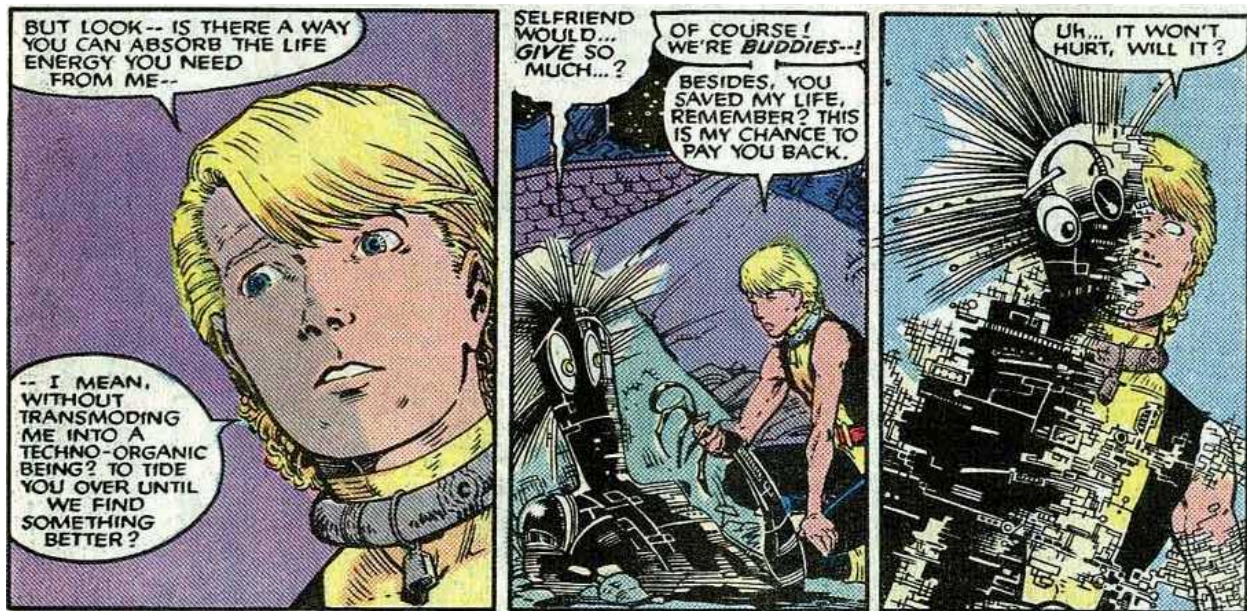


FIGURE 5: Adams, Arthur (p) and Claremont, Chris (w). *Uncanny X-Men Annual #9* (1985), Marvel Comics, pp 24.

supporting role, both on the teams he is a part of and, more generally, in the comics in which he appears. In *The New Mutants*, the team experiences friction when he is forced to take a backseat. Warlock, always attentive to those around him, works with his selfriend to develop a solution: Doug and Warlock begin merging forms – Warlock fitting around Doug like exoskeletal armor – and are surprised to discover how quickly their minds and souls merge when they share a lifeform. Their union is met with horror and shock from their teammates (Claremont & Davis 36). Their fear is, admittedly, not undeserved: the techno-organic virus is incurable and corrupting. However within their physical entanglement simmers a subtextual queer intimacy. While there is a real ‘risk’ in their union, it also speaks to cultural anxieties around sex and sexuality that I see as queer in both the literal sense, as two boys being physically intimate with each other, and in the metaphoric sense, that this cross-species relationship (despite both being mutants under the social definition of mutant) challenges anthropocentric ideas of what bodies

are, what the *right kind* of bodies are, and how they should entangle. Their bodies come together, flesh on techno-organic metal and with that, the risk for Doug of never recovering the flesh he had before. That this union forms, in part, out of Cypher's desire to transcend the limits of his body, invokes Stryker's writing on transsexualism and monstrosity:

I find no shame, however, in acknowledging my egalitarian relationship with non-human material Being; everything emerges from the same matrix of possibilities [...] I who have dwelt in a form unmatched with my desire, I whose flesh has become an assemblage of incongruous anatomical parts, I who achieve the similitude of a natural body only through an unnatural process, I offer you this warning: the Nature you bedevil me with is a lie. Do not trust it to protect you from what I represent, for it is a fabrication that cloaks the groundlessness of the privilege you seek to maintain for yourself at my expense (246-7).

In their gestalt form, which is made out of their mutual response-ability to each other, Doug and Warlock push at the very boundaries of what is possible, even for mutants. Yet, once separated they find that they have somehow – impossibly – escaped permanent damage (Claremont & Davis 47). Through their affection for each other, their profound act of intra-species existence and worldings become possible. After the deaths of Doug and Warlock – Doug's in *The New Mutants* #60 and Warlock's in #95 – Rahne instructs her teammates, "Scatter [Warlock's ashes] on **Doug's grave**. I know 'tis what **both** of them would have wanted" (Simonson, et. al. 24). The scattered ashes reach into the soil and to mingle with Doug's body. They do, almost literally, as Haraway suggests: compost and become with. Claremont, Simonson, and their collaborators leave an opportunity for future creators to stay with the trouble through Doug and Warlock. In 1994, the *Phalanx Covenant* crossover event pulls on those threads. Plotted by Scott Lobdell, scripted by Chris Cooper, and penciled by John Aoye, *Excalibur* #78 introduces Douglock, a new gestalt hybrid made from both Cypher and Warlock. Importantly, Douglock is *not* Doug or Warlock, but an amalgamation of the two, once again pushing against and expanding out the

definitional limits of mutanthood and personhood. As he says to Kitty Pryde in *Excalibur* #79, “You are mistaken about my *status*. I am, in fact, a *living being*... though apparently I do not conform to your somewhat narrow-minded definition of the term” (Lobdell, et. al. 14). Douglock challenges – like the Doug and Warlock gestalts before him – what kind of bodies are possible and what is (and is not) considered alive or animate. Douglock’s role during this period of *Excalibur* suggests again the potential for engagement with these questions of liveliness and embodiment that is created by comics.

Through the intense kinship and affection between Karaoke and Quentin Quire, as well as Doug and Warlock, and the intra-species form of Douglock already reveal comics’ potential for engaging and challenging the questions of the Anthropocene, the paradigm shift that occurs in *House of X/Powers of X* highlights not only the strength of *X-Men* comics as a means of addressing the Anthropocene, but also how comics as a form is especially suited to the task.

Within *House of X/Powers of X*, Moira McTaggart gathers together all mutants – heroes and villains alike – to make her final attempt at securing the future of all mutants. Key to her plan is Krakoa – the original, not the “grandchild” of Krakoa that appeared in *Wolverine & the X-Men* – with Krakoa, mutants are able to accomplish two things: the establishment of a physical place, not dependent on any other landmass, for the mutant race to make a nation-state *and* the ability to trade. “The flowers of Krakoa” are flora indigenous to Krakoa that can be used to multiple affects. As an export, the flowers produce Human Drugs L, I, and M. All together, these drugs can extend human life for five years, make an “adaptive, universal antibiotic,” and cure all “diseases of the mind” (Hickman, et. al. 13). For mutants, they create gateways, which are

teleportation entrances to Krakoa; habitats, which are “a self-sustaining environment—a biome—that is part of the interconnected consciousness of Krakoa;” and no-places, made from “a non-naturally occurring flower [that] produces a habitat that exists outside the collective consciousness [...] A Krakoa tumor” (14). However, to make Moira’s dream come to fruition, she and Charles Xavier must recruit not only Krakoa, but a means of communicating with it. While telepaths are able to communicate with Krakoa, their communication is more empathetic than linguistic. They receive feelings, scenes, emotive gestures, but not full, nuanced language. Unlike telepaths, Doug Ramsey – codename: Cypher – has a mutation that proves more useful in this endeavor. Cypher is able to communicate with Krakoa fluently. Cypher as an embodiment of a contact zone is the key to becoming with Krakoa. Though he is no longer “Douglock,” Doug and Warlock are merged together in *House of X/Powers of X*. This gestalt form invokes Bennett’s question from *Vibrant Matter*: “And how would an understanding of agency as a confederation of human and nonhuman elements alter established notions of moral responsibility and political accountability” (21)? Within *House of X/Powers of X*, Cypher (and Warlock, the selfsoulfriend along with him) and Krakoa model and reveal the relationship kinmaking, response-ability, and world-making have with liberation and pleasure.

Language, as I have previously suggested, is a loadstone in this formation. In part, *House of X/Powers of X* privileges language because of Cypher’s mutation. But when one remembers that Cypher is able to understand *all* language, both what is traditionally understood as language *and* other forms of communication that are still semiotic, though not based on words as they are conventionally understood, we can, I argue dismiss the concern of language-as-anthropocentric.

As Eduardo Kohn argues in *How Forests Think*, all life is semiotic. Signs themselves exist for all beings; anthropocentrism is that “we attribute to nonhumans properties that are our own, and then, to compound this, we narcissistically ask them to provide us with corrective reflections of ourselves” (21). For example, a sonic or haptically felt disturbance in the forest can function as a sign to those living within it and they, in turn, respond to the sign.

That is, all semiotic processes are organized around the fact that signs represent a future possible state of affairs. The future matters to living thoughts. [...] Signs oriented toward the ways in which future signs will likely represent their relationship to a likely state of affairs. [...] This particular kind of causality, whereby a future comes to affect the present via the mediation of signs, is unique to life. [...] In the life of signs future is also closely related to absence. All kinds of signs in some way or other re-present what is not present. [...] it is the product and history of all other sign processes that less accurately represented what would be (Kohn 23-4).

Signs – representations, communications – are used to convey what is, what is to be, what is not, and what is not to be. By being made of absences, it is possible to see how signs might function similarly to process of imaginative negation. Using Kohn’s formulation of signs and language, Cypher, then, is perhaps better understood as knowing and ‘speaking’ all forms of signs. As Krakoa cannot fully treat or communicate with Xavier and Moira, they must bring Cypher to Krakoa (Hickman, et. al. 258). Xavier treats Krakoa with respect, but Cypher is able to interface with it in an entirely different way, to truly become kin with it. His task is to make that kinbond open for all mutants. Language is the step that makes “the dream” achievable. Together, Cypher and Krakoa develop “Krakoan” which is described as,

Mutantdom’s first autochthonous language. It’s important note that Krakoan is a manufactured language and not the native language of Krakoa the living mutant island. The language of Krakoa is untranslatable, and almost all human/mutant brains are incapable of comprehending it. The only known exception is the mutant Cypher (Hickman, et. al. 203).

By referring to Krakoa as *both* mutantdom's first indigenous language but also *not* the native language of Krakoa, *House of X/Powers of X* reinforces the social model of mutation – that being a mutant is an identity, rather than a biological destiny. Through the creation of a shared language, then, Krakoa is able to become with mutant society, just as mutants are able to become with Krakoa. The reciprocity of the exchange is part of the project of staying with the trouble.

Krakoa's role is able to expand far beyond team member, for the vision that Xavier has for Krakoa and all mutants is this: an independent mutant nation, housed on, fueled by, and in symbiosis with Krakoa. Krakoa is not a passive actor in the creation of a mutant state. It would be easy to let the island be simply an interesting, somewhat animate setting for this new age of *X-Men* stories. However, Hickman resists this colonizing, anthropocentric impulse and instead gives the island a type of agency that can be understood as a type of Benettian assemblage,

living throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within. They have uneven topographies, because some of the points at which the various affects and bodies cross paths are more heavily trafficked than others, and so power is not distributed equally across its surface. Assemblages are not governed by any central head [...] The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen [...] is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone (23-4).

Krakoa is described as a collective body, full of many parts and different locations – both on the island and off, in the form of its habitats. This collective comes into being with and is shaped by its interactions with others: when Doug and Warlock enter Krakoa's forests with Xavier, the places where Doug-Warlock touch the flora become techno-bio-organic (*FIG. 6*). The structures within Krakoa mix technology and organic life – in the island's gateway nexus, roots snake across the floor like wires, connected to machinery in symbiosis. *House of X/Powers of X* tells

this story, of how the X-Men and Krakoa made a dream into a world. This is Haraway’s instruction: “A common livable must be composed, bit by bit, or not at all” (40). The series follows this narrative arc, tracking the world-making and what entanglements appear in its making through deep time.



FIGURE 6: Hickman, Jonathan (w), Larraz, Pepe (p), and R. B. Silva (p). *House of X/Powers of X* (2019), Marvel Comics, pp. 254

Aside from land, to make a nation-state, one must create a state. In *House of X/Powers of X*,

Xavier, along with his collaborator Magneto,

institutes “The Quiet Council of Krakoa” to be the nation’s governing body. The council has 14 seats – two of which belong to Krakoa and Cypher (Hickman et. al. 337). In the council’s first meeting, they begin to establish the laws of the new nation. Questions about what natural rights mutants are entitled to arise – including the question of property. To which Cypher argues: “Krakoa is alive. Not a place, or a biome – a person. *Fauna*, not *flora*. So I’d be careful how hard you want to lean into the whole property rights thing” (344). Doug’s classification of Krakoa as fauna, rather than flora is interesting. There is, within it, an echo of Bennett’s call in *Vibrant Matter* to develop “a more subject-centered vocabulary” (9). It implies an attempt on Doug’s part to articulate the liveliness of Krakoa. While *flora* often implies passivity and a rootedness, *fauna* is read more easily and quickly as something alive, with agency and semiotics. Calling Krakoa *fauna* is an attempt to acknowledge the agency of *all life* on the island. Invoking

Krakoa's vibrant materialism is essential to the task at hand: to challenge the idea that there should be a legal right to ownership over another mutant, even if it is, in part, a landmass. This is the second law the council creates: to protect and honor Krakoa as sacred land – not a right to property. Cypher's response-ability to Krakoa sways even the most unlikely of council members, the villainous Exodus, rather than Storm – who is often the character most affiliated with environmental concerns – or Emma Frost, who question Doug's refusal to entertain the idea of owning the land. This is a direct refusal of Enlightenment philosophies, making Krakoa a model of Haraway's proposed "Terrapolis [...] rich in com-post, inoculated against human exceptionalism but rich in humus, ripe for multispecies storytelling" (11). Having a seat on the council among allies willing to not only listen, but engage in relations of response-ability with Krakoa gives the chthonic an active, agential role in the nation-making happening on its own soil. The project of making a nation is "a case of noninnocent, risky, committed," becoming with. To reach the Terrapolis of Krakoa, X-comics had to build off of each other for five decades. Each new imaginative practice in staying with the trouble that takes place in the *X-Men* is layered over the last, building and building.

What Krakoa, the younger Krakoa, Quentin Quire, Doug Ramsey, and Warlock show us is not just what is possible when we see the face of the other and respond to its ethical demand; but how it is done. Though I have not yet written this word into this chapter, the answer to the question of "how do we get into good, entangled trouble and stay with that trouble?" has always been love. That is what the kin relationships between Krakoa the younger and Quire; selfsoulfriends Cypher and Warlock; Cypher (with Warlock entwined with his hand) and Krakoa

show us. “To be in love,” writes Haraway, “means to be worldly, to be in connection with significant otherness and signifying others, on many scales, in layers of local and globals, in ramifying webs” (97). The ethical demand the face of the other makes of us, Levinas reminds us, is one of love (24). That is what Quire responds with, even if it is a tough love, when Krakoa the younger shares its suffering with him. Love is Doug Ramsey and Rahne Sinclair putting their safety on the line for a dying alien they do not yet know; love is Warlock fitting himself over Cypher like armor; it is Doug giving his lifeflow to Warlock, permanently. Love is Doug refusing to let the mutant nation begin with the colonization of his friend. What these love stories represent are ways of being in the world with love. They present modes of entanglement that are not always easy, but are always ultimately beneficial and will always reshape their participants through their response to each other. The processes of becoming with that *X-Men* stories give to us are only possible through the social model of mutation that the X-Men practice. By moving away from defining mutant as *homo sapiens superior*, beginning with Angel calling Krakoa a mutant in *Giant Sized X-Men*, the X-Men transcend the binary between Humankind and Nature. They cross the boundary with Krakoa, Warlock, and the other non-*homo sapiens superior* mutants who call themselves X-Men and – now, after *House of X/Powers of X* – make Krakoa their home.

Conclusion: Hope You Survive the Experience!

At the threshing heart of this thesis has always been attachment. The X-Men have been crucial pieces of my life: they have offered me ways of seeing myself – queer, disabled, and weird – reflected in media; they have taught me that to exist as I do – queer, disabled, and weird – is a political act; that part of this political act includes leveraging my own body and privilege to give those who are *not* like me the power and tools for their own flourishing – that our survivals are intertwined, forever; and they have brought me to a community that strives to be a little more mutant and a little more revolutionary each day. This is the power of the social model of mutation: through it we learn not only how to experience our own marginalities, but also find solidarity and kinship with others. In “Beyond the Mutant Metaphor,” X-Pert and critic Jay Edidin writes, “The metaphor’s own mutability gave marginalized readers a means to see themselves in stories [...] That, ultimately, is the power of the X-Men. [...] They fight for not just the world around them, but for their right to a place—and an unassimilated voice—within it” (89). The strength of my attachments – and my community’s attachments – is a powerful, motivating force. While scholarship such as Ramzi Fawaz’s supports this claim, concluding that,

the political productivity of comics—understood as their capacity to imaginatively innovate and make public aesthetic and social responses to the limits of contemporary political imaginaries—in the generative relationship between comic book producers, an emergent countercultural readership, and the expanding visual and narrative content of comic book texts (39).

I wanted to push this argument further, past the concerns of human politics and into the tangled, massive network of the world that Anthropocene studies calls us to attend to. The political productivity of comics, I have argued, includes radically imagining new ways of becoming with

the nonhuman made possible not just through the social model of mutant identity within X-comics or the capability of science fiction’s imaginative scope, but within the very nature of superhero comics themselves. As a hypo- and hypertextual medium they speak to and bring forth different temporal moments; they lend authorship, though unequally distributed, to illustrators, graphic artists, writers, and fans all at once. The act of making superhero comics and reading superhero comics asks us to embody Haraway’s call to stay with the trouble. Invoking these ideas, I have attempted to theorize the attachments I – and others – have to the *X-Men*, in an effort to work towards the development of an approach to comics scholarship that can, as Stephanie Burt suggests, “emphasize immersion, identification, and community” under the sign of the Anthropocene (575).

Near Krakoa’s center is Transit – the nexus of the gateways that enter into the island, where

Krakoa, Cypher, and the mutant Sage scan all incoming arrivals. We first see Transit in the first issue of *House of X/Powers of X*, as the three mutants at work there index new arrivals. The second panel on the page is a series of eyes, nestled in bark or stone, all fixed on the figure dwarfed



FIGURE 7: Hickman, Jonathan (pP), Larraz, Pepe (p) and R. B. Silva. *House of X/Powers of X* (2019), Marvel Comics, pp. 16.

by the sheer size of Krakoa: Cypher, reaching up with his arm covered by Warlock to speak with it (*FIG. 7*). It's a striking visual. In the foreground of the panel Sage sulks,

SAGE. Last week, you built an entire system to manage the traffic of the Krakoan network from scratch—

CYPHER. *And how cool was that?*

SAGE. —coded in a language only you and the island can speak and bioengineered to run on light and not electricity... Yeah, I can't believe I doubted you.

CYPHER. It's time to get with the program, Sage. You need to bury all that *cynicism* and replace it with good old fashioned *hope* (16).

Cypher's words to Sage distill exactly what X-comics ask their readers to do. The task is to bury cynical, game-over attitudes. We bury them with hope – with the pleasurable possibilities of radical imagination. This is why I do not buy the work of ecocritics, such as Timothy Clark, who seem to never find a representation of the challenge of the Anthropocene satisfactory. This is why I agree with Amitave Ghosh and Ursula K. Heise, that disaster and dystopian “cli-fi,” cannot animate us. Both of these positions accept “a position that the game is over, it's too late, there's no sense trying to make anything better, or at least no sense having any active trust in each other in working and playing for a resurgent world” (Haraway 3). The *X-Men* taught me better than that.

Positions that discard the importance of the imaginative worlds of science fiction and superhero comics (such as Ghosh's), fail to realize, I have argued, is that although climate change does not occur in “an imagined ‘other’ world apart from ours; nor is it located in another ‘time’ or another ‘dimension,’” these other worlds, times, and dimensions that exist in science fiction are portals to worlds where things can be done differently, where response-ability can be learned, developed, and practiced (72). Furthermore that from Ghosh's own argument, we can conclude that courtesy

of the novel's own form, its worlds, times, and dimensions are also imagined. They are products of the bourgeoisie order that determines the imaginative frame for our cultures, just as it extends hegemonic power over other societal frames. In other words:

It matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what knowledges know knowledges. It matters what relations relate relations. It matters what worlds world worlds. It matters what stories tell stories (35).

I have attempted to ask: what thoughts think the novel? And in turn, what thoughts think the superhero comic? Which medium *tells* me what is possible? Which medium asks me *what* is possible? One question is generative; the other is game over. X-comics, in their ridiculous, massive, and twisting histories, make the challenge of turning dark from terrible to inscrutable fun. They inspire connectivity and response-ability on the formal level and within their own narratives. Mutants are my selfriends – part of me and part of something other, mixing together to make something new.

Works Cited

- Aaron, Jason (w) and Bachalo, Chris (p). *Wolverine & the X-Men* v1 #1-10 (2011-2), Marvel Comics.
- Adams, Arthur (p) and Claremont, Chris (w). *Uncanny X-Men Annual* #9 (1985), Marvel Comics.
- Adeney Thomas, Julia, et. al. "JAS Round Table on Amitav Ghosh, 'The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable.'" *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 75, no. 4, 2016, pp. 929-955.
- Arendt, Hannah. *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*. Edited by Jerome Kohn, Schocken Books, 1994.
- Bates, Catherine, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to the Epic*. Cambridge University Press. 2010, pp. i-xiv.
- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*. Duke University Press. 2010.
- Bogdanove, John (p); Claremont, Chris (w); Lee, Jim (p); Liefeld, Rob (p); and Simonson, Louise (w). *X-Men: X-Tinction Agenda*, (1990), Marvel Comics.
- Bong Joon Ho. Interviewed by Alamo Drafthouse. "2019 Extended Interview on PARASITE," Sep. 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sr9PC7yKDeY>.
- Brooker, Will. "Fandom and Authorship." Charles Hatfield, pp. 61-71.
- brown, adrienne maree. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. AK Press, 2017.
- brown, adrienne maree. "How We Learned (Are Learning) Transformative Justice." Ejers Dixon and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, pp. 321-324.

- Burt, Stephanie. "Who Really Created the Marvel Universe?" *New Yorker*, 8 Feb. 2021. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/02/15/who-really-created-the-marvel-universe>. Accessed 8 February 2021.
- . "Why Not More Comics?" *PMLA*, vol. 134, no. 3, May 2019, pp. 572-578.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "The Climate of History: Four Theses." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2009, pp. 197-222.
- Chute, Hillary. *Why Comics? From Underground to Everywhere*. HarperCollins. 2017.
- Clarke, Timothy. *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a threshold concept*. Bloomsbury. 2015.
- Claremont, Chris (w) and Sienkiewicz, Bill (p). *New Mutants* v1 #18-31 (1984-5), Marvel Comics.
- Claremont, Chris (w) and Davis, Alan (p). *New Mutants Annual* #2 (1986), Marvel Comics.
- Claremont, Chris (w) and Guice, Butch (p). *New Mutants* v1 #41-50 (1986-7), Marvel Comics.
- Cockrum, Dave (p) and Wein, Len (w). *Giant Size X-Men* (1975), Marvel Comics.
- Darowski, Joseph. *X-Men and the Mutant Metaphor: Race and Gender in the Comic Books*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. 2014.
- Davis, Angela Y. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Seven Stories Press. 2003.
- Dixon, Ejeris and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, editors. *Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories From the Transformative Justice Movement*. AK Press, 2020.
- Eddin, Jay. "Beyond the Mutant Metaphor." *Marvel: Universe of Super Heroes*, edited by Travis Langley, Museum of Pop Culture, 2019, pp. 84-89.

- Edidin, Jay and Miles Stokes, hosts. "164 – This Is the Mutant Revolution: Live From Rose City Comic Con." *Jay & Miles X-Plain the X-Men*. September 17 2017. <https://www.xplainthexmen.com/2017/09/164/>.
- Fawaz, Ramzi. *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the American Radical Imagination*. New York University Press. 2016.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An archeology of the human sciences*. Routledge, 1989.
- Fraction, Matt (w) and Christian Ward (p). *ODY-C* (2014-2016), Image Comics.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XIV (1914-1916)*, translated and edited by James Strachey, Hogarth Press, 1964, pp. 243-258.
- Genette, Gérard. *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, translated by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, University of Nebraska Press. 1997.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. University of Chicago Press. 2016.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll. "Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader*, edited by Ken Hiltner, Routledge, 2015, pp. 120-130.
- Graeber, David. *The Democracy Project: A history, a Crisis, a Movement*. Allen Lane. 2013.
- . *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams*. Palgrave. 2001.
- Grey, Mary C. *The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope: Prophetic Dreams for the Twenty-First Century*. The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000.

- Gry Ulstein. "Brave New Weird: Anthropocene Monsters in Jeff VanderMeer's *The Southern Reach*." *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2017, pp. 71.
- Gumbs, Alexis Pauline. "Forward." Ejers Dixon and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, pp. 1-3.
- Haiven, Max and Alex Khasnabish. *The Radical Imagination: Social movement research in the age of austerity*. Zed. 2014.
- Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press, 2016.
- . *When Species Meet*. University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- Hassen, Irwin. Interview with PBS. "Truth, Justice, and the American Way." *Superheroes: A Never Ending Battle*. PBS. 2013.
- Hatfield, Charles, et. al., editors. *The Superhero Reader*. University Press of Mississippi. 2013.
- Heise, Ursula K. "What's the Matter With Dystopia?" *Public Books*. February 1 2015. <https://www.publicbooks.org/whats-the-matter-with-dystopia/>
- Hickman, Jonathan. Interviewed by Ryan Penagos. "This Week in Marvel." July 2019. <https://youtu.be/1rhi-bjVhdo>.
- (w), Larraz, Pepe (p), and R.B. Silva (p). *House of X/Powers of X* (2019), Marvel Comics.
- Hinds, Gareth. *The Iliad*. Based on Homer, Candlewick Press, 2019.
- . *The Odyssey*. Based on Homer, Candlewick Press, 2010.
- hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Routledge. 1994.
- Horn, Eva and Hannes Bergthaller. *The Anthropocene: Key Issues for the Humanities*. Routledge. 2020.

“Hypotext.” *Key Terms in Semiotics*. First ed. 2006. Print.

Kaba, Mariame. Interviewed by Ejeris Dixon and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha. “Be Humble.” Ejeris Dixon and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, pp. 287-300.

Kohn, Eduardo. *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. University of California Press. 2013.

Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter. Harvard University Press. 1993.

Le Guin, Ursula K. “Speech in Acceptance of the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters.” November 2014.

—. “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction.” *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader*, edited by Ken Hiltner, Routledge, 2015, pp. 353-356.

Levinas, Emmanuel and Richard Kearney, “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas.” *Face to Face with Levinas*, SUNY Press. 1986, pp. 23-24.

Lobdell, Scott (w), Cooper, Chris (w), and Ken Lashley (p). *Excalibur #79* (1994), Marvel Comics.

Lorde, Audre. “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power.” *Sister Outsider*. Crossing Press, 1984: pp. 53-59. Rpt. in *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*. By adrienne maree brown. AK Press, 2019, pp. 27-35.

Miller, Andrew P. “Mutants, Metaphor, and Marginalism: What X-actly Do the X-Men Stand For?” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2003, pp. 282-290.

Morias, Renato A., et. al. “Severe coral loss shifts energetic dynamics on a coral reef.” *Functional Ecology*, vol. 34, no. 7, 2020, pp. 1507-1518.

Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

Okpewho, Isidore. *The Epic in Africa: Toward a Poetics of the Oral Performance*. Columbia University Press, 1991.

Oppermann, Serpil. "From Posthumanism to Posthuman Ecocriticism." *Relations*, vol. 4, no. 4.1, 2016, pp. 23-37.

Paulson, Justin. "The Uneven Development of Radical Imagination," *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2010, pp. 33-38.

Pfau, Nola. "Adoption Papers for Rahne Sinclair." *Women Write About Comics*, 12 November 2019. <https://womenwriteaboutcomics.com/2019/11/adoption-papers-for-rahne-sinclair/>.

—. "The Violence in the System: Transmisogyny in Uncanny X-Men #17." *Women Write About Comics*, 2 May 2019. <https://womenwriteaboutcomics.com/2019/05/the-violence-in-the-system-transmisogyny-in-uncanny-x-men-17/>.

"Powers of Ten." Directed by Charles and Ray Eames, 1977.

Puc, Reed. "The Death in UNCANNY X-MEN #17 Is a Trans Panic Murder, & It's Not OK" *The Beat: The News Blog of Comics Culture*, 2 May 2019. <https://www.comicsbeat.com/uncanny-x-men-17-trans-panic-murder/>.

Resha, Adrienne. "The Blue Age of Comic Books." *Inks: The Journal of the Comics Studies Society*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2020, pp. 66-81.

"responsibility, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/163862. Accessed 11 February 2021.

Rollin, Roger B. "The Epic Hero and Pop Culture." Charles Hatfield, pp. 84-98.

- Scharrer, Erica. "Media Exposure and Sensitivity to Violence in News Reports: Evidence of Desensitization?" *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 85, no. 2, 2008, pp. 291–310.
- Shakespeare, Tom. "The Social Model of Disability," *The Disability Studies Reader*, edited by Lennard J. Davis, Routledge, 2010, pp. 215-221.
- Shooter, Jim. *Jim Shooter: Conversations*, edited by Jason Sacks, Eric Hoffman, and Dominick Grace, University of Mississippi Press, 2017.
- Simon, Joe. Interview with PBS. "Truth, Justice, and the American Way." *Superheroes: A Never Ending Battle*. PBS. 2013.
- Simonson, Louise (w) and Blevins, Brett (p). *The New Mutants*, v2 #59-61, 64-74 (1987-9), Marvel Comics.
- Solnit, Rebecca. *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*, 3rd ed. Haymarket. 2016.
- Stein, Samuel. "Gentrification Is a Feature, Not a Bug, of Capitalist Urban Planning." *Jacobin*. March 2019. <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/03/gentrification-is-a-feature-not-a-bug-of-capitalist-urban-planning>.
- Susan Stryker; "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage." *GLQ*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1994, pp. 237–254.
- Thomas, Roy (w) and Miguel Angel (p). *Marvel Illustrated: The Iliad #1-8* (2007-2009). Based on Homer, Marvel Comics.
- Thomas, Roy (w) and Greg Tocchini (p). *Marvel Illustrated: The Odyssey #1-8* (2008-2009). Based on Homer, Marvel Comics.

Woolf, Virginia. "A Sketch of the Past." *Moments of Being*, edited by Jeanne Schulkind, The Hogarth Press. 1976, pp.64-73.

WWF, 2016. *Living Planet Report 2016: Risk and resilience in a new era*. World Wildlife Fund. 2016.