

# In Dialogue with More-than-Human Wor(l)ds: Collaborative Kinship and Relationality in Digital Publishing

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**Abstract:** *Animated Wor(l)ds* is a multimedia born-digital project with roots in relational practices that honor biocultural diversity and multispecies flourishing. Our community is composed of scholars, artists, and activists who contribute a wide array of transdisciplinary and multisensory research-creation projects promoting care-full attunement with more-than-human wor(l)ds. Focusing on the developmental process of the project, we celebrate the vital network of relations animating our work and the multispecies ethics that permeates our editorial practice.

By retracing the collaborative efforts occurring behind the scenes, we explore three interwoven areas to illustrate our experimental methodology: (1) developing an editorial process rooted in community care, (2) entering in dialogue with more-than-human persons, and (3) building a digital ecology. Ultimately, we draw attention to radical reciprocity to propose a counterexample that challenges established publishing models embedded within hierarchical organizational structures as well as the underlying anthropocentric logic that characterizes scholarly research and artistic production conducted within the humanities.

**Keywords:** multispecies kinship, relationality, digital humanities, project sustainability

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the idea for a collaborative project began to take shape. Despite the physical isolation demanded by the global state of emergency, we felt moved by a sense of vibrant connection after we met at an online conference in 2021. Our similar academic background in cultural studies, languages, and linguistics, alongside our shared commitment to multispecies justice, inspired us to conceive of *Animated Wor(l)ds*. With a deeper awareness of social and ecological vulnerability

and globally entrenched inequalities, and inspired by Indian writer Arundhati Roy, we saw the pandemic rupture as an opportunity, a “portal” we walked through lightly “ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it” (2020, 126). As Danielle Celermajer and Philip McKibbin suggest, “multispecies justice, with its commitment to relationality, encourages us to re-think health and well-being, to reconsider who and what matters, and to explore the ways in which we are all related” (2023, 664).<sup>1</sup> These aspirations shaped our vision of a publication that would both affirm our interconnectedness with more-than-human *worlds* and amplify the meanings and wonders of multispecies *words*.<sup>2</sup>

From our first conversations, we set ourselves the objective of providing a platform to people with shared core values, both within and outside academia, that would promote alternative ways of relating to, thinking about, and entering into conversation with more-than-human communities. The digital multimedia project *Animated Wor(l)ds* is thus a call to awaken our senses and expand our understanding of intra- and interspecies dialogues. In our creative praxis, we recognize more-than-human beings as co-creators in building more livable futures and as architects of their own liberation.<sup>3</sup> In doing so, instead of continuing to view them as passive objects of research, we acknowledge them as active collaborators and open up possibilities to reimagine common worlds and shared futures.

To accomplish this, we start from the premise that humans are not the only species to have languages and meaningful cultural practices, thereby exposing harmful human supremacist norms that erase the personhood of more-than-human beings and the expressive qualities of their communicative acts. While we are aware that these are still marginal(ized) notions in academia and in society at large, it is our objective to disrupt ideologies that are characterized by extractivist and egocentric fragmentation. As a deeply ecological, multivocal project, *Animated Wor(l)ds* brings together scholars, poets, artists, and activists from diverse backgrounds who collectively honor biocultural diversity and multispecies flourishing in their contributions.

In this self-reflective article, we explore the ways in which a relational ethics permeates all aspects of our project, ranging from our editorial practice to our commitment

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1. Among the publications that deal with the entanglements between pandemics, ecology, and our broken relationships with more-than-human communities, see Dardenne (2021), Sebo (2022), and Browne and Sutton (2024). See also the webinar series organized by Charlotte E. Blattner, Kathrin Herrmann, and Eva Meijer (<https://animalsclimatehealth.com>).

2. Our project title hints at the semiotic dimensions of relationality: on the one hand, it visually plays with the idea that *words* encapsulate *worlds*, emphasizing that languages shape our reality just as much as they are shaped by it; on the other, it evokes the potential of the digital space to animate multimedia content and enhance the perception of more-than-human animacy.

3. On more-than-human animals as conspirators of their own liberation, itself an expression of agency and free will, see Colling (2020), Dugnoille and Vander Meer (2022).

to transdisciplinarity and nonlinear digital design. In particular, we discuss three interwoven areas where we apply a relational multispecies methodology: (1) developing an editorial process rooted in community care, (2) entering in dialogue with more-than-human persons, and (3) building a digital ecology.

This is not an article on results, outcomes, and metrics. Knowledge creation and shifts in cultural perceptions are not tangible activities and thus do not readily lend themselves to immediate measurement. Nonetheless, we conceive of this work as a form of activism that encourages letting go of anthropocentric privileges and enhancing “visibility of species in the academy” and beyond (Gaard 2012, 16). To this aim, *Animated Wor(l)ds* amplifies more-than-human voices and mobilizes readers to enter into conversation with all earthlings, learning to recognize and respect their individual autonomy.<sup>4</sup> Because we are just entering the production stage, in this article we focus mainly on the developmental process of the project rather than on the final “product.” To offer a glimpse behind the scenes, we include work-in-progress materials, such as assemblages of ideas, notes, and sketches. We also engage imaginatively with the editorial stages that still lie ahead, addressing questions of design and feasibility.

It is important to note that this is a self-made project from scratch, through trials and errors, with all the challenges and limitations that come with it, but also all the joys and opportunities for growth, which we wish to celebrate here. By choosing to “stay with the trouble” (Haraway 2016) of the unfinished, we prioritize authenticity and community knowledge, centering the wealth of intellectual and relational nutrients gathered by and from our contributors. Ultimately, we wish to make manifest the often hidden collaborative endeavors animating editorial practices and the invaluable contribution of precarious artists and academics to knowledge creation.

We are aware that realities in flux inevitably lead to conditions of uncertainty, unpredictability, and contestability and that emerging epistemologies may be hard to fully understand. Yet, we invite our readers to sit with the discomfort of unlearning human supremacy in order to make space for a regenerative paradigm to emerge. The interspecies narratives we craft in *Animated Wor(l)ds* seek to foster this process, awakening radical sensibilities rooted in wonder, curiosity, and a care-full attunement to normatively othered and silenced wor(l)ds.<sup>5</sup>

4. On the social benefits and long-term impact of artistic activism, see Duncombe (2024).

5. We draw upon Tamara Shefer, Michalinos Zembylas, and Vivienne Bozalek’s use of the term “care-full” to speak of both “a caring practice” and “a vigilant practice which is located within an alternative ethical, ontological and epistemological project” (2023, 150).

## Building a Community of Care: Towards a Relational Editorial Process

According to the ancient wisdom of ethical foraging, once we have received permission to take from the Land, we should always leave enough for wildlife and re-growth, being careful not to contribute to erosion of the Land and plants; to never harvest any protected, endangered, or at-risk species; and to avoid harvesting plants that are not robust and healthy.<sup>6</sup> Foraging is thus an act of reciprocity with the Earth, rooted in connection, active listening, and deep respect. According to Robin Wall Kimmerer's guidelines for the Honorable Harvest, sustained in small acts of daily life, we must:

*Give thanks for what you have been given.  
Give a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken.  
Sustain the ones who sustain you and the earth will last forever.*

(2013, 192)

We strive to take on this holistic approach in our editorial practice, viewing ourselves as gatherers of interwoven rhythms of knowledge sharing. As Indigenous researcher Shawn Wilson teaches us, not only is knowledge relational, but it is also shared “with the cosmos, it is with the animals, with the plants, with the earth” (2008, 56).

Following Lauren Tynan's reflections, we realize that relationality is not a metaphorical concept to capitalize on (2021, 598). Hence, we wish to cultivate a deep awareness of the interconnectedness of all life, which we embrace in both our thinking and editorial practice. This involves acknowledging our own positionalities as white individuals with a western European upbringing. Aware of Europe's historic role in perpetuating settler colonial relations and epistemicides, we find ourselves enmeshed in a lifelong process of unlearning and undoing, understanding it as a “becoming,” and knowing that emerging ideas and critical reflections will continue to shape and change our thinking and being. We thus come from a position of humility and respect towards Indigenous teachings, aspiring to honor the wisdom of our kin across cultures and species.<sup>7</sup> With our project, we respond to Dwayne Donald's invitation to compose “stories and

6. On responsible harvesting and Indigenous ethnobotany, see Turner (2014). For hands-on trainings on sustainable foraging, follow the I-Collective (<https://www.icollectiveinc.org>) and Linda Black Elk on TikTok (@linda.black.elk) and Instagram (@linda.black.elk).

7. In our commitment to validating Indigenous worldviews, we strive to unsettle dominant methodological paradigms and to produce “insurgent research” (Gaudry 2011). On decolonizing research approaches towards non-extractive research, see also Idwe, Madichie, and Rugara (2022).

mythologies that teach us how to be good relatives with all our relations—human and more-than-human” (2016, 11).<sup>8</sup>

Being a culturally diverse group spread across the globe that sought to build a tightly knit community, we initially faced the challenge of speaking in a non-native common language. In a process that we experienced as a sort of “linguistic convergence,” we gradually learned each other’s vocabulary while coming to understand and appreciate facets of our individual identities, navigating conflicts with compassion, and building trust to lean on each other’s strengths. This kind of careful discovery and harmonization is, we believe, not too distant from learning how to communicate with an individual who belongs to a different species and whose “grammar of animacy” (Kimmerer 2013, 48–59) we are not yet attuned to. Eva Meijer, an *Animated Wor(l)ds* contributor who has published groundbreaking research on the inner lives and sociality of more-than-human animals, articulates this clearly in her book *Animal Languages*, where she emphasizes that experience lies “at the heart of getting to know someone else” (2019a, 145). In other words, it is through intimate knowledge of another (more-than-human) person that we co-create a shared vocabulary that allows us to communicate even across species lines.<sup>9</sup>

In this spirit, we come together as a multispecies community to rethink communication and restore damaged cultural and linguistic landscapes. Echoing Eben Kirksey’s words, we form an “emergent ecology,” that “contain[s] the promise of supplanting deeply rooted structures,” thus aspiring to nourish hope in the face of rapid ecological destruction (2015, 1). Our contributors act as a disruptive force on said structures in various ways through their creative work. Shivani Shukla, for instance, conspires with mosses who have learned to thrive in the most unlikely places, to poetically subvert the objectifying language of economics. Disruption can also take the shape of non-conformity, of turning one’s attention deliberately away from the busy human world towards the more-than-human lives thriving in one’s backyard. There, Issy Clarke engages in mesmerizing feral conversations with her four-legged and winged neighbors, such as Bobbit, the robin: “I am still interacting with my collaborators and Bobbit seems to be courting a very sleek robin I named Tiny. She, if I am right about what’s

8. In this, we are also reminded of and inspired by Enrique Salmón’s notion of “kincentric ecology” according to which “everything that breathes has a soul. Plants, animals, humans, stones, the land, all share the same breath” (2000, 1328). Additionally, we closely and mindfully follow in the footsteps of those who have paved the way towards re-imagining multispecies co-existence, such as Lori Gruen and Michelle Westerlaken—animal studies scholars whose writings echo Indigenous teachings. Lori Gruen’s formulation of “engaged empathy” envisages how to fully attend to nature, rooting ourselves in “balance, perspective, attunement, sensitivity to animality and vulnerability, responsiveness, care” (2009, 25). Likewise, Michelle Westerlaken invites us to imagine “distant intimacies,” which can “open sites for multispecies learning that celebrate mystique, hidden dimensions, curiosities, and the inexhaustible otherness of other beings” (2021, 5). As editors, we take inspiration from these visions that invite speculation and curiosity in our interactions with more-than-humans.

9. On the parallels between intercultural and interspecies communication, see Spiegelhofer (2020).

happening, is amenable to being watched and today she led a good natured chance around my head a few times!”<sup>10</sup> For Issy, Bobbit and Tiny are not “objects” of study; they are persons, agential subjects in their own right—and very much a part of our *Animated Wor(l)ds* community.<sup>11</sup>

In recognizing the potential of collective knowledge as a means to shape wor(l)ds, we choose to follow a relational approach that counters established publishing models frequently embedded within vertical systems of power. As a result, we refuse to reproduce academic perfectionism and competitive individualism, which drastically clash with Indigenous paradigms rooted in relationality. Additionally, we recognize academic discourse and ecological praxis as inseparable aspects of our collective endeavor, and respond by creating space for the symbiotic exchange of knowledge and radical dreams.

We foreground reciprocity in our editorial practice to subvert hierarchical organizational structures and propose a counterexample to the publishing industry’s status quo. We thus openly welcomed our contributors’ views and suggestions from the very start, such as by organizing virtual group meetings to invite the participation of everyone involved in the decision-making process. Especially in moments of institutional and financial precarity, such as when we experienced difficulties with finding suitable grant opportunities, our coordinated efforts have been vital to overcome challenges encountered along the way. This heightened attention to each and everyone’s ideas and needs not only aligned our collective voices, but also compelled us to shift away from our original idea to publish a printed edited volume. We soon realized that the digital space held greater potential for animating our contributors’ experimental and speculative approaches to multispecies relationality. Their creative explorations called for a dynamic, multimedia format, which led us to re-conceptualize *Animated Wor(l)ds* as a born-digital publication that would support a wide array of research-creation projects.<sup>12</sup>

As part of our efforts to cultivate a supportive environment of communal growth, we sought alternatives to common patterns of review processes that can lead to uncertainty, doubts, and frustration. For this reason, we dedicated considerable attention to care-full feedback, which entailed providing strategic direction to each member of our

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10. Issy Clark, email exchange with Elizabeth Tavella and Eva Spiegelhofer, January 25, 2024.

11. Bobbit tragically passed away soon after Issy submitted their finalized video essay documenting their close encounters with Bobbit. This contribution is thus a testament both of his animacy and of the possibility to build enriching human-bird relationships through empathetic conversational acts. Bobbit’s legacy will live on in their recorded dialogues, creating a safe space for grieving also our more-than-human kin.

12. Research-creation can be described as “the complex intersection of art, theory, and research” (Truman and Springgay 2015, 152) and is experimental in nature. According to Natalie Loveless, “research-creation—at its most innovative—is dissonant, failing to fully cohere or belong, attempting to open up the playing field of disciplinary knowledge production to its polymorphous potential” (2019, 70).

group while creating the conditions for their creativity to thrive.<sup>13</sup> To do so, we offered individual brainstorming meetings at any stage of the writing process and took the time to provide additional feedback rounds, extending deadlines when necessary to prioritize personal needs and mental health.

An important lesson through these experiences was learning the art of harmonizing divergent opinions, sharing our suggestions while giving authors space to make choices based on their own preferences. In response to our invitation to provide us with feedback on the revision process, So Sinopoulos-Lloyd, a scholar, naturalist, and field philosopher, shared that it felt like “sitting round a campfire chatting about our edits and ideas rather than an overly formal or distant process.” This evocative image encapsulates our commitment to reciprocity and community care, and we feel invigorated by So’s description of *Animated Wor(l)ds* as “making philosophy more permeable and practical for our other-than-human kinships.”<sup>14</sup>

To foster genuine and respectful conversations between contributors, we coordinated an optional internal peer-review process that aimed at identifying common thematic threads and strengthening community ties. Our role was primarily to facilitate these reciprocal exchanges, matching those who signed up based on their fields of interest and specific set of skills. Through this experiment in alternative review praxis, we made space for what Vivienne Bozalek, Michalinos Zembylas and Tamara Shefer define as an example of “response-able peer-reviewing” (2019). We believe that such a practice opens up possibilities for co-writing and co-reviewing that hold the potential to transform and redistribute the relations between authors, editors and reviewers. When we think of communicating across the species line, we envision similar conversations rooted in attentive care and compassionate engagement.

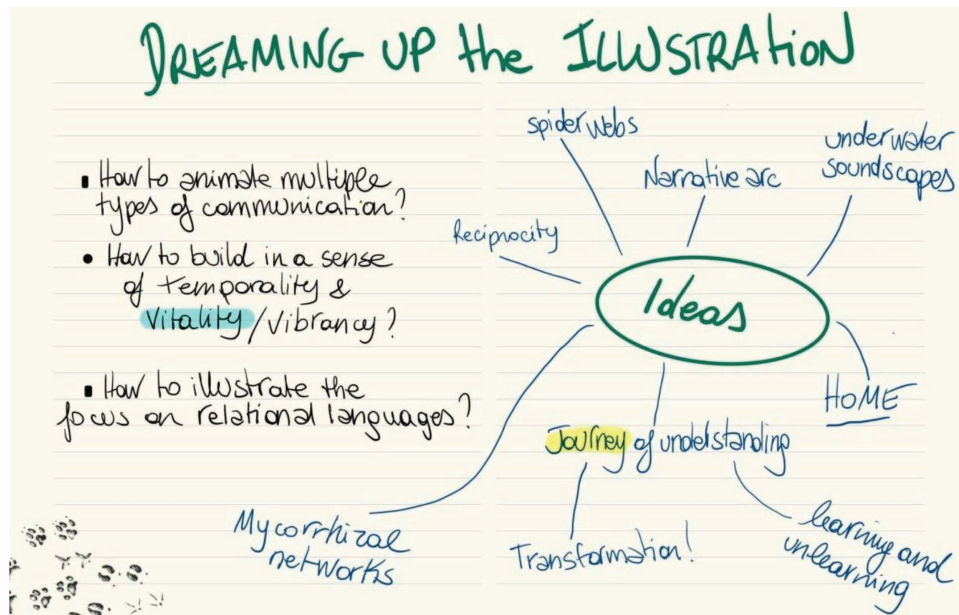
Besides trusting the vision of our community members as they experiment with individual ways of giving expression to the spirit of our project, we have established a vital collaboration with Diné (Navajo) artist Nicole Neidhardt, whose illustration will be featured on the landing page of the web publication, bringing to life its conceptual and relational nature. Nicole is the illustrator of *Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults* (Kimmerer 2022) and thus intimately familiar with Kimmerer’s teachings that lie at the heart of our project. Following an initial conversation with Nicole about the project, we met again online to “dream up the illustration” together, as she aptly called it (fig. 1).

This generative process of sharing visions and dreams and co-imagining multispecies futures was perfectly in tune with our mode of drawing inspiration from being in community. We thus wholeheartedly entrusted Nicole with our ideas like seeds,

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13. We are deeply grateful to Maia Baltzley, Steven Saada, and Jacy Highbarger who joined our group at the copy-editing stage to share writing advice with contributors and to generously support us in proofreading the contributions. Given our limited access to resources for this project, we strongly rely on this kind of invaluable community support.

14. So Sinopoulos-Lloyd, email exchange with Elizabeth Tavella and Eva Spiegelhofer, September 2, 2024.



**Figure 1.** Notes from “dreaming up the illustration” with artist Nicole Neidhardt and her agent Kaitlyn Corlett (February 2024). (Created with the application Goodnotes, <https://www.goodnotes.com>.)



**Figure 2.** Detail of the initial concept sketch in black and white of Nicole Neidhardt’s digital illustration (March 29, 2024). (Shared with the artist’s permission.)

confident that under her care they would flourish and sprout into a stunning projection of our collective imaginings (fig. 2).

To us, then, being *in* and *with* community means to acknowledge every individual member of our group, to give space to each person’s subjectivity, to cultivate attentiveness towards each other and our more-than-human kin, and to sustain our collective well-being as we build multispecies wor(l)ds together.<sup>15</sup>

15. On the conceptual and ontological resonance between caring and relating, see Puig de la Bellacasa (2012).



## Conversing and Collaborating across Species Lines

Our commitment to cultivating kinship networks does not stop at the human. Instead, community building for us involves attuning to more-than-human wor(l)ds and engaging in interspecies dialogues. It is no coincidence that the words *communication* and *community* share the same etymological roots, both connected to the idea of acting together. When thinking about collaboration with other animals, the presumed inability to communicate across species lines immediately inhibits our imagination, and we tend to see limitations where there could be possibilities. Normative views of language that remain stuck in a logocentric, speciesist logic represent a deep rupture in the relational continuum.

As Louise Westling states, “other animals surely have ways of perceiving and communicating realities that are not obviously tangible or visible to us” (2014, 124). While we may not be able to entirely comprehend their conversations, it is nevertheless our responsibility to acknowledge their existence with curiosity, countering their continued systematic erasure. Instead of feeling disheartened by the impossibility of complete understanding, we let ourselves be guided by creative intuition to attune more deeply to interspecies communications and the possibilities they hold. Where does it take us to leave behind anthropocentric definitions of language? Which doors open up if we dare to think of language more broadly, unconventionally, and relationally?

With *Animated Wor(l)ds*, we invite contributors and readers alike to embark on this speculative journey, to immerse themselves in the “art of noticing” (Tsing 2015). In Anna Tsing’s words, this means seeing things with unfettered imagination and paying attention to the “unruly edges” (2015, 17–26), where exciting and transformative encounters can take place, if only we learn how to be fully and truly *present*.<sup>16</sup> Maria Kaika theorizes a “scholarship of presence” that involves adopting the dual perspective of frog and eagle, the first encouraging us to “zoom-in empirically, make our hands ‘dirty’ and splash (a bit like a frog) into the murky waters and messiness of local struggles and conflicts,” while the other teaches us to “zoom-out, to distance our gaze (a bit like an eagle) from the militant particularisms of local socio-environmental struggles in order to see the bigger picture” (2018, 1715). Wary of the use of other animals as metaphors, we still agree that there is much we can learn from eagles about how to see the world more acutely from a distance and from frogs about how to immerse ourselves more fully in its wonders.<sup>17</sup>

16. Donna Haraway also invites us to linger on the edges, since “we need stories (and theories) that are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections” (2016, 160).

17. On more-than-human animals as teachers and carriers of healing wisdom, see Gumbs (2020).

In a similar spirit, Julie Andreyev refers to the combination of outward-looking attentiveness and inward reflection as “biophilic attention.” She describes it as a methodological approach that implies “using our own sensing and feeling bodies,” so that “we can open up to the vitality of nonhuman life and ecosystems in our homes, our neighborhoods and our regions, and simultaneously get to know our own felt responses” (2021, 7). As a vital member of our *Animated Wor(l)ds* community, Julie practices this biophilic attention in her site-specific sound art performance in collaboration with trees.

While language can function as a tool of separation and control, as Ida Bencke and Jørgen Bruhn suggest, it is also “a kind of *gathering* technology that enables collectivity and continuity between bodies and ideas” (2022, 9, emphasis added). In our frame of thought, language encompasses various forms of meaning-making, including “birdsong, insect calls, even the patient shrugs and pulses of geology” (Newell, Quetchenbach, and Nolan 2020, i), that together make up the semiotic plurality of more-than-human landscapes. This perspective allows for radically new considerations of multispecies languages to emerge, capable of undermining the myth of human superiority to its logocentric roots. In this direction, Eva Meijer argues that “[l]anguage plays a large part in the formulation of new relations and the creation of new forms of coexistence, because it is through language that we can learn to better understand others, and they us, which can serve as a starting point for strengthening common worlds” (2019b, 83).<sup>18</sup>

In order to form meaningful multispecies connections based on reciprocal understanding, we strive to follow research methods that are ecological in nature. In practice, this means attuning to all those individuals who dwell at the periphery of our perception and embracing non-invasive ways to enter into conversation with another person, regardless of their species membership.<sup>19</sup> Considering that many species, including our own, speak not only via vocalization but also through scent, posture, gaze, or even vibration, it is essential to foster multisensory approaches that align with more-than-human ways of experiencing life. We therefore recognize also the somatic dimensions of language and recover the bodily and “sensuous” awareness that David Abram identifies as the origin of our nature as speaking beings (1996).

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18. Among the many scholars who have exposed the faulty circular reasoning behind defining language as a distinctive and unique human property are Barbara Noske (1997), Alastair Pennycook (2018), and Mel Y. Chen (2012, 23–56). Along the same lines, David Abram suggests that “our own speaking does not set us outside of the animate landscape but—whether or not we are aware of it—inscribes us more fully in its chattering, whispering, soundful depths” (1996, 55).

19. On ethical and reciprocal interspecies collaboration, see Jevbratt (2009) and Colombino and Bruckner (2023).

This embodied practice of becoming-with the more-than-human world rejects conventional (western) observational methods that require emotional distance from the subjects of study. Sensory sensitivity enables modes of immersion that connect us more deeply to the surrounding environment. Nicole Brown, whose contribution to *Animated Wor(l)ds* explores the stigmergic narratives surrounding the orcas of the Salish Sea, describes the experience as “one of the most embodied acts of writing I have ever participated in.”<sup>20</sup> As we strive to collaborate with individuals of other species to create mindful art and research, we become caring witnesses to the lived experiences of unseen and unheard kin. Alexandra Ismahani-Hammonds, for instance, contributes a poem commemorating an encounter with an octopus killed for food, and Susan Pyke sings in chorus with her bovine neighbors exploited for their milk.

By paying attention also to suppressed or neglected experiences, we question what matters epistemically, ethically, and methodologically and, in turn, undermine established assumptions about what is worthy of study. This process of redefinition of worthiness, in the words of Lindsay Hamilton and Nik Taylor, “legitimises the use of nontraditional forms of data such as reflective writing about emotions or senses, sounds or visual stimuli” (2017, 79). We therefore enthusiastically welcomed contributions that challenge traditional academic research in favor of experimental forms of writing.

In particular, we encouraged our contributors to adopt a conversational writing style, privileging personal narratives that make space for emotionality and self-awareness in solidarity with our more-than-human kin.<sup>21</sup> For instance, journalist and author Hilal Sezgin shares her experience as caregiver of a group of sheep and their mutual efforts to build trust, cooperation, and communication strategies. Likewise, Rachel Yerbury, a clinical psychologist who applies an ecocentric perspective in her practice, tells of her close encounters with marine dwellers in the waters of Australia’s Eastern Coast. Both their stories relate intimate interspecies encounters that foreground subjectivity, empathy, and vulnerability as they engage with their local multispecies communities.

Several contributors also bring together complementary skills in co-authored pieces, such as Rosie Benn and Florian Heinze who combined their expertise in the arts and in philosophy to explore conflictual relationships between farmers and wildlife in the context of biocyclic vegan agriculture.<sup>22</sup> According to them, finding a common voice

20. Nicole Brown, email exchange with Elizabeth Tavella and Eva Spiegelhofer, September 2, 2023.

21. Marie Beauchamps notes that styles of writing that do not conform to the formal tone of academic writing, such as storytelling, characterization, and focalization, are systematically pushed back and mis-read as non-academic, yet “they contain knowledge in their own right” (2021, 394).

22. Among the contributors who have engaged in collaborative practice are also So Sinopoulos-Lloyd with Pinar Sinopoulos-Lloyd, who contribute an essay accompanied by a short film and multiple photographs on the semiotics of wildlife

was “one of the biggest but also most enjoyable challenges of the project,” stressing that reciprocal communication requires “navigating needs and boundaries” with kindness and curiosity. They describe their collaboration across species lines as a creative attempt to “strive for, articulate, and dream of a more caring world.” Rosie views both her ethnofiction film and their accompanying essay as providing a platform to the often unwelcome deers who visit the farms and as an act of interspecies translation that “invites people to observe their gestures through a different lens.”<sup>23</sup>

With *Animated Wor(l)ds*, we also promote language that disrupts, questions, and reframes normative—often oppressive—ways of relating with marginalized individuals of our own species and our more-than-human kin. For this reason, our attention to language choices is deeply political, since we are well aware of the power of language to influence cultural norms and provoke new ways of thinking.<sup>24</sup> In our view, the benefits of inclusive language for those who are socially marginalized outweigh the discomfort that linguistic shifts may cause. In the project’s style guide, we accordingly recommend the deliberate use of liberatory language that acknowledges personhood, individuality, and agency across species (fig. 3).

Recognizing that languages also have their own animacy and are constantly changing and evolving, we propose creative alternatives to conventional ways of addressing our more-than-human kin. Similarly, we offer guidelines on gender-inclusive language and capitalizations regarding racial and ethnic identities. Instead of presenting our contributors with strict rules to follow, we invite them to push our collective epistemic boundaries further and to participate with us in the creation of a language that unsettles and reshapes dominant cultural perceptions.

## Impressions of a Digital Ecology in the Making

As we turn to the digital publication growing out of our collaborative efforts, we are keenly aware of the potentially contradictory nature of making a case for embodied modes of (scholarly) communication within a mostly digital environment. Yet, while the disembodiment of the digital age and disconnection from physicality may pose an epistemic challenge, we actually see it as an opportunity to open up human-made—and

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tracking; Chantelle Bayes and Josephine Browne who think through their own creative writing efforts to express the subjective lives of marine animals; Danqiong Zhu and Terrance Caviness, a field environmental philosopher and a bryologist, examining the cultural implications of scientific and Indigenous nomenclature of bryophytes; and Maria Martelli, who collaborated with sound artist Teodora Retegan to create a video to her poem on multispecies homes.

23. Excerpts from the reflective commentary by Rosie Benn and Florian Heinze in response to our invitation to share insights on “cooperative relationality,” August 20, 2024.

24. On language, speciesism, and animal liberation, see Dunayer (2001) and Nguyen (2019). On linguistic justice as a means to achieve social justice, see Nee et al. (2021).

AW TERMINOLOGY	TERMS TO BE REPLACED	COMMENT
<p>more-than-human (person / individual / etc.)</p> <p><i>OR “other” (when referring to humans and “other animals”)</i></p>	<p>nonhuman, non-human, other-than-human, etc.</p>	<p>We ask you to use the phrase “more-than-human” rather than alternatives, unless your argument specifically addresses and problematizes the implications of one of these alternative terms (e.g., nonhuman).</p> <p>We likewise encourage you to refer to our more-than-human kin as “persons” where applicable.</p>
<p>they/she/he (when referring to animals, plants, and other life-forms)</p>	<p>it</p>	<p>To heighten our readers’ sense that the natural world is indeed alive and animate, make sure not to objectify individuals by referring to them as “it”; e.g., “The fish swam towards me, they seemed curious.”</p>
<p>Plural for animal species</p>	<p>collective singular</p>	<p>For some animal species, it is common to linguistically reduce a group of them to a noun in the collective singular (sheep, deer, fish, etc.).</p> <p>In AW, we ask you to deliberately add a plural <i>s</i> (even if automatic spell-checking marks these unconventional plural forms as incorrect); e.g., “many fishes” (not “many fish”).</p>

**Figure 3.** Table excerpt from the *Animated Wor(l)ds* style guide.

thus human-dominated—spaces to more-than-human wor(l)ds. We do so by reimagining research within a technological context that offers tools to vividly convey myriad multisensorial lived experiences “sliding off the digital screen” (Abram 1996, 162).

Given that our community is geographically and temporally distributed, we also acknowledge that the digital landscape is what makes our social interactions possible in the first place. We think with Donna Haraway when we conceive of ourselves as a “cybernetic organism” (2006, 5–6), a truly posthumanist assemblage of multispecies collaborators—transcending the nature-culture divide and creating our very own digital ecology. According to Attila Márton, digital ecology in the context of digitalized worlds means “to understand organized complexes of heterogeneous parts and relationships (i.e., ecosystems) without assuming inherent, natural boundaries between the biotic, abiotic, social, mental, or mechanical” (2022, 4).

When we speak of creating a digital ecology, we have in mind a synergy between digital technologies and more-than-human wor(l)ds. Storytelling thus becomes a symbiotic process that traverses species lines mediated by digital tools. And so, finely tuned

technological setups enable trees and humans to perform music in unison, make wind visible and audible as carrier of meaning, and integrate the soundscapes of extinct and extant amphibians into a chorus.<sup>25</sup>

While digital technologies often interfere with our animal senses, we believe that they also hold the transformative potential to (re)connect us with realities that unfold beyond human perception. Much of this potential lies in the possibility of incorporating a variety of multimedia elements in digital publications. For instance, audio and video files are especially powerful in animating the voices and kinesthetic presence of more-than-human collaborators and all organisms reverberating with sound, movement, and gestures. Even electrical signals, imperceptible to our human senses (e.g., bats ultrasounds) and color-coded communicative acts (e.g., chameleons) can potentially be represented, thus making the digital space astonishingly inclusive of multispecies languages. While sensory communications transmitted through smell and touch are perhaps more difficult to include in the digital sphere, our contributors also invite readers to engage with their own ecologies as a way of expanding their vocabulary beyond the human.

The plurality of multispecies wor(l)ds also defies systematic and linear organization which most of us are accustomed to in our thinking. Just like a species taxonomy, a table of contents implies a hierarchical structure, according to which content is organized based on relevance and pre-set categories. Previous attempts have shown that it is possible, yet difficult, to overcome these organizational conventions in a printed format or even a typical e-book.<sup>26</sup> A nonlinear design, by contrast, allows us to visually express our relational arguments to full effect, without being limited by epistemic categorizations.<sup>27</sup> Besides being more dynamic, and thus more closely resembling the vibrancy of more-than-human wor(l)ds, nonlinear design also supports an interactive user experience. Echoing the concept of “passionate immersion”—that is, “becoming curious and so entangled, ‘learning to be affected’ and so perhaps to understand and care a little differently” (van Dooren, Kirksey, and Münster 2016, 6)—we build the grounds for immersive ways of knowing and being with others.

To fully visualize the network of relations between contributions, we draw inspiration from natural principles and biomimicry, which allows us to create continuity between content and visual design. More specifically, we take the notion of the web as in *website* quite literally, reminded of spiders as unequalled artists when it comes to

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25. These examples allude to three pieces that will be featured in *Animated Wor(l)ds*: namely, Julie Andreyev’s “Branching Songs: Recital with a Forest as Multispecies Relating,” Marie-Andrée Pellerin’s “Wind-ing: An Aeolian R[hhh]apsody,” and Jami Reimer’s “Wetland Mouthpiece: Speculative Bioacoustics and Amphibian Voice.”

26. An example of such an attempt can be found in Burnard et al. and their “visual mapping of topic flows” (2022, ix).

27. To achieve this, Nicole (the artist on our team) suggested developing a circular table of contents, an idea we are currently experimenting with.

“web” design. Due to speciesist assumptions and phobias, our eight-legged kin are often unwelcomed and feared visitors when encountered in human spaces. Yet they populate myth and folklore worldwide and are often acknowledged as skilled crafters and expert weavers.<sup>28</sup> We think of them as teachers, learning from their storytelling abilities how to weave narratives relationally. As we trace their threads, we envision the digital landscape of *Animated Wor(l)ds* as a relational system akin to a web of multidimensional entanglements and mutually sustaining knots.

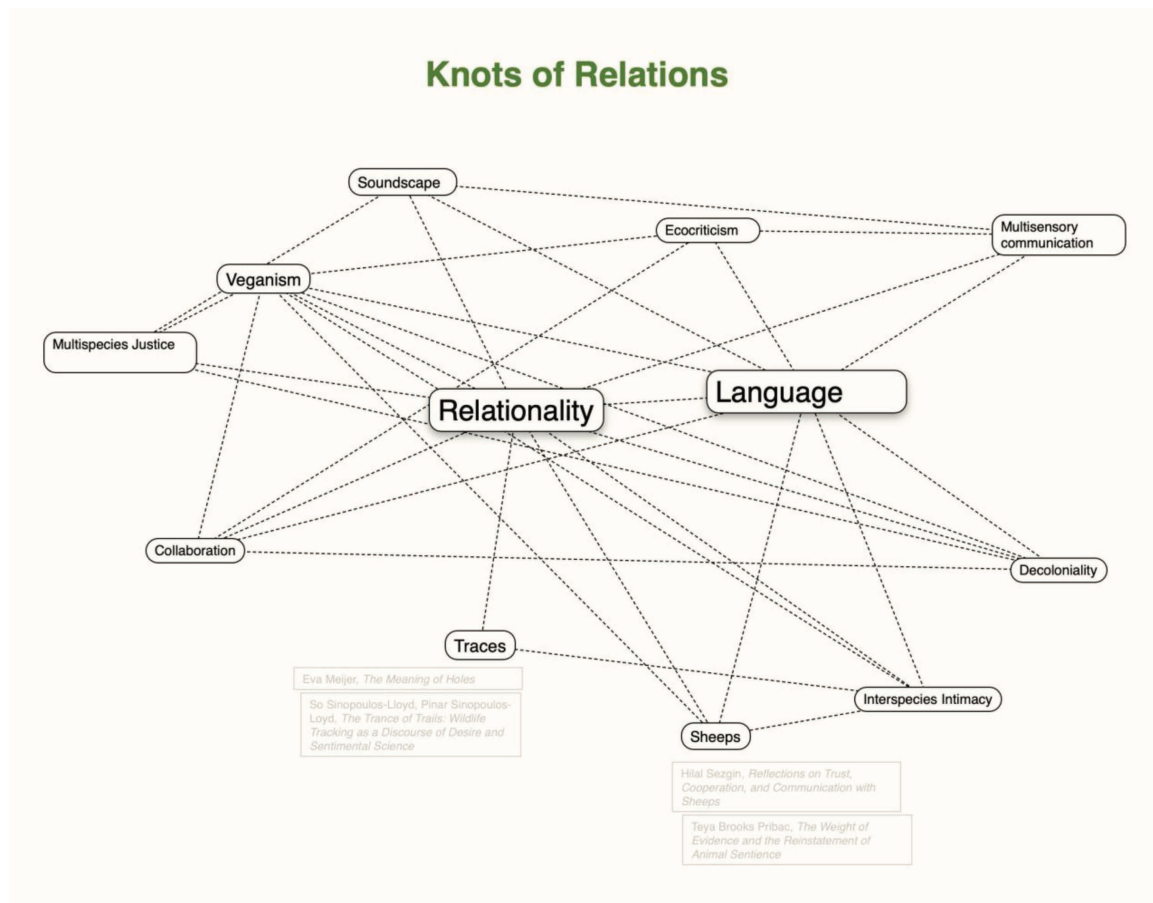
Among the strategies we employ to make these connections “tangible” is the use of hyperlinks within the texts to jump from one key concept to another. The intention is to highlight multiple synergies between contributions that allow readers to explore the publication following flexible navigation paths. In drawing together the conceptual and thematic threads running through the contributions, we follow the teachings of Shawn Wilson, who states that “theories and ideas are only knots in the strands of relationality that are not physically visible but are nonetheless real” (2008, 87).

The sample diagram (fig. 4) displays a selection of key concepts randomly distributed in nodes that vary in size based on the frequency of each term across contributions, whereas the boxes in lighter font represent nested dropdown menus with hyperlinks to the contributions featuring the term. This experiment in data visualization is inevitably patchy and illustrates just one of the many possible visual renditions of content and connections. We include it here to illustrate how digital design can aid readers in identifying patterns within contributions, connecting ideas, and reflecting on how they translate into real-world practices. Visualizations cannot, however, replace a close engagement with individual contributions because of the limitations and biases that come with translating texts and stories into “data.”<sup>29</sup> So while the different sizes of the knots may suggest a hierarchical relationship between clusters, implying that certain nodes have more weight than others, we consider each element to be equally relevant in the knowledge ecosystem of our community. We realize that the final look and feel of the publication depend to a large extent on the affordances of the software and publishing platform we will use and that it might look different from what we imagine at this stage. Regardless of potential limitations, we hope that our creative intuition will inspire future projects to further explore the potentials of the digital space for promoting ecological principles and multispecies justice.

To support the growth of our digital ecology, once the website goes live as a stable publication, we plan to launch a community blog featuring diverse content such as

28. On the cultural depictions of spiders throughout history and across cultures, see Michalski and Michalski (2010). On the spider web analogy, see Jiménez (2018). Not surprisingly, artists have always been fascinated by spiders’ craftsmanship, and there is a long tradition of building an analogy between human artistry and spider webbing; see Dussol (2011).

29. On the pitfalls of data visualization, its potential epistemological biases, and social and ethical implications of how “data” are identified and handled, see, for instance, Drucker (2011) or Schäfer and van Es (2017).



**Figure 4.** Sample diagram of the network of relations between contributions. (Created using the application Scapple, <https://www.literatureandlatte.com/scapple/overview/>.)

commentaries, interviews, and threaded discussions. As such, the *Animated Wor(l)ds* blog will function as a space to continue the conversations initiated by the digital publication and to expand our relational network. Anyone will be able to join our community by engaging with its content through comments and responses, while contributors can publish follow-up research, and project affiliates can use it as a space to share related artworks, pedagogical resources, and reviews. By engaging critically with the publication and joining in conversations on the blog, we ultimately wish to inspire our readers to nurture authentic and transformative relationships across species in their daily lives.

### Envisioning Multispecies Futures

This exploration of the vital collaborative work that occurred behind the scenes of *Animated Wor(l)ds* has heightened even further a sense of interconnectedness and



interdependence with(in) our community. We wish for these collective efforts to be celebrated instead of remaining unseen and unrewarded. Perhaps, it is only after being enmeshed in bringing this project to life for over three years that we have come to fully realize how strongly it has (re)shaped our thinking and the fibers of our being. It is with deep appreciation that we open ourselves up to the myriad possibilities of a truly relational world, a circumstance that entails the re-positioning and even the dissolution of selfhood.

We came to understand that to truly embrace a multispecies lens entails grounding ourselves in a relational ethics and visions of collective flourishing that can be applied also to editorial practices and digital landscapes. On our continued journey of unlearning and attunement, we are inspired by our contributors and their more-than-human collaborators. Their creative leaps have encouraged us to reimagine multispecies research beyond accepted methodologies within western academia, often pushing us gently but insistently outside of our comfort zone.

By opening a dialogical engagement with a variety of ways of knowing across species boundaries, we come to value the idea that “this porous, always open horizon—of embodied beings—is where singularities touch, and are touched” (Introna 2021, 213). In so doing, we animate an ecological praxis that relies on what John Shotter calls “witness-thinking” (2006), an approach where we engage responsively in relationships and processes “from within” our living involvement with them. In this process, the knowing subject/known object dualism disappears, and research itself becomes a space of opportunity where new ontologies that unsettle anthropocentric perceptions of reality take shape.

As we continue to learn in community what it means to be care-full gatherers of knowledge, *Animated Wor(l)ds* invites readers to embark on this journey with us. We welcome curious humans to immerse themselves in a speculative world of relations, where individuals of all species converse and conspire to imagine multispecies futures together.

## Author Biographies

**Elizabeth Tavella** is a scholar of critical animal studies and environmental humanities whose work builds on decolonial methods and queer ecology to investigate interlinked systems of oppression and liberation histories from an artistic and cultural perspective. Elizabeth has held a postdoctoral teaching fellowship and a research position at the University of Chicago, with affiliations in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures and the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality, and teaching appointments at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and The University of

Illinois (UIC). Elizabeth has contributed book chapters to *Animals and Race* (Michigan State University Press, 2023) and *Storying the Ecocatastrophe* (Routledge, 2024) and has forthcoming publications in the journals *Transpositiones* and *Studi Culturali*. They are the creative writing and arts editor of *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment* and co-editor of the multimedia digital publication *Animated Wor(l)ds: Language and Relationality for Multispecies Kinship*.

**Eva Spiegelhofer** (she/her) is an independent researcher with a joint master's degree in cultural studies. In her research on relationality and multispecies kinship, Eva focuses on animal languages and interspecies communication, investigating the potential of dialogue between humans and other animals from a socio-cultural perspective. She currently holds a position at the Vienna Anthropocene Network at the University of Vienna, Austria, and is co-editor of the forthcoming digital publication *Animated Wor(l)ds: Language and Relationality for Multispecies Kinship*.

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