



Transnational tomorrows today:

Graduate student futures
and imaginaries for art education

Guest Editors:
Anita Sinner, Kazuyo Nakamura
and Elly Yazdanpanah

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ABOUT THE e-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

CANADA

WHAT CONNECTS A BOOK AND A TREE?

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ABSTRACT

Material-discursive creation offers an entryway to engage with theoretical frameworks, including new materialism, non-dualism and more-than-humanism. This project was inspired by a glocal collaboration and expansive exploration of the SDGs *Climate Action* (Goal #13) and *Quality Education* (Goal #4), which has led me to the theme, *the life cycle of knowledge*, and in turn, the question: *What connects a book and a tree?* Conceptual and material ruminations on this question are rendered through narrative and collage, which weave a dialogue with and through one another. This story is a descriptive journey with a coverless book through my everyday life as a graduate student in Montreal, Canada, which leads to more questions than answers. Multimedia collages illustrate the layers, textures, saturations and contrasts that are entangled throughout the written story. This creative exploration is intended to frame the repetition, patterns and serendipity of day-to-day life through a diffractive, colourful and playful lens.

KEYWORDS

Material-discursive creation; multimedia; collage; SDG #4, 13

I have been learning about the Sustainable Development Goals outlined by the United Nations alongside my colleagues at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada and Hiroshima University, in Hiroshima, Japan. In collaboration with five other students, my group met weekly to reflect on how we see ourselves entangled with/in the SDGs. Through these meetings and discussions, we have connected within our shared practice of walking outdoors, which became the common point of reference we built upon in our work. On our walks down different streets, in different cities 10,748 kilometres apart, we found parallels in our steps and in our shared journeys. The SDGs *Quality Education* (Goal #4) and *Climate Change* (Goal #13) (United Nations 2019) were threaded throughout all our experiences and manifested themselves in particularly unique ways through each of our eyes. As artists, researchers and teachers from around the world, our passion for quality education and environmental awareness connected our global and local (glocal) communities. This established a strong bond of shared identity in who we are, where our walking led us and where it will continue to take us. Our conversations throughout this project introduced a theme to my life that became intertwined with various elements of my lived experiences and studies: *the life cycle of knowledge*.

THEORETICAL OPENINGS

This inquiry combines narrative and collage to explore the theme, *the life cycle of knowledge*, by proposing the question: *What connects a book and a tree?* This question was sparked by my encounters with a coverless book found on one of my walks through Montreal in the fall of 2021. This found object offered a creative rupture for me in my thinking about the shared knowledge of human and non-human voices in academia and beyond, and the experience of searching for one's own identity within academic scholarship. Informed by Kathryn Strom's (2018) investigation into the accessibility of high theory, I stage Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1988) seminal discussion about rhizomes, roots, books, assemblages and trees, in a non-hierarchical framework to attend to everyday life. Through a new materialist lens, and building off of Tim Ingold's (2010) concept of *things*, I adopt the question, *What connects a book and a tree?* as a catalyst to explore the contrasts and continuums between

epistemology and ontology, and knowing and being. Through an attuned awareness of the entanglements between ecological, social, and cultural webs of reality and beyond, I map a nonlinear story of *intra-actions* between myself and various matters that *matter* within my day-to-day experiences in my home and in my local community (Barad 2014). With attention and care braided within the autonomy and agency of places and *things*, my narrative is one of shared knowledge, relationalities and existence.

METHODOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS

I have embraced the inquiry approach of narrative as research through ruminations where I consider the dynamics of story, interpretation and discourse, as discussed by Carl Leggo (2008). I experiment with using the porous nature of words as a tool to examine the material realities of everyday life that have the potential to cross borders between space and time. Through the use of rich, thick atmospheric descriptions inspired by Kathleen Stewart (2011), I set the stage for a place of conversation and exploration with and through the content of my writing. Poetic repetition of words and phrases embeds Karen Barad's (2014) concepts of difference and diffraction into this work, where shifting contexts expose varied meanings of matter, and matters of meaning.

Along with my narrative I have created collaged visual images that embody the materiality of the linguistic elements of this work. Inspired by Kathleen Vaughn (2005) and Paula Gerstenblatt (2013), I use collage as a method of material exploration, where I have layered meaning and matter that resides in the 2D, 3D, digital and natural realms (see Figure 1). Collage has enabled me to tangibly activate, explore, tease apart, and sew back together the pieces of my story. Photographs of objects, hand-drawn elements, outdoor landscapes and natural materials are entangled through transparencies, cuts and rips, collectively constructing a visual dialogue that speaks back to and along with the narrative in this inquiry (see Figure 2). In turn, these visual components embody a physical representation of the rhizomatic analogy of the book and the tree (see Figure 3).

Through these methods, my investigation of *Quality Education* (SDG #4) and *Climate Change* (Goal #13) culminate in a *compost* story, where the cyclical patterns of life and death in nature and knowledge are layered like pages and leaves in the intertwined concepts of autumn and found books (Haraway 2019). In the narrative and collages that are rendered in the following section, I have experimented with the flux and flow of knowing and being through the analogy of a book and a tree, inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's statement, 'The tree imposes the verb "to be", but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and ... and ... and ..." This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb to be' (Deleuze & Guattari 1988: 25). I have embraced this idea by thinking about how a book full of knowledge has a *life cycle*, and before it was a book, it was a tree which held an alternative form of knowledge within the natural world. Through these experimental thoughts, I explore what it means to be an artist, researcher and teacher who is conscientious of climate action globally and locally. My creative rendering is intended to playfully and inclusively encourage endless interpretations from readers, as they are invited to accompany me as I encounter a coverless book that I found on a walk.

What Connects a Book and a Tree?

What connects a book and a tree?

This question does not have a beginning, but I will *start* with a walk.

One foot, the next.

A tempo, a pulse.

The next foot, the next.

Autumn air is always heavy with contrast and transition. The flow of change is woven within the chilled winds that find balance amongst fiery leaves. I pass by a brown box, sitting, waiting on the side of the road, full of things looking for their next home. This is a common occurrence in Montreal, especially when the city shifts as students move, schools open, and temperatures drop. Things often are put aside by hands, sometimes finding new ones, sometimes never to be found again. I do not always look in these boxes, not if I have somewhere to be, or if I am lost in a thought. But on this particular walk, within this particular tempo, I pause and look inside.

A pile of old books is stacked in this soggy cardboard space of limbo.

I look down at the books.

The books look up at me.

A small coverless book catches my eye. With the front chapter or so ripped off, the book *starts* somewhere in the middle, much like a Deleuzian fold. This was not the beginning, but it was a *start*. Held in my hands, found once more, the raw pages of this book feel exposed, simultaneously lacking with bareness, and displayed in abundance. I continue on my walk with my newfound thing, turning towards Mount Royal, the landmark mountain of Montreal. I wonder what knowledge is waiting in this book, on these pages, between these words. I ponder what cover had been stripped away. Was it discarded and lost in the wind? Or had it been tucked away before I came along, like a special treasure of intention by hands not my own?

The mountain is magnetic this time of year. Its colours of fall are vibrant and loud, yet damp and muted. I sit under a tree on this autumn day, pull out the book with no cover and open it up. One leaf falls, landing purposely on a page. A gentle and intentional touch, a nostalgic hello. I brush the leaf off onto the dewy earth beside me. Returning home again, yet never quite leaving, this leaf took its place layered above the roots from which it came and to which it will return (see Figure 1).

I look down at the book.

The book looks up at me.

And on this particular day, in this particular tempo, I question...

What connects a book and a tree?



This is not the beginning but it is a start. Photographs of the coverless book, natural materials found on the forest floor, and hand drawn gestures are layered digitally and intertwined within the activation of negative space. The presence of the being within the found book is invoked through colourful eyes that peer back at the viewer from ripped pages that reside somewhere in the middle. Their stare reminding us of the intra-action that exists between those who read and that which is read.

Figure 1.

Natalie Pavlik, *The Look of a Book*, 2021. Mixed Media Collage.

This question did not begin or end here, and was it a question at all? Maybe a statement or an observation fit more clearly between these concepts, these pages, these layered leaves. These thoughts trace my mind as I start again, pacing through my home, looking for the perfect resting spot for my newfound thing. The book with no cover finds its place on a shelf beside a clock with no batteries. Displayed for its form and not for its content. One less working clock is a blessing this time of year when moments slip through every crack. Autumn is rich with ticking time as days get shorter, papers are due, deadlines approach. Leaves fall steadily.

*One leaf, the next.
A tempo, a pulse.
The next leaf, the next.*

Life cycles of places and things are illuminated in autumn light that streams stronger and through the growing negative space where leaves once were. With every tick of every clock, branches become more exposed. Displayed, abundance, lacking, bareness, unsure in which order these words belong. The comfort of this transition rests within the knowledge that those leaves will be back to start again. Because a coverless book never has a beginning, but it always has a start. This question returns to where it never quite left...

What connects a book and a tree?



This is not the beginning but it is a start. Contrasting colours, textures, shapes and dimensions are piled upon each other in the digital realm. An oil pastel rests beside the marks it has mapped, and once again our view is met by an eye beyond. A point of contact with a presence that is layered within our story, regardless of which page we read.

Figure 2.

Natalie Pavlik, *The Middle of a Book*, 2021. Mixed Media Collage.

How to answer a question with no beginning? I deliberate this as I *start* again tracing through recently reopened library halls at my university. I collect a pile of books to read, to tick off of a list of things I could know. Autumn light filtered through the fluorescent bulbs feels just as exposing as the light which streams through bare trees. Transitions sing through the steady pulse of moving students who hum a rhythm, like a ticking clock.

One student, the next.

A tempo, a pulse.

The next one, the next.

I build a pile of books made of covers and pages that blend into one and put the layered stack in my backpack. With no covers, no beginnings, where would these stories *start* and end? Would they seep into each other and become one? Or would they lie like layered leaves? Their weight on my shoulders as I walk home, one foot, the next, is dense with shifts and flows. This is autumn air. What shoulders carried these books before me? What hands will find them after? What trees that once held leaves are waiting in these inky papered ideas and thick protective covers? Predictable like a ticking clock, I question...

What connects a book and a tree?

A question left waiting in chilled wind to be spoken of again and again. I *start* once more back in my home where I stack my library books.

One book, the next.

A tempo, a pulse.

The next book, the next.

Fingerprints visible on their layered spines, leaves that fall leaving light behind (see Figure 2).

I look down at these books.

These books look up at me.

I stand and walk one foot, the next, and pick up the clock and coverless book. I put batteries in the clock, its ticking reminds me of leaves on dewy earth. I turn on a lamp as autumn sun sets, and draw trees in the leaves of the

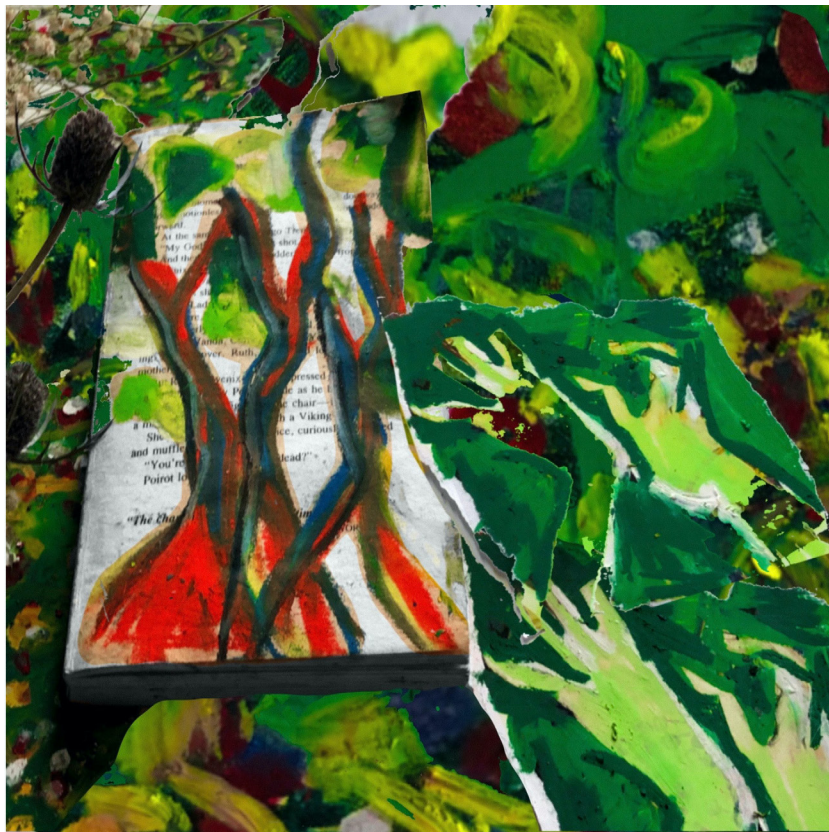
coverless book. This was not the beginning but it was a start. My pastels glide over spaces and words and my ideas flow alongside my gestured marks. The negative space between these lines pulls our question back into focus...

What connects a book and a tree?

A question that might be an answer itself. I start again within my own hands. I search amongst the intentions of my coloured curves and the smudges of my fingers (see Figure 3).

I look down at these marks.

These marks look up at me.



This is not the beginning but it is a start. Hands are outstretched and grasp at one front of the coverless book, ripped and layered, green and read. Pastel marks seep through porous pages of paper, of words, of lines, of spaces. Tall unfolding trunks and branches extend beyond the border of the page, joining the layered background composed of drawings and dried flowers.

Figure 3.

Natalie Pavlik, *The Start of a Book*, 2021. Mixed Media Collage.

As my thoughts trace through jagged, abstract shapes and hues, they become branches and leaves and landscapes. Composed within this space and time where forests fill a coverless book, a choir of knowledge sings loud and clear

One voice, the next.

A tempo, a pulse.

The next voice, the next.

Paths between these lines of words and lines of trunks, clear the way for singing autumn wind. As these ideas stack themselves together through my hands, my tempo, my pulse, I invite those reading through these layered leaves to join me in questioning the seeds of it all...

What is it to know and be?

What connects a book and a tree?

WHAT CONNECTS A BOOK AND A TREE?

My investigation as an artist, researcher and teacher into the intricacies of the SDGs *Quality Education* (Goal #4) and *Climate Change* (Goal #13) began within a *glocal* collaboration between Hiroshima University and Concordia University. Through conversing and creating with a diverse, brilliant and inquisitive team of people, my awareness of the rhizomatic potential of my surroundings was activated. My many walks throughout the fall of 2021 were infused with inspiration as my eyes became attuned to details in my local community and climate that I then shared with my global community through photographs and descriptions. This practice led me to explore the relationalities between environmental factors, knowing and being, embodied through questioning, *What connects a book and a tree?* My creative rendering has allowed me to express through practice and theory the importance of questioning the subjectivities of our realities. I believe that continuously and actively working to expand our perspectives of the world and all its entanglements is a crucial element within reaching all of the SDGs, especially *Quality Education* (Goal #4) and *Climate Change* (Goal #13), which are interwoven within environmental change, culture, society, economy, ecology, locality and more.

This is why I suggest that questioning what connects the knowing of a book and the being of a tree, is in itself the connection of importance. Examining the life cycles of ontology and epistemology illuminates how access to knowledge is cycled through patterns of unforeseen intra-action and entanglements. Through exploring expansive questions in collaboration with diverse individuals in art education and beyond, we can create together, research together, teach together, and continue to progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals together.

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