



feral feminisms

Hacking the Anthropocene:
Do-It-Together (DIT)

issue 10 · fall 2021

falling out together

Astrida Neimanis and Jennifer Hamilton

When we—Jennifer and Astrida—were invited to perform at Hacking IV in Melbourne 2019, we were just coming out of an intense period of collaboration. Trying to figure out how to continue “doing it together”—now in different cities, with new roles and shifting contexts—was troubled by fatigue, trepidation, as well as conflict, both in other professional relations and between us. The fall out was all around us, and between us too. Leaning into this reality as the context for this invitation, we began the process of developing our presentation via a series of emails that we exchanged over the period of several months. It turns out this was not a problem to be solved; the exchange itself became our contribution. At the Melbourne event, we recited an abridged version of our correspondence, while a fuller account scrolled behind us on the screen. “Falling out together” is focused on process, attention to each other’s needs and situation, listening, careful response, slow critique, risking vulnerability, testing the ground that one wishes to stand, and the opening of different possibilities. We offer a critical rather than utopian understanding of collaboration. Doing it together, we insist, is not easy. Learning to hack the Anthropocene is also about the sweaty work of hacking—in all senses of the word—an ethics of relation.

From: Astrida Neimanis

Date: Tuesday, 5 March 2019 at 8:39 am

To: Jennifer Hamilton

Subject: Fw: Invitation to present at Hacking the Anthropocene IV

What do you think? Any ideas? We just need a title.

I would be delighted to conjure something in the spirit of composting - critical, rigorous, but ultimately joyful. Collective practice that is open and responsive.

Breathing. Breathing together. Aeration. (N)aeration. Accountability. Digging. Labouring (housework!). Sweating. Perspiring (respiring. Aspiring).

Have also been thinking a lot about ‘fall out’ (sarah ensor’s queer fallout) and unintentional residue... ‘fall out’ from critique and speaking up (e.g. fall out from composting essay, ‘fall out’ from my shit with journal, your critique of a mentor)--thinking of how to embody ‘fall out’ differently (in ways less anxiety causing or insular)--how ‘fall out’ might be not another brick wall (thinking with ahmed here)...

Some morning bus ride ideas...

Avoiding the overworked concepts and metaphors to bring something else to life.



From: Jennifer Hamilton
Date: Tuesday, 5 March 2019 at 9:22 am
To: Astrida Neimanis
Subject: Re: Invitation to present at Hacking the Anthropocene IV

Hey!

Yes! Thank you for starting this thread!

I have been thinking the theme DIT (do it together) has lots of potential but what to set as a working title?!

I immediately went mega personal – how do we (e.g. you and I) collaborate now; but that dovetails with the bigger question of how to build scholarly unions/collectives/collaborations/togetherness across scales and apart, together and apart (especially in the atomised neoliberal casualised workplace). In the context of a protracted EBA bargaining round here, Craig keeps saying to me that some academics operate like small business owners, pejorative, and I think that scholarly collaboration can, should, and does contend with how changes to the workplace structure have done that, and composting is an example—both grounded, and now, dispersed!

But I think all this actually complements or can be read along the same trajectory as what you're saying somehow—and it can be a substrate to something more enigmatic, performance like. Or maybe there is a contrast here between a kind of breathwork/housework and a hacking together that seeks a collective/unionised but queer/feminist/anticolonial situation?! Actually, Greta's keynote was in some ways along these lines, but didn't engage with the people you are engaging (or really the air and smog cultural studies that exist), but it was a collective embodied breathing exercise amongst the crowd interspersed with scholarly work on smog, industrialisation, commodification, race, and class.

I also like that idea of 'fall out' a lot. I remember when Liz Wilson gave her masterclass two years ago or whenever it was, she was adamant that scholarly politics should feel vertiginous and scary—that we must risk the fall out of making a claim amidst peers that could rupture, that's part of the job. That really resonated with me, and I think we did that well in COMPOSTING, despite what happened. Like, I also loved it how in composting one could say something that was politically "wrong", but we could all talk about it, and work through it and around it to think where those things came from, even if it was a bit shocking for some or something. But then, how to move amongst that at scale is really interesting. Yes. And all these different experiences with composting, and then dealing with different structural issues to do with hierarchy (e.g. on one hand, addressing predatory behaviour by seniors, and critiquing respected and loved senior mentors on the other).

Ok. That was a brain dump. Is there even a vague sense of a working title here?

Maybe it is about 'fall out'? 'Falling out together'??? It does have original sin/after the fall elements. I don't know if I want to centre on breathwork as such, though I think it could be part



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of it. Hmmmm... I also liked Abby and Louise's epic performance, but I don't know if I want to do total play, but some kind of theatrics might be fun(ny)?!

Ok. I must stop.
Jen

From: Astrida Neimanis
Date: Friday, 26 April 2019 at 2:47 pm
To: Jennifer Hamilton
Subject: falling out together

There is lots in here!

Yes!

Ok – I like “Falling out together” – I think it could accommodate a lot that is in both of our threads, and the theme of the event, too. I like that it is a lure we can start thinking about and reconvene in a month or two to see where we've come.

Yes, definitely something a bit theatrical/performative, collaborative, participatory... (also not up for doing a 'play' though)

I really like the idea that we could tackle the idea of dissensus in a generative and generous way.

Shall we suggest this?

From: Astrida Neimanis
Date: Friday, 26 April 2019 at 2:47 pm
To: Jennifer Hamilton
Subject: falling out together

When I started thinking about 'falling out together' I was deeply mired in the fall out of months of fall out: me, who had always considered myself collegial, easy to work with, all of a sudden claustrophobic in conflict. Me, who had always felt committed to the sweaty labours of care and kin, was watching relationships fall apart around me, in little and large ways.

For an instant or longer, I was even falling out with you!

'Fall out' is an atmospheric pressure, a gravity. I was so heavy. A physical weight I didn't want to carry, but I also couldn't put down.

What are the politics of 'falling out'?

How is 'falling out' tethered to exhaustion?



Can 'fall out' also be a form of care?

From: Jennifer Hamilton
Date: Monday, 29 April 2019 at 5:43 pm
To: Astrida Neimanis
Subject: Re: falling out together

When I started thinking about 'falling out together', I was in a process of trying to be more honest about my emotions and actually engage in difficult discussions. This is a way of dealing with anxiety. I grew up in a conflict averse household, but also in a place where I wasn't especially encouraged to have negative emotions. There were negative emotions present, but often unacknowledged. This had an impact on me. I have always sought to practice a considerable amount of emotional control. I am seeking to regulate my emotions differently now, but I want to do that with care.

'Fall out' is an excess, a biproduct, a waste product
'Fallout' is inevitable.
'Fallout' is negative.

How is fallout linked to the critical process? How is it imperative that we fallout with our closest collaborators and colleagues? How can we do this *together*? Is fallout always unidirectional or entropic? Can fallout lead to new processes?

These questions are related to your question "What are the politics of falling out?" I think there is an institutional politics of fallout that is related to what we are talking about here. About your mire of fallout/fall out, one that usually results in irreconcilable rifts and little "camps". Perverse in disciplines that require criticality. How to make a safe space for falling out with our closest?

Stan just came home, and I said no to him about something, and we are having a dramatic family fallout.

This feels relevant. But it is also catalysing me to send this email now!

From: Astrida Neimanis
Date: Tuesday, 30 April 2019 at 9:30 am
To: Jennifer Hamilton
Subject: Re: falling out together

I am really curious about fallout as something other than unidirectional, or entropic, as you say. I am not sure if falling out is imperative, but I wonder if it is something we should want?

I am compelled to turn back to our mutual love for Sarah Ensor and her writing about fallout in the context of a queer impersonal ecological ethics. She is quoting Delaney's *Times Square Red Times Square Blue*:



[O]ver the next eight months, I have seen none of the people involved in them again[...]Their only fallout is that they were pleasant—and that pleasantness hangs in the street under the trees and by the brownstone stoops near which they occurred, months after Hale-Bopp has ellipsed the sun and soared again into solar night. That fall-out will remain as long as I remain comfortable living here. (182–83)

Ensr continues:

No matter how many times I read TSRTSB, I am always stopped in my tracks by the word that flashes up not once but twice in this passage’s final sentences. Accustomed as ecocritics are to works seeking to represent the kind of slow violence that Nixon so magnificently theorizes—the aftermath of a nuclear bomb; the prolonged temporality of global climate change; the persistence and magnification of toxins as they make their way through ecological systems and chains—it is, of course, not the word fallout itself that startles me. But within a context not of damage but of gain, dealing not in chemicals but in affect, Delany’s use of the term—and the kind of endurance implicitly at stake within it—turns Nixon’s logic on its head. For what he helps us to see is not slow violence but slow intimacy, the promise of a mode of relation (interpersonal or environmental) that attends to the forms of significance that inhere in the wake of a past event—even, or perhaps especially, if that happening seemed to matter little at all. (163)

Ensr continues, discussing how the positive fallout here is a kind of ambience. She suggests that in environmental terms, our relation to the Earth will never be our primary relationship, and as such we should think about the fallout there as a positive kind of collateral. She writes:

Our contribution is only ever going to be provisional, partial, and minor. Our task, then, may be not to get into the business of saving but rather to ask ourselves a series of questions that are no less important for being a bit more diminutive: How are we to relate to a job that is only ever partially and contingently done? How do we build a political movement responsive to accident, to the collateral, to the unintentional? How do we learn to value the things that happen secondarily—whose outcomes lie beyond the reach of our control, and beyond the reach of our intent? And how might we thus acknowledge the fact that the secondary need not be devalued but rather differently valued, requiring different paradigms of engagement—and yielding different forms of benefit—than those we associate with our primary relationships? What if, rather than analogizing environmental stewardship to the forms of care that we already know how to practice, we trained ourselves—and each other—in these? (164)

The final section of the paper is about “Queer Fallout”. Ensr concludes by noting that Delaney’s work invites us:

to consider how forms of pleasure and sociability (not just toxins) can yield fallout and how benefit (not just damage) can unfurl collaterally. [...] A livable life is the queer fallout of a net of casual encounters that, on their own, often seem to yield little of immediate consequence. Sustained ethical investment in the environment(s) where we



live—and the wide-ranging communities that comprise them—is the queer fallout of forms of contact that seem to require less commitment than coincidence. (165)

So that's long. But I am struck by how in rereading it I am rethinking the whole business of "falling out", and the heaviness it afflicts. How might these ideas of collateral, incidental, unintentional, accidental—help us understand what it means to fall out together?

This really goes to the question – what is the relation between "fallout" (the aftermath, the wake, what lingers) and "falling out" (coming apart, rifting, cleaving apart)?

Of course, in thinking these things I am also brought back to our older discussions about Liz Wilson and feminism's negativity. Is falling out a commitment to dwelling in negativity (refusing to always 'make good') or is it reparative? Is it a mode of being and being together that troubles these two options as the only ones?

From: Jennifer Hamilton

Date: Wednesday, 8 May 2019 at 9:53 am

To: Astrida Neimanis

Subject: Re: falling out together

So, the reason I was compelled to return to this writing this morning, was because I just read Liz Wilson on the fallout from the Avital Ronell case, and it reminded me of your email and ending on Wilson and negativity. The piece, related but different to the end of *Gut Feminism*, is about all kinds of dubious professor/student relations which, when they make it public, the fallout tends towards the legal apparatus and a particular hierarchical understanding of power and relationality. Wilson's essay in *Australian Humanities Review* is a response to a response about this book: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unwanted_Advances. I will come to that below, but first, this question: How are we to relate to a job that is only ever partially and contingently done?

What a question! Within the context of environmental thought, as Ensor says, this is about the impossibility of actually "saving" the environment or fixing things enough. But it is also so much more. It also relates to feminisms, broadly conceived, which are never finished, which are in some contexts starting all over again. The first thing I think in this regard is how do we know anything in this context? Even claiming something as an "outcome" is somewhat hubristic! But also, and conversely, more can count as knowledge when what is known does not have to be a solution to a problem, but rather a stage in a process. Outcomes can be incremental or accretive. In this context: What does it mean to make a relationship? What does it mean to break one?

I like how Ensor encourages people to think about fallout as affect and ambience. Fallout is thus as both particulate matter and feeling, smoggy atmosphere, and ambience. Ensor says: "not slow violence but slow intimacy", but perhaps for our purposes it is both slow violence and slow intimacy.

I feel compelled here to go back to my original strong feelings of resistance to Ensor's



argument. I read it as problematically ambivalent and romanticising of detached encounter. It's almost hard to imagine that feeling now. But at first, I felt that the analogy (with cruising) was really stretched, and refused to see the potential cruelty in that space of the fleeting. This was, at least partly, about myself. I now seek comfort, shelter, and attachment, and while I wasn't able to access beats and cruising culture, I once practiced a kind of unnamed femme equivalent. In reading, I projected on to Ensor's argument my own experiments in fleeting attachment and short-lived affective/physical intensity and exposure that marked many of my early quests for intimacy. So, in reacting to Ensor as I did, contained a moral judgement: as if the casual and fleeting was somehow naïve, lesser, misguided, or even unhealthy. Which reveals at least one way that Ensor's argument about the dominance of the romantic tradition in environmental thought works: the power of implicit moral assumptions in relation to relationality itself. It was hard to move through those feelings to actually apprehend her argument, which I now think is quite generative.

Wilson on Avital Ronell (australianhumanitiesreview.org/2018/12/02/im-not-sure-response-to-rosalind-smith/) is problematically ambivalent too. Wilson does not go so far as to defend Ronell (as per **that** Open Letter), but rather refuses to firmly adjudicate on the power dynamic at the centre of the student/teacher relationship and its fallout. Wilson writes:

I am not sure that such a choice can be made, between manipulation and resistance. In the first instance, these two rhetorical effects are transposable (resistance can be Machiavellian; manipulation can be insubordinate). Manipulation and resistance are not securely differentiated from one another (np).

Beyond the lack of differentiation between these two processes which are integral to intimate relations that produce fallout, what this paper is about are the complex ways in which power is distributed (following Foucault) and the primacy of intersubjectivity (following Freud and a little known psychoanalyst named Ogden). The possibility of intimacy is lined by the possibility of exploitation, of manipulation, and violence because of how power is distributed. Fallout. It may not always be slow violence and slow intimacy, but it is always potentially either/or.

I wonder now whether this has something to do with making kin?

From: Jennifer Hamilton
Date: Monday, 13 May 2019 at 7:57 pm
To: Astrida Neimanis
Subject: Re: falling out together

Sorry to write out of turn, but an excellent example of “falling out together” in the second hour of this interview with Haraway. Surrounded by a discussion of the importance of falling out together. <https://www.blurbry.com/thedig/43841686/cyborg-revolution-with-donna-haraway/>





From: Astrida Neimanis
Date: Tuesday, 28 May 2019 at 4:06 pm
To: Jennifer Hamilton
Subject: Re: falling out together

So many things to think ... I haven't responded because responding felt too big.

I have been thinking about our question "What does it mean to fall out, together?" and trying to make it a bit clearer—in my head at least. This begins for me by trying to phenomenologically differentiate different kinds of 'fall out' or 'falling out'.

Definition:

"Falling out—the breakdown of relation." That's the best I can come up with. Is it a viable working definition? If it is, is it possible that 'breakdown of relation' could have no value attached to it? Is it possible that some breakdown of relation is necessary and even welcome? (And what am I to do with that, if, for the past years, I have been committed to thinking about making relations as the only thing that is important? Can one make a relation by breaking one?) Here I'm thinking about what you wrote:

The first thing I think in this regard is how do we know anything in this context? Even claiming something as an "outcome" is somewhat hubristic! But also and conversely, more can count as knowledge when what is known does not have to be a solution to a problem, but rather a stage in a process. Outcomes can be incremental or accretive. In this context: What does it mean to make a relationship? What does it mean to break one?

So again: can one make a relation by breaking one?

And then: Are all of the things we've been talking about really falling out? Are there different kinds of falling out and fall out that need to be differentiated? I am wondering if there is a difference (a possibility of differentiating? An important difference?) between 'falling out' when—as Haraway describes in the Dig podcast—you are not a part of something, but that doesn't mean you are against it—and falling out as really "being against"?

So Haraway describes "not being part of" as in when you choose not to support something but that doesn't mean you don't think that thing (that tactic, that approach, that venturing, that proposition) shouldn't be in the world; you recognise there is probably a place for it and you might even find some kind of solidarity or coalition with it, someday. This is different than what she calls "the real enemies"—I think she calls these "those on the extreme far right who are many and powerful" (n.p.) or something like that. (And are either of these things really 'falling out' – in the sense that there was a relation and then it was broken?)

But back to Haraway: I get this. She so rightly reminds us that what others might more problematically refer to as "petty infighting" is a waste of our time and energy! There are bigger wars to be waged! But I also am troubled by this, because I am actually not sure that it is so easy to differentiate. I have been thinking about the election here, and Queensland, and a farmer, or a miner, maybe. A woman at home making chook stew for her hubbie, or grandkids. They might



be sexist, racist, and even identify with the so-called far right. But are they my ‘real enemy’? What does it mean to even say that?

I’ve also been thinking about this on a really personal register and thinking about all of the ‘falling out’ I was enduring/precipitating in the last 12 months. I feel like I need to/want to make some differentiations between three kinds of ‘falling out’ that were going on:

- (1) My own personal failing as precipitating the falling out. When I was just too tired and too exhausted to hold anyone’s vulnerability or needs anymore. I broke the relation because I needed a break. (I am thinking about my falling out with you here, but also there were others...). I needed a break—not necessarily from them, but from my own exhaustion. (In the case with you, I look back to see that ironically, I didn’t need a break from you at all; I needed to ask you to hold my need and vulnerability, while refusing to drop yours. But instead, I just broke the relation. What a lesson!)
- (2) Falling out as precipitated by me, because there were some things I no longer wanted to condone. Like sexual predators getting highly esteemed positions in academia. Like feminism being treated like a cute add-on when it is a serious thing with high material stakes. So, I broke relations because I could not stand the way of the relation anymore. No. Let me rephrase that. I broke relations because I felt it was my responsibility to break them. This is what I really mean to say, and I think it is important to put it like that. I felt a responsibility to fall out. Now, that said, I also harboured a hope that I could break relations without breaking relations. That if done professionally, courteously, and plainly by pointing to the facts, then relations may not need to be broken. But I was wrong. I precipitated the falling out, so I had to endure the fall out. I also have to say, though, that there has also been regenerative and recuperative fall out that I did not anticipate now that the dust has settled. Certain relations, though, are probably broken forever.
- (3) Then there is a third kind of falling out, which I guess is what Haraway is talking about—the ‘petty infighting.’ Hmm. I am really uncomfortable and unsure about this. Because sometimes ‘petty infighting’ is like (1), and sometimes it is like (2). Are we supposed to tend relations with sexual predators because they ‘like animals’ or whatever? And then I am also thinking about that miner, that farmer. I think there is something here about the local and the global, the specific and the abstract, the person and the persona. And about, as you put it below, ambivalence.

But, and, so ...

If ‘falling out’ is the break-down of relation, I have been wondering:

Is ‘fall out’—the residue, what’s left of the break down—where the possibility for something else lies?

Is that how, or where, one begins to ‘make a relation’ again?



From: Jennifer Hamilton
Date: Tuesday, 11 June 2019 at 11:48 AM
To: Astrida Neimanis
Subject: Re: falling out together

Hi A,

I am sending this before it gets out of control. Because I've genuinely spent too long working on this email. But it only just now came to a place that it made sense to send. I don't resent this process, but I just thought I would let you know there was a bit of a process in replying here:

That said, I feel like we are really getting to the core of what we want to say, but maybe not yet why.

We are describing a process of breaking and making and breaking and making. But we are also talking about breaking explicitly as falling out and generative of fall out. Then I guess the question remains for me about why we are proceeding on this question in the context of HtA IV (maybe I should read the abstract again—just went looking for an abstract, and maybe there is no abstract just a title?!). Anyway, I think we still need to figure out why (though some things you said in the prev. email are about the politics of relations and that is meaningful in the context of ecological thinking, and I take this up below).

A few things:

- 1) "Falling out – the breakdown of relation" is a viable definition.
- 2) I agree with the fundamentally deconstructive point at the heart of what you wrote in the last email: making is internal to breaking. When one breaks a relation, new relations are made. I am happy to totally agree then that breaking a relationship will always make a new relationship. I am totally on board with breaking as making as breaking as the structural framework/grounding principle for how we proceed.
- 3) I like the idea of the fall out as the atmosphere of the breaking, the aftermath of the act of falling out. Like the affective dust after a break is made.
- 4) It makes me think of Spivak's "Teaching Feminism and Deconstruction, Again: Negotiations:

It is not just that deconstruction cannot found a politics, while other ways of thinking can. It is that deconstruction can make founded political programs more useful by making their in-built problems more visible. To act is therefore not to ignore deconstruction, but actively to transgress it without giving it up. (A slightly tougher formulation which clarity-fetishists can ignore: deconstruction does not aim at praxis or theoretical practice but lives in the persistent crisis or unease of the moment of techne or crafting. (134)

The idea of "negotiations" which is in Spivak's title, might be useful. Her example of



negotiation: “not to ignore the powerful currents of European antihumanist* thought that influences us, yet not to excuse them of their masculinism while using them. This is what I am calling ‘negotiation’” (142). Another term she uses for this is “complicity” (“affirmative deconstruction says yes to a text twice, sees complicity when it could rather easily be oppositional” [322]). *I don’t really know what Spivak means by antihumanist thought in this sentence, but I basically think that word can be substituted for other terms: canonical, humanist, patriarchal and the sentiment remains similar.

Is the “why” of this Hack about an ethics of falling out? Which is also (given the “making breaking making breaking” principle) an ethics of relationality?

I think this point you make is really important:

But back to Haraway: I get this. She so rightly reminds us that what others might more problematically refer to as ‘petty infighting’ is a waste of our time and energy! There are bigger wars to be waged! But I also am troubled by this because I am actually not sure that it is so easy to differentiate. I have been thinking about the election here, and Queensland, and a farmer, or a miner, maybe. A woman at home making chook stew for her hubbie or grandkids. They might be sexist, and racist, and even identify with the so-called far right. But are they my ‘real enemy’? What does it mean to even say that?

This is one stab at an ethics of falling out – Haraway says don’t have a falling out here, have a falling out there instead! This makes of other devoted deconstructionists versus Haraway who is making the clear cut/finite political claims. While Spivak and Elizabeth Wilson and Vicki Kirby might fall into this “devoted deconstructionists” camp, the flipside of Haraway would be someone like Avital Ronell.

How to decide on where and when to fall out? Clearly the student who called her out made a decision where others did not. This kind of negotiation is what you did in the fall outs precipitated by you. The idea of falling out as strategically precipitated by you as being kind of extraordinary though, I think (like Ronell’s student was extraordinary). “Falling out as precipitated by me, because there were some things I no longer wanted to condone”: not everyone would have this perspective on things or have the capacity to hold the line for so long and in such ways before firing. But also, there is an affective line you draw—you can’t tolerate certain things anymore. It is an affective ethics of falling out. I am sure Sara Ahmed writes about this in *Living A Feminist Life* too.

This also brings me to the kind of relationship that may have been made between us had we not had a falling out: not breaking a relation under duress is a form of relation-making too.

You say this: “In the case with you, I look back to see that ironically, I didn’t need a break from you at all; I needed to ask you to hold my need and vulnerability, while refusing to drop yours. But instead I just broke the relation. What a lesson!” This is really interesting, and I’m just so sorry I didn’t really register your vulnerability. You present as powerful. On reflection, I don’t know what I saw other than an unwillingness to talk openly, but I wasn’t sure of the motive. I have blind spots here. But from my flawed POV, I felt very wedded to having an open



conversation—which is not often the case with me. But also, I felt that there was something suddenly potentially very hierarchical about our relationship where previously there had been collaboration. I do wonder if we hadn't had the fallout would a not-so-nice hierarchy have been made? In one version, I the more junior scholar would have emotionally retreated and deferred to the position of the senior (I can't imagine how this would have played out longer term though). In the other version you would have just masked your vulnerability and managed the situation, but you'd call the shots. Maybe there are other plausible scenarios for what would have happened had we not had a falling out. Falling out was one thing, working in and through the fallout together was another. This is what this is, I think.

What does it take to create circumstances where two or more people can sit together in shared vulnerability (sit weathering the fallout? [I tried not to use that word!]) and know that everything is not at stake (career, job prospects, collaborative relations etc etc)? How to have fallouts with non-family and in informal interpersonal structures in neoliberal times and be able to and motivated to work through it?

OK> I LEAVE THIS NOW>

From: Astrida Neimanis
Date: Monday, 24 June 2019 at 9:03 pm
To: Jennifer Hamilton
Subject: Re: falling out together

Thanks for all this, Jen!

I think in all of this we have generated many things to share! Certainly, we have generated enough. The work will now be in figuring what we want to share, why, and how.

A few thoughts, not necessarily ordered well:

- 1) I don't think we need to agree about everything. (For example, you agree with what you characterize as my deconstructionist argument. Great! But you don't have to. I think it is totally fine and interesting if we present something and don't necessarily agree, if that's the way it plays out. Also, I am not as convinced as you that it is such a neat deconstructionist argument I was making. I think my hesitation is because it isn't necessarily always this way...? As in – sometimes breaking can make something interesting, but maybe not always. Sometimes things just break? The question marks indicate that I am interested in thinking about this, but don't feel strongly committed to these positions (yet).
- 2) WHY do we want to talk about this? You are right, there was no abstract! And I think, rather hysterically, we never really talked about this. We were both just drawn to the idea of falling out together. But I think you are right – we need to provide some kind of framing that sets up why our contribution relates to feminist, queer, anticolonial propositions for hacking the Anthropocene! I don't think this is difficult, but we should discuss it. I am thinking in a few directions here, about how it relates: (a) falling out as both hampering and necessary for resistance politics, activism, solidarity in the struggle, etc (b) fall out as



affective atmosphere of worlds falling apart (c) an ethics of relation as what everything is always all about, and what we need for any kind of alter Anthropocene (I think these are implicit in what you write below—we have to think about how to bring them in to any presentation), (d) is also of course my personal investment is trying to figure out and deal with all the falling out in my life. Maybe it is important to connect this personal to the political; maybe not (I always leaned towards yes on this question, but can be convinced otherwise).

- 3) Your comments about what might have happened had we not fallen out are interesting. I'm not sure I can speculate. Another option, I suppose, is that things would blow over and it would be mostly okay, and then we would fall out another time, or not, or maybe we just go our own ways. I don't know. I am also, in all of this, quite interested in fatigue. I am interested in the work of fatigue as a political affect, or something. I mean in general—both in relation to falling out and more generally I am becoming super interested in the idea of fatigue. This may not get developed in this presentation at all, but I am just putting it out there.
- 4) Presentation. ?? For some reason I keep having this image of both of us telling a story about falling out where our texts partially overlap—you are speaking and then I am speaking, and sometimes we are speaking over each other as the texts overlap. They are parallel stories about falling out that speak kind of together but also perform a sort of discord. I don't know why but I keep picturing this. I think it would be great to have something more than us just speaking. Maybe a really strange bit of film footage in the background—maybe something very mundane being broken. Many things. Repair and breaking. Or maybe just continuous 10 minutes of footage of walking along the Cooks River, as a place that holds us together? Or small and quiet, interspersed with footage of other kinds of breaking. I don't know.
- 5) There is a lot of good stuff in your message around the Spivak quote. Good to think with. I think we will have to go back and figure out what content we want to pull forward and up.
- 6) Truth be told, of everything you write I am most gripped by your observation: “But also, there is an affective line you draw—you can't tolerate certain things anymore. It is an affective ethics of falling out.” For whatever reason, exploring this is what I am most drawn to, but that could be just straightforward self-indulgence.

Thursday is good—can definitely schedule around your stop work. What time would be good? I have meetings 12:30-3 pm.

x astrida



From: Jennifer Hamilton
Date: Monday, 24 June 2019 at 9:20 PM
To: Astrida Neimanis
Subject: Re: falling out together

Hey.

Thanks for your reply!! Great way to wrap up this part of the process.

I have a meeting at 2 PM on Thursday. So sometime between 11AM -2PM, I guess 11.05 is good?! Or let's say 11.30AM to keep it to an hour? Can you afford that much time, or do you want to do less time?

Jen

Afterword

From: Jennifer Hamilton
Date: Monday, 2 November 2020 at 4:09 pm
To: Astrida Neimanis
Subject: conclusions: falling out together

So, we have to figure out how to summarise this epistolary piece of writing: what is falling out together? what is the point? what is the “why do we care and why should you?” of this piece? What is its contribution to scholarly knowledge?

I know when we started writing the emails back in early 2019 that I was still feeling strongly like I wanted a connection with Sydney: Sydney the place, Sydney the people, Sydney the University. I think that tug back to Sydney after having been gone for a year and a bit was for legitimate reasons—I'd helped establish things there with you, and I felt sad to just leave that all behind; I wanted to keep a foot in the door for as long as possible in some vain hope for something (I don't know what). But also, that desire to stay in Sydney was because I had stubbornly dug myself into the place when I finished my PhD. The top shelf advice I got from my mentor at the time was “try not to have roots” after your PhD, be as open and flexible as possible, and go where opportunity takes you. I think she said this while literally looking at the tree I'd just planted in my front yard at home, and laughed and said “but you're obviously putting down roots”. I didn't really want to leave that behind. On top of all these more or less selfish reasons for not wanting to leave Sydney, I wondered what would happen to our relationship.

These kinds of ruptures to tight research relationships must happen all the time in academia because people move around, or a short contract ends, or a person retires or dies, a PhD is submitted. The relationship between researchers can be so intimate, but the intimacy doesn't have an infrastructure or an architecture to continue beyond the formal moment, it doesn't have contract law or vows. It has an idea of “professionalism” which is good to a point—keeps things from getting too personal or shady, but the idea of “professionalism” can also be a way of



excluding all the energies that are always already in excess of that idea of professionalism—like the fact our research is always already about the idea of excess, the in between, the outside in some way. But also, what’s also complicating about working in Feminist Environmental Humanities is how deeply place based a lot of research is—it can’t just be abstracted from the constellation of people and the places they gather. It’s not data to be mined from that locale and analysed elsewhere, but it is the description of the local and the processes that the research catalyses to make the locale better. Moving away and falling out is thus more than just the basic realignment of which university gets which share of the publication output, or which lab is responsible for the analysis.

So, I think what I want to say in conclusion here is that, for me, “falling out together” is an ethics to guide the process of altering the dynamics of and/or ending research relationships in the context of the contemporary university. It is a recognition that the conversation to make good in informal and ad hoc spaces is almost always worth it. I don’t want to be in Sydney anymore, but I am glad I didn’t just disavow those feelings knowing they’d pass, because part of that process was this conversation and all the other little ways we renegotiated the how of our collaboration in the fallout of geographical, institutional and, to be honest, somewhat emotional and spiritual relocation.

But this is also about informal collegiality, collaboration, union, solidarity, care in a cold and cruel world. Falling out together is like holding hands while jumping out of the plane and seeing how you can negotiate the landing.

I think that I want to say more about how this is an original contribution to scholarly knowledge too. If I’m to be absolutely frank, the epistolary format is the only way that I could find time to do this work. When I was finishing my PhD my supervisor (the alive one, not the dead one) always said my best work came out when I was responding to her comments (violently defending myself from her attacks!) via email. The format gave me a kind of clarity, and also a sense of fearlessness because it wasn’t in the intimidating Word Doc space of the official dissertation. Although I think I’m OK at getting to the point on email, primarily it was just efficient not to have to synthesise. As soon as I get stressed, I start losing sleep, and the longer I experience sleeplessness the more physical pain I endure. If I’m going to be in this job I have to keep sleeping. And writing this piece via email is part of that.

Finally, I want to say that the contribution here is the articulation of the process as important as the product. For all these good reasons (the relationship nurturing, the ethics of care in the neoliberal academy, the brute pragmatism of the time), the process that is on display is also an ethics of falling out together—of feeling safe to bare the bones of an intellectual process before it’s all stitched up. Though I don’t know whether that’s a good thing or just another symptom of not having enough time to keep “rough and ready” material hidden anymore.

- 1) I also really like your point from a previous email June 24, 2019: “I don’t think we need to agree about everything.”

Speak soon,

Jen



From: Jennifer Hamilton
Date: Monday, 16 November 2020 at 9:12 am
To: Astrida Neimanis
Subject: Re: conclusions: falling out together

Hi A,

It feels appropriate for this project that I am chasing you for your summative final notes!

It's almost as though the rhythm of send and reply is naturally fracturing as you prepare your move across the ocean. A falling out of another kind—not being in the same national context (teaching cycles, seasonal cycles, funding cycles), and all these other annual rhythms start to breakdown – I mean they are anyway (semesters, trimesters, micro-mesters, micro credentials) there is no coherent academic calendar anymore, but the seasons do hold something together sort of (if they have integrity anymore either, though I don't want to be too apocalyptic they sort of still do mark time—cicadas are out as summer approaches, frogs are croaking after rain, I'm wearing shorts and took the doona off the bed, frosts have ceased for another year—despite the statistics and trepidation of what's to come).

Jen

From: Astrida Neimanis
Date: Monday, 16 November 2020 at 11:31 am
To: Jennifer Hamilton
Subject: Re: conclusions: falling out together

Dear Jen

I actually replied on November 4th. But even if (as you say) the epistolary form is the only way this exchange could take place (and I agree), there are still so many things an email can't hold. I hadn't sent that reply yet, because it felt too unfinished, too many things unsaid.

But again, you are right—the rhythms are breaking down, and I am well and truly out of time, now. So here it is:

Dear Jen

It is strange and fitting to revisit this ending - the ending of your time in Sydney as the impetus for "falling out together"—just at the time when all I can think about is endings; for me, now that my time in Sydney is coming to an end. I am trying to extract myself from a life—leaving behind what I don't want to carry but holding on to the relations and feeling that I want to endure. It is impossible, though. I'm realising that's not the way that endings work. And I'm kind of falling apart.



What is the point of this exchange, and how does it "contribute to knowledge"?

Tonight, I went to see Betty Grumble's new show, *Enemies of Grooviness Eat Sh*t*. During her show she referenced her previous show (the one we asked her to perform at the last *Hacking* event in Sydney) with a flippant aside: "This show is a lot different—but I still believe that Sex Clown will save the world!" Being part of her performance that was filled with such deep humour, pleasure, and grief, all I could do was fully agree. In excess of all of the devastation and violence that she workshops in the show, Betty Grumble still insists on love. I walked home under the warm Sydney sky and everything was alive. The nocturnal cockroaches darted across the sidewalk and the air was heavy with jasmine. I stood at the top of the hill in Marrickville that climbs up just after the train tracks, before it plunges down again to meet the Cooks river. I could see the escarpment up the other side of the river, where you used to live at Earlwood Farm, when I first met you. Turning back, I could see the lights of the CBD. To the east, I knew that the river ends as the ocean.

It is okay that we don't agree about everything. At one point, back then, when we were starting to fall out, you called it out and we regrouped. I remember saying to you something like: "what is the point of any of this—work, writing, academia, outputs—if it damages the relationships that make it possible to endure it in first place?" It felt like it required being deliberate about this claim, and that it took a conscious decision to abide by it. That's what this place can do to us.

I think the original scholarly contribution of falling out together is that it is also not a scholarly contribution, or perhaps more accurately that it is in deliberate excess of one. That's why it matters.

all my love,
astrida

From: Jennifer Hamilton <Jennifer.Hamilton@une.edu.au>
Sent: Friday, 12 February 2021 9:07 AM
To: Astrida Neimanis <astrida.neimanis@sydney.edu.au>
Subject: Re: references for feral feminisms

Thanks for doing this!!! It was on my list 😊

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feral feminisms

**Hacking the Anthropocene:
Do-It-Together (DIT)**

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falling out together
Astrida Neimanis and Jennifer Hamilton

Wilson, Elizabeth A. "I'm not sure: Response to Rosalind Smith." *Australian Humanities Review* 63 (November 2018). <http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2018/12/02/im-not-sure-response-to-roosalind-smith/>.

ASTRIDA NEIMANIS is a cultural theorist working at the intersection of feminism and environmental change. Her research focuses on bodies, water, and weather, and how they can help us reimagine justice, care, responsibility and relation in the time of climate catastrophe. Her most recent book, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* is a call for humans to examine our relationships to oceans, watersheds, and other aquatic life forms from the perspective of our own primarily watery bodies, and our ecological, poetic, and political connections to other bodies of water. Astrida is Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair in Feminist Environmental Humanities at the UBC Okanagan, on unceded Syilx territories in Kelowna, BC. **Twitter/Instagram:** @AstridaNeimanis. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7666-8507>

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