Manifesto for Living in the Anthropocene
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In 2010 I made a short trip to the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. My main impetus was to visit the ancient standing
stones at Calanais as well as experience, however briefly and vicariously, other worlds, lives and landscapes. Regardless that I had only a couple of days on the island, I decided to catch the local bus and walk to the sights rather than hire a car. I’m sure many readers have made similar choices and experienced the delights of being on foot in an unfamiliar place. Instead of the ordinary, regular, enclosed, plastic world of automobility, I was greeted by smells, animals, uneven surfaces, twisting paths, sheep, dogs, farmers, wind, sun, and more. My intention is not to romanticize walking, nor to suggest a singular notion of walking. How I walk, what I look at, and my practices of movement and thinking are all shaped by historically contingent cultural practices of looking and moving that are familiar to those with a European cultural heritage. Acknowledging this is to understand that walking is as cultural as it is embodied, and that there are many ways to walk, many ways of seeing and knowing (Solnit 2000; Ingold 2000; Amato 2004). What I do want to emphasize is the interrelation between body, knowing, place and feeling. In many ways the random and impromptu qualities of walking engender a kind of openness to surprises and chance encounters that provoke affective ways of knowing (Solnit 2000, 11). The intermeshing of movement, mind, body, land/scape, ground and atmosphere transport us into a realm of inexpressible, ineffable and fleeting relatings, where we know “the world through the body and the body through the world” (Solnit 2000, 29).

At the end of the day, my sore legs and tired feet reminded me of a gently undulating topography of peat bogs, paddocks, craggy cliffs and scattered settlements. Alongside contemporary lives, on Lewis it is possible to see the remnants of worlds past and those passing. As I walk this landscape I’m reminded of the contingencies of space, time and power. Lewis, once a center of power, is now considered remote and marginal. Its past is revealed on a day’s walk where one can go from the Bronze Age standing stones to an Iron Age broch and finish up at recently repaired “blackhouses” belonging to a mode of living more recently gone. Walking slows you
down, time passes differently and mind and body are merged in the effort to cover ground and take in the surroundings. That is, every step embodies time as well as space, each step meshing things past and those to come in an ongoing process, each step participating in the making of worlds and in the process, knitting together responsibility for past, present and future.

On Lewis I experienced what many walkers encounter—a different pace and perspective, a different way of seeing and feeling (Wylie 2005; Phillips 2005). These qualities add up to understanding walking as a kind of knowledge-making—in that how I moved through the land/cape and among the people, animals and townships of Lewis was constitutive of how and what I learned about the place and related to it, as well as how the place shaped my mind and body as I moved in and through it. David Turnbull gives insight into the relationship between movement and knowledge in his consideration of another set of stones—the Maltese Megaliths. Turnbull (2002) describes the megaliths as “theatres of knowledge” in order to emphasize the co-production of cognitive, material and social worlds, so that “knowledge, artifacts and human agents work together to produce our lived lives in the world” (125). This performative understanding of space and knowledge highlights the complex processes through which worlds are always relational achievements and perpetually “in-the-making,” never fixed or pre-given. We enact structures and landscapes at the same time that material worlds—be they standing stones or concrete walkways or a track through the bush—may direct, facilitate or constrain movement thereby shaping human experience and encounters with others (135). Modes of movement, such as walking, therefore, can help us not just experience things differently but can help to build different knowledges. This is knowledge forged in the spirit of “wayfinding”—an always unfinished, rhythmic, open and creative mode of being-in-the-world that embraces the twin entanglements of movement and being moved (Dening 2008; Ingold 2000; Lee and Ingold 2006).

Way-finding, or what Ingold refers to as wayfaring, is a
sort of wandering line, or more precisely, a rich meshwork that weaves and textures “the trails along which life is lived” (Ingold 2007, 81, italics in original). It endorses a performance of respectfulness towards otherness that invokes “myriad expressions” of difference and a sense of wonder that moves us so that “no knowledge, no image is stilled in either time or space” (Dening 2008, 147–148).

The story I’ve told about walking on Lewis features the common western trope of the lone human figure, walking and thinking in harmonious relation with the world around (Solnit 2000). But this is a misleading image that tempts us into thinking that we humans are the main actors, and that thinking alone (in both senses) can shape better worlds. The human-centeredness of much writing on walking was brought home to me by Lyanda Lynn Haupt’s book *Crow Planet* (2009), a charming and perceptive look at the interconnectedness of humans and others in the ordinary spaces and places of suburban life. Whether we realize it or not, whenever we walk we are walking alongside multiple others, human and nonhuman, and how we move is likewise not only a human achievement, but shaped by the more-than-human worlds through which we step. Like us, Haupt points out, crows are bipedal, they’re intelligent, adaptable, use technology, and spend much of their time walking. Crows are “good to think with” because they’re not rare, not universally liked or appreciated, and not cute. Crows therefore challenge us to think in different ways about our relations to more-than-human worlds and challenge us to walk in more considered, open and tolerant ways, ways inclusive of difficult, as well as pleasant, others.1 Many of us have experience of walking alongside canine companions, and will know how this “humanimal” encounter can stretch our perceptions to smellscapes, different styles of directionality, as well as the enhanced sociality of dog walking for both humans and dogs. Dogs defy our desire for visuality and linearity. Likewise, crows as undomesticated co-walkers, unsettle our habits of

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1 See also van Dooren’s (2011b) work on vultures.
being and challenge us further to make a place for unchosen and uncomfortable others. That’s why Haupt says that crows “are so entirely relevant to our place on a changing earth, [as] they help us to ‘reimagine a different future’” (202). For instance, walking-with crows means facing up to the wasteful consumer-driven and careless lifestyles that feed the piles of rubbish and roadkill on which crows thrive and multiply (202).

Thinking about walking-with crows brings a more-than-human resonance to practices of movement. “Walking-with” highlights mutuality, respect, plurality, and engenders a respectful “being-for” in the sense of kindling practices of movement and engagement that not only acknowledge the place and presence of others, but that contribute to, and allow space for, their flourishing (Howitt 2011). Walking-with others involves our hearts as well as heads, legs, guts, and minds. It combines rational and more-than-rational knowing. It is a kind of engagement with the world and otherness that can change our step and take us down unexpected pathways.

At first glance, “walking” and the “Anthropocene” do not seem to go easily together. After all, walking is slow, fragile, unreliable—it’s hardly a mode of movement suited to grappling with the pressing issues the Anthropocene heralds. Surely we don’t have time to dawdle in the face of the urgent politics of global change? But in another sense, walking might be exactly what we need. The slow, engaged and engaging attributes of walking might indeed help to enhance our connectedness with the world in embodied and creative ways. The mode of walking and wayfinding appropriate to the Anthropocene isn’t a headlong rush to get somewhere “better” or the conceit of thinking that we have the answers. Rather it’s a studied movement of the here and now, a fragmentary, wandering, lively, embodied and relational process. A respectful movement that puts emphasis on sensory, contingent and fragile encounters conjured through making our way, alongside others through time and space, here and now. My experience on the Isle of Lewis brought to life for me how the strands of past walkers, the movement of all manner of
non-humans (organic or otherwise), our choices of wayfinding in the present, all tangle together to constitute world, body and the particular places we inhabit.

To me, notions of wayfinding and respectful walking-with are useful ways to think about how to proceed in times of uncertainty, when there’s no singular right way, and where we don’t know quite where we’re headed. The Anthropocene confronts us with an uncertain and unknown future where to follow conventional paths would be to amplify current problems. Wayfinding as an experimental, nonlinear mode of movement helps us meet the challenge of unknowable futures in a changing world. Wayfinding can be playful, lively, and rhizomatic, such that it can accommodate ambiguity, diversity and accountability. With walking, each step poses the possibility of an alternative, each step is a becoming, a journey not an end point (Phillips 2005, 509). In this way, wayfinding and walking-with are not just about movement, communication and knowing, but about making some worlds and not others.

Walking can attune us differently to the world but offers no universal prescription. And, of course, walking, the choice to walk and the freedom to be able to walk, is a privilege not available to all. A privilege not to be squandered or taken lightly. At best it’s a generative practice of risking ourselves and risking new relations, rather than falling back on sedimented habits and well-worn paths. The Manifesto for Living in the Anthropocene advocates an experimental stance, and you might like to try out some walking experiments of your own. You might like to try some seriously playful walking-with crows, lizards, dingoes, as well as refugees, unfamiliar people, children, your neighbor, and the many others who together make our worlds. You might like to practice co-motion to cause a little commotion, way-find towards practices that diminish waste and consumption and enhance the flourishing of others. Who knows where they will take you and what you will find out along the way, but respectful walking-with and a spirit of wayfinding will, I believe, take you a long way.