



## **An Ecotopian Lexicon**



# An Ecotopian Lexicon

*Edited by  
Matthew Schneider-Mayerson  
and Brent Ryan Bellamy*



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS  
Minneapolis  
London

The University of Minnesota Press gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance provided for the publication of this book by a Yale–NUS College Subvention Grant.

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Published by the University of Minnesota Press

111 Third Avenue South, Suite 290

Minneapolis, MN 55401-2520

<http://www.upress.umn.edu>

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Schneider-Mayerson, Matthew, editor. | Bellamy, Brent Ryan, editor.

An ecotopian lexicon / Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Brent Ryan Bellamy, editors.

Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, [2019] | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018058231 (print) | ISBN 978-1-5179-0589-7 (hc) |

ISBN 978-1-5179-0590-3 (pb)

Subjects: LCSH: English language—Foreign words and phrases. |

Environmentalism—Terminology.

Classification: LCC PE1582.A3 E26 2019 (print) |

DDC 422/.403—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018058231>

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

The University of Minnesota is an equal-opportunity educator and employer.

25 24 23 22 21 20 19

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*In memory of Beatrice Annie Goranson,  
who would have loved this,  
and Trout,  
who loved seaweed, sunlight, and the wind*

*The climate crisis is also a crisis of culture,  
and thus of the imagination.*

—AMITAV GHOSH, *THE GREAT DERANGEMENT:  
CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE UNTHINKABLE*

*To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life.*

—LUDWIG WITGENSTEIN,  
*PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS*

# Contents

xi Foreword  
*Kim Stanley Robinson*

xv Acknowledgments

I Introduction: Loanwords to Live With  
*Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Brent Ryan Bellamy*

15 ~\*~  
*Melody Jue*

22 **Apocalypso**  
*Sam Solnick*

34 **Blockadia**  
*Randall Amster*

42 **Cibopathic**  
*Daniel Worden*

52 **Dàtóng**  
*Andrew Pendakis*

63 **Fotminne**  
*Sofia Ahlberg*

72 **Ghurba**  
*Allison Ford and  
Kari Marie Norgaard*

Portfolio

FOLLOWS PAGE 152

*Nicolás de Jesús*

*Rirkrit Tiravanija*

SWOON

*Jonathan Dyck*

*Jenny Kendler*

*Lori Damiano*

*Michelle Kuen Suet Fung*

*Yellena James*

*Natasha Bowdoin*

*Moonassi*

*Nikki Lindt*

*Kate Shaw*

*Susa Monteiro*

*Maryanto*

- 82 **Godhuli**  
*Malcolm Sen*
- 92 **Gyebale**  
*Jennifer Lee Johnson*
- 99 **Heyiya**  
*Michael Horka*
- 110 **Hyperempathy**  
*Rebecca Evans*
- 122 **Ildsjel**  
*Karen O'Brien and  
Ann Kristin Schorre*
- 132 **In Lak'ech—A la K'in**  
*John Esposito*
- 141 **Metahuman**  
*Anthony Lioi*
- 153 **Misneach**  
*Evelyn O'Malley*
- 163 **Nahual**  
*Carolyn Fornoff*
- 176 **Nakaiy**  
*Kira Bre Clingen*
- 187 **Pa Theuan**  
*Andrew Alan Johnson*
- 194 **Pachamama**  
*Miriam Tola*
- 204 **Plant Time**  
*Charis Boke*
- 215 **Qi**  
*Yifei Li*
- 226 **Rén**  
*Pierre-Héli Monot*
- 237 **Sehnsucht**  
*Andrew Hageman*
- 245 **Shikata Ga Nai**  
*Brent Ryan Bellamy  
and Sheena Wilson*
- 256 **Sila**  
*Janet Tamalik McGrath*
- 266 **Solastalgia**  
*Kimberly Skye Richards*
- 273 **Sueño**  
*Robert Savino Oventile*
- 284 **Terragouge**  
*Chris Pak*
- 295 **Total Liberation**  
*David N. Pellow*
- 305 **Watershed  
Discipleship**  
*Cherice Bock*
- 317 **Contributors**

## Greetings

- 92 **Gyebale**  
*Jennifer Lee Johnson*
- 132 **In Lak'ech—A la K'in**  
*John Esposito*

## Resistance

- 34 **Blockadia**  
*Randall Amster*
- 122 **Ildsjel**  
*Karen O'Brien and  
Ann Kristin Schorre*
- 141 **Metahuman**  
*Anthony Lioi*
- 284 **Terragouge**  
*Chris Pak*
- 295 **Total Liberation**  
*David N. Pellow*

## Dispositions

- 22 **Apocalypso**  
*Sam Solnick*
- 153 **Misneach**  
*Evelyn O'Malley*
- 226 **Rén**  
*Pierre-Héli Monot*
- 110 **Hyperempathy**  
*Rebecca Evans*
- 245 **Shikata Ga Nai**  
*Brent Ryan Bellamy  
and Sheena Wilson*

## Perception

- 42 **Cibopathic**  
*Daniel Worden*
- 82 **Godhuli**  
*Malcolm Sen*
- 176 **Nakaiy**  
*Kira Bre Clingen*

204 **Plant Time**  
*Charis Boke*

## **Desires**

237 **Sehnsucht**  
*Andrew Hageman*

72 **Ghurba**  
*Kari Marie Norgaard  
and Allison Ford*

266 **Solastalgia**  
*Kimberly Skye Richards*

52 **Dàtóng**  
*Andrew Pendakis*

273 **Sueño**  
*Robert Savino Oventile*

## **Beyond the Human**

163 **Nahual**  
*Carolyn Fornoff*

15 **~\*~**  
*Melody Jue*

99 **Heyiya**  
*Michael Horka*

63 **Fotminne**  
*Sofia Ahlberg*

305 **Watershed  
Discipleship**  
*Cherice Bock*

## **Beyond “the Environment”**

215 **Qi**  
*Yifei Li*

187 **Pa Theuan**  
*Andrew Alan Johnson*

194 **Pachamama**  
*Miriam Tola*

256 **Sila**  
*Janet Tamalik McGrath*

## Foreword

Kim Stanley Robinson

Languages change over time when people use new words. Fairly often these new words are borrowed from other languages, and linguists call these *loanwords*, though the return on the loan is never reciprocal, being no more than some kind of social-psychic tribute to the ingenuity of the host language's culture. Probably there should be a word too for this mysterious return on the loan.

Science fiction, consisting of stories set in the future, has often led its writers onto the perilous ground of making up new words, or even new languages. These languages suggest the historical and technological changes that have occurred between the present and the time of the science fiction story, and more generally they create the feeling of estrangement appropriate to science fiction's transport by mental travel to distant times and places. Orwell's controlocracy in *1984* is famously facilitated by Newspeak; Anthony Burgess cleverly portrayed a Russian-inflected English dialect in *A Clockwork Orange*; Russell Hoban conveyed an apocalyptic scenario in the postliterate language of *Riddley Walker*; Suzette Haden Elgin invented a postpatriarchal language in her Native Tongue series. Many other writers have portrayed dense accelerated futures partly by way of a blizzard of neologisms, as in Greg Bear's *Queen of Angels*.

Science fiction writers have also often invented new words, inserted into our familiar English to indicate a new technology or a new mental phenomenon. Two excellent examples are Ursula K. Le Guin's word *ansible*, a communication device that transmits information instantaneously across any distance, and Robert Heinlein's *grok*, which is a kind of telepathic gestalt understanding of some other person or idea. For a

## FOREWORD

decade or more, the popularity of Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* was such that lots of people used the word *grok* in real life, which is quite an accomplishment for any writer. On the other hand, Heinlein also coined the word *tansstaafl*, from the acronym "There ain't no such thing as a free lunch," and although some libertarians still love to quote this untrue truism, it suggests to me that Heinlein's ability in this realm was hit or miss.

The book you are about to read focuses on individual words or short phrases, either from other languages or invented, that English, and perhaps all languages, could use to better describe our historical situation, which we now often call the Anthropocene—another new word, and one that is very likely to last, defining our period in both human and geological terms, now collapsed to the same thing. One scientist, Eugene Stoemer, invented this word, and another, Paul Crutzen, popularized it. Now it is an important and permanent part of our language and our sense of history. Though this origin story might seem surprising, recall that *ecology* is a word coined by Ernst Haeckel in 1873, while the word *scientist* was coined by William Whewell in 1834. People invent new words! It's obvious when you say it, and yet still a little startling to remember.

Each word or phrase included in this book is more than a word or phrase, being also a concept. Of course all words are concepts, but familiar words contain their concepts in a familiar way, and so seem simpler than new and unfamiliar words. As all the words included here are new to English, they bring new concepts with them, so the short essays accompanying each word are crucial to the success of the project. The essays all move from straightforward definition to discussions of the contexts of the concepts evoked, elucidating larger systems of thought and culture, and casting light on the "long emergency" of the twenty-first century, when anthropogenic climate change will impact the biosphere and all its inhabitants.

So many new words gathered together like this, each bringing with

it a new concept and system, creates a dizzying effect. This is good and right, because we live in a dizzying time. What we do now as a global civilization will create one future out of a vast array of possible futures, an array which ranges from utmost disaster to lasting peace and prosperity. The sheer breadth of this range is all by itself extremely confusing, to the point of inducing a kind of mental and emotional gridlock. Anything could happen! So what should we do? Maybe nothing! Maybe we can't do anything!

But we can do things, if we can figure out what they are. Various good futures are achievable, even starting from our current moment of high danger. So some really comprehensive analysis, destranding, and remapping is now part of our necessary work. Inevitably new concepts and new words will emerge—lots of them. So this book's profusion is an accurate foretelling of what will come. It's a kind of science fiction story in the form of a lexicon, and it postulates and helps to create a future culture more articulate and wiser than we are now. Thus by definition it is a utopian science fiction story.

Among other good effects, this book makes us more alert to new words already out there, and it puts us on the lookout for more. Recently I noticed a couple of meteorological phrases new to me, which helped me while I was compressing and revising my *Science in the Capital* trilogy, written between 2002 and 2006. I saw in my 2016 revision that I had described what we now call an "atmospheric river" a decade before the phrase appeared (at least to me), and I happily inserted it into the text, as being better than earlier names like "pineapple express." Similarly, in the second volume I had described what we now call a "polar vortex," but again, either the term had not yet been invented or it had not yet shifted from the meteorological community to common usage (or to me). Again, I retrojected the phrase into the text.

These kinds of re-visionings are going to keep happening to us all, expanding from small meteorological clarifications such as these I've mentioned to much larger and more important expressions of the

## FOREWORD

zeitgeist, including definitions of actions we can take to wrest history into a good Anthropocene. As these inventions pop in our heads, this delightful lexicon can serve as sourcebook, clarification, diagnostic, and stimulus. It's an already existing example of the way people playing with language can help bring things and events into sharper cognitive focus. Playful and useful: I trust you will enjoy this book, and I hope you will put it to use.

## Acknowledgments

While no academic work is truly solitary, edited collections are especially communitarian. This book is the product of a transnational web of scholars, writers, artists, and editors, not to mention the trillions of nonhuman organisms that made our work (and all of human life) possible. Thanks to the nematodes for recycling soil nutrients to enable agriculture; to the trees for producing the oxygen that we breathe every day; and to the bacteria and other microbes that comprise over half of the cells in our bodies. Human friends and colleagues also provided critical support, including Dominic Boyer, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Jeff Diamanti, Soo Go, Eva-Lynn Jagoe, Eduardo Lage-Otero, Michael Maniates, Shama Rangwala, Imre Szeman, and Juria Toramae. We thank Chantal Bilodeau for her early contributions. We are grateful to the University of Minnesota Press and our editor, Doug Armato, for supporting this unique project, and we acknowledge the generous assistance of Yale-NUS College, which provided a subvention grant that enabled the inclusion of full-color artwork. We want to express our gratitude to the countless creative thinkers whose work inspired this project, especially Octavia E. Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin, Hayao Miyazaki, Marge Piercy, Kim Stanley Robinson, and Rebecca Solnit. Above all, we thank the authors and artists for their willingness to join us on this journey.

Matthew would like to thank, in particular, Juria for her intellectual, artistic, and emotional support and Trout Fishing in America, Blue, and Maggie for their love and affection. As always, he is grateful for family: Elizabeth Schneider, Anna Schneider-Mayerson, Hal Mayerson, Rebecca Edwards, and Louis Mayerson, among others. This kind of work would not be possible (or fun) without comrades to talk

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

and think with; thank you to Joni Adamson, Jodi Dean, Kei Franklin, Greta Gaard, Jesse Goldstein, Louis Ho, Steffani Jemison, Stephanie LeMenager, Elaine Tyler May, Ella Dawn McGeough, Kevin P. Murphy, David N. Pellow, Daniel J. Philippon, Karen Pinkus, Elizabeth Povinelli, Elise Rasmussen, Alexa Weik von Mossner, Benjamin Wiggins, Audrey Yeo, and Natasha Zaretsky. A residency at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity as part of the Banff Research in Culture “Year 2067” program offered an ideal location to share ideas and think about desirable futures. Friends and colleagues at Yale-NUS College were supportive throughout this process, especially Michael Maniates, Marvin Montefrío, Brian McAdoo, Ma Shaoling, Nicole Constable, Joseph F. Alter, Anju Paul, Catherine Sanger, Nick R. Smith, Stuart Earl Strange, Ajay Mathuru, Matthew Stamps, Joanne Roberts, and President Tan Tai Yong. He is indebted to the students in his 2018 “Foundations of Environmental Humanities” and 2019 “Ecotopian Visions” courses at Yale-NUS for their thoughtful discussion of selected chapters. To them, and to you, he says: *gyebale!*

Brent would not have had the time and space to complete this project without the care, love, and support of Alexandra Carruthers. The companionship of George helped, too, including his constant demand: “Be better!” In the course of editing this book, Brent spoke with many colleagues, comrades, and friends. If you talked and he’s missed your name here, hit him up for a copy of the book! Thanks to Adam Carlson, Marija Cetinic, Amy De’Ath, Jonathan Dyck, Danine Farquharson, Veronica Hollinger, David Huebert, Mariève Isabel, Rob Jackson, Aaron Kreuter, Lauren Kirshner, Katie Lewandowski, Karla McManus, Tanner Mirllees, Sean O’Brien, Joseph Ren, and Jill Stanton. Thanks also go to his family (and their animal companions) especially Barbara and Hope, who shared their home in fall 2017, and also to Brent Sr., Wendy, Rebecca, William, Josten, Blue, Max, and Lily; Leigh Ann and Pearl; and Clyde and Lindsay. Thanks are also due to Adrienne for the vital work of helping to bring new hope to the world.

## Loanwords to Live With

*Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Brent Ryan Bellamy*

For the past decade, dark clouds have been massing on the psychic horizon. Against the trickle of encouraging news about the growth of renewable energy comes a countervailing torrent of numbingly ominous climatic developments. The four elements seem to be assembled like the four horsemen. Air: the world chokes. In May 2019, the concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide passed 414 parts per million, the highest concentration in millions of years and far beyond what scientists consider safe for humans.<sup>1</sup> Fire: life swelters and burns. From 2010 to 2016, seven successive years registered as having the highest average global temperature on record.<sup>2</sup> Calamitous wildfires have become more common, from Australia to Greenland and everywhere in between. Water: the land floods. In July 2017, an ice shelf twice the size of Luxembourg broke off the Antarctic ice shelf, floating toward warmer waters; a month later, Houston and Mumbai endured devastating floods. Earth: the soil bakes. A drought that started in 1998 in the eastern Mediterranean is likely the most severe of the past nine hundred years, significantly contributing to the mass migration out of Syria.<sup>3</sup>

Under these stresses, the web of life is coming undone. According to many scientists, we have now entered the sixth mass extinction in our planet's history. Some species will adapt; others, tragically, will not. Yet readers of this book do not need more statistics about the climate catastrophe; those of us paying attention are already familiar with the

## INTRODUCTION

projections. Learning the basic facts about our warming world is only the beginning of reckoning with what needs to be done to mitigate the worst impacts on the planet, nonhuman species, and ourselves. We all struggle to understand how to respond, emotionally and politically, collectively and as individuals, to the advent of the Anthropocene, the current geologic epoch in which humanity acts as the dominant world-shaping force.<sup>4</sup> There is no doubt that the Earth will be profoundly transformed in the coming decades. The situation is dire, but instead of catastrophism, this book offers something else: conceptual tools to help us imagine how to adapt and flourish in the face of socioecological adversity.

To forge such tools, we need to take stock of where we are. We need to accept that what we might have imagined to be stable, consistent, and normative ceaselessly shifts underfoot. As philosopher Allen Thompson argues, what many of us in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries saw as “normal” will likely be seen, “in the full course of human history,” as “an outstanding aberration.”<sup>5</sup> As the scale and fallout of climate change, ocean acidification, mass extinction, and other processes become increasingly undeniable and unavoidable, we will need to change our cognitive maps of the world. What are the psychological analogs of calving icebergs and drowned coastlines? What new cultural constructions will arise along with renewable infrastructures? Though we cannot accurately predict the future, it is now reasonable to “expect that many, but not all, of the culturally embedded perspectives and habits basic to late twentieth century life will not continue.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the question is not whether the world will change, but how. Through the medium of language, this book presents possibilities for the cultural maps of better futures.

### WHAT IS TO BE IMAGINED?

Over the last two decades, one of the most popular rallying cries from radical activists and scholars in the West has been “another world is possible.” It has been chanted at thousands of protests, scribbled on

countless concrete borders worldwide, and repeated over 800,000 times on the Internet (according to a recent web search). “Another world is possible” is a conscious rejoinder to the assertion that “there is no alternative” to the status quo, unjust though it may be. Traced to nineteenth-century liberal political theorist Herbert Spencer, “there is no alternative” was popularized by British prime minister and grand wizard of austerity Margaret Thatcher, who used it so frequently to justify her callous deregulation and market fundamentalism that it acquired its own acronym: TINA. Thatcher was reading from an authoritarian playbook: fascists and totalitarians understood that by restricting the imagination and consideration of alternative possibilities—of politics, policy, and social life—citizens would resign themselves to the order of things, thereby enabling further manipulation by political and financial elites. In the face of catastrophic ecological collapse, novel versions of “there is no alternative” are intoned today, by conservatives recklessly dedicated to fossil-fueled capitalism as well as by comfortable liberals who wish to see only gradual, incremental, and nonthreatening responses to an increasingly turbulent status quo.

“Another world is possible” is a worthy maxim, but without further elaboration it stands like a narrow bridge to a destination shrouded in mist. Would you want to journey there? When radical activists and scholars describe what lies on the other side, they often write manifestoes or lists of principles, yet these dry or polemical formulations rarely stir the passions. This is where speculative fiction holds great promise. Though the mist always clings to visions of different worlds, the very act of imagining the future enables a radical departure from the trajectory of the present.<sup>7</sup> As “barely audible messages from a future that may never come into being,” speculative visions offer critical perspectives on the present and remind us of the infinite possibilities of life on Earth, as well as the ways that we might bring some of them into being.<sup>8</sup>

When a wave of fiction explicitly concerned with climate change arrived a decade ago, it held incredible potential as a kind of literary

## INTRODUCTION

time machine, transporting us to the foreign country of the distant future. Unfortunately the genre has not yet realized that promise, as many authors have recycled familiar apocalyptic tropes that describe diminished, destroyed, and denatured worlds.<sup>9</sup> Though packaged as cautionary tales that might spark us to take action, social scientists report that dystopic visions tend to do the exact opposite.<sup>10</sup> In the few cases where authors have constructed desirable environmental futures, they often portray their inhabitants with familiar subjectivities: people of the future, they're just like us! Consider the characters of Kim Stanley Robinson's compelling 2017 novel, *New York 2140*, who are comfortably recognizable: social media celebrities, greedy financial traders, and treasure-seeking orphans.<sup>11</sup> This representational tendency exists so that readers have something familiar to hold on to while being transported to an unfamiliar world, but it can cast a misleading spell. Historians of social life, emotion, and the everyday report that our ancestors were not just like us; there is little reason to believe that our descendants will be any less different. Acknowledging the probable alterity of future inhabitants of Earth is a first step in meeting the obligation to change our culture, our selves. This imperative is one of the goals of this book, and the reason its authors draw on speculative fiction, anthropology, and the sociology of existing subcultures: these fields help us remember that other worlds already exist, while history reminds us that change is inevitable.

We now know that even our sensual apperception is not “natural” but rather dependent on fundamental, unconscious, and culturally specific worldviews, norms, and scripts. However, this knowledge alone—like the phrase “another world is possible”—does not help us imagine, cognitively or emotionally, better worlds. Especially at this historical moment, imagination is not frivolous but crucial: as cognitive psychology's simulation heuristic argues, people view a possible event as plausible to the extent that they can imagine it.<sup>12</sup> Small tweaks to the status quo—such as replacing fossil fuel consumption with centralized

and corporate-controlled solar and wind power—are much easier to imagine than wholesale transformations. This perceptual tendency has profound consequences. Even the most felicitous future is not worth struggling for if it is not considered “realistic,” if it seems like our hopes cannot be realized. Because of this poverty of imagination, we are left fighting for minor shifts in policy that most scientists see as wholly insufficient, or we find ourselves faithfully trudging toward a destination we cannot even envision. As ecofuturist Alex Steffen notes, “It’s literally true that we can’t build what we can’t imagine. . . . The fact that we haven’t compellingly imagined a thriving, dynamic, sustainable world is a major reason we don’t already live in one.”<sup>13</sup>

Enter the volume you hold in your hands. It does not pretend to offer a fully fleshed-out description of an ecotopian future, let alone a road map to get there. What it does present is an assortment of conceptual tools and a prismatic window into the ecological multiverse. In the tradition of speculative fiction authors such as Octavia E. Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin, Marge Piercy, and Kim Stanley Robinson, it presents thirty terms and concepts to jump-start the critical process of imagining and eventually realizing better futures. Unlike most speculative fiction, however, these visions revolve around describing different ways of inhabiting this fractured planet to which we are inextricably bound. As Jacques Mesrine notes, “There is no other world. There’s just another way to live.”<sup>14</sup> In that spirit, you might read these entries not only as descriptions of unfamiliar ideas but as fun house mirrors in which you can glimpse yourself as radically otherwise.

#### LANGUAGE AND REALITY

What role could language play in a Great Transition? As ecotheologian Thomas Berry asserts, “Our challenge is to create a new language, a new sense of what it is to be human. . . . This brings about a completely new sense of reality and of value.”<sup>15</sup> There is little question that language reflects the material and conceptual worlds that we inhabit—consider,

## INTRODUCTION

for example, the copious critters and place-names that are slowly being edged out of dictionaries and common usage in favor of recent coinages such as *browsability* and *post-truth*. Classical thinkers from Aristotle to Giambattista Vico have suggested that this is a two-way street: language might also have a powerful influence on perception and thought. In the early twentieth century, anthropologists began to focus their attention on this hypothesis, now known as linguistic relativity. One of its leading theorists, Benjamin Lee Whorf, summarizes this notion in a tellingly ecoimperialist metaphor:

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. . . . The world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds—and this means largely by the linguistic system in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significance as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way—an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language.<sup>16</sup>

The “thick” version of this idea, commonly referred to as the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, is linguistic determinism: the claim that language not only influences but determines and therefore constrains perception and thought. Though repudiated by contemporary social scientists, linguistic determinism has been part of the motivation for the intentional construction of over nine hundred artificial languages, from *Lingua Ignota* (conceived by twelfth-century German mystic Hildegard von Bingen) to *Loglan* (developed in the 1950s to transform its speakers into logical thinkers) to *Láadan* (a feminist language created in the 1980s).<sup>17</sup> The 2016 film *Arrival* stretches the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis to the point of caricature: learning an alien language with no linear concept of time somehow enables its speakers to see the future.

Is there an ideal ecological language that would instantaneously usher in a true culture of sustainability? Unfortunately, no. The labor of constructing a better future will take many forms, though the power of language and concepts should not be understated. Linguistic relativity has often focused on the influence of grammatical structures, yet “words wield tremendous influence over human thought and action” too, notes linguistic anthropologist Sean O’Neill.<sup>18</sup> Who hasn’t had a memorable moment of recognition at learning a new term that encapsulates and thereby crystallizes an existing idea or feeling? The power of novel terms to establish practices as normative might be demonstrated by the recent neologisms *selfie* and *binge-watch*: what had been embarrassing can become, once named, communicable and commonplace.

Many environmental thinkers agree that language should be one site of analysis and intervention as we confront the Anthropocene. Scholars of environmental studies and the environmental humanities have published thoughtful critiques of familiar but problematic terminology (such as “nature,” “culture,” and “the environment”) and highlighted newly resonant terms (including “denial,” “extinction,” and “apocalypse”).<sup>19</sup> British author Robert Macfarlane has published a loving lexicon of reenchantment via local place-names and called for a “desecration phrasebook” of our near future, full of neologisms for trash vortices, geoengineering drizzles, and oil-soaked tidemarks.<sup>20</sup> Artists such as the Bureau of Linguistical Reality<sup>21</sup> have crowd-sourced the coinage of Anthropocene terminology, leading to suggestive terms such as *ennuipocalypse* (a slow-motion collapse) and *shadow time* (a feeling of living simultaneously in two different temporal scales). We are fellow travelers with these thinkers and artists, but this book offers a slightly different perspective. Our authors present their loanwords as conceptual tools for reckoning with the environmental, political, social, and philosophical challenges of the Anthropocene, today and in the decades to come. This lexicon does not stop at critique of what exists today; it argues for what could or even should be. To think of language

## INTRODUCTION

in this way is to implicate the daily choices we make as individuals and communities—to utter one word instead of all others is to shape the direction of our living language, consciously or not. Insofar as every choice shapes the cognitive frames we inhabit, our future is established not only through dramatic historical events but also through gradual accretion: moment by moment, act by act, word by word. In this spirit, this lexicon does not merely describe unfolding disasters but offers buoyant linguistic and conceptual tools for the collective construction of a future that is more just, equitable, pleasurable, and truly sustainable for *Homo sapiens* and the millions of species with whom we gratefully share this planet.

## CONCEPTS IN MIGRATION

These suggested additions to the current global lingua franca known as Standard American English do not come to us from the ether. They hail from speculative fiction, subcultures of resistance, and other languages and cultures. This last category is particularly important. While resurrecting what has been forgotten and constructing new things *ex nihilo* will be necessary, we must seek appropriate responses to our collective challenges with the full tapestry of human experience in mind. Whatever may come, humility is a surefire virtue in the Anthropocene, and welcoming new and old friends with different experiences and forms of knowledge will be especially important in this era of change, turbulence, and migration. We acknowledge that such borrowing, however conscientious, carries the risk of cultural appropriation, especially because English speakers have been and continue to be responsible for staggering material and cultural theft from Indigenous peoples and people of color. With this history firmly in mind, we believe it is crucial to learn from and think with other cultures and subcultures in these perilous years, and that this can be achieved without the symbolic violence of romanticizing the outlooks or reducing the complexity of previously unfamiliar worlds and worldviews. As environmental critic

Ursula Heise has noted, “The environmentalist ambition is to think globally, but doing so in terms of a single language,” or a single culture, “is inconceivable.”<sup>22</sup>

In this sense, the loanword is a fruitfully relational linguistic category. Loanwords are terms that are adopted into one language from another without translation.<sup>23</sup> Their irregular spelling and pronunciation thus advertises their difference, demonstrating that language, like culture, is always heterogeneous and historied. Contemporary English is unimaginable without loanwords, from *government* (French) to *chocolate* (Nahuatl) to *ecstasy* (Greek). Indeed, English is a particularly eclectic language; according to the World Loanword Database,<sup>24</sup> 42 percent of English words are loanwords, compared to only 2 percent for Mandarin Chinese. While loanwords are not truly loaned in the sense that they are incorporated into one language without the prospect of being returned later, they certainly constitute a gift. Indeed, linguists sometimes refer to their language of origin as the “donor language.” While a gift can be seen as a form of theft (i.e., uncompensated incorporation), it might also be viewed in the context of the gift exchanges that occur in many cultures. Anthropologists attest that gift giving is not a simple or isolated act but rather serves to weave communities together into dense networks of mutual indebtedness, exchange, and interdependence. Accepting these loanwords, then, makes English speakers obligated to return the favor with gratitude, respect, and equal moral consideration.

Because this book is written in English, it is focused on the value that these loanwords might bring to English speakers. Given English’s global popularity—in 2017 it was estimated that there are 1.12 billion English speakers worldwide—and the disproportionate and continuing responsibility of many English speakers for global environmental injustices, we see this as an important intervention. However, English is not the language of the majority of the (human) world. Mandarin is spoken by 1.1 billion people, Hindustani by 697 million, Spanish by

## INTRODUCTION

512 million, and Arabic by 422 million. Mandarin and Arabic are the native tongues of far more people worldwide than English—909 million and 442 million, respectively, to 378 million.<sup>25</sup> None of the editors, authors, or artists involved in assembling this ecotopian lexicon believe that English, with or without these loanwords, ought to replace any of the seven thousand languages that are spoken today. Indeed, linguistic imperialism is often a means of cultural expansionism, which reinforces the notion that dominant cultures are more advanced and desirable.<sup>26</sup> Rather than propose a linguistic monocrop, we hope that these loanwords might highlight the world's linguistic and cultural diversity, expand the collective imagination of environmental possibilities, and even inspire similar projects.

Words can only take us so far, of course. It is of little surprise that when it comes to the imagination, we almost always rely on visual metaphors. Sight enjoys a remarkable dominance over the other senses—how often do people long to taste, touch, or hear the future? To add an additional imaginative (and mnemonically sticky) layer to this project, we challenged fourteen artists to respond to selected entries with original artwork, along with a short statement reflecting on their process and product. These artists hail from eleven countries and draw on a wide range of visual styles and artistic traditions, from Buddhist sculpture to sgraffito black-and-white etchings to Día de los Muertos prints. The result is a transmedia conversation between the originary author, culture, or subculture; a critical thinker; and an artist. These images can be found in the color plate in the center of the book; they are also available online for purchase as T-shirts, tote bags, handkerchiefs, and stickers ([www.ecotopianlexicon.com](http://www.ecotopianlexicon.com)). All proceeds from these items and this book will go toward a fund to support creative political and cultural interventions focused on addressing climate injustice—the disproportionate vulnerability and suffering from the consequences of climate change by those who are least responsible.

## INTRODUCTION

### LOANWORDS TO LIVE WITH: AN ECOTOPIAN LEXICON

We asked each of our contributors to compose an entry describing a word or phrase that would aid us in our collective task of living well in the Anthropocene. We requested terms whose adoption might accomplish much-needed psychological, social, cultural, and political work, and we encouraged contributors to exercise the creativity that this moment demands. Each entry would need to accomplish three basic tasks: introduce the term in its original context; identify its ecological, ecopsychological, ecosocial, or ecopolitical potential; and describe how it might be applied in common usage in English.

These minimal instructions produced a grounded yet vertiginous collection of essays. We present these focused meditations alphabetically—the traditional organization of a book of keywords. But unlike those works, which generally offer a familiar list, our table of contents will be, for most readers, dizzying and even intimidating. That is very much the point: to think we already know the range of social, cultural, phenomenological, psychological, political, and economic options for responding to the existential challenge that we face is to foreclose the possibility of something radically different, something better. (For readers that prefer some guidance, we offer Another Path, which you can take by turning to the loanword listed at the end of each entry.) We hope you take the strangeness of these terms as an invitation to join us on a critical and imaginative journey. We also hope that you will share with others the sense of wonder and possibility that this book intends to animate. Give *An Ecotopian Lexicon* as a holiday gift. Bring it to parties. Leave it in a coffee shop, waiting room, or library for a stranger to find.

To make the most of this historical moment requires that all concerned, creative, and thoughtful people—including you, dear reader—play a role. Culture is ultimately a fragile tapestry that we weave together. As the dominant culture is worn thin by the lashing cataclysms of the Anthropocene, why not choose to weave differently? In

## INTRODUCTION

Jorge Luis Borges's short story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," artifacts from an invented world, Tlön, begin to appear. This fictional universe, it turns out, was not the fabrication of a lone genius but a diverse range of actors, including "astronomers, biologists, engineers, metaphysicians, poets, chemists, algebraists, moralists, painters, geometers"—just the sort of motley coalition that we need today.<sup>27</sup> From a solitary mention in a single dictionary to a few coins, the imaginative vision of a radically different world slowly supersedes reality. People simply prefer to live in Tlön, and so they do, transforming their ideology, language, poetry, and even history. Borges's story illustrates the extent to which we might exert collective control over the perceptual, cultural, social, and political worlds that we choose to inhabit. Consider each of these loanwords, then, as a Tlönian seed buried in the backyard of your mind, waiting to be watered. Let's see what grows.

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