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## ABSTRACT

People like stories. Movies and books tell stories. Advertisements and news networks tell stories. TikToks and Twitter threads tell stories too. People are bombarded with narratives about themselves, others, and the world around them. The following pages are about a few stories that can be told by contemplating ordinary objects.

My thesis focuses on a few mundane things—Costco hot dogs, shoelaces, and English Football—and what they have to reveal about what it means to be human in the Anthropocene, the era where humans impact the environment and climate on Earth. I will combine research about the Earth as a product of various environmental systems with personal vignettes that involve these three things. I will explore different outlooks on the situation we as humans currently find ourselves in.

In Homer's *The Iliad*, he spends nearly 150 lines describing the Shield of Achilles in great visual detail. On the Shield of Achilles there is imagery of the Earth, the moon, the sun, and the stars. Wrought in the metal of the shield, there are also depictions of two cities, a field being plowed, and a shepherd tending to his sheep. These images encapsulate a lot of the human experience. This thesis is my attempt at depicting my experience and research on the Anthropocene—my own version of the Shield of Achilles, if you will.

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## Acknowledgements

This thesis is the product of a whole lot of reading. When I was younger, my Mom and Dad read books to my brothers and I at night. They sat in the middle of two beds that Conor, Wesley, and I were perched on, listening to them read. Thanks for those memories, Mom and Dad. I think that's where I started to love reading.

Thanks also to Professor Claire Colebrook for her patience and guidance during the process of writing and revising this thesis.

## Introduction

A few summers ago, I worked as a landscaper at a golf course near my childhood home. I woke up each morning, hastily ate breakfast, and drove to work in the dark. I started up a lawnmower and spent the day cutting the grass on the course. Every morning, I watched the sun come up while smelling burnt gasoline. It was easier to cut grass in the morning—it was cooler and there was dew on the ground. The dew left a mark of the path I took through the grass, so I knew exactly what I had cut and what remained to be mowed. For the most part, it was a peaceful job. I met with my boss and co-workers first thing in the morning to listen to a gameplan of who had to do what each day. After that, I spent most the day alone.

This solitude watching the sun rise each morning was wonderful. I appreciated the time alone with my own thoughts, free to ponder whatever popped into my head. Mowing grass is not a particularly mentally taxing job, so after a certain period of time, the novelty of being alone with my thoughts wore off a bit. I got bored. A few days into this job, I brought a pair of ear pods to work and began to listen to podcasts. I tried everything—true crime series, sports analysis, news, investigative journalism. One podcast that particularly caught my interest as I hand-mowed the tee boxes one afternoon was called ‘The Anthropocene Reviewed,’ written and read by John Green. The Anthropocene is the current era in which humans are leaving a tangible impact on Earth’s environment. In this podcast, Green talks about certain aspects of the human-centered planet he finds fascinating. He reviews anything from *Monopoly* to humanity’s temporal range and rates them on a five-star scale. This rating aspect of the podcast is somewhat facetious. Green discusses the chosen object or topic at length, interspersing his personal thoughts with explanations of the history or science of his chosen facet of the Anthropocene. At

the end of each episode, Green concludes his analysis with his rating out of five stars, as if to point fun at the inadequacy of this rating system to capture the nuance of the topics of his episodes. Green might say this inadequacy is particular to the Anthropocene.

That same summer spent listening to podcasts while cutting grass, I also read *The Parable of the Sower* by Octavia E. Butler. In this dystopian book, a girl grows up in an American society that is reeling after a cataclysm involving climate change, class inequality, and the threat of a return to slavery. Reading this novel, I was presented with some different ideas about the era in which humans impact the Earth. Intrigued by the concept of the Anthropocene, I began to try to incorporate my own experiences into this framework of understanding humanity's position on Earth. At the time, I was studying abroad at University College Dublin. When I wasn't in my classes at UCD, I was traveling around Western Europe as much as I could afford—living out of a backpack and sleeping in hostels. At these hostels, I met an abundance of people with drastically different lives from my own. I met a carpenter from Berlin, who was on holiday in Lagos, Portugal. Her skin was covered in ink. So many illustrated memories and ideas. She had the most piercings of anyone I've ever seen. The sides of her head were buzzed, but she had bleached dreads that came down past her shoulders. We talked for hours while she smoked hand-rolled cigarettes that made this sweet aroma in the cool, salty evening air. We talked with another woman from the Netherlands who was on a European road trip in a van she and her dad had custom made together. This was entirely foreign to me, but I was enthralled with the stories of their lives.

In Killarney, Ireland, I met a trio of American friends in their late twenties from LA. One was a comic, another was an artist, and the third was a college admission counselor. They were

hilarious. We talked with another woman staying at the hostel from Taiwan who had recently quit her job at Apple to pursue a career in music and was attending music school in Dublin.

Seeing glimpses of the lives of all these different people made me even more curious about the Anthropocene. Coming back to State College for my final year as an undergraduate student, I decided to read a little more about the Anthropocene. I was interested in how objects and concepts in my own life can tell a story about the Anthropocene.

My thesis is the culmination of this research and thinking. I chose to write about a few things: Costco, Shoelaces, and English Football. By looking closely at these things, I drew some conclusions about what it means to be human in a time where humanity is destroying the climate and the environment. This thesis is written at the intersection of creative non-fiction and cultural studies.

## Costco

I was sitting on a red picnic bench. Basking in the peculiar constancy of fluorescent overhead lighting, I ate a hotdog with my brother and my mom. We were at Costco. For those unfamiliar, Costco is a store that sells a wide range of consumer goods in large quantities at a reduced cost. Basically, Costco is a warehouse except instead of shipping their pallets of goods to retailers to be sold, they slap some bar codes on the products and allow customers to peruse the warehouse and grab items directly from the pallets. It's a rather ingenious business model. A sprawling island of a warehouse amidst a sea of cars in the parking lot, Costco is emblematic of the Anthropocene. It takes a whole hell of a lot of pistons fired and fields fertilized to make Costco a thing. Costco, like the Anthropocene, is environmentally taxing, somehow out of place and peculiar, and beautiful in a potentially tragic and fleeting way.

About two hours prior to eating this hotdog with my brother, I walked into Costco with my brothers and my mother. Staring ahead into a sea of flat screen TVs and large storage shelves, I walked through a big, open garage door. In this doorway, a man in uniform asked for our card, looked at it for a moment, and allowed us to pass through the threshold.

To my left were four different types of shampoo. That's a lot of shampoo. More than I could use in an entire lifetime. To my right stood rows of TVs. The sun and hot wind and sweat of outside got left behind when I walked into this vast warehouse. It's reminiscent of that Indiana Jones movies where they store the Ark of the Covenant in a big warehouse. There was no ark in this building.

Instead, there was the scent of hotdogs and pizza. There is a lot a that goes into this scent of hotdogs. A hot dog is the product of a whole lot of systems, at the precipice of thousands of



years of history. A pig was raised to be slaughtered. Its food was grown in large monocrop fields in the middle of nowhere Iowa or Kansas or Nebraska. Its flesh is processed in some large factory by a host of different people and machines all hell bent on chopping, sorting, and pureeing—turning the product of thousands of years of evolution into an 8-pack of hot dogs. This pack is then shipped off by land, air, or seas—by highway or railroad or airplane or boat. These are networks that span the globe. These networks move hotdogs and ideas, alike. These networks are fueled by electricity and engines and other manifestations of the human imagination. These networks have a large and impactful environmental and ecological impact.

As a reminder, the Anthropocene is the geologic era in which humans have impacted the environment they exist in—the Earth. James Lovelock wrote “I would sooner expect to see a goat succeed as a gardener than expect humans to become responsible stewards of the Earth” in *Gaia: The Practical Science of Planetary Medicine*. The Anthropocene is the geologic era in which the effects of humanity’s irresponsible and reckless stewardship of the Earth have manifested themselves in what is called the climate and environmental crisis. The term ‘crisis’ is flawed. As Bruno Latour points out in his first lecture in *Facing Gaia*, the term crisis implies some sort of temporal range. A crisis is finite, but the climate crisis has far exceeded the point where there is a quick fix.

Costco—for all its flaws—has phenomenal free samples. As I strolled down the aisles of the Costco, pushing a comically large cart, I occasionally stopped to enjoy these samples. A mini-cheesesteak at the endcap of one aisle and a gulp of strawberry banana smoothie by the frozen section make for a great shopping experience.

The samples at Costco may be nominally free, but these free samples undoubtedly come with a significant environmental cost. The mini-cheesesteaks are the culmination of various agro-

industrial systems. Livestock account for 62% of the world's mammal biomass, humans make up 34%, and wild mammals are just 4%. Cattle alone account for 35% of mammal biomass, slightly more than humans (Bar-On, Phillips, et. al.). The majority of this livestock is stored in large warehouses. These animals are fed a diet consisting of largely grains. These grains are farmed predominantly in large industrial mono-crop fields which are maintained with toxic fertilizers. The fields themselves are the result of deforestation. Once the beef for the steak is slaughtered, the dairy for the cheese is gathered, and the grains for the roll are harvested, these raw materials must be converted into final products. Shipping and processing and the like add to the environmental toll. Evidently, these Costco free samples come at quite the price.

Costco, for all its negative environmental impact, remains fascinatingly peculiar to me. This fascination is of same type that initially drew me to the Anthropocene as a whole when I was mowing greens at a golf course. It's rather ingenious that Costco the sets up their warehouses the way they do. The entrance and exit right next to each other and in between a carefully crafted labyrinth of capitalism. The TVs and tablets at the beginning followed by couches and then snacks. It's easy to get sidetracked staring at a seventy-two-inch plasma screen showing a video of a South American waterfall during sunset. It's fun to sink into a brand new couch and bask in all the glory of it's sumptuous memory foam cushioning and remote controlled foot rest. Then after escaping these attention sand traps, a barrage of snack aisles impeded my path. A jumbo-sized bag of peanut-butter-filled M&Ms made me hungry. The image of the anthropomorphized piece of chocolate somehow made me hungry. Then I continue to push the cart forward. Through trail mixes, granola bars, potato chips, classic beef jerky, wagyu beef jerky, and turkey jerky. Then there was clothes piles on rows and columns of tables: an array of sweatshirts, tees, and jeans. It was overwhelming—all of these options and all of this excess.

As I walked through Costco that day, I thought to myself how weird this whole thing is. How alien. A labyrinth of Capitalism just doesn't seem like it should belong on what would presumably otherwise be a few acres of forest. Every other species on Earth makes their food from sunlight, eats an organism that makes their food from sunlight, or eats another animal. This means of living—by creating, gathering, or hunting for food occurs on repeat until the end of these organisms' lives. This system of living is perverted by humans, though. We can drive a car down paved roads to the peculiar constancy of an air-conditioned and fluorescently-illuminated aisles of a Costco. We can sit at red picnic table indoors and eat a hot dog which costs a bit of some made up currency that only holds value because everyone has agreed that it has value. There is no struggle to hunt down an animal that is trying to escape in the great outdoors. There is no searching for fruit growing in the wild. No. Even our whole vocabulary used to describe these actions underlines our position as distinctly separate from the cycles of life that are customary for all other living things on Earth. There is no outdoors for a rabbit. Rabbits just exist. Bears don't think they are searching for berries in the wild. They are just searching for berries. Or maybe these animals can draw these environmental distinctions and the reason for this human misunderstanding is rooted in some underlying sense of exceptionalism. Either way, humans think we're different from the other organisms on Earth and this thought has some very real manifestations.

Humans even talk about the world around them as though they are somehow separate from this world. A defining characteristic of the Anthropocene is the impending doom of the environmental and climate crisis. As mentioned previously, crisis isn't quite apt here because it implies that the problem is temporary. Another issue with the lexicon used to describe the environmental crisis is that the word environment creates cognitive distance between the person

observing or taking note of the environment and the person themselves. Latour goes on to conjure this image of an observer who makes the distinction between nature and culture.

Ultimately, making this distinction prevents humans from addressing the environmental crisis because the environment is, in this model of the world, distinct from the human observer and the human-created culture of towns, cities, Costcos, and, ultimately, society.

As my cart fills, I near the exit of the Costco. My mother, my brother, and I each grabbed items from the cart and placed them on the conveyor belt to be scanned by the woman at the register. We paid, and then took a few steps forward into the food court. It smelled like the hot dogs. After walking through this store for ninety minutes, we were all hungry. The food court at Costco is perfectly placed. After buying enough peanut butter, popcorn, chicken breasts, and an assortment of other food to sustain a family for two months, more food is somehow just what most people want. Shopping for food works up an appetite, I guess.

My brother bought the \$1.50 deal for a hotdog and a large soda. There's a history to this low-price deal. Since 1984, when the hotdog and soda deal was introduced, the price of this deal has remained constant at \$1.50. Costco president W. Craig Jelinek complained to co-founder and former CEO of Costco Jim Sinegal about the price of this deal not reflecting increases in production costs. The deal wasn't profitable and Jelinek wanted to make a change. Famously, Sinegal responded, "If you raise [the price of] the effing hotdog, I will kill you. Figure it out." And the price is still \$1.50 to this day, 39 years after its introduction. The Costco hotdog and soda deal—this oddity of the Anthropocene and relic of human obstinacy—tastes pretty good, I must say.

Despite the huge environmental cost and the blatant excess of Costco, there is something glorious about its shelves of pallets. There's a tragic beauty to Costco. Costco is beautiful in the

same way an empire verging on collapse is beautiful. Between 1833 and 1836, Thomas Cole painted a series of five paintings collectively titled *The Course of Empire*. The third of this series of paintings depicts a landscape covered in colonnaded marble building where people walk about in ornate robes, involved in conversation or else marveling at some statue. There's an opulence to the painting that suggests the Roman Empire at its peak. Costco's excess is decadent in the same way this depiction of empire is decadent. The final two paintings in the series depict the destruction and ultimate desolation of this once magnificent empire. Despite the eminent disaster in the series of paintings, the empire is beautiful in an ephemeral way.

Walking through Costco also reminds me of the final scene in Wes Anderson's *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. In this scene, the clan of foxes and other animals celebrate a small triumph over a group of notorious agricultural business magnates who own all the land and are trying to squeeze out every last cent of profit from it. The animals have just made an underground community and discover a tunnel that leads to a grate that opens into a huge grocery store laden with all sorts of food. With 'Let Her Dance' by The Bobby Fuller Four playing in the background, the foxes dance through the aisles, soaking in the glory of store's excess, gleeful to have finally found their place in a world that didn't really have a place for them. When I stroll through Costco, I feel just a fraction of the happiness and awe that these foxes feel when they are dancing in this scene.

There is probably something to be said for the fact that the foxes in the movie are anthropomorphized. Ascribing a human problem and human emotion to these foxes makes the movie a lot more interesting to us humans.

Costco is emblematic of the Anthropocene. Costco is an environmentally taxing oddity that is tragically beautiful. These qualities are evidently representative of the Anthropocene. By definition, the Anthropocene is characterized by the environmental impact of humans. The

Anthropocene is also peculiar. Humans have perverted the natural order. For example, foxes eat other animals. Conversely, humans watch movies about foxes that can talk in order to be entertained and/or learn something about ourselves while eating Sour Patch kids in a dark room that is air-conditioned. Finally, this fleeting position we find ourselves in as humans is tragically beautiful. The blatant excess is unsustainable just as humans are mortal just as humanity's temporal range is finite. There will be an end to \$1.50 Costco hotdog and soda combos . We will all die. Humanity will someday be extinct. This impending doom lends a fleeting nature all these things. In my opinion, that is beautiful.

...

Costco can tell us all this about the Anthropocene. But there's another way to interpret the Anthropocene that is revealed by a few lines at the end of a *New Yorker* short story entitled *History Report* by Simon Rich that I read recently. This story presents a different take on the Anthropocene. In this short story, humans live in space after Earth had to be evacuated because of a climate and environmental disaster. The bulk of the piece focus on the dialogue between a kid who was born in space and his elderly grandfather who grew up on Earth who is reminiscing on his childhood and when he met the kid's grandmother. Referring to Earth, the author of this short story Simon Rich writes,

It was something people talked about, and praised, and maybe even tried to save, but the whole time what everybody secretly, actually cared about was the person sitting next to them. That's where all of mankind's effort went, the sweat and the toil of billions, not to saving the world but to the frantic, desperate quest for love. And that's why the Earth is gone, because it was nothing more than a conversation starter. It wasn't what we really,

truly cared about. We never even really lived there. We lived in the presence of each other.

So maybe that's what the Anthropocene is about. Maybe the hotdogs at Costco are the product of so many environmentally destructive processes. Maybe it's not about the hotdogs and it's about sitting there with my brother and my mom, enjoying our fleeting time together on this inevitably doomed Earth. Or maybe this is unimaginably self-centered. Or maybe nothing matters at all. I'm not sure. Hotdogs, like humans, are weird.

Unfortunately, this conclusion doesn't really suffice for an undergraduate thesis. By just contemplating a hot dog, there's only so much one can come to terms with about the nature of the Anthropocene. Truths about humanity and Earth at large are tough and maybe impossible to come to when approaching things from an individual standpoint. There is certainly value in isolated contemplation, but I will attempt to piece together a picture from various points of view. This is to say that I won't just be writing about Costco hotdogs. I will be talking about shoelaces too.

## Shoelaces

I'm drawn to images of effort in vain. Sisyphus pushing the rock is probably the most famous instance. Another sight I think of is shoelaces splayed out on the floor. Specifically, shoes that have been worn and worn by someone working hard. I also think of the images taken by Dorothea Lange during the Great Depression. The image of a woman gazing off into the distance while one child leans on each of her shoulders is poetic. She's burdened with the weight of these young lives, trying to raise them in a time of economic despair. Her eyes look off at an angle from the camera—longing for something beyond the horizon. The lines on her face express the stress of her plight, but she seems stolid—resolute in the face of this hardship. Maybe the source of her determination is a sense of hope.

Humanity's current position on Earth is a tough one. The climate is changing. It's difficult to buy a house. Racial tensions persist. There are numerous wars being waged. This list is by no means exhaustive. Evidently, there's a lot wrong with the world we live in. Yet there's always tomorrow. There's a new day to be had. There's a new opportunity to take action and make a change. There's hope. John Greene writes in his book *The Anthropocene Reviewed: Essays on A Human Centered Planet*, "hope is the correct response to the strange, often terrifying miracle of consciousness. Hope is not easy or cheap. It is true." Hope is paramount in the Anthropocene. To imagine a better future, or even to imagine there might be steps that might lead to some improvement is vital.

Hope is particularly relevant when considering climate change. The current climate crisis that humanity finds themselves in is caused by humans with a degree of upwards of 99% certainty among scientific studies (Lynas, Houlton and Perry). Given this certainty about the



cause of climate change, one might expect there could be a human-caused solution. If humans caused the issue, humans should be able to fix it. Unfortunately, this logic is not so clean cut.

There are a barrage of reasons to throw hope to the wayside. Despite near certainty about humans causing climate change among the scientific community, the media discourse surrounding climate change suggests ambiguity as to the cause of the current environmental crisis. The closest humanity can come to objective facts about climate change is by using devices that measure physical properties. There is no clear cut ‘two plus two equals four’ logic with climate change. Top down, principles-first thinking is not how climate change is proven. Instead, there is a whole host of studies that all point towards the same outcome—humans are the source of the warming climate on Earth. The science of climate change is empirical, “drawing from the multiplicity of the data” (Latour). In this way, the truth about climate change is revealed slowly, from myriad different researchers and studies around the world. Because of the nature of this data, some find this truth hard to believe. These people find fault in the scientific climate change discourse—raising concerns that there is debate among experts about climate change. These “negationists,” as Latour refers to them, seek to promote the falsehood that inaction is okay because the climate situation is not urgent. Their flawed logic here works on the basis that because there is apocryphal debate among experts, the crisis isn’t worth fretting over. There is a kernel of truth in this argument—there is debate among experts about the truths in any field of science. That’s just how science works. Studies can say with nearly 100% certainty that humans are causing global warming. But there are new studies continuously coming out that posit various findings about climate change. These studies don’t take away from idea that humans are warming the climate. This is how science works: theories and ideas are rigorously tested by humans, disproving or proving by doing. Learning, either way. Science is fluid and organic and

constantly changing just like the world it seeks to understand. There is no gospel distributed from some divine source of truth. There are constantly new experiments and studies in attempts to uncover some small piece of truth. So when someone says there is debate among experts about climate change, know these two things. First, there is damn near consensus about global warming being caused by humans. Second, there is debate about the most up to date information in any field of science. That's just science.

Others refuse the findings of these studies because the results of the studies threaten their ways of life and impose on the status quo. For business owners who reap the benefits of the current modes of production that sustain human life as we know it, a drastic change in carbon output would impact their bottom line. This myopic viewpoint manifests itself in denying global warming with similar arguments to the negationists discussed previously.

These two perspectives creep in on the hope that a change can be made to alleviate global warming. Without a clear and widespread acceptance of the crisis that is global warming, it is difficult to inspire change and induce action. When the problem is intentionally made nebulous, there is little hope of a solution. In this current predicament—faced by an Earth-altering crisis but refusing to fully acknowledge that this crisis exists—humanity finds itself in a tough position.

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So far, I have been referring to the Anthropocene as an era in which humans impact the climate and environment. This definition of the Anthropocene adopts a pretty narrow view of humanity. In her essay “Indigenizing the Anthropocene,” Zoe Todd explains that the “current framing of the Anthropocene blunts the distinctions between the people, nations, and collectives who drive the fossil-fuel economy and those who do not.” The ceaseless production of

greenhouse gases is largely done by those who drive the Capitalist systems in the West. The largest contributors to greenhouse gas emission in the U.S. are transportation (28%), electric power (25%), industry (23%), commercial and residential (13%), and agriculture (10%) (Global Emissions). Many of the indigenous peoples that Todd refers to have historically not contributed to these sectors to the same degree as their typical Western counterparts. Generally, these indigenous communities aren't home to large industrial centers and don't account for relatively large energy expenditures. Many indigenous communities in the U.S. have been marginalized to life on largely rural reservations where the networks of transportation are significantly less prevalent than in major cities and even in suburban communities. This is to say that there is much less fossil fuels expended by a Native American reservation in South Dakota, for instance, than by a city like Chicago. This makes sense given the drastic difference in population density between reservations and cities and sprawling suburban towns. There is, however, a statistically significant difference in per capita carbon dioxide emissions between races. White neighborhoods have the highest per capita emissions compared with Black, Latinx, and other communities (Mazerolle).

In addition, much of the farming done by indigenous people is considered shifting agriculture—temporary clearing and farming of a certain area before letting this area lay fallow and moving to a new plot of land. Conversely, most of the farming done in the West is monocrop, commodity farming, which has numerous negative effects on the environment. The industrial agricultural system uses fertilizers that contribute to toxic runoff that harms human drinking water as well as degrading various ecosystems. These industrial farms also cut down swaths of forest to make room to plant crops, destroying a major source of carbon neutralization—trees. This commodity farming causes deforestation that “is essentially

permanent compared to shifting agriculture” (Sizing up How Agriculture Connects to Deforestation). Essentially, the term Anthropocene implicates all of humanity as the culprits for the actions that are destroying the environment. Evidently, all humans, especially indigenous communities, are not equally responsible for the climate crisis.

In this unfair reality, these indigenous communities are also disproportionately impacted by climate change. Many indigenous communities rely in part on traditional practices of hunting, fishing, and gathering in areas where the “land, water, and wildlife are polluted.” 20% of all drinking water advisories are in indigenous communities in Canada which only make up 5% of the population (Laduzinsky). The land on which indigenous communities live is often disproportionately the site of sources of pollution such as mines, fracking, and pipelines. On top of this, there is relatively low levels of government support for these communities. Indigenous communities contribute relatively little to climate change and disproportionately feel its effects. Raoni Metuktire, indigenous activist and chief of the Kayapó community in Brazil, stated, “We all breathe this one air, we all drink the same water. We all live on this one planet. We need to protect the Earth. If we don’t, the big winds will come and destroy the forest. Then you will feel the fear that we feel.” The bulk of scientific research is indicating that “the big winds” are on their way. The time is now to take action.

The term Anthropocene implicates all humans in causing a problem that has evidently been caused in large part by white, Western industry. However, the climate crisis that characterizes the Anthropocene is an issue that all humans must grapple with, regardless of one’s involvement in causing the issue. Despite being caused predominantly by Western industry forged by largely White people, climate change is an issue that impacts Earth in its entirety.

Imposing agency onto indigenous communities that didn't contribute to climate change is unfair, but this is the nature of a crisis that threatens an entire species.

To be clear, everyone on Earth is impacted by the climate crisis even though not everyone is equally involved in causing this crisis. One barrier to coming to terms with this reality is the distinction between natural and human history. These sectors of history have been two distinct spheres of knowledge and discourse. This distinction between human and natural history allows for the responsibility of addressing the climate crisis to be placed on the groups of humans who contributed to causing the crisis. Because human history has been seen as separate from natural history, the typically white humans who contribute to industry can be singled out as those primarily responsible for addressing climate change—these are the people in human history who are destroying the environment and changing the climate. In typical Western narratives of human history, nature has been seen as a constant. The repetitive cycles of nature—days, seasons, tides—have traditionally served as “a timeless backdrop to human history.” The Anthropocene explanations of climate change “spell the collapse of the age old Humanist distinction between natural and human history” (Chakrabarty). Because the Anthropocene unites natural history and human history into some collective history of Earth, everyone—all humans—are implicated in addressing the climate crisis threatening Earth as a whole.

I'll bring back the image of shoelaces here splayed on the ground after a long hard days work. These laces are torn up from being tied so tightly and from the boots they are wound into being walked in for many long hard miles in the mud and snow. These laces lay on the ground of a wooden floor by a fireplace that is warming the boots up in a fleeting and futile attempt to thaw them before they will be laced up again. Shoelaces that have been strained by human effort. That

are old and shabby and discolored. But laces that will persist. Until they won't. These shoes can tell a story.

Philosophically, there is a famous example of shoes discussed by Martin Heidegger. In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger discusses what art is as well as what "things" are. Heidegger writes, "a painting hangs on the wall like a hunting weapon or a hat," and that, "Beethoven's quartets lie in the publisher's storeroom like potatoes in a cellar." Art is physical just as hunting weapons, hats, and potatoes are physical things. In the words of Heidegger: "Every work has a thingly character." Heidegger continues this argument, explaining what distinguishes art from any other physical object. There is, evidently, something to artwork that is "over and above its thingliness." Artwork is a thing that is made, but it says something more than what the thing itself is. Art "makes publicly known something other than itself, it manifests something other: it is an allegory" and "a symbol." This story and symbolism that characterize art need observers to consider them. Heidegger writes, "we are required to take the works as they are encountered by those who experience and enjoy them." In an example of this aesthetic contemplation the allegory and symbolism of art, Heidegger analyzes and interprets a Pablo Picasso painting of a pair of boots:

From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining

anxiety as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending childbed and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the earth, and it is protected in the world of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself.

From this painting of boots, Heidegger conjures an entire life of the peasant woman whose shoes are in the painting. Art, in the eyes of Heidegger, is made art by the one observing it. The painting of the boots is just a physical thing until the allegory and the symbol are interpreted by some observer.

It seems common these days to dismiss a thing as just a thing. Under Heidegger's definition, art exists in the time and effort spent contemplating the thing. Often, a shoe is just what goes on one's feet. A Costco hotdog is just something to be eaten. Stories are so readily available—in the news, on Netflix, in TikTok videos—that there is little incentive to extract stories from objects. This thesis attempts to look at things and tell a story. I hope that readers are interpellated as those contemplating a few different objects of the Anthropocene and that in this contemplation, some truths about humanity's current position and predicament in history are revealed.

Laces tell a story of hope. Laces can always be tied up again. Despite the previous toil and hardship. Despite even the definitive successes of hard work or luck or some combination of both. Laces can be tied up again. There is hope for some change in human behavior against the rising tides of global warming. We can collectively lace our boots tomorrow.

## Premier League Soccer

The headlights illuminated a narrow band of road and forest. I leaned my head against the passenger window, watching the blurs of tree trunks zoom past. My legs were caked in mud. Classic rock radio 102.9 FM buzzed in the background fading between levels of static. “Why can’t I juggle a soccer ball?” I beseechingly asked my Dad, hoping he would have some magic answer. Maybe I could eat something and I would somehow be able to learn how. Maybe I could sprinkle some salt in my shoes like Michael Jordan did when he wanted to be taller. “All the other kids on the team can do it so easily. It looks like they’re not even trying.” My dad looked at me as he braked, approaching a stop sign. Those big green eyes that I loved so much.

I loved spending time with my dad. He always took my brothers and I on adventures. He knew the sound of an owl. He knew the best spot to get muffins on Sunday mornings. Preparing to watch a thunderstorm with a roof over our heads, he knew to bring out the lawn chairs to the edge of the garage when those big, dark clouds came around.. I knew him and that was awesome. If anyone would know how to juggle a soccer ball, it would be my dad.

“Well, there’s no special trick. You just have to practice,” he explained.

“Dad... how do I even practice when I can barely keep the ball up in the air for two kicks?”

“Hmm.” A few static chords of a Rolling Stones song played faintly on the radio. He looked over at me. Patient. “Let’s make a plan.”

And we made a plan that I followed to a tee. Each night I would go out into the driveway and practice. At first, I would try to get five consecutive kicks of the ball without it touching the ground. I would stay out until I got it, taking maybe an hour or so. Dropping the ball from waist



height, I tried to hit the ball right in the center with the top of my foot. Soon I would stay out until I could get five sets of five touches in a row. Then ten touches in a row. Soon twenty-five. Little by little, I learned to juggle in the driveway under the light from the garage lamp. Effort exerted over time. I learned how to learn.

Soccer is just a game. My experience with this game is, in the grand scheme of things, negligible. But it is important to me. And soccer is the world's game—it means a lot to a lot of different people across the globe. There's an apocryphal quote attributed to Pope St. John Paul II that goes, "Amongst all unimportant things, football is the most important." Soccer teaches creates communities and maybe, just maybe, can provide a blueprint for how to live in the Anthropocene.

In England, people love soccer. Well. They call it football there. For the sake of clarity, I'll be using the terms soccer and football interchangeably to refer to the same game. Cheering on the local football team binds together communities.

In England, there's a tier system that governs professional and amateur football. The top tier of English football is famously called the Premier League (the first tier). Below that, there's the English Football League Championship (the second tier). Below that, there's League One (the third tier). Evidently, these tiers don't have the most self-explanatory names. The tiers of English football are predicated on the concept of promotion and relegation. This concept is foreign to most Americans.

To explain this concept, I'll use the Championship as an example. A football season consists of a certain number of matches. Each match is a 90 minute game between two different teams. At the end of the match, the winning team earns three points and the losing team earns no points. If the match ends in a draw, both teams earn a point. The teams are ranked based on who

was earned the most points. The best few teams at the end of the season get promoted, or moved up into the Premier League, and the worst few teams get relegated or moved down to League One. To account for all these teams leaving the Championship, the few worst teams from the Premier League are relegated into the Championship, and the few best teams from League One are promoted into the Championship. This system of promotion and relegation means that every game matters. Even a team at the bottom of the league will play hard in an attempt to earn points to avoid relegation. This is often not the case in American sports. In the US, a team with a poor record is incentivized to continue to lose games on purpose to get a better draft pick. The system of promotion and relegation pervades throughout all levels of English football. Hypothetically, an amateur team could be promoted in the Premier League in by continuing to win the league they are in. By the same token, a Premier League juggernaut like Manchester United could move into non-league football if they continued to get relegated season after season. In practice, this type of rapid rise and precipitous fall are rare.

Despite this statistical improbability of rising to the top flight of English football, fans fervently support their local teams. And there are a whole host of local teams. In the top four leagues alone, there are 92 full-time professional clubs. Below these top four professional leagues, there are an array of semi-professional and amateur clubs that compete in a continuation of this tiered system, commonly referred to as non-league football. As the leagues progress further from the Premier League, there are more and more leagues and more and more teams. This broadening of the competition base is visualized as the English football pyramid. In total, there are over 5,000 football clubs in the UK (English Football League System). On average, that equates to about one football club per nineteen square miles of land.

This whole tiered system of English football is really a network of communities. Each club is the culmination of a fanbase often rooted to the place where the team plays. Bacup Borough Football Club are the epitome of this type of footballing community. Bacup Borough play in the Division One North of the West Counties League in the tenth tier of English football. The rural town of roughly 13,500 people, built up initially around its cotton mills, is located about a forty-five minute drive north of Manchester (Bacup Population). Having never been to Bacup myself, I found out about the team watching a YouTube video made by Nieve Petruzzello in which she interviews residents of Bacup. Bacup Borough are a humble, working class club. In the words of one fan, “We don’t have the class of ’92 here.” This fan was referring to a famous class of Manchester United players including David Beckham, Paul Scholes, Ryan Giggs, and Gary Neville. Boasting a global support base, Manchester United are one of the largest and richest clubs in England (and the world). This class of ’92 won an FA Youth Cup in 1992 and went on to add a collection of hardware to the Manchester United first-team trophy cabinet, culminating in a European Cup triumph—arguably the biggest and most coveted club trophy in the world. Bacup Borough, evidently, are on quite a different level than Manchester United.

“It’s Brent Peters and Debra O’Connor, and that’s about it. But we’re trying,” continued this same Bacup fan, referring to his beloved club. Debra O’Connor leads all the behind the scenes work that goes into a match day. She stays up until 9pm the day before the game baking pies to sell at the stadium the next day. She takes care of clubs finances. Brent Peters is the manager of the club. On the day of the game, Peters wakes up to clean the pub he owns before going to the stadium to take care of the pitch—mowing, watering, and lining the field to prepare for the game. He then moves his focus to picking the starting line-up. The stadium is a humble field, surrounded by some worn-out but well-cared-for stands. Like the fans, O’Connor, and

Peters, the team itself is a collection of hard workers. There are no superstars on Bacup Borough FC. But that's not what manager Peters really wants anyway. "The first thing I want in a player is work rate," he emphasized.

Peters' devotion to the club is admired by many around Bacup. One fan emphatically stated, "Football just comes out of every pore of his body. I mean, he eats, sleeps, and breathes Bacup Borough." O'Connor mirrored this sentiment, saying, "He cares a lot for this club. This is his life, isn't it?" Bacup is a community of people that come together to support their club. Bacup is nominally a football club. But Bacup is really a people. Hard-working. Hopeful. One player on the team, reiterates, "I'm a Sunday league player. I'm used to playing in front of an old man and his dog. So honestly when I come here and play in front of quite a lot of people, it's good. And you see what it means to the fans." Bacup is a community that persists together. They succeed triumph together. They lose together. The team means a lot to the community and this community surrounding the Bacup football pitch brings meaning to people's lives.

Standing on the sideline of the Bacup stadium, O'Connor says, "This club is going to be here for a long time. We're just passing through." This statement holds true to humans on Earth too. Humans on Earth aren't so different from Bacup Borough supporters. We're just passing through. O'Connor was talking about her beloved football club, but she could just as easily have been talking about humans in the era of the Anthropocene.

Football clubs like Bacup in Northern England have an interconnected relationship with the Anthropocene. The industries that polluted the environment and emitted the greenhouse gases that contribute to our current climate crisis are the same industries that gave rise to many of the first English football clubs. Martin Cloake, author of *Taking Our Ball Back: English Football's Culture Wars*, wrote that, "industry ... looms large in English football's formative years. The

game's early giants came from Blackburn, Preston, Burnley, Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham, Bolton, Derby, Nottingham, Stoke, brought together by men connected with steel, railways, textiles, manufacturing. The world's first Industrial Revolution shaped England, and England's sport. Community is at the core of football, and with it notions of identity and place." The factories and industry that sprang up across Northern England in the early 1800s brought people together in unparalleled numbers. Shortly after these industries created the first urban centers, the people working in the textile, steel, railway, and manufacturing industries began to found football clubs and leagues to formalize a system of playing competitive football against each other. More than a century later, some of the current best football clubs in the world — Manchester United, Liverpool, and Manchester City—are based in these Northern industrial cities. When industry brought people together to form some of the first urban industrial centers, football clubs (and the ensuing footballing communities) were quick to follow. The same factories that brought about the Anthropocene also brought about modern football clubs.

Bacup is emblematic of many smaller clubs across the English countryside. In fact, the creator of the podcast that inspired this thesis—John Green—is a part owner of another community-based English club. Green's fascination with the Anthropocene and his love of football might be more related than it would appear at first glance. This story begins in 2002 when the English Football Association, commonly called the FA, allowed the owners of Wimbledon F.C. to move the club 70 miles away to a town called Milton Keynes. This left the town of Wimbledon without a football team. The beloved Plough Lane stadium was left empty and abandoned. Teams moving to different cities happens all the time in American sports. In England, though, this is an exceedingly rare occurrence. This is because in America, teams are franchises whereas in England, teams are "community assets" (Green). Teams in England have a

deep and enduring tie with the local community in which they play. Green writes that for many Wimbledon fans, “to lose their club was to lose their community.” One banner protesting the movement of the club read, “A club is for life, not just for profit.”

In the wake of this decision to move the team, Wimbledon fans were left reeling. The fans ultimately decided to start their own team. Green writes, “there were some initial challenges — for instance, none of them had any experience running a football club, and they also had no uniforms, no sponsors, no coaches, and no players.” The fans held open tryouts in a public park, hired a coaching staff, rented out a stadium, and found a video-game company as the sponsor on their uniforms. The new team, called AFC Wimbledon, began the 2002-2003 season in the ninth tier of English football. Ninth tier English football isn’t the best quality, but the people of Wimbledon had a team again—one that they each owned an equal share in. This new form of egalitarian football club ownership led some to speculate on the provenance of the “AFC” portion of the name AFC Wimbledon. Some say “AFC” stands for “A Fans’ Club.”

In spite of the club’s humble beginnings, they started to win. And they kept winning. First being promoted to the eighth division and then into the seventh in the subsequent season. The fans in the stands took to singing “Show Me the Way to Plough Lane,” the name of their now-demolished stadium. “I’m tired and I want to go home. / I had a football ground twenty years ago / And I want one of my own.”

In 2011, Wimbledon had earned enough promotions to play in the fifth tier of English football—the last tier before the leagues turn professional. The team earned a place in the playoff before booking their spot in the final. The final was tied and went to extra time before going to penalty kicks. Green, a huge fan of the Dons, explains how the last few kicks of the season went down: “The Dons’ 19-year-old goalkeeper Seb Brown saved two penalties. And then

Wimbledon's captain, Danny Kedwell, stepped up to take the final penalty. In his 10-year career, Kedwell had never played a game in the Football League, and with one penalty he could take himself and his club there." As Danny Kedwell walked from the halfway line to place the ball on the penalty spot, the Radio WDON announcers commented on this moment, "This is one man. This is one spot kick. And if any man deserves to put the Dons up, and if any man embodies the spirit of the Dons more than anybody, it's Danny Kedwell." Kedwell ran forward to kick the ball. "Deep breathes, deep breathes, deep breathes. Come on Danny! This, for League Two is Danny Kedwell..." The net rippled as Kedwell smashed the ball into the top left corner. The broadcasters erupted in ecstatic screams before crumbling into crying sobs of disbelief. "They've done it. We're in League Two." The fans in the stadium jumped up and down, waving flags, and screaming in elation (Emotional Day the Wombles got back in the Football League). Nine years after the new club was formed by the fans, the Dons, founded by a group of middle-aged fans with regular jobs and no clue how to run a sports team, had officially earned their place as professional football team.

John Green, a fan and shareholder in AFC Wimbledon, summarizes this historic rise for the Dons:

Today, Wimbledon are [7th in League Two], and their plans for a new stadium in Wimbledon are well underway. And off the pitch, they continue to be a progressive force — AFC Wimbledon were the first club in England, for instance, to take a stand against homophobia.

By choosing community over profit, and by reminding us that hope is necessary even when it is also preposterous, AFC Wimbledon has shown the world the way to Plough Lane.

Football is a game where adults can sing together and cry together, a rectangle upon which we can see in manageable scale all that is good and terrible about people, all the injustice and folly and joy of human life. And when that rectangle was taken away from Wimbledon, they built it again. That resilience represents the very best of us, and I am so excited to be part of the team working to share that story with a wider world.

AFC Wimbledon and Bacup Borough represent communities built around these rectangles that contains the “injustice and folly and joy of human life.” Change is collective. The climate crisis that is emblematic of the Anthropocene evidently requires changes to be made. Maybe, the communities that football creates can serve as examples of how to create the collectiveness that preempts change.

Both Bacup Borough and AFC Wimbledon are relatively small clubs. They represent the communities of small English towns coming together to support their team play in their respective rectangles. Globally, there are some rectangles that receive a lot more publicity and attention than these rectangles. One such club—called Manchester City—is located a roughly 45 minute drive South of Bacup and a 4 hour drive Northwest of Wimbledon. Manchester City’s rise to prominence underscores the importance of community in creating change while also revealing the hypocrisies of the Anthropocene.

Manchester City is one of the current best clubs in the world. In 2023, they won the English Premier League, the FA Cup, and the UEFA Champions League. This combination of titles is historically difficult to achieve and is called the treble. A couple decades ago, this feat would have been unimaginable for the club. So, what changed in the past twenty years for the club? Well, in 2008 the club was bought by Sheikh Mansour. Mansour is the current vice



president and deputy prime minister of the United Arab Emirates as well as a member of the ruling family and minister of presidential court of Abu Dhabi. Mansour is a billionaire, and his wealth comes from being the inheritor of a nation's fortune (The UAE's "Sportswashing" of Human Rights). UAE is a hereditary dictatorship. To grossly simplify the matter, City improved because of this influx of foreign cash.

Now, this money has been spent in smart ways. Not every club that gets bought by a wealthy foreign owner achieves the same level of success that City has. City looked around at other exemplary football clubs with a long history of success and wanted to replicate that. The clear choice of clubs to attempt to emulate was FC Barcelona.

This club in the Catalonian capital city has cultivated an innovative, collaboration-based, and ultimately highly successful brand of football. Barcelona's Footballing system begins at the youth level where they teach kids to play soccer. This famous youth system—called La Masia—teaches kids a team-based style of soccer. There are a plethora of ways to play the game of soccer. Some coaches teach aggression and encourage a tough, no-nonsense style of play. Other coaches encourage individuality and self-expression through dribbling. Other coaches have a rote defensive system that requires peak physical fitness from all of their players. Still others encourage long passes where the attackers run onto the balls. At Barcelona, the style of play instilled in kids all the way up through the first team places passing as the most important aspect of the game. Players are taught to keep close control of the ball while also being aware of where all their teammates are around them. Players are also taught to be fluid in terms of positioning. A defender should be comfortable and capable in the attacking third of the field. Players with these skills are able to pass the ball to the open man and move into open space to receive the next pass anywhere on the field. By passing the ball quickly and moving into open area on the field,

Barcelona team can create spaces to attack and score. This style of play—called Tiki taka—allows creative expression within the framework of a team. Tiki taka is taught at all levels of play at Barcelona all the way from the professional level to the eight-year-old kids in La Masia. By the time these kids reach the first team, they have had about a decade of experience learning to play in this certain way. Lionel Messi, arguably the best football player of all time, is a product of this La Masia system. The famously successful Barcelona teams that Messi played on were comprised of other La Masia graduates. Even the Spanish national team that won the FIFA World Cup in 2010 is a product of this system. Of the fourteen Spanish players that saw the field in the 2010 World Cup final in South Africa, eight of them played for Barcelona or were La Masia graduates (Mukherjee). At its core, Barcelona's iconic style of play is successful because it is collaborative. Everyone on the team is involved in build-up play, even the goalkeeper. At a larger level, everyone at the club is involved in promoting this style of play.

After purchasing Manchester City, Mansour attempted to emulate this famous style of play and footballing philosophy. To do so, he hired a few of the people who were integral in making Barcelona so successful. Ferran Soriano, the vice president of FC Barcelona from 2003 to 2008, was hired as the CEO of Manchester City in 2012. Txiki Begiristain, the director of football at Barcelona from 2003 to 2010, was also hired by City in 2012. Both these men have been instrumental in transforming City into the global powerhouse they are today. Both these men are also close with arguably the best coach in the world. This coach is named Pep Guardiola, and on the first day of February in 2016, he signed a contract to coach Manchester City (Cooper). Guardiola has been with the team ever since, and he has successfully implemented the tiki taka style of play to the tune of leading City to the most goals scored and least goals

conceded in the Premier League since his appointment as manager. Guardiola has also led City to winning sixteen trophies in his eight-year tenure so far (Pep Guardiola: The Story So Far...).

For better or worse, all this unprecedented on-field success has been exactly what Mansour wanted when he took over the club in 2008. Often, the goal of owning a club is to make the team better and hopefully more profitable. Given Mansour's affluence, he didn't have much of an incentive to make Manchester City more profitable. Owning a football club isn't the best business decision. Added together, all spectator sports globally are roughly the same size as the Johnson & Johnson Corporation. So for someone inheriting a nation's fortune, owning Manchester City doesn't make much sense from a financial perspective. Buying Manchester City was largely a public relations decision for Sheikh Mansour. By owning and operating a successful football club in England, Mansour is attempting to promulgate a more positive image of the United Arab Emirates in the West. The logic goes that if a UAE-backed club is well run and successful, people will forget about the human rights violations the UAE has done. To be clear, the UAE criminalizes freedom of speech, arresting critics of the state. In 2018, Matthew Hedges, a British academic, was convicted and sentenced to life in prison after a five-minute trial without a lawyer. The UAE has also forcibly disappeared and tortured detainees in UAE detention facilities in Yemen, been complicit in child sex trafficking, allowed quasi-slavery working conditions for migrant laborers in the Kafala system, and permitted domestic violence and marital rape (The UAE's "Sportswashing" of Human Rights). Mansour is pouring money into Manchester City to divert attention from his nation's atrocities. This exertion of soft power through sports is known as "Sportswashing."

Subliminally influencing public opinion is not a new concept by any means. In ancient Rome, a poet named Juvenal coined the term "bread and circuses," which referred to attempts to

keep the Roman people complacent with corrupt government leadership. In ancient Rome, bread and circuses was a metonymic term for appeasing the populace by satisfying their basic needs (Morell). When people are fed and entertained, they don't typically revolt against the government. There are some other creative ways that nations have tried to sway public opinion. As Stephen Dubner remarks in the Freakonomics Radio podcast, Thailand has the third highest public opinion in the United States out of all Asian countries. The first two are Japan and South Korea, which are prominent democracies that currently have good relations with the US. Dubner posits that people in the US have such a good opinion of Thailand because the country has systematically funded Thai restaurants to the point where there is practically a Thai restaurant every few blocks in every city in America. Americans have a positive opinion of Thailand in part because of these subsidized Thai "gastro-diplomacy" efforts. Just as food can sway public opinion, sports can and have been used to do that same thing. The most famous example of so-called "Sportswashing" is the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. Before the games took place, they were man ultimately failed calls to boycott the games because of Adolf Hitler's racist regime. During the games themselves, the Nazi government attempted to paint themselves as tolerant and peaceful. This attempted façade was ultimately successful. After the conclusion of the 1936 games, The New York Times touted this Olympics as "the biggest athletic games ever held, the most largely attended, the best organized, the most picturesque and the most productive of new and startling records." They also noted the "good-humored, happy crowd" which "is the picture that foreign visitors will take home, to the undoubted improvement of world relations and general amiability." A few years later, Germany invaded Poland. By the end of World War II, over 6 million Jews had been killed the Holocaust (Irwin). More recent examples of Sportswashing include the 2018 World Cup in Russia which was followed by the Russian

invasion of Ukraine. This form of reputation laundering through sport is unfortunately somewhat effective.

Mansour's takeover of Manchester City has led the club to massive success, but this same success serves to mask some human rights atrocities. In the Anthropocene, people across the globe face diseases and natural disasters. Wars are waged. People are starving. People are wrongly imprisoned. Racism persists. There is a lot wrong with the world. Football teams like Manchester City can bring people together in support of on field success. Pep Guardiola's mesmerizing brand of football can distract people from acknowledging and eventually addressing these global issues. Mansour can harness the community of fandom around the Manchester City to distract from the human rights issues in the UAE that Mansour and his regime perpetuate. Football is a powerful game in this way. Watching a football match is absorbing, all-action affair. It forces you into the present moment. For ninety minutes, watching players pass the ball and fight for possession is all there is. The enthralling tactical chess-match that unfolds is pure entertainment. There are no time outs or TV commercial breaks. There is continuous football and it is glorious. Watching a football match, much like playing one, is a meditative experience: football forces one to be here and now. Present for an ephemeral few moments. The rest of the world just fades away and what's left is a wonderfully simple yet fabulously complex rectangle.

Football is a funny game. Everyone plays on the same sized rectangles. Bacup Borough plays on a 90 meter by 120 meter rectangle of grass just as AFC Richmond and Manchester City do. Footballing rectangles create communities. Or maybe communities create footballing rectangles. Either way, the communities that surround the rectangles are powerful and have tangible effects on the world. Bacup Borough bring a spark of joy to an otherwise sleepy North-

western English town. Led by the efforts Deb O'Connor and The Manager, the whole town gathers around their well-manicured rectangle surrounded by well-worn and well-loved stands to support a group of working-class men and boys who are used to plying their beloved trade in front of an old man and his dog. This footballing community gives meaning to the lives of the people involved. The neighborhood of Wimbledon lost their football team. Their footballing rectangle was abandoned. Unprepared yet unphased, the supporters banded together to create a new team from the ground up. They held open tryouts at a public park. They scratched and clawed their way to creating a new football club: AFC Wimbledon. Once again, they had a rectangle to gather around. This time, the rectangle and the club in its entirety was owned by the fans. Faced with uncertainty, this community created unprecedented change. In 2008, Sheikh Mansour, the beneficiary of United Arab Emirates royal wealth, purchased Manchester City FC. Spending excessively, the club underwent a massive transformation under Mansour's guidance. World class players, coaches, staff, and management were brought in at great expense. A new football academy was constructed. The team and everyone surrounding the rectangle that is the pitch in the Etihad Stadium were transformed. Manchester City are now one of the most successful clubs in the world in the past few seasons. This success has diverted attention away from the human rights atrocities that the UAE continues to commit. The rectangle that Manchester City plays in garners a global audience. The eclectic and international community surrounding this rectangle have the power to perpetuate inaction against human rights atrocities. Evidently, footballing rectangles and their associated communities are powerful. These communities can both cover up crimes as well as create lasting change for communities. Football brings people together, and these communities have the power to create change. In the Anthropocene, change is increasingly necessary. Football certainly isn't the answer to the climate

crisis, but maybe local communities, such as those created by around football clubs, can create change at a small level.

## In Media Res

Addressing the Anthropocene is a challenge. The lifestyles of many people across the globe is tightly tied to the systems of transportation, energy, and agriculture that contribute to climate change. Costco, the mecca of the Anthropocene, is the product of these systems. Replete with not-so-free samples, Costco is emblematic of the excess and absurdity of the Anthropocene.

Shoes can tell a story about effort and about the Anthropocene. The image of shoelaces splayed out of the floor after a long day. Effort in vain. Often times, narratives are unfolded before us. On Netflix and Hulu. On TikTok. In books. On the news. Stories are told and the audience is the recipient of these stories. It takes effort to tell a story by oneself. This thesis is an attempt to look at ordinary things and extract a story about the Anthropocene. To look and shoes and envision a whole story.

Communities are both tools and weapons depending on who is wielding them. Bacup Borough gives their community a sense of purpose and belonging each weekend. The Wimbledon community built its own football club out of the metaphorical ashes of their former club. Sheikh Mansour weaponized the global community of fans that support Manchester City to mask human rights atrocities committed by the United Arab Emirates. The on-field success Manchester City has achieved is largely by building a culture of unity. Pep Guardiola's style of play is based on collective excellence and passing the ball. Communities, like those built around the football pitch, are powerful tools in the Anthropocene era.

So we're here now. In the midst of climate change and an environmental crisis. In the middle of these stories that Costco, shoelaces, and English football tell. Bruno Latour equates the position humanity is currently in to being on a lifeboat with a tiger that you are trying to tame while the tiger is simultaneously trying to eat you:



But from now on there are no spectators, because there is no shore that has not been mobilized in the drama of geohistory. Because there are no more tourists, the feeling of the sublime has disappeared along with the safety of the onlookers. It's a shipwreck, to be sure, but there are no more spectators. It looks more like *Life of Pi*: in the lifeboat, there is—there might be—a Bengal tiger! The unfortunate young shipwreck survivor has no more solid shore from which he can enjoy the spectacle of the struggle for survival alongside an untamable wild beast for whom he serves as both a tamer and lunch! What is coming toward us is what I call Gaia; this is what we have to look at head on if we don't want to be driven crazy for real!

In this situation, the tiger might represent Earth—the place humanity is trying to tame with highways and swaths of monocrop farms. By cutting down forests and paving parking lots. But the tiger that is Earth is also verging on devouring humanity with rising temperatures and resulting natural disasters. On this metaphorical boat, there is no room to spectate. Costco hotdogs, Heidegger's shoes, and Bacup Borough can tell us a little about the predicament we're in and how we might move forward. But at the end of the day, we are all in. In the here. In the now. In media res. That's how life works. There is no room to plan out a perfect life. You are born and then have to try to figure it out and then you die. It's the same with the Anthropocene. We are here. We are unprepared for something that has already happened and scrambling to figure it out.

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