

[EXCERPT]

How to Talk with “Children”
about Global Warming

a novel

by D. Franklin a.k.a. Manta

Copyright

Title: How to Talk with Children about Global Warming

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Self-publishing

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Preface

How to Talk with Children about Global Warming (HtTwCaGW) is a multimedia artwork, including:

- a science-fiction novel (of which you are reading a rough draft)
- a movement-based performance
- an album of original electro-acoustic music
- a series of drawings.

How to Talk with Children about Global Warming is not for children, except for the parts that **are** for children.

About the author

Born in New York City in 1964, D. Franklin a.k.a. “manta” is an award-winning video / graphic / performance artist with achievements in movement arts, drawing, music, digital media, and cross-cultural collaboration. His work includes collaborations with dissident performance artist and former member of the Czech underground Milan Kohout; experimental film director Michael Pope; rock musician Amanda Palmer; Czech dissident cinematographer Jiri Dvorsky; soprano vocalist and voice educator Anne Harley; experimental guitarist and musician Henry Kaiser; martial arts masters Haroyoshi Ito and Masashi Minagawa; composer and conductor Yii Kah Hoe; and others. His work has been

presented in both solo and group shows, exhibits, and performances at Mobius, (Boston's center for experimental art in all media), at Pan9 (an underground performance venue that he co-founded in Boston's Allston art district in the 1990s), the DeCordova Museum (Lincoln, MA), the NewYorican (New York), and internationally (Prague, Pilsen, Beijing, Taiwan).

A graduate of Harvard College, TUFTS School of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, and Université Paris 8 St-Denis, Franklin's cross-cultural approach to art and live performance is informed by his education in anthropology and practical and theoretical knowledge of digital media. His long-term interest in East Asian somatic and movement arts (Shintaido, T'ai Chi, Shiatsu, etc.) infuses his art with a rich physicality that enhances his work as a movement-based performance artist. He has taught movement arts workshops in the USA, Japan, France, Great Britain, Italy, and the Czech Republic, and is the founder and head instructor of Shintaido Czech Republic.

He can usually be found in Pilsen or in Prague.

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Excerpt from Chapter?

“Gorilla School”

Gorilla stared at the lightning.

Gorilla stared at the lightning. It rained straight vertically downward and dripped noisily off the leaves of trees and vines and tendrils of plants and antennae and legs of insects and feathers of birds and spider webs. It rained so hard and was so humid that rain drops were dripping from the surfaces of other raindrops.

There was nothing to stare at really, because the form of the vein-like river-delta-like branching-root-like pathway of the raging river of electrons and ionized gasses called “lightning” did not cut a groovy canyon into his retinas that had any discernable way, shape or form. It just flashed and made the whole inside of his head white for a moment and made his fur stand up and try to touch all the sounds, vibrations, and small movements of air that were lacking in the crawling vivid oozing fetid fecund aromatic 110% humidity, 24° C / 75° F rainforest, other than the sound of falling rain.

[INSERT SCIENCE CURRICULUM UNITS]

10th grade PHYSICS

How do we measure temperature? What is the history behind °C and °F? Why are °C and °F different? How were they invented as measuring systems, and who did it? What would you invent to measure temperature? Why do we measure things? (To compare, to repeat conditions such as for baking bread). Which ones are used in which countries/regions? Which one is mostly used by scientists, and why? Examples of experiments with lists of equipment needed.

9th grade MATH

Why do the patterns formed by lightning, veins, river deltas, and roots look so similar? What are the forces that cause them to form that way? Fractal structures: how complexity grows from reiteration. Example: measuring the coast of England. Drawing graphs.

PHYSICS

Lighting, electricity, ions.

8th grade BIOLOGY

What is the average temperature in the gorilla's natural environment? What do they eat, how does their digestion work, how do they get so strong, how many calories do they need per day? What is metabolism? Threats to their

environment. Questions about intelligence, animal rights, and inter-species communication. Documentary: Koko the gorilla using sign language (Nat'l Geographic 1981).

PHYSICS

Calories, ways of measuring heat and other kinds of energy.

Thunder.

Gorilla became the thunder, stood, beat his chest, bellowed without shame, without joy, without aggression; he simply had to let it all out, the aliveness inside.

Modern humans might be surprised at how self-aware gorillas are. Gorilla was no exception. He knew that he was becoming the thunder, that he was choosing to stand and bellow and beat his chest, even if the urge was irresistible. He had the ability to choose between being more outrageously expressive or more taciturn, and he knew when and why he was doing it. He just didn't know how to *blah, blah, blah* on and on endlessly about it with words like Humans do.

Like Problem Child Big Little Cousin Human.

Gorilla knew what words were, to a limited degree. His mother had lived with humans and had learned quite a few of them before she was released back into the wild. He had learned a few from her, but they didn't interest him much. He was content to think without words.

Gorilla stared at the pitch blackness that followed the lightning, sat down quietly, and sighed.

Gorilla stared into the blackness and started to make out dim forms. There was enough form to the blacknesses—the shapes of trees and the bodies of his family, the most minimal impression of light seeping from above the rainforest canopy as scant photons—not that Gorilla knew what photons were, but he knew the blackness of near but not total darkness, more to see here than in a cave. There was enough form to the blackness for there to be something there to stare out into, his vision reaching out to gently touch the darkness with his eyes, just enough to feel who was close and what was far. He felt the warmth of other gorilla bodies on his fur in one way, through it on his skin also on another channel, and on his eyes like a gentle soothing stroking pressure of darkness against darker-ness.

Gorilla stared into the blackness and tried to figure out, given that some have to sit closer to the fan than others when the shit hits it, because there's a limited amount of space in the room, jungle, savannah, forest, lake, canyon, ocean, or planet, how the humans did it.

How did they decide who had to end up low and who high on the totem pole of society in their species? Gorilla did not know about fans and totems poles, but he knew about getting feces thrown and getting the short end of the stick. Stones and sticks break bones and pricks. Clearly it had something to do with color and something to do with dicks. But

there was something else he couldn't put his finger on. Numbers. Not numbers of humans, that he understood in a vague way: there were just too damn many of the fuckers. But aside from that, the humans were also doing something with numbers and hierarchy and dominance which was kind of connected with the number of humans but also separate from their bodies, numbers that were invisible but still a part of them, in the atmosphere but untouchable, like your breath after you breathe it out. The weird thing humans were doing with numbers seemed constantly just beyond the edge of his vision, a sound that you could never be sure whether you actually heard it or not, a smell you get a whiff of and can't remember what it is till after it's wafted away ...

So he put his finger up his butt. This usually helped him think better for some reason. He remembered a story his mother had told him telepathically in a dream. His mother was with her human keeper. Gorilla was merged with her as she showed him the telepathic dream memory and so he saw and felt what she had as though he were the young her, but her adult version was also there with him in his mind, explaining what was happening through feeling-pictures, not the kinds you see with your eyes. Like he and his mother were both visiting his younger mother together but from inside, hiding where she wouldn't know they were there watching the scene unfold.

Gorilla and the Adult Mother of His Memory watched his Young Mother of Her Adult Mother's Memory together:

The keeper was teaching his mother to talk sign language. Today it was about colors. The teacher was having trouble grasping that Gorilla saw colors differently than people did, so it was hard for her to make sense of the names for them. Gorilla's mother was also Gorilla, because all Gorillas were named Gorilla, even if humans sometimes tried to give the primates they "experimented" on names like Koko or Nim Chimpsky. All Gorillas are Gorilla, but Gorilla knew the different kinds of Gorillas, even though they all had the same name. Many different kinds, in fact. Almost all Gorillas would know these Gorillas in relationship to themselves at least, and often in relationship from the point of view of several others: there was almost always Mother, Everybody's Daddy, Maybe my Daddy, Older Brother, Younger Brother, Older Sister, Younger Sister, Little Ones, Babies, Mom's Friends, Mom's Enemies, Dad's Friends, Dad's Enemies, Stronger-than-me Friend, Stronger-than-me Enemy, Weaker-than-me Friend, Weaker-than-me Enemy, Who I Want to Have Sex With, and then depending on who was around or if some visitors came, there might be Some Grownup, I Dunno Who Really and Some Kid, I Dunno Who Really. Gorillas understand intersectionality, even if they don't have a word for it, so they know that relationally the same Gorilla might be a Mom's Friend, Stronger-than-me Enemy, and Who I Want to Have Sex With at the same time, or in various roles at different times. In other words, they know how to code-switch. They also know about kink, but they don't like to talk about it much.

Besides not grasping that Gorillas sees colors a bit differently than people do, the keeper was also having trouble grasping that never mind kinky play, some Gorillas just don't like to talk much, about that or anything else. Even if words were pretty easy, a natural game for them, they would, as a species, mostly be on the taciturn end of the spectrum of symbolic communication. Much less talkative than bees or crows, for example, never mind obviously whales and dolphins.

But Gorillas are really good at listening, watching, and understanding. Much better than most humans would expect. They just don't have much to say about what they see, hear, and understand in any language, be it signing or farting. Importantly, Gorillas understand fart jokes, because they understand ingratiating themselves to others the way dogs understand brown-nosing, and they understand how to use self-depreciating humor (such as fart jokes), because they understand hierarchy.

Nonetheless, the keeper kept cajoling her about colors, and at least they could agree easily on black and white. The keeper's name was Jane. She had a sound name and a sign language name. All the humans had different meaningless names, but it didn't matter. You got used to it after a while.

Jane was not very satisfied with Gorilla's use of color words and was starting to emanate smells of frustration when her friend walked in and starting signing "What are you guys talking about?"

Jane signed and talked at the same time. She always did this. They called it "reinforcement." Jane probably didn't have a clue how much English Gorilla had absorbed this way and by listening to conversations when the Humans thought she wasn't listening, much the same way that human children do among grown-ups, with the difference that an adult Gorilla has a lot of experience with social interactions and a much more sophisticated level emotional intelligence than a human child. Gorillas can't talk, and there are so many other more interesting things to you with your hands than sign, but they sure know how to listen.

"Colors," signed and spoke Jane simultaneously.

"Which colors?" signed Jane's Friend. Jane's Friend had big boobies. She was fatter than Jane and smelled waftier and was a lot darker.

"All we can agree about is black and white," said-signed Jane.

"And brown!" signed Gorilla. "Brown! Brown! Brown! Shit is brown! Shit! Shit! Brown! Brown shit. I know brown." Gorilla was making fun of Chimpanzee's excessively boisterous and expressive style of signing, but the humans didn't get the joke.

"Brown," sign-said Jane. "What else is brown?"

Gorilla pointed at a wooden chair. "Chair brown," signed Gorilla. This seemed to cheer Jane up, so Gorilla attempted another joke.

"I want a snack," signed Gorilla.

"Soon," said Jane. "Not yet, soon."

Gorilla decided to play along by playing dumb at first. You have to pull the twig out of the termite mound slowly to trick them so they don't jump off. Then surprise them and pop them in your mouth real quick. Gorillas understand metaphors. They just don't like to talk about them much.

"Chair is brown. Brown chair," signed Gorilla.

Jane smiled cautiously. She looked at Gorilla unwaveringly, thinking that by holding her gaze, she could withhold information by not giving unintentional hints. She had no idea how easily Gorilla could read her mind, never mind her smells and the increasingly bothersome tic that had started to occupy the muscles around her left eye ever more frequently during the last few months. "What else? What else is brown?"

Gorilla went in for the setup. "Jane's Friend! Brown! Brown brown brown! Shit, brown!" Jane's Friend cracked a smile.

"I want a snack now," signed Gorilla. The tension was building.

"Soon." Jane was half-nervous, half-excited. She leaned forward. Her lip trembled a little. Her vagina leaked a bit of something it shouldn't have. She started salivating, even though Gorilla was the one signing about snacks.

"I'm black!" signed Gorilla, extravagantly. "Black, black! Jane's Friend is brown, I'm black. Black black black. Jane's Friend is brown, I'm black."

Jane's Friend started laughing. Jane was Weaker-than-me Enemy, but also kind of Stronger-than-me Enemy, because she had control over the snacks, which was confusing. But Jane's Friend was definitely a Who I Want to Have Sex With. Gorilla wondered if she had spent too much time with the Bonobos when she was little before she came to school to learn about Humans.

"What about me?" asked Jane.

"White," signed Gorilla. "White white white whitey-whitey white white. Jane's friend is brown, Jane is white, I'm blackety-black black."

"Good!" beamed Jane, pleased with herself again, while pretending Gorilla was earning credit that she would take for herself as usual.

"Jane's white's, Jane's Friend is brown, I'm black," sign Gorilla, just to prove she wasn't monkeying around or parroting the same sentence over and over. Punchline time: "I want a snack, I don't have a snack, I want a snack, I'm blackety black-black! I don't have a snack and I'm black black black!!!"

Gorilla did not know the phrase *emotional intelligence*, but had plenty of it anyway, and she felt somehow that these animals, in spite of all their cute, weird tricks with machines, were quite stupid. She knew this black and white stuff was a theme that would make their hair stand on end. She liked playing these games with them. She had a knack for freaking them out when they least expected it.

Jane's Friend whooped with laughter. She got the joke. Jane turned even whiter for a moment, then went kind of red and started smelling weird. Fear mixed with something Gorilla couldn't identify. The atmosphere in the room got chilly. Jane got up from her brown and green chair and left the room. No snack? WTF? Maybe the joke wasn't funny enough? Or the delivery was too dry? Gorilla made a note to herself (yes, gorillas do that) to come up with a joke about the color green next time.

Gorilla had wanted to say "You get what you want because you're white and I only get what I want when you let me have it because I'm black, and Jane's Brown Friend over there is just trying to stay out of the way while we work this out." She thought this situation was incredibly funny, but expressing it to Jane the Keeper was way beyond her abilities unless these People learned telepathy quick.

Jane's Friend took out one of those little glowing rectangular elephant brains the humans are carrying around all the time and started looking at it and touching it with quick, gentle gestures of her fingers.

Jane came back and gave Gorilla a snack. She still smelled weird. "What are you going to do now?" Jane's Friend asked.

"Go to lunch. You?"

"Same," said Jane's Friend. "Let's go?"

They got up and waddled toward the door together. If Gorilla had been Monkey, she would've thrown a turd at Jane. As if on cue, Jane's Friend

half-turned to look over her shoulder as they left, giving Gorilla what seemed to be an I-Want-to-Have-Sex-With-You-Too look. Gorilla smelled the sex. The telepathy! It was finally working! *Come closer. I won't hurt you*, signalled Gorilla telepathically.

It fell on deaf bioelectrical telepathy receptors. Gorilla got a brief waft of Jane as well. She was having bladder troubles. They left together, leaving Gorilla alone.

What the fuck is wrong with these People? thought Gorilla. She felt lonely. *Jane's Brown Friend liked my joke, though. I want to go back to the rainforest.*

§ § §

Gorilla of Now did not wake up immediately. He let the dream linger. He sensed that dawn was coming that he was no longer with his mother, neither the older nor the younger version.

In the pre-dawn hypnagogia of half-sleep he had a vision of a flower. It was a spinning flower, and he was looking down on it from above, going down, closer and closer towards it. It spun faster and faster until the petals were invisible and making a sound like a combination of wind and a hummingbird

[INSERT EDUCATIONAL UNIT ON MESOAMERICAN CULTURES]

The meaning of the hummingbird as a symbol. Mayan and Aztec math and astronomy. Pyramids and other astronomical observatories. Teotihuacán and hydroponic agriculture. The Inca. Other MesoAmerican cultures (Toltec, Zapotec, Olmec, etc.) The needs of ancient human cities (of all civilizations) to have division of labor = transport of resources to city centers that did not produce calories. What happens when extraction causes eco-crisis? Examples of civilizations that caused their own collapse (Jared Diamond). The European invasion of the Americas and the Catholic Church's efforts to destroy indigenous culture, burning codices, etc.

...and he was falling toward it. He was shit, and he was falling toward the spinning flower, and it was spinning really fast. He felt the presence of so many Humans in the place. They weren't completely packed together, but there wasn't much wiggle space. There were all different kinds of humans, different colors and shapes and rainbows of gender-smells. They were sitting in a perfect circle. They were all exactly the same distance from the fan as the shit hit it, holding hands.

[INSERT EDUCATIONAL MATH UNIT ABOUT π AND CIRCLES.]

[PHYS ED: T'AI CHI UNIT]

Gorilla woke up.

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