

Giving Shape:

Towards Unsettling the Anthropocene

By Aja Bond

Model Thoughts

“A model is a work object; a model is not the same *kind* of thing as a metaphor or an analogy. A model is worked, and it does work. A model is like a miniature cosmos, in which a biologically curious Alice in Wonderland can have tea with the Red Queen and ask how this world works, even as she is worked by the complex-enough, simple-enough world.” --- Donna Haraway¹

Simple geometric and material forms have always held for me a helpful illustrative quality in presenting models of how energy, power and attention are flowing, whether they are in the realm of time, space, economics, resistance, ecologies or in a spiritual/metaphysical sense. They help me visualize patterns of thoughts, behaviors and how these do or don't interact in a more-than-human picture of relationality that can be applied on multiple scales. These shapes have informed my actions as well as my ideas and how I understand the ideas of others.²

¹ Donna Haraway, “Symbiogenesis, Symptoiesis, and Art Science Activisms” in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, ed. Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, Nils Bubandt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), m29

² My first introduction to the concept of “more-than-human” was in David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, (New York: Random House, 1996)

These models can be thought of as discrete in and of themselves but also as component parts of larger patterns and also as stages in a cyclical progression, and have been organized accordingly here.

“The Anthropocene” is a proposed new geological epoch marking an unprecedented time in which human actions have become a primary influence on the Earth’s material conditions. While the assumption of universal culpability across class, race, nationality, etc. and the emphasis on the individual as the primary unit affecting these changes is grossly oversimplified, and has been repeatedly, thoroughly contested, it is now not a matter of *if* but *when and how* the terms of the Anthropocene will be defined. Its attendant critical, alternately proposed terms -- the Capitalocene, Chthulucene, Plantationocene, White Supremacene, Gynecene³ -- all point to different origins and implications in attempts to politicize and make transparent the cause as well as the effect of this clusterfuck of compound crises. As with most things under late-Capitalism, the Anthropocene thesis, while still being articulated and debated by professionals, has been quickly co-opted and instrumentalized by corporate entities wishing to capitalize on this confluence of catastrophes, using it as an opportunity to further consolidate their power and frame the future in their terms - techno-fixes, geoengineering and a presumed-logical conclusion that humans have, by means of unquestionable progress, become the new *Creators* of the Earth.⁴

This essay utilizes a set of shapes as models for thinking through some of the ways people are engaging and resisting the Anthropocene from a variety of perspectives. I am responding to writing by both Indigenous and Settler scholars and activists from the fields of evolutionary biology, philosophy, art, ecological ethics and some interdisciplinary cross-pollinations, as well as sharing personal

³ Discussion of these alternative terms can be found in TJ Demos, *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and the Environment Today* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017) 85-112, as well as Donna Haraway, “Making Kin in the Chthulucene: Reproducing Multispecies Justice,” *Making Kin Not Population*, ed. Adele Clarke and Donna Haraway (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, forthcoming, 2018).

⁴ TJ Demos, *Against the Anthropocene*, 23-37

experiences that convey how I have come to some of my own conclusions. It is undoubtedly clear that the momentous challenges of our times require a diversity of tactics and in that spirit I offer this contribution from my own lived experience as an artist, community organizer and witch, working through these problems and creative solutions with a neuro-divergent/synesthetic lens and a DIY ethic.⁵ As an autodidact whose education has occurred first and foremost in the world of collaboration, conversation, trial and error, with much inspired support from the world of books, I offer these shapes as models of not just thoughts but of my felt sense of dynamic intra-action.⁶

“You don't think your way into a new kind of living. You live your way into a new kind of thinking.” — Henri J.M. Nouwen⁷

⁵ Framed both politically and spiritually, identifying with the term witch accomplishes two things; it is a gesture of solidarity towards the many thousands of women and healers murdered under the bloody banner of the term by the church during the enclosure of the commons in Feudal Europe in the transition to early Capitalism, and an acknowledgement of my long-held belief in and practice of magic, defined by Starhawk as “the art of changing consciousness at will”. For more on these intertwining threads, see Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, (Oakland: AK Press, 1998) and Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark: Sex, Magic and Politics*, (Boston: Beacon, 1982) and *Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority and Mystery*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1990)

⁶ With a wink and a nudge to my few years in community college and night school fashion and music programs, which I consider having furthered my already present tendency towards thinking in shapes, patterns and waves. Also thanks to TJ Demos for enabling this first semi-legit foray into the realm of higher education.

⁷ Henri Jozef Machiel Nouwen (1932-1996), was a Dutch Catholic priest, professor, writer and theologian. His interests were rooted primarily in psychology, pastoral ministry, spirituality, social justice and community.

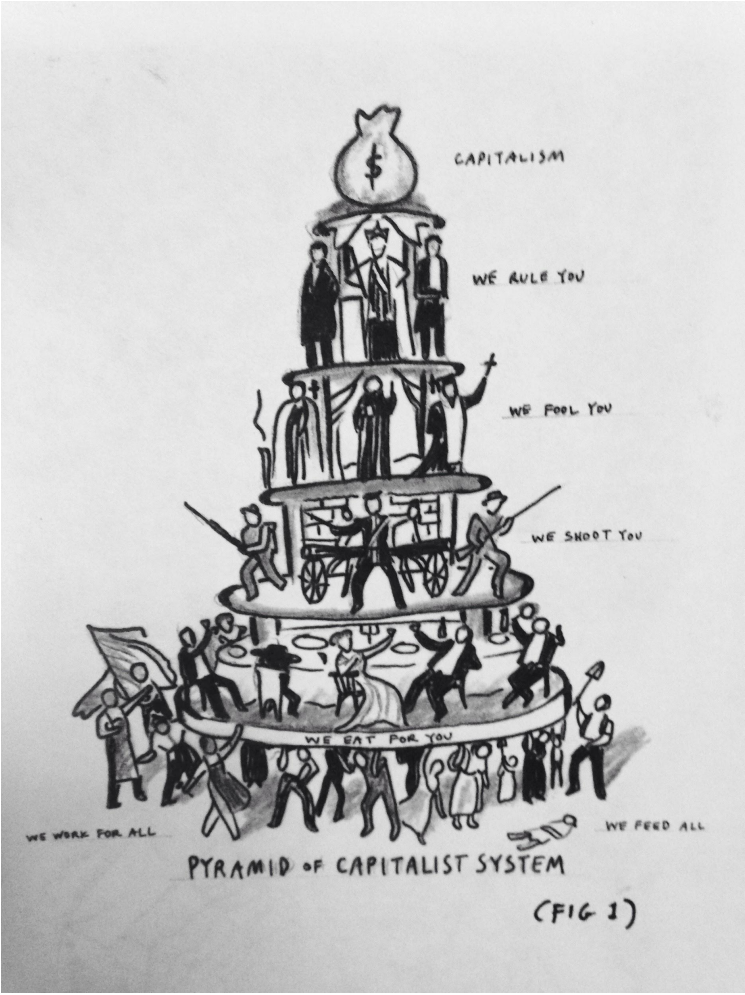
Pyramids of Power

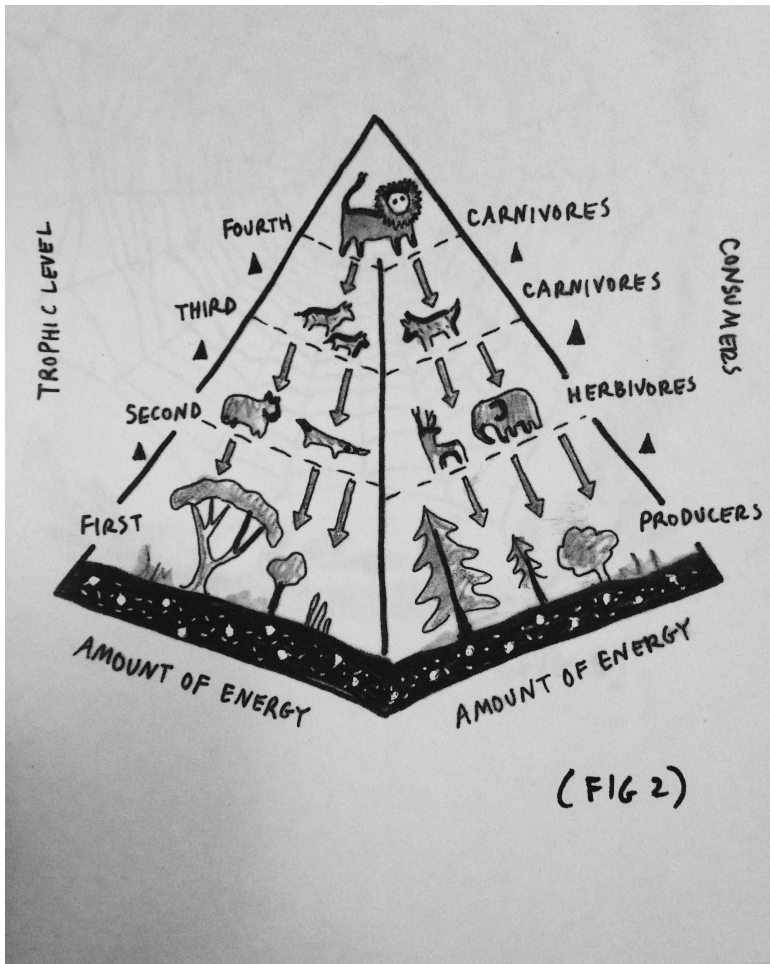
Many on the radical left are familiar with the famous poster titled *the Pyramid of Capitalist System* (fig.1).⁸ Based on an anonymous drawing of the Russian Empire from 1900, it was adapted into a critical caricature in an American IWW newspaper in 1911. It depicts poor or working-class people on the bottom tier in their masses struggling not to be crushed by the weight of those above them: the middle class enjoying their relatively modest comforts and pleasures; the military, church and profiteers in the top levels running the show. It is dated but remains a useful, if simplified depiction of the flows of capital, how extracted surplus value moves and the violence used to keep the working class from seizing the means of production and recuperating the wealth they generate with their labour. It is a picture of hierarchy from a class analysis.

Most are also familiar with some form of the pyramid associated with the food chain as it relates to other-than-human forms of life (fig. 2). Large predators on top, followed by small carnivores, herbivores, with plant producers below them and microbial/bacterial/fungal decomposers on the bottom tier. The categories seemingly go down in body size, complexity and importance as they increase in numbers. This is not the current scientific understanding of this model, or the reality of relational dynamics in ecosystems, quite the opposite, but it is nonetheless how it is widely *interpreted*, which is just as significant for the purpose of this essay as its factual meaning. Whatever apex predator is illustrated in any given model, most humans will imagine

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyramid_of_Capitalist_System

themselves to be on the *very* top. There is a pyramid solidly built at the foundation of Western thought about who “we” are in relation to the rest of the non-human world, even amongst people who are simultaneously oppressed by the qualities of this shape as it is materialized in various ways in human hierarchies.





The Anthropocene thesis, as I understand it, uncritically reinforces this anthropocentric, or human-centered logic, to the point that I might suggest a more accurate naming, the *Anthropocentricene*. The elite humans qualified to participate in the official conversation of how to define this recently proposed geological epoch, as well as those enthusiastically adopting the term and using it to push forward their corporate agenda are proliferating pyramids with their thinking and actions as they detail and simultaneously further the crisis without considering the cause of the problem, namely, the pyramid of the

capitalist system and its extractive, colonial, patriarchal, white supremacist, heteronormative facets.

The pyramid formation renders in multiple dimensions both mass and topography, which in these times of rising sea levels evokes the kind of “higher ground” that the affluent have exclusive access to. As the effects of climate change impact those with nowhere else to go and cataclysm continues to escalate, either through slow slides or instantaneous ruptures in the fabric of reality, those on top of the pyramid are insulated from the consequences they have always intentionally externalized. Gabrielle Hecht has clearly pointed to this in her scholarship on the impacts of extractive, global capitalism in Africa, and she uses the term *regulatory arbitrage* to describe the racist, imperial “defeat device” that operates on a planetary scale. The oil industry complies with tighter restrictions on some continents by offloading dirtier fuel on others. Diesel vehicles that no longer adhere to European standards end up in African cities, increasing the incentive to export highly toxic fuel. Ultimately, all the pollutants end up in the atmosphere, driving climate change. But along the way, some people pay a higher price than others.”⁹ And in this the implication of universalized human fault is revealed as an obvious obfuscation of the truth that the crises are not a product of “human action”, but of select human action and specifically the relentless, cumulative actions of corporate entities, with their quasi-human legal status and meta-human access to power and influence at most all levels of governance and regulation. The terrifying fact that corporations are granted more rights and protections than most humans and the horrendous, escalating loss of life that has followed is the result of the twisted logic of the pyramid at work.

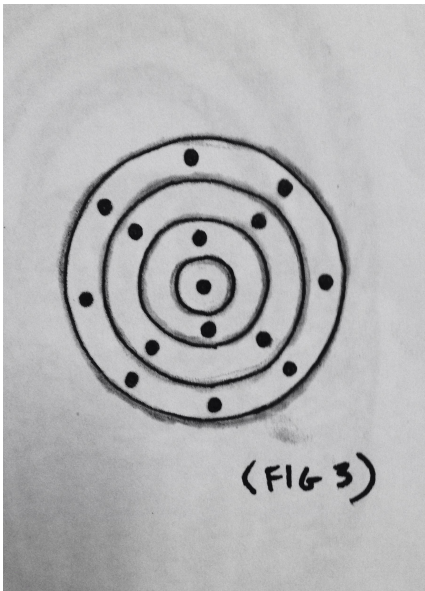
⁹ Gabrielle Hecht, “The African Anthropocene”, *Aeon*, 06 February, 2018, <https://aeon.co/essays/if-we-talk-about-hurting-our-planet-who-exactly-is-the-we>

The Trouble with the Center

A few years ago, I was duped by a pyramid scheme disguised as a circle (fig. 3), convinced to wrangle and then give away a significant amount of money (for me, a low income, working class artist) towards a project that was purportedly generating abundance and gratitude in feminist communities of spiritual, emotional and material mutual aid.¹⁰ While I can admit my own faulted wishful thinking and self-deception wrought out of financial desperation, I have learned the hard way that the misrepresentation of a circle (intuitively translated as wholeness,

non-hierarchical organizing, organic containment, etc.) was the main cause of the cognitive/somatic dissonance and anxiety I experienced over the year-plus that I was involved in the project.

The pyramid is widely distrusted by many people in subcultures of anti-capitalist resistance, given its propensity for hierarchy and exploitation. There have been many varied and longstanding attempts to address the pervasiveness of hierarchy in communities of practice with some degrees of



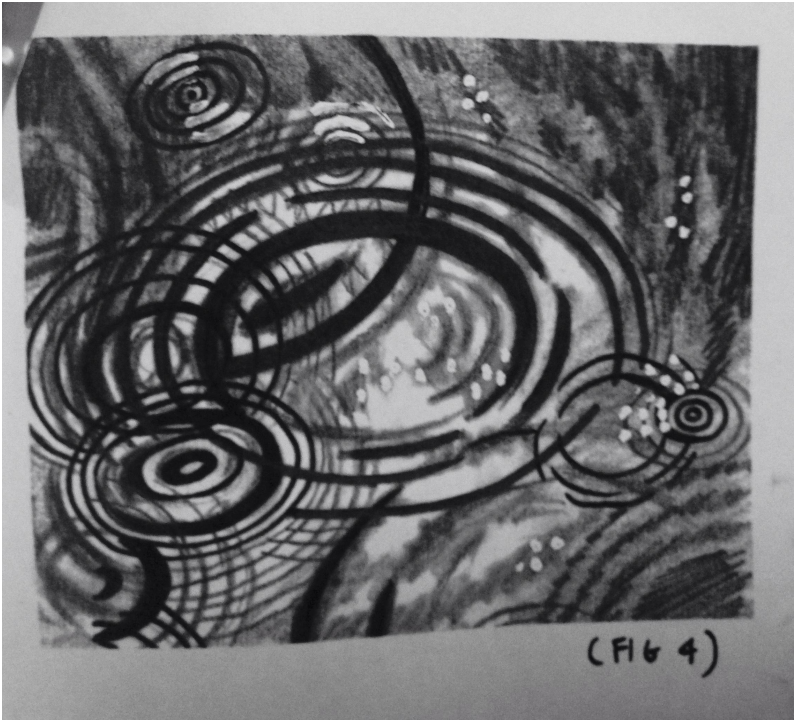
¹⁰ Opaquely called “the Circle”, the project is swathed in secrecy and perpetuated by isolating participants from critique by justifying new-age “positive thinking” at all costs, yet has rightly come under scrutiny.

success. As it relates to the anecdote above, the circle was a model I naively trusted because of its familiarity to me in part through permaculture design, specifically the way concentric circles are used to describe scale and degrees of relationship. It was also familiar from the social justice framework practice of centering as an act of equalizing power, an intervention into the pyramid shape and a form of reparations-in-action meant to acknowledge and adjust for systemic marginalization (a position at the outer edges of the circle). The practice of centering gives folks a turn to be heard, to influence decisions, and to have access to power and resources they have long been denied.

I have seen this work beautifully in particular instances and at the same time somehow it is all too easy to invert the pyramid model, flatten it, round out it's hard angles, and pass it off as a circle in a seeming gesture towards egalitarianism and social justice. People will claim that "now we are all here on the same level", and yet there are glaring omissions in many social justice models of anyone other-than-human, the main exceptions being Indigenous movements¹¹. In addition to these troubling absences is a rigidity of the ideology and implementation of anti-oppression politics and the understandable reactionary recoil from the often alienating, essentializing of identity.

While the principle of centering marginalized voices and oppressed individuals might be sound in theory, it often runs aground in practice. Even in the well-intentioned concentric circle models there are curved lines being drawn between us, helpfully articulating power differentials and yet inadvertently and opaquely inverting hierarchies. There is, to the best of my knowledge, *only one center of a circle*. And yet there are myriad subject positions whose voices need to be heard and considered if we are to understand the diverse nature of our problems and access the rich potential of a creative, collaborative problem-solving approach. In the logic of the centering intervention, the question of whose voice/story/perspective gets how much space/time/attention to be heard is dependent on the

¹¹ How people can go into such detail at the differences of human experience in attempts to enact justice without considering the lives of non-humans at all is quite beyond my understanding.



quantifiable/verifiable experiences of multiple intersecting oppressions. This is then necessarily policed/enforced in organizing efforts by some authority/expert. It is difficult to imagine how the convener/facilitator of any particular circle-form convinces the outer rings of participants to stick around for the long haul. I wonder, will those individuals who, while possessing various unearned privileges, having found their lived experiences newly marginalized, have a chance to contribute/reciprocate/participate in the dialogue/process/unfolding of whole new worlds that could have a right-sized place for their own unique lives?¹². Some of these individuals may stay for a while, in order

¹² I am particularly grateful to Mariam Gafforio (aka Mars Goetia) for our lengthy conversations on this subject, informed by her countless hours of experience facilitating groups in conflict aiming to restoratively meet the needs of the harmed parties, which centering is attempting to attend to, while still considering the needs of other involved and impacted parties.

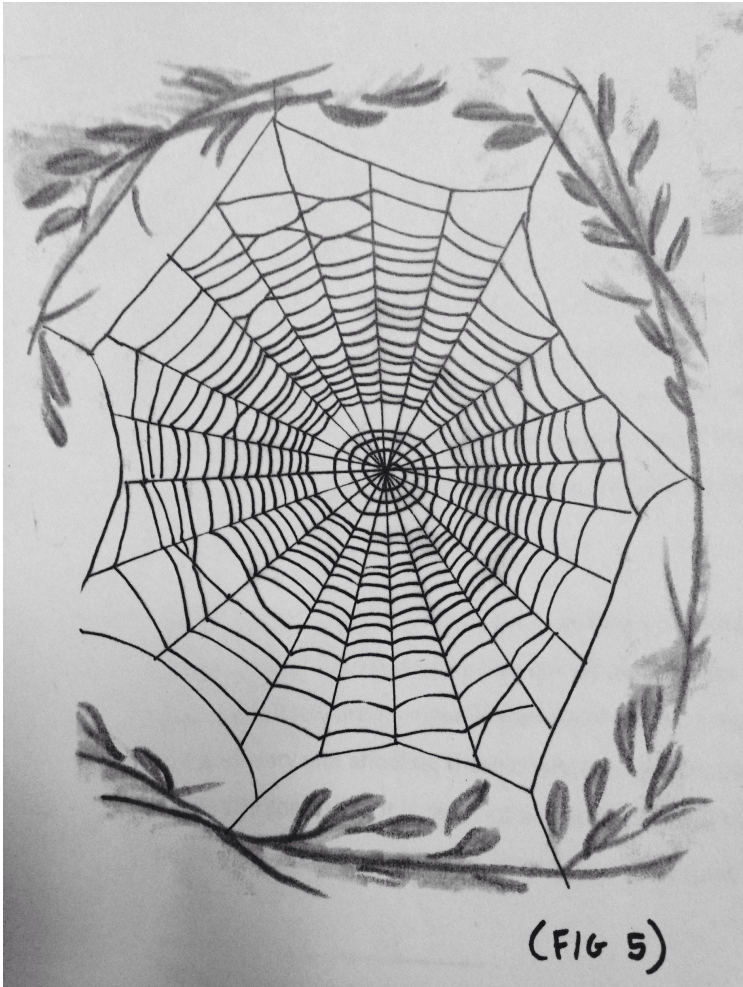
to learn from other's perspectives, and some longer out of duty, guilt, peer-pressure or a lack of imagined alternatives. Some may stay indefinitely if they are convinced their needs matter, but that is not, in my experience, the rhetoric of these centering models. If the circle can be made flexible/fluid/queer, able to shift/move/grow, then perhaps these practices have enduring value, but as ideology and concretized forms, enforced by perverse purity politics, I do not understand them to be sites of praxis for the liberation of all beings.

The concentric rings seem a sound structure, one it was easy for me to trust, mistakenly. Ripples in water, rings of a tree, these are manifestations of this shape that make sense to my brain, my body, my experience of energy. But now that I know it is possible to manipulate this shape into containing an artificially flattened, covert structure of hierarchy and its social justice inversions, I am looking for other shapes on which to map my practices, both personal and collaborative. Perhaps a missing piece in this model is the plurality and impermanence of the circle(s), as seen in the way that raindrops make multiple overlapping circles that appear and disappear, interacting and affecting those next to it (fig. 4). Or the forest as a map of countless centers, all radiating outwards, towards one another, intertwining roots and branches. They emerge, coalescing, then dissipate in and reform in other places, echoing each other but each one a unique and irreplaceable moment in time and space.

Web as spiral wheel

One of the most consistently invoked shapes of the respective movements of Decolonization, unsettling, climate and environmental justice is that of the web (fig. 5). Often referred to as the “web of life,” with differently scaled iterations such as the soil food web, it is a shape that is related to concentric circles, but distinct. Our preeminent architect is of course the spider. And while spiders create webs across a spectrum from crystalline perfection to gossamer globes and dusty cobwebs in the rafters of our shared homes, they nonetheless have an archetypal form in our symbol-lexicon: that of the synergized forms of the wheel and the spiral. With a few preliminary armatures in place, the radial spokes of the wheel move out from the center to the margins, and another thread (entirely different in their tactile qualities, one being for catching food and another for walking upon unhindered) spirals out, circumnavigating the whole and connecting each spoke along the way.

The spider is often found waiting patiently at the center of the finished web (her body a beautiful mirror of the web she weaves: symmetrical, radial, perfect). Disturbances in any part of the web, whether they are created by detritus on the wind or the frantic tugging of her next meal, make themselves known to her through the interconnectedness of each of the points, and the carefully gauged tension that holds the whole structure together. Delicate, powerful,



vulnerable, a unique temporal creation and an ancient, reliable blueprint.

Despite the ubiquity of the web as metaphor for the interconnectedness of life, we have again a discrepancy between its use in theory and in practice. The barriers between our human kin of differing class, race, nationality, gender etc. - both inherited and, more recently, recreated in attempts to reorganize ourselves towards justice - while nothing if not complex, seem to be of a whole other category to

the chasms of difference and lack of understanding between ourselves and our other-than-human kin. It would appear that the web is anything but intact. It has not collapsed outright, though the threat is looming. We are attempting to rebuild connections between the various, uncountable points even as crucial precious parts of the web vanish into the endless night of extinction. These broken lines of reciprocal connection have left so many of us impoverished and bereft, isolated with only our own human understanding to guide our economical, solution-oriented thinking towards some beacon of progress, which itself is a product of distorted thought too long isolated from the wisdom of the web.

Multi-species kinship is an articulation of the web that has come through Donna Haraway and her infamous sympoetic, interdisciplinary, visionary scholarship.¹³ What at times reads as theoretical utopian SF (sentimental fluff) is actually informed by a rock-bottom understanding of evolutionary biology (science facts) underlying the horrific predictions (speculative fabulation) of our current trajectory. Her works insistence on art and story as ways of worlding in cahoots with science and big numbers is a fertile, unpredictable site of friction between seemingly incongruous bodies (of knowledge, including that of other-than-humans) that may just have the potential to co-evolve some of the brilliant, adaptive, hybrid creatures we need to help make our way out of this tangle, to fill some of the gaping holes left in the tragic wake of mass extinction, and patching together a makeshift web to hold us intact-ish as we weather the storm.

The web as spiral wheel is also a way of conceiving of time in one of its cyclical, non-linear forms. A term that has emerged within one of my communities of practice, that of queer, anarchist-feminist witchcraft and earth-based spirituality, is *Whole Time*, in which the past and the future are not separated by hard boundaries and the spiral wheel of the web structure allows both practical and magical actions in the present to ripple through it in all directions.¹⁴ It seems that in the

¹³ Haraway, "Making Kin"

¹⁴ The name *Whole Time* is based on a spontaneous, ecstatic pronouncement in ritual as the understanding sank in that "It was there the *Whole Time!*", *it* being

same way that we can be affected by interventions from our multi-species descendents in their present/future, we are impacting our multi-species ancestors in their past/present. It is potentially possible to jump along the cycles of time the same way the spider can move from one ring of her web to another without having to traverse the circuit in its entirety. While this description may seem at once far-fetched and all too simple, it is generated out of my own experience of over a decade of collaborative work in intensive ritual experimentation, non-chemical altered-states and rapid cultural transformation - it is not something that can be accessed by any shortcut that I am aware of. It also builds upon the praxis of my predecessors in the Reclaiming and Radical Faerie Traditions and has been undoubtedly influenced by countless inter- and intra-actions over decades of blurred cultural sharing and appropriation from countless sources, for better or worse.¹⁵ That said, my experience of this phenomena/facet of Time has been experiential without much prior framing besides those of the science fiction variety. It is only now being connected to accounts from indigenous writers and scholars detailing millenia-old ways of interacting with Time as a complex being

this aspect of Time as a multi-dimensional being, seemingly revealing itself to us in a wild and fleeting moment that changed everything.

¹⁵ Reclaiming is an feminist tradition of Witchcraft formed in the 1980's in the SF Bay Area in the midst of anti-nuclear direct action and other forms environmental activism, with a foundational principle being that if one believes the Earth is sacred, one must defend it. For over 30 years the tradition has organized week-long intensive gatherings, now across North America, Europe and Australia, called Witchcamps where people learn in formal paths/classes taught by a teacher and student-teacher duo and culminating each night in collective ritual. The Radical Faeries were formed predominantly by gay men in the 1970's out of the gay rights movement and following AIDS crisis, many of whom coalesced around rural land projects called "sanctuaries" where many Radical Faeries went to die, to have their ashes spread or to grieve and celebrate their loved ones in collectively created ritual space. While always anti-assimilationist, the tradition has been expanding to include all genders and expressions of queerness. The primary practice of the tradition is that of enacting *subject-subject consciousness* through heart-centered witnessing of the beingness of everything. Both traditions have strong anarchist and environmentalist roots and have proliferated into global communities with considerable overlap.

outside of the incessantly ticking linear clock-time imposed through genocide and violence by colonialism and capitalism.

As Métis/otipemisiw scholar Zoe Todd and Canadian white-settler scholar Heather Davis collaboratively point to in their essay *On the Importance of the Date*, referring to the horrific world(s)-ending event of settler-colonialism, “We argue that this seismic shockwave has rolled through and across space and time and is now hitting those nations, legal systems, and structures that brought about the rending and disruption of lifeways and life-worlds in the first place. The Anthropocene – or at least all of the anxiety produced around these realities for those in Euro-Western contexts – is really the arrival of the reverberations of that seismic shockwave into the nations who introduced colonial, capitalist processes across the globe in the last half-millennium in the first place.”¹⁶ Kim Tallbear, a Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate scholar and professor specializing in racial politics in science writes, “Present-past-future: I resist a lineal, progressive representation of movement *forward* to something better, or movement *back* to something purer. I bring voices and practices into conversation from across what is called, in English, time.”¹⁷ In *Emergent Strategy*, adrienne maree brown writes of Black folks, “We are living in the ancestral imagination of others, with their longing for safety and abundance, a longing that didn’t include us, or included us as enemy, fright, other.”¹⁸ These voices express a deep conviction that I wish to echo, if not from a shared experience, then from a shared sense that Time - as yet another of our multi-species kin - is much more complex than we have words to describe or models to hold, but that within it are potent ways to resist the foreclosure of possible realities besides the resonant doom tolling from Anthropocenic clock-time.

¹⁶ Heather Davis and Zoe Todd, “On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene”, *ACME: An International Journal of Critical Geographies*, 2017, 16(4), 761-780

¹⁷ Kim Tallbear, “Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sex and Families”, in *Making Kin Not Population*, ed. Adele Clarke and Donna Haraway (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2018, forthcoming)

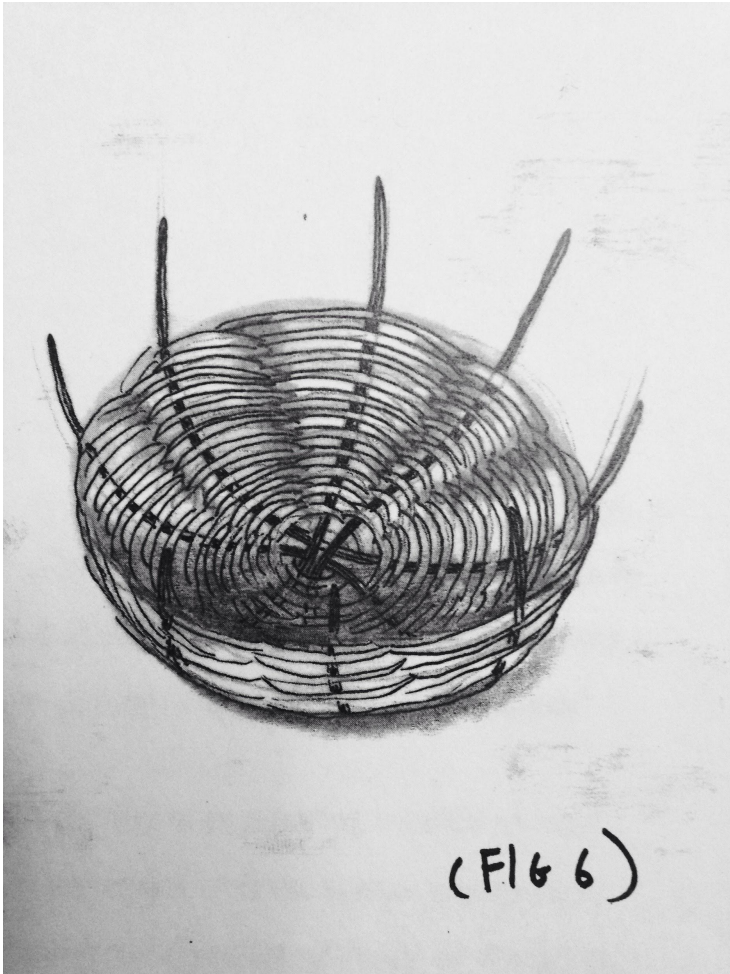
¹⁸ adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, (Oakland: AK Press, 2017) 19

The Nested Baskets of Worlds

It is my belief that humans learned to weave from reciprocal kinship with spiders. One of the most basic baskets is made in a similar way to a web, which I learned how to make with invasive ivy culled from the forest in Stanley Park, on unceded Coast Salish Territories, in the city known as Vancouver BC, from socially engaged environmental artist, Sharon Kallis.¹⁹ (fig. 6) Baskets, the earliest form of weaving, emerged all over the world at roughly the same time, around 13-12,500 B.C. - they continue to be made in much the same way today as they have been for millennia and they are still all made by hand.²⁰ The basket is a web woven of earth materials, learned from spiders and created in an incredible imaginary leap forged in the crucible of crisis - the need to gather, carry, contain and in essence, survive. My sense is that the model of *nested* baskets has the possibility of revealing things about how multiple realities can co-exist simultaneously and teach us about the capacities of our imaginations to hold what is needful for survival (fig. 7).

¹⁹ Not only does she teach basket weaving with invasive plant bodies culled from the intensely ecologically compromised “ivy deserts”, she has used the same disruptive, out-of-balance species to create huge nets - knit on a large scale using wrought iron fences in the park as supports, the organic material being rendered inert by splitting the vines down the middle lengthwise - to rehabilitate the fast-eroding embankments in the forest caused by the ivy mono-culture, allowing the soil to be rebuilt and a new diversity of flora to proliferate. Read more about her amazing work at <https://sharonkallis.com/>

²⁰ Howard Risatti, *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007) 60-61



In *Ecological Ethics*, Patrick Curry describes varying ways we think, develop priorities, make decisions and take action in regards to the “environment”, organizing them into 3 categories; *Shallow (Anthropocentric) Ethics*, *Intermediate (Biocentric) Ethics*, and *Deep (Ecocentric) Ethics*.²¹ Within this system, the skeleton or armature of value on which the actions and consequences of each framework are

²¹ Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2011)



woven becomes clear. *Shallow Ethics* perceive the earth as being for humans exclusively. This is also described as the *Sole Value Assumption*: “Nonhuman beings of any kind have no independent moral status or considerability and only merit consideration insofar as they matter to humans; consequently, any parts of nonhuman nature that have no use-value for humans can be exploited and any parts which have apparently no value can be disposed of. Likewise an ecological problem is defined here as one that poses difficulty for humans, regardless of its

effects on the rest of nature.”²² It is easy to see the reflection of the current corporate-driven techno-solutions in this system. It is motivated by a desire to preserve the status-quo of consumption, convenience and above all, profit, regardless of the impact on other-than-humans.

In describing *Intermediate Ethics*, Curry offers two definitions, one being that of a modified *Greater Value Assumption* “according to which natural items have some intrinsic value but wherever they conflict with human interests the latter must take precedence. [...] The other and ultimately more useful way of defining mid-range ecological ethics (which is not necessarily consistent with the first) is as non-anthropocentric but not fully ecocentric. That is, value is not restricted to human beings, but it also does not extend all the way to ecosystems.”²³ In this system we can see the above logic extended to certain honorary humans (domestic animal companions, impressive trees, critters with cute faces that inspire our caregiving impulses), but undoubtedly denying “humanity” to most of the world.

Deep (Ecocentric) Ethics, “like biocentrism, is non-anthropocentric.”²⁴ It differs though, in that it “takes as objects of ethical concern, *holistic* entities (although that can and usually does include individuals); and those entities include integral components that are non-living as well as animate.”²⁵ His criteria for *Deep Ecological Ethics* must satisfy the following: “1) It must be able to recognize the value, and therefore support the ethical defence, of the integrity of species and of ecosystemic places, as well as human and non-human organisms. So it is holistic, although not in the sense of excluding individual value. 2) Within nature-as-value it must, (a) allow for conflicts between the interests of human and non-human nature (b) allow purely human interests, on occasion, to lose. (It is hardly a level playing field otherwise).”²⁶ This way, arguably the oldest and most reliable way of being in multi-species kinship, is difficult if not impossible to imagine enacted within the current legal and economic structures that

²² Ibid. 61-62

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. 92

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

determine contemporary civilization. Nonetheless, this model resonates with integrity and a potential for intactness that most of us living today have never experienced.

Each one of these models for living is a web, crafted into basket form, built to capture and contain the value it perceives in the living world. The smallest basket (small in creativity, imagination, scope) is nested into the next larger one, which can hold a little more meaning and wonder at the preciousness of other-than-human life, and the last, the largest holds all as “human” and holds the understanding that all the other baskets depend on its intactness to keep them from falling out of existence. The largest basket is also that of *Perspectivism*, as articulated by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, which holds the potential for “Human” to manifest in an unending possible array of bodily forms. As I understand it, these diverse bodies and their wildly varying sense-abilities determine the “perspectives” or the unique ways of knowing the other, quite unknowable from outside the particular body configuration. The enspirited form, whether it be jaguar or mountain, is not in question from within this way of perceiving the world.²⁷

Using an equally disorienting and unsettling set of ideas from *In the Dust of This Planet*, the first of 3 books in a series titled *The Horror of Philosophy*, Eugene Thacker attempts to map out a similarly nesting and related but distinct set of frames in order to understand the current limitations of thinking through the Anthropocene - including the possibility of the end of human life on Earth - stating that “Arguably, one of the greatest challenges that philosophy faces today lies in comprehending the world in which we live as both a human *and* a non-human world - and of comprehending this politically.”²⁸ He maps out 3 worlds using Pessimist and Nihilist lineages: the world-for-us (World), the world-in-itself (Earth) and the world-without-us (Planet).²⁹ This task is mired with contradiction, namely the “unthinkability” of

²⁷ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “Perspectivism” in *Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-Structural Anthropology*, trans. and ed. Peter Skafish (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2014)

²⁸ Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet, Horror of Philosophy* (London: Zero, 2011) 1-9

²⁹ Ibid.

certain thoughts and the ways in which the attempt to understand the non-anthropocentric world-in-itself seems to immediately enclose it into the world-for-us. These limitations of Philosophy are exactly what interests him. Beyond the straightforward engagement of horror as a genre, or horror as the emotion of fear, he uses the term to describe the “enigmatic thought of the unknown” and argues that “‘horror’ is a non-philosophical attempt to think about the world-without-us philosophically”. Using this model of nested baskets, the of World, Earth and Planet may seem wholly incommensurable but they exist simultaneously in Whole Time, beyond linear or rational modes of thought.

In a similar way, the “End of the World(s)” has already occurred for many generations of Indigenous Peoples now living with Post-Apocalyptic Stress Syndrome, even as future-facing settler-colonial subjects wring our hands at the impending onslaught our histories have wrought.³⁰ And of course there are the myriad many species whose flame has already been extinguished in the Dithering - an apropos term for our prolonged “state of indecisive agitation”³¹. As is suggested in the Introduction to the *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, “To track the histories that make multispecies livability possible, it is not enough to watch lively bodies. Instead, we must wander through landscapes, where assemblages of the dead gather together with the living”[...]“Their traces are still with us.”³² Perhaps they will remain in some ghostly iteration until we can properly integrate their importance, grieve their loss and our own ineffectual and perhaps misguided attempts to save the world with the same hubris that brought us to this place.

There should be no corner of the imaginary left unexplored in our yearning for meaning and connection - all of these ways of thinking through the complex-concurrent problems of the Anthropocene are building capacity for the quantum shifts needed in moving through the

³⁰ Davis and Todd, “On the Importance of a Date”, describing the work of Minnesota Chippewa scholar, Lawrence Gross

³¹ Kim Stanley Robinson, *2312*, (London: Orbit, 2012)

³² Tsing, Swanson, Gan, Bubandt, “Introduction: Haunted landscapes of the Anthropocene” in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, G5

catharsis-in-crisis of our current moment. I see, as Risatti does, that “In the conceptualizations that brought craft objects into being as physical entities can be seen the workings of consciousness itself” but I dare us to take it further, to refuse his insistence that this moment of initial breakthrough represents the fatalistic “power of human creativity to wrest a realm of culture from nature”.³³ I instead wonder if this intelligence, so long assumed as the exclusive domain of our kind, is actually the primordial creative, adaptive impulse that has driven the evolution of life forms through innumerable cataclysmic changes, from within which we could perceive no clear way out and nonetheless, time after time we have *responded from a place of listening for what is needful*.³⁴ That something of our situation is held in the basic models presented here points to Haraways “complex-enough, simple-enough world” quoted in the beginning of this piece. A humble suggestion, that in the humble shapes, objects and unassuming other beings we interact with in our daily lives are living portals into knowing the nature of our dilemmas and possible ways through them to some unknown other side.

³³ Risatti, *Theory of Craft*, 64-65

³⁴ For some much needed perspective and awe-inspiring narration of the Universe’s unfolding through World-ending crisis upon crisis with the most ingenious and unexpected evolutionary creative action, see Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era--A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1992)

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