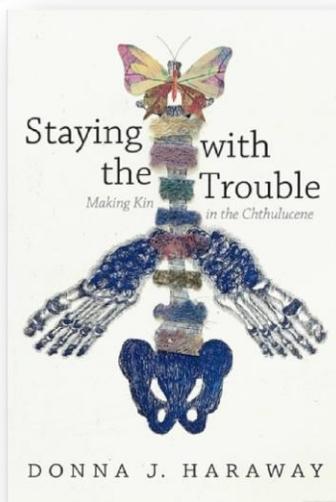


Article Type: BOOK REVIEW
Article Ref. No.: CONSORTIUM0030
Article History: Submitted on 19 Dec
2021 | Accepted on 23 Dec 2021 |
Published online on 27 Dec 2021



DONNA J. HARAWAY'S *STAYING WITH THE TROUBLE: MAKING KIN IN THE CHTHULUCENE*: A REVIEW

Dr. Asijit Datta¹ ✉



In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Donna J. Haraway addresses deeply situated feminist explorations and varied epistemologies and ecologies. It contains figurative criticism of the current environmental crises that forms the emergency of the Anthropocene. Haraway traverses alternative ways of knowing how the subject's experiences of the past, present, future, gender, culture, race all dissolve into each other and need continuous interrogations to arrive at the evolving notions of subjecthood and environment. The book investigates the material semiotics, political histories of different surfaces, mythologies, species, and stories and forces us to establish contact with other existents in search of harmonious ways of survival. In our age when global politics and global capital are operating by destruction and distortion of natural resources, the book emerges as an inevitable counter by product of staying with the trouble. Being alive on earth must inevitably follow being-with-other-species or sympoiesis (worlding with). The origin of the modern cell itself is an outcome of bacterial reactions, inclusions-exclusions and indigestions. In a desperate attempt to find the umbilical cord connecting the born and the disappeared ones (from races that are subjected to genocide to animals that are extinct), Haraway introduces the notion of the Chthulucene (the tentacular ones).

A ubiquitous trope in this book is the multi-tentacles SF which simultaneously stands for "science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, speculative feminism, science fact, so far"

¹ [Author] ✉ [Corresponding Author], Assistant Professor, Department of English, The Heritage College, Kolkata

E-mail: asijit.datta@thc.edu.in

© 2021 Consortium Journal; The author



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

(Haraway 2), and assists Haraway in tracing entangled threads and seeking multispecies and environmental justice. The book is an appeal towards the practice of tentacular thinking, and analyzing our story-making, thought-making and world-making. Haraway suggests string figuring as material engagement of cognitive practices, being loyal to our threaded involvements and mutating patterns. *Staying with the Trouble* emerges as a response to two primary impulses around Capitalocene (globalizing systems of forced productions, extractions and circulations, fossil fuel economy, melting of icecaps) and Anthropocene– the first one talks of a techno-Godlike-saviour at the wake of techno-apocalypse and the second is a kind of nihilistic pragmatism where we are heading towards an inevitable extinction (and all efforts at collaboration and mutual trusting would end in futility). Facing these intense and insistent arguments or what for Haraway filters to staying with the trouble would mean a commitment towards stringed involvements with companion species, “making oddkin...unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles” (Haraway 4). Haraway finds the solution in hybrid coexistence while approaching the crises induced by Anthropogenic alterations of an autopoietic, physical-chemical metabolizing planet/system by anthropogenic effects that transform properties of a planet conceived systemically. Haraway also shifts our focus to the radical modifications of previously biodiverse and culturally spread out living systems and rearranging and relocating them elsewhere for extraction of forced values (an adversity she terms ‘Plantationocene’ which affects both native human and nonhuman actors), and burning of forests and destruction of multispecies co-living for monocropping and forced productivity and profitability. The book takes an ecological biologist route and a diversity approach to questions of race, regionality and gender, cultural formations in the scientific workforce and opposes the geneticization of everything for extraction of human traits and reducing differences, commodification of every kind of knowledge, environmental crises, extinction of animals, impediments surrounding inclusion of indigenous knowledge-making.

The book is branched into eight chapters comprising broadly three parts: the first 4 chapters elaborate on the concepts of the Chthulucene, SF bifurcations, Tentacular Thinking and Sympoiesis; Chapters 5, 6, and 7 deal with multiple becoming-with other species and our transformational interrelationships with animals and plants (Terrapolis); the final section of the book develops thinking based on Speculative Fabulation (SF) and the power of storytelling as a solution to the emergency of the Anthropocene. For Haraway, the Chthulucene is a period in which human animals, to avoid extinction, will make kin with underground biological critters. Inside the networks of tentacular thinking the binarised body is ruptured by enactments created by complex and developmental patternings and trajectories. Haraway upholds the sympoietic contact zones instead of the autopoietic to focus on collective entanglement and making-together;

Poiesis is symchthonic, sympoietic, always partnered all the way down, with no starting and subsequently interacting “units.” The Chthulucene does not close in on itself; it does not round off; its contact zones are ubiquitous and continuously spin out loopy tendrils. Spider is a much better figure for sympoiesis than any inadequately leggy vertebrate of whatever pantheon. Tentacularity is symchthonic, wound with abyssal and dreadful gaspings, frayings, and weavings, passing relays again and again, in the generative recursions that make up living and dying. (Haraway 33)

As a biologist, Haraway stresses on the holobiont *Mixotrichaparadoxa* or the symbiotic correlation between *Mastotermesdarwiniensis* and *Macrotermesnatalensis*. In chapter 3, she delves into four distinct projects: 1) crocheting of dying coral reefs, 2) Madagascar Ako project for children concerning lemurs,

3) a videogame, *Never Alone*, formed with the support of the Inupiat, an Alaska Native people, 4) the notion of beauty (hózhó) in Navajo cosmology. However, for the Gaian theorist Bruce Clarke, without autopoiesis, there is no chance for sympoiesis. The foundation of any living phenomenon is its individuation. Clarke believes that Haraway builds her sympoiesis borrowing it from Margulis's symbiosis as a fundamental, ecological and biological dynamic (where Gaia is the sum of all symbiosis).

In the last parts, this book turns to a kind of realignment of humans, animals, and the environment with the help of mythical and spiritual histories and future-stories. We are in the middle of speculative inventions of human-animal symbionts grounded in the fictional reworkings by Haraway, Despret, and filmmaker Fabrizio Terranova. Haraway weaves the "Camille Stories" around the Children of the Compost, a community surviving in a more paralyzingly complex environment by merging with different species and intuiting themselves as "humus, rather than as human or nonhuman" (140). Haraway charts a fabricated future of human-animal genetic collusion over the next 400 years or five generations of Camilles. The Camille children as symbiotic beings will be a combination of human and monarch butterfly, and thus, androgynous in appearance, with visible and sensory features of both their parents (Haraway 149). The objective of the genetically modified Camille children is to build new communities by reinventing kin-making in a multispecies way. The fundamental freedom of the pregnant woman is the choice of an animal symbiont (animals that are particularly migratory and near extinction). The aim of the symbiont child would be to create space for the ongoingness of its sibling/symbiont. Devin Proctor, in his review of the book, succinctly explains the Camille evolution–

At birth, Camille 1 is given a suite of genetic material that produces a monarch butterfly pattern on her body, as well as allowing her to smell, taste, and digest substances like a butterfly, thus beginning the "sympiogetic join" of Camilles and monarch butterflies. As the generations progress, the world population decreases, as the people of earth, or "Children of Compost," have taken to "making kin, not babies," and Camilles become more and more like butterflies. Gradually, the butterflies become extinct, leaving only Camille to act as a sort of Speaker for the Dead. (880)



"Mariposa mask...Photograph by Jim Clifford" (Haraway 135).

Camille children follow a three parents model, the third being an animal from an endangered species. The whole community plays an active part in the growth of this child. The woman who chooses pregnancy also adopts one of the endangered animal species (symbiont) for the child to bond with. It is the responsibility (response-ability) of the child to heal the animal threatened by extinction and help it survive. These stories emerge as a response to the demographic and ecological crises threatening the existence of all lives on this planet. Haraway borrows the Proto-Germanic 'guman' which later changes into 'human',

...but both come soiled with the earth and its critters, rich in humus, *humaine*, earthly beings as opposed to the gods. In Hebrew, Adam is from *adamah* "ground" ...in sf worlding *adam*, *guman*, *adamah* become more a microbiome of fermenting critters of many genders and kinds, i.e., companion species, at table together, eating and being eaten, messmates, compost. (Haraway 169-170)

Haraway's Chthulucene highlights sym-poiesis (making with) instead of autopoiesis or self-making. It is a kind of tentacular becoming in a heterogeneous society that believes in the manifesting forces of Gaia and making kin rather than children. Chthulucene could be broken down into the Greek root 'khthôn' (underground, earth and underground) and 'kainos', meaning that which is marked by the "temporality of the thick, fibrous, and lumpy "now," which is ancient and not" (Haraway 206). The tentacles of the chimerical creature Haraway adopts from *Pimoida chthulhu* spider, the *Octopuscyanea*, and Medusa's hair. These conjoinings and holobionts crop up from compost piles. Haraway refers to "symanimogenesis," in which, as derivative from animism, one establishes connections with ghosts and spirits that reside in material things. Humans, Haraway suggests, must be read as humus (and not posthuman) or organic soil to engender possibilities of a restructuration formed through decomposition of not only the flesh but of anthropocentric ways. *Staying with the Trouble* is Haraway's forward march to new compositions of world-making and species-making, where everything is expanded into an earthly multiplicity, a horizontal coexistence through exchange and inwardness. Haraway's ecofeminism and neo-animism immerses us into a speculative zone of world-making, full of multispecies possibilities, unknowing one's position on earth and reimagining convergence.

Works Cited

- Clarke, Bruce. *Gaian Systems: Lynn Margulis, Neocybernetics, and the End of the Anthropocene*. University of Minnesota Press, 2020.
- Haraway, Donna. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press, 2016.
- Proctor, Devin. "Book Review: Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene by Donna J. Haraway". *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 90, no. 3, 2017, pp. 877-882. *Project Muse*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2017.0054>.