

Book Review: Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8223-6224-1 (Paperback). 312 Pages. \$27.95.

Reviewed by Jay Jones¹

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“Love and rage contained the germs of partial healing even in the face of onrushing destruction.”

- Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 137

As crises of ecological harm and systemic violence continue to escalate, the work of radical reimagining becomes more crucial than ever. In her 2016 book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Donna Haraway draws out the possibilities for decolonial, multispecies justice without and beyond our current ways of organizing life within ongoing ecological precarity and the complexities of survival, well-being, and responsibility in a damaged world. Making use of an innovative vocabulary including the Chthulucene, response-ability, and SF, Haraway develops new ways to understand our histories, to respond to our current circumstances, and to cultivate the worlds and relations we desire.

Staying with the Trouble traces a multitude of paths for multispecies survival, connection, and transformation in an era Haraway calls the Chthulucene. Rejecting both the Anthropocene and Capitalocene, she instead chooses the underworldly, interwoven, tentacular chthonic ones, who represent the intertwined relations and possibilities between humans, non-human beings, and their environments. Chapter One, “Playing String Figures with Companion Species,” examines cross-species collaborations in the Chthulucene, with pigeons and their people as the through line. Chapter Two, “Tentacular Thinking,” introduces the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and Chthulucene as three overlapping timescapes, with

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sympoiesis or the “making-with” of human and non-human communities defining the possibilities for multispecies futures.

This theme is further developed in Chapter Three, “Sympoiesis,” combining evolutionary biology, ecology, and art-activism in four case studies: (1) the Crochet Coral Reef Project, blending art and climate activism, (2) the Madagascar Ako Project, elevating Indigenous Malagasy knowledge of lemurs, (3) *Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna)*, a video game from Inupiat storytelling, and (4) the survival of Diné and Hopi peoples, Churro sheep, and their lands, waters, and lifeways in Black Mesa. Chapter Four, “Making Kin,” considers the risks and possibilities for reproductive justice within increasing human populations; beyond humanism and futurism, she argues for the necessity of making kin not babies. Similar string figures are traced in Chapter Five, “Awash in Urine,” around DES (diethylstilbestrol, or synthetic estrogen) and its connections to Haraway and her dog Cayenne, veterinary research, pharmaceuticals, horse farming, and activism for women’s and horses’ health. She interrogates these strands to become more response-able: more able to respond to such precarious conditions. Chapter Six, “Sowing Worlds,” draws out the possibilities for storytelling within evolutionary biology, with ants, acacia seeds, and lichens as her guides for SF—not just string figures, but science fiction, speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, science fact, and so far. Chapter 7, “A Curious Practice,” centers Belgian philosopher and psychologist Vinciane Despret and her practice of “visiting” to learn through curiosity and multispecies becoming-with. Haraway ends the book with a work of speculative fiction, “The Camille Stories,” following five generations symbiogenetically tied to monarch butterflies in an effort to preserve the species and the physical and cultural landscapes they inhabit.

These eight chapters construct a framework for staying with the trouble in our troubled times. Most notable of the concepts in *Staying with the Trouble* is the Chthulucene, the precarious era in which we must (re)learn the interconnections of life and death in our own and other living communities. Haraway argues for developing response-ability, or our capacity to respond and connect to each other, non-human beings, our surroundings, and the mass displacement, exploitation, and extermination in which we are all implicated. Sympoiesis also occupies a major place in the book, as our ongoing co-constitution shapes every practice and relation. Haraway explains string figuring as the practice of tracking and (re)telling patterns, while crafting string figures through her analysis of distant yet always connected arguments and examples. *Staying with the Trouble* is original and illuminating, and Haraway brings theory, practice,

poetry, and science together in this discussion of the urgencies of environmental and multispecies harm with which we are contending for our (and others') survival. The heavily theoretical and metaphorical content can be inaccessible and unclear for certain audiences, but suits her purpose; the elaboration through examples in the later chapters is a crucial component for understanding the precedent and possibilities of the book's central framework.

Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* provides readers with a new vocabulary not only for the limitations of the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and our current sociopolitical systems, but also for why and how we might transform our ways of being and relating with multispecies collaborators. By citing creative, spiritual, political, and scientific projects, she also points to the concrete actions from which we might learn and (re)build our capacity for response-ability. The Chthulucene is far from doomed: it reveals our potential for living, dying, and becoming-with in the compost pile of an always possible future.