

The Stories We Tell: Toward a Feminist Narrative in the Anthropocene

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Abstract: In *Staying with the Trouble*, ecofeminist Donna Haraway argues for multispecies collaboration and storytelling as a necessary response to the crisis of the Anthropocene. Ultimately Haraway's focus is on the possibility of *response* through multispecies collaboration. This is a largely presentist project, and although at times she evokes an awareness of the future and acknowledges the need to learn from (respond to) the past, her text rarely takes into account the conditions that created the Anthropocene as part of the necessary response required to overcome the crisis. In this paper, I highlight four specific narrative criteria that connect other noted critiques of modernity to Haraway's major arguments to achieve two major aims. First, I offer a close reading of Haraway's text to synthesize her arguments for a new cultural narrative in clearly defined criteria. Second, I extend Haraway's argument to account for remaining legacies of imperialism and globalization that—while mentioned in the text from time to time—generally go unexplored in the practical application of her proposed narrative. Through this reading of Haraway's newest manifesto, I establish key components for a narrative that can meet Haraway's goal of multispecies collaboration while also more adequately taking the past into account as a vital part of moving forward. Ultimately, this paper will critically engage with recent criticism of Western ideas of modernity, progress, and the Anthropocene to articulate criteria for a feminist narrative that can decenter the individual (the human) as figure of key concern and advocate for a more collaborative understanding of life (existence) without neglecting the conditions that created the current system.

Keywords: Feminist Narrative, Anthropocene, Precarity, Modernity, Postcolonial

Introduction

Originally labeled by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen in a 2002 article in *Nature* magazine, the Anthropocene is rooted in the Industrial Revolution, scientific progress, and accelerated human and technological development.ⁱ While the term is fairly new and remains a topic of debate, the time period it represents is frequently linked with ideals of progress and modernity.ⁱⁱ Despite these lofty associations, scientists and scholars are often critical of the changes humans have wrought to the planet. In November 2017, over 15,000 scientists from around the world signed a "Second Notice" to humanity about the devastation of industrialization in the present era, most often referred to as the Anthropocene.ⁱⁱⁱ This destruction includes catastrophic climate change and the onset of the sixth mass extinction event "wherein many current life forms could be annihilated or at least committed to extinction by the end of this century".^{iv} Ultimately, the Anthropocene has gained awareness as an time period in which humanity has the ability to destroy the Earth.

In *Staying with the Trouble*, ecofeminist Donna Haraway argues for multispecies collaboration and storytelling as a necessary response to the crisis of the Anthropocene.^v Going beyond scientific critiques of this human-centered epoch, Haraway explores alternatives and methods of response, notably the need for more detailed awareness of the stories we tell. This focus on

stories through the oft-repeated refrain that “it matters what stories tell stories,” and the use of storytelling throughout the text, encompasses all manner of stories ranging from fictional entertainment to features of daily life, including the origin of medicines we give our pets. This refrain and method speaks to the need to understand not only the details of stories through critical analysis, but also to understand the providence and scope of the story: it’s past, present, and future.

Throughout her argument, Haraway uses a nonlinear writing style to criticize the narrative of the Anthropocene—a narrative of linear modernity, progress, and development—and instead argues for humanity to learn to live and die well with other critters. For Haraway, this is the only possible response to the current environmental crisis, a thread that resonates through her constant use of the word “must” regarding all “we must do” to react. Ultimately, although Haraway’s proposal is not a ‘happily ever after’ tale of heroism and triumph, she offers a viable, albeit radical, approach for responding to the current crisis through cultivation of a multispecies responsibility. In brief, Haraway’s formula calls for her readers (and by extension, humanity itself) to learn to *stay with the trouble* through collaboration with all living organisms. In a very circular fashion, modeling the “string figure” concept she threads throughout her book, Haraway defines the phrase often, although she limits the term to “become capable . . . of response”.^{vi} This is not about fixing the problems humans have caused on the planet, and it is not about “reconciliation or restoration” of life/the planet/anything.^{vii} Rather, Haraway’s focus is on the possibility of *response* through multispecies collaboration, fully acknowledging that a lot of dying will take place. For Haraway, staying with the trouble is ultimately presentist, and although at times she evokes an awareness of the future and acknowledges the need to learn from (respond to) the past, her text rarely takes into account the conditions that created the Anthropocene as part of the necessary response required to overcome the crisis.

Haraway is not alone in paying inadequate attention to the past, even in her push for new feminist stories in the Anthropocene. In her book *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*, Clare Hemmings tackles this problem in regard to the narrative of Western feminist theory, and in doing so offers a clear explanation of the importance of the past in all stories. The book aims to explore “how feminists tell stories about Western feminist theory’s recent past, why those stories matter, and what we can do to transform them”.^{viii} Hemmings’ exploration begins with the underlying assumption that the way feminists tell stories matters, as the history and development of those stories makes waves far beyond the covers of academic texts. Hemmings notes that, for example, “The insistence on Western gender equality as *the* marker of progress does complicated and damaging work in terms of fixing non-Western cultures as backward (as premodern) and in need of help from Western philanthropists and experts (as postmodern)”.^{ix} Drawing on feminist postcolonial theorists like Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Mohanty, Hemmings grounds her argument in the need to understand the development of these stories, and the scope of their impact—even when that impact includes the presumed aid of ‘underdeveloped’ women in decolonial spaces. The stories we tell shape the world around us, and as Hemmings explores, understanding the history behind those stories is vital to moving forward in this time of environmental crisis.

In this paper, I outline four specific narrative criteria that highlight and extend Haraway’s argument alongside additional critiques of modernity to achieve two major aims. First, I offer a

close reading of Haraway's text to synthesize her arguments for a new cultural narrative in clearly defined criteria. Second, I extend Haraway's argument to account for remaining legacies of imperialism and globalization that—while mentioned in the text from time to time—generally go unexplored in the practical application of her proposed narrative. These criteria include collaborative and ongoing stories; stories that think beyond the human; stories that effectively retain awareness of past inequalities and violence; and finally, stories that embrace the contradictions of modernity. Each criterion I articulate is rooted in Haraway's text, but points two, three, and four expand her manifesto to establish key components for a narrative that can meet Haraway's goal of multispecies collaboration while also more adequately taking the past into account as a vital part of moving forward. Ultimately, this paper critically engages recent criticism of Western ideas of modernity, progress, and the Anthropocene to articulate criteria for a feminist narrative that can decenter the individual (the human) as figure of key concern and advocate for a more collaborative understanding of life (existence) without neglecting the conditions that created the current system.

Narrative Criterion Number One: Collaborative and Ongoing Stories of Daily Life

Throughout her text, Haraway highlights the importance of collaboration as a key component of the new narrative she advocates. Specifically, here I will speak of *sympoiesis* and “SF” as vital theories for the process of ongoing becoming-with (staying with the trouble). In brief, sympoiesis are “collectively producing systems,” to use the original definition supplied by M. Beth Dempster.^x For Haraway, sympoiesis is more broadly defined as “making-with” and therefore deeply tied with her theory and method of storytelling.^{xi} Collaboration is a fundamental part of this process, as “critters [including humans] interpenetrate one another, loop around and through one another, eat each other, and thereby establish sympoietic arrangements”.^{xii} Haraway plays with language throughout the book, and this line (one of many) evokes the “string figures” she utilizes throughout her argument. Haraway uses the abbreviation “SF” to stand in for a string (pun intended) of related phrases, initially explained as “science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, speculative feminism, science fact, so far”.^{xiii} Haraway notes that “SF is a method of tracing” interrelated concepts and ideas, evoking the never-ending nature of a loop used to play cat's cradle and other ‘string figure’ games.^{xiv} Further, SF is “storytelling and fact telling; it is the patterning of possible worlds and possible times,” harnessing infinite possibilities through the act of telling stories.^{xv} Through this elastic term, Haraway utilizes common associations and related meanings to call attention to her narrative project: this is about figuring out how to live and die well, collectively, within an epoch defined by tentacles. Multiple meanings matter—and it matters what meanings we deploy.

While collaboration is a key method in Haraway's framework, the principle of *ongoingness* is crucial to the application of the method. In *Staying*, Haraway espouses a carrier bag narrative of ongoingness in the Chthulucene, her proposed name to replace ‘Anthropocene’ and other suggested terms (including Jason Moore and Andreas Malm's suggestion of ‘Capitalocene’). Haraway utilizes science fiction writer Ursula Le Guin's carrier bag theory of storytelling to outline a new narrative method to provide a means of effective response to the Anthropocene, by whatever name we label it. Le Guin and Haraway explain that “much of earth history has been told in the thrall of the fantasy of the first beautiful words and weapons” where the hero reigns.^{xvi} Instead, in an active demonstration of collective ongoing narrative, Haraway advocates Le Guin's call for stories of becoming-with that focus on carrier bags, what goes in them, and who

carries them. Le Guin (quoting Elizabeth Fisher, in another layer of collaboration) explains that “the earliest cultural inventions must have been a container,” as it certainly wasn’t a weapon.^{xvii} These stories are not without the possibility of conflict, but, Haraway notes, “carrier bag narratives are full of much else in wonderful, messy tales to use for retelling, or reseeded, possibilities for getting on now, as well as in deep earth history”.^{xviii} Tales of ‘the things they carry’ are ongoing, rather than neat hero-driven tales with clear beginnings, middles, and endings, and reflect moments of daily life to allow for the inclusion of collaborative symposiums.

Haraway continues the thread advocating for stories of non-heroic daily life throughout her argument. The “science fact” and “science fiction” level of the stories varies, scaling up from pigeons (chapter 1) to crocheted coral reefs (chapter 3) to the science fiction story of Camille and the Children of Compost (chapter 8), but such stories are “Still possible *if* we render each other capable of worlding and reworlding for flourishing”.^{xix} Throughout the varied stories Haraway tells in her knotted, circular narrative, she argues strongly for a greater awareness of the world and how it impacts us, how we impact the world, and how we can *collectively respond* to the consequences of that impact. We should all learn more about the research and development of the drugs we take—and give to other critters (chapter 5). We should all take part in art projects that focus on collaboration and multispecies education (chapter 3). We should all “cultivate response-ability” through an “activated storytelling” that seeks to engage a narrative reflecting the entire world, rather than just the part that an Eurocentric Anthropocene narrative encourages.^{xx}

Narrative Criterion Number Two: Thinking Beyond the Human

Another fundamental component of Haraway’s argument for a new narrative of response is awareness that goes beyond the human: “Staying with the trouble requires making oddkin: that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become-with each other or not at all”.^{xxi} In Haraway’s framework, the only chance for any survival is if all critters work, respond, live, and die together. This begs the question, in light of the history of Western imperialism and globalization: is such composting possible? Haraway thinks so, as she demonstrates with the new term she supplies for the present: *Chthulucene*.

In chapter two of *Staying*, Haraway outlines her major argument against the Anthropocene/Capitalocene narrative, instead supplying *Chthulucene* as a more accurate and useful term for our present epoch. While the terms Anthropocene and Capitalocene encompass the destruction humanity has caused, neither offers an alternative. In both frameworks, “stories end badly. More to the point, they end in double death; they are not about ongoingness” and moving forward.^{xxii} Haraway seeks to remedy this lack with her proposed Chthulucene, which is rooted in a tentacular mode of living-with and multispecies collaborative storytelling. Haraway is not alone in her critique against the limiting and Western-centric frameworks of Anthropocene and Capitalocene. In their article “The geology of mankind? A critique of the Anthropocene narrative,” Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg explain that the Anthropocene is generally considered the result of the entire human race engaging in changes from the Industrial Revolution to the present, but they note that “at no moment did the species vote for” such changes.^{xxiii} In extending their discussion, Haraway proposes Chthulucene, with tentacles and multicultural backgrounds, to allow for a story that goes beyond concepts of Western progress and modernization. The Chthulucene isn’t a pretty narrative, but it isn’t supposed to be: it

matters what stories we tell stories with, and Western humans cannot remain the only important actors in our world narrative.

Speaking beyond the human isn't new for Haraway, although she is clear in *Staying* that she is not espousing a posthuman narrative, a deliberate shift away from earlier works, especially her 1984 *Cyborg Manifesto*. That manifesto begins with a strong critique against Western myths, similar in many ways to Haraway's 2016 critique of the Anthropocene narrative. 1984-Haraway offers a hybrid cyborg as the narrative of the future that challenges the dualism that has been "persistent in Western tradition," including "self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive ...".^{xxiv} This challenge leads to the possibility of resistance of these narratives and allows for "regeneration, not rebirth, and the possibility for our reconstitution ... of the hope for a monstrous world without gender".^{xxv} While 2016-Haraway continues to embrace this monstrous narrative, as all multicultural images employed for the tentacled beings inspiring the Chthulucene are monstrous, her vision of what the narrative can achieve differs greatly: 2016-Haraway realizes that resistance is impossible and instead offers an entirely new cultural narrative that might give us a chance to respond—a very different reaction than resistance.

Haraway offers a slogan to speak to her push beyond the human: "Make kin, not babies!" which differs in significant ways from her earlier slogan of "Cyborg for Earthly Survival!" from her famed *Cyborg Manifesto*. For Haraway in *Staying*, making kin (oddkin) is about more than the need for a cyborg understanding: while we are all cyborgs, staying with the trouble requires more than an awareness of the organism/machine hybridization. For Haraway, kin refers to a connection above and beyond the boundaries of the traditionally "human" *Homo sapiens*: making kin is about "becoming-with" all life on earth. While Haraway's interest in making kin (not babies) speaks broadly to concerns of overpopulation, it has been critiqued for not adequately accounting for the imperial and racist histories at play in understanding the present. In a review of Haraway's manifestos, Jenny Turner observes a critique made by Sophie Lewis regarding this particular concept: "One would be justified in expecting to get some elaboration on how the removal of eight billion heads ... could be non-coercive, or indeed non-genocidal".^{xxvi} Haraway never justifies or explores this point, however, which has the potential to advocate for "irresponsibly racist narratives," especially regarding reproductive policies amidst ongoing imperial legacies.^{xxvii}

Although Turner, in collaboration with Lewis, raises an extremely important concern about Haraway's almost cavalier acceptance of unstated methods for drastic human population decline, it remains a human-centric critique. While this does not detract from the extremely troubling potential for genocidal policies and practices in our future, Haraway's intent in *Staying* is to expand the conversation beyond the human to all manner of other critters, including pigeons, lemurs, green turtles, and coral reefs. In Haraway's estimation (even if it contradicts centuries of human-assumed scientific superiority over the beasts of the earth) these beyond-human kin must be factored into our stories—and more importantly, our daily lives.

Yet despite Haraway's consistent focus on critters and other beyond-human living organisms, Haraway leaves out a rather large being in her discussion of cultivating a multispecies narrative: the Earth itself. Following much postcolonial theory, Arturo Escobar strongly champions the need to study local and regional voices left out of narratives of modernity and progress. In

Territories of Difference, Escobar considers the earth itself as a voice, always simultaneously local and global, that is almost always absent from such narratives.^{xxviii} Alongside other scholars of empire and imperial practices, Escobar highlights the results of classification, the creation of hierarchies, and the essentialized view of nature as separate from the human, all features of the European Age of Imperialism and expansion. Escobar takes things one step farther than most scholars critical of the political theory of empire as practices in the past, present, and possible future, urging for “*Alternatives to modernity*, as a more radical and visionary project of redefining and reconstructing local and regional worlds from the perspective of practices of cultural, economic, and ecological differences, following a network logic and in contexts of power”.^{xxix} For Escobar, alternatives to Western modernity requires shifting from a human-centered understanding to earth-centered engagement with all living things, and acknowledging the lost voices of anything that isn’t human—including the earth itself—is a place to begin our transition away from Western-centered perspectives.^{xxx} Only through this kind of collaborative (respons)ability, to apply Haraway’s term, can we hope to engage a cultural narrative that can stand apart from stories and practices rooted in modernity and progress.

In an exploration into the divide between nature and politics that has dominated Western and global politics and approaches to nature, Marisol de la Cadena explores the rise of earth-beings in the political arena in Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia.^{xxxii} Although de la Cadena notes that these earth-beings, including the mountain Ausangate, have always been present in local politics, they are now gaining more widespread political awareness as a consequence of rapidly changing political climates in Latin America.^{xxxii} The bulk of de la Cadena’s exploration is centered on the artificial (yet-presumed unquestionable) divide between *nature* and *politics*, and her intent is to articulate awareness of earth-beings as one of many previously muted voices that can aid a shift between politics-vs-nature and instead bring the two into harmony—or at least into productive conversation.^{xxxiii} In a collaboration with Isabelle Stengers, de la Cadena uses the idea of *cosmopolitics*, where “cosmos refers to the unknown constituted by these multiple, divergent worlds and to the articulation of which they would eventually be capable,” to speak to other ways of engaging the world that goes beyond (or outside of) traditional modern/Anthropocenic frameworks.^{xxxiv} By gaining an awareness of the earth itself, and earth-beings driven into silence through the processes of imperialism and modernization, it is possible to expand Haraway’s call for *multispecies* collaboration into one that considers the earth itself a key player (and victim) in the Anthropocene. And barring catastrophic disaster, the earth is the most likely survival of the present precarity: we would do well to take this amazing ‘critter’ into our new narratives of response.

Criterion Number Three: Retaining Awareness of Past Inequalities, Violence, and Ruination

While *sympoiesis*, collaboration, and ongoingness are exceptionally useful in envisioning a new feminist narrative to tackle the problems Haraway outlined regarding the Anthropocene, Haraway’s application of these methods often falls short of retaining awareness of the past. As Turner’s critique of *Staying* indicates, Haraway often ignores the lived realities of the processes that created the Anthropocene. Although Haraway acknowledges the need to preserve knowledge of the past throughout the text, including explaining that “*Staying with the trouble*, yearning toward resurgence, requires inheriting hard histories, for everybody, but not equally and not in the same ways,” her text largely dismisses these unequal histories and contemporary lived

realities of the postcolonial age.^{xxxv} Taking inspiration from Haraway's own emphasis on collaborative stories, I turn now to other explorations of narratives of modernity to more clearly articulate a new narrative that can de-center the human in this era of environmental crisis—and one that can take into account the history of the modern world in ways that Haraway does not.

Haraway's main critique of the Anthropocene is rooted in her concern over the "twin myths of Progress and Modernization," although she does little to explore how those myths originated and the extent to which they continue to shape the daily life she hopes to disrupt with her new narrative.^{xxxvi} While there is no requirement that Haraway devote a chapter of her book to charting the path and development of Progress and Modernization, as she herself notes over and over again, *it matters what stories we tell stories with*. By her own logic, we require awareness of how these stories progressed—how these stories affect(ed) the daily life of all critters, and what they carried with them—in order to go on telling stories, especially stories that might break the previous mold.

To begin, it is important to examine the origins of the Anthropocene, which we might also call "the modern world". In short, the Anthropocene is a product of Western imperial expansion and exploitation. To support this claim, I first offer a basic definition of modernity: in "A Working Definition of "Modernity"?" historian Mark Elvin defines modernity as "the ability to create power".^{xxxvii} Elvin notes three specific kinds of power that must be utilized to claim the title "modern": power over human beings, power over nature, and intellectual power over nature "in the form of the capacity for prediction".^{xxxviii} For Elvin, *power* refers to "a capacity to direct power," as both the literal energy harnessed during the industrial revolution and "somewhat metaphorically, as in the cases of the more effective military power and internal administrative control, and the increased output per person of goods and services, that are characteristic of modernity".^{xxxix} Ultimately, Elvin argues that "We may define a society as 'modern' when the power-complex, as a whole, is clearly dominate over other ends".^{xl} In other words, we define a society as modern when they have the technological power to dominate. Elvin's definition of modernity aligns nicely with Paul Crutzen's original sketch of the Anthropocene, as both connect power and technology:

The Anthropocene could be said to have started in the latter part of the eighteenth century, when analyses of air trapped in polar ice showed the beginning of growing global concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane. This date also happens to coincide with James Watt's design of the steam engine in 1784.^{xi}

Both Crutzen and Elvin establish technology as central to any discussion of modernity and the Anthropocene, which is reinforced in a recent publication by scientists Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin. Lewis and Maslin argue that the start date of the Anthropocene should be pinned in the early 16th century with the onset of expansive European imperialism and colonization in the "New World".^{xlii} Technology remains a key piece of this formula, although the technology of 1610 was vastly different than the design of the steam engine and the onset of the Industrial Revolution. Still, technology enabled the European discovery of the Americas, and was absolutely central to the European project of imperial domination.^{xliii} While Lewis and Maslin study the scientific changes in the earth (including Antarctic ice, ocean acidity, and earthworm habits) rather than human populations in the wake of European imperialism, their voices add to

the many scholars and scientists critiquing modernity itself and the effect humanity has had on all living organism—including the earth itself.

Regardless of where the dot is laid on a timeline, the Anthropocene originates in the human practice to expand and dominate both peoples and the earth. More importantly, recall the observation noted by Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg in “The geology of mankind? A critique of the Anthropocene narrative” that these changes were not universally agreed upon by humanity. Rather, “a clique of white British men literally pointed steam-power as a weapon” against the world.^{xliv} Malm and Hornborg critique the standard Anthropocene narrative that centers the human as the figure of prime importance, which ignores the “highly inequitable global processes” that contributed to the current crisis.^{xlv} As such, the Anthropocene is a product of global inequalities that is “completely dominated by natural sciences,” and creates a system of continuing inequalities, especially when speaking about means of resilience and survival.^{xlvi} Malm and Hornborg remind us that “there will [always] be lifeboats for the rich and privileged,” and although they don’t articulate a new narrative that can overcome this system of global inequality, their reminder of the Anthropocene as rooted in inequalities begins to provide what Haraway brushes over throughout her text: acknowledging and remaining aware of the inequalities of life on earth as a key component to *staying with the trouble*.^{xlvii}

It does not stop with inequalities, however. In a noted critique of modernity and the modern world, postcolonial historian and theorist Dipesh Chakrabarty pushes beyond explorations of power and technology to introduce *narrative* as a foundational component to modernity.^{xlviii} Chakrabarty’s analysis offers an additional feature of a new narrative to stay with the trouble in the Anthropocene: these stories must retain awareness of the tragedies of history. More specifically, these stories must not deflect, redirect, or misdirect the violence of modernity. In *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty explores the creation of history itself as a particularly insidious narrative of modernity. Chakrabarty’s goal in this text is to ‘provincialize Europe’ (and history) by seeking to “write into the history of modernity the ambivalences, contradictions, the use of force, and the tragedies and ironies that attend it”.^{xlix} These historical narratives of modernity almost exclusively point to a certain ‘Europe’ “as the primary habitus of the modern”—that is, the colonizing, imperializing Europe is ‘modern,’ and anyone else is not.^l Of key concern for Chakrabarty is the history left out of this primary narrative of modernity, specifically “the repression and violence that are as instrumental in the victory of the modern as is the persuasive power of its rhetorical strategies”.^{li} In a narrative that seeks to *stay with the trouble* and move beyond Western-centered ideas of the modern world, past violence cannot be erased or brushed over.

Chakrabarty’s critique of a narrative of modernity is rooted in his theory of Western-centric historicism that “enabled European domination of the world in the nineteenth century” and “legitimated the idea of civilization” as something uniquely European.^{lii} His overall goal, to “decenter an imaginary figure that remains deeply embedded in *clichéd and shorthand forms* in some everyday habits of thought,” is not dissimilar from Haraway’s intent to decenter the human as central to the Anthropocene/Chthulucene.^{liii} Still, Chakrabarty speaks more directly to the historical violence that created the modern world, and is rooted in the assumption that understanding the past is necessary in order to live within the present. Although Haraway makes broad overtures to this practice, indicating her agreement with Chakrabarty’s approach, her text

itself is void of detailed engagement with these tragedies. Take the first critter story Haraway discusses as an example: in chapter one, she explores several projects of human engagement with companion species that fits her framework for staying with the trouble. These projects involve pigeons, which Haraway notes are “creatures of empire”.^{liv} Despite this acknowledgement, Haraway ignores the reality of history to explore the practices of both humans and pigeons to create multispecies bonds. Jeanne Morefield notes in *Empires Without Imperialism* that strategies of deflection of imperial violence “embolden thinkers to imagine a world of empires without imperialism”.^{lv} The phrase refers to “liberal imperialism” without the associated historical violence of the Age of European Imperialism, and although Haraway clearly has no intent to reify the current political status quo, discussing collaborative living-with amongst humans and pigeons without taking into account the historical relationship between pigeons and humans (as imperial agents, as imperial intermediaries, as victims of imperialism and the development of the Anthropocene), it becomes more difficult to break out of the current system and narrative.

Engagement with ruins offers one possibility for new stories of multispecies collaboration to retain awareness of past inequalities and violence in ways that don’t risk deflection. In *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Anna Tsing explores “the possibility of life in capitalist ruins”.^{lvi} We might consider substituting “Anthropocenic ruins” in this phrase, recalling the link between concepts of Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and the modern world. Tsing grounds her anthropology of matsutake mushrooms and nomadic harvesters of these mushrooms in an examination of ways to tell new kinds of stories and respond to environmental devastation caused by humans in the 20th and 21st centuries. In particular, she notes that these mushrooms were the first life to grow in the ruins of Hiroshima, Japan, after the use of the atomic bomb by the United States in 1945.^{lvii} This historical reality causes Tsing to explore the possibilities of life within the ruins, a theme that carries over to the recently published *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, edited by Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt.^{lviii} This book features two major themes, ghosts and monsters, and ruins are central to both. Ghosts are “traces of more-than-human histories through which ecologies are made and unmade” and monsters, inspired by Haraway, are “the wonders of symbiosis and the threats of ecological disruption”.^{lix} Both concepts “unsettle *anthropos*”—the human—and go beyond ideas of Progress and Modernization.^{lx} These two lens through which to explore responses to the Anthropocene create the space to play within the ruins, both literal like the mushrooms in Hiroshima and figurative landscapes haunted by more than human figures (those long dead, those vanishing, and those yet to come). These ruins allow us to explore “multiple unruly temporalities” and “urge us to radically imagine worlds that are possible because they are already here”.^{lxi} They speak to past, present, and future in an interwoven ongoing temporality, and encourage us to pay attention to *all* the critters (mushrooms included) that make their way into these ruins and find a way to survive. Although Haraway reminds us in *Staying* that this is ultimately not about survival, but rather response, ruins remind us that there will always be something left to inhabit for any critters that remain.

Further, as Ann Stoler explores in *Duress: Imperial Durabilities In Our Times*, ruins allow for the acknowledgment of ongoing imperial practices in the present, which speak to Haraway’s concerns of the myths of Progress and Modernization. Following postcolonial theorists like Edward Said, Stoler argues strongly that empire remains a current political formation, and her work explores life dominated by an ongoing “colonial presence”.^{lxii} For Stoler, ruination is both a

political act and a condition humans are subject to, which can certainly be extended to all critters in light of Haraway's aim to de-center the human in the Anthropocene.^{lxiii} Awareness of the continuing practice of imperial ruination in the present can create the space for a multispecies narrative of response detailing daily life and collaboration and—following Haraway—perhaps permit *some* survival.

Criterion Number Four: Embracing the Contradictions of Modernity

Ruins also create the space to explore ongoing contradictions of modernity, the final additional component I propose to further nuance Haraway's framework for a new narrative of multispecies response. Although Haraway is clearly aware of these contradictions (after all, no one would be attaching air pollution monitoring equipment to pigeons without the Industrial Revolution and subsequent technological development), her text does not dwell on them.^{lxiv} Instead, Haraway seeks to distance herself from the auspices of modernity, which is evident the recounting of her 'Children of Compost' story at the conclusion of the text. In this collaboratively written SF tale, a group of humans relocate to West Virginia in early 21st century, when the human population is still rising.^{lxv} The first Camille is genetically engineered to 'become-with' monarch butterflies, and as time passes, each successive generation of Camilles is born with additional butterfly traits. In the tale, the human drive for individual reproduction has lessened, and children are planned and born with a wider "village" of parents and family as the overall human population slowly (and inexplicably) declines. By the time Camille 5 is born in 2340, humans number 4 billion, lowering to 3 billion by 2425—one third of those humans being "syms" like Camilles 1-5.^{lxvi} Jenny Turner's critique of the text comes to mind here, since we are given no explanation for the rapid decline of the human population, although the decline of critters ("over 50 percent of all critter species living in 2015 have vanished by 2425") is less shocking to Turner's mind, or perhaps simply easier to except/explain away as a general consequence of the present.^{lxvii}

Regardless of potentially troubling population decline, in many ways these Camille tales evoke a lifestyle that predates (or postdates) modernity, which seems to be Haraway's intent. That said, there is one glaring exception that goes unacknowledged in the original retelling of Camille: the scientific knowledge required to genetically alter human beings to literally 'become-with' a butterfly, or any other critter. Here, Haraway is embracing one feature of the contemporary/future world and by-and-large leaving the rest behind as it suits the purposes of her story. Since Haraway notes that this is simply one of many possible stories, and urges readers to "change parts of the story and take them elsewhere, enlarge, object, flesh out, and reimagine the lifeways of the Camilles," I propose to create the space for such a revision with a more articulated awareness of the contradictions of modernity that inhabit the Anthropocenic ruins in this collaborative multispecies tale of response.^{lxviii}

I turn to historian Laura Bier to highlight the contradictions of modernity that we all live with in the present. In *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt*, Bier examines narratives of modernity in Nasser's Egypt and argues that generally, "Modernization narratives take the axiomatic position that ... newly Westernized or modernized societies, whether indigenously inspired or imposed upon from the outside by colonization, produce new sources of openness, emancipation, and possibilities for women".^{lxix} Through a collaboration with historian Lila Abu-Lughod, Bier critiques this modernization narrative by exploring the "politics of modernity," explained as how "new ideas and practices, identified as

‘modern’ and progressive and implanted in European colonies or simply taken up by emerging local elites, ushered in not only new forms of emancipation but also new forms of social control and coercive norms”.^{lxx} Bier’s position is deeply rooted in broader feminist postcolonial critiques, and explores how modernity creates the space for both emancipation and *simultaneously* new forms of control practiced through the European imperial project.

Following arguments made by scholars like Chandra Mohanty, Bier engages directly with studies of local situations alongside global issues of imperialism and colonization to explore these contradictions of modernity. In her exemplary critique of Western feminist theory, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse,” Mohanty argues that we need to understand local and regional differences in order to understand the full extent and result of imperial power, especially if we aim to do something about those power structures.^{lxxi} The analysis of particular local contexts is vital to move toward a complete understanding of imperial formations (past, present, and future) and the imperial narrative present in much cultural production and political rhetoric. Still, the ‘politics of modernity’ framework reminds us that there are benefits to the project. This recalls Chakrabarty’s acknowledgment that his critique “does not call for a simplistic, out-of-hand rejection of modernity, liberal values, universals, science, reason, grand narratives, totalizing explanations, and so on”.^{lxxii} Rather, Chakrabarty, Bier, and other scholars who critique narratives of modernity (and modernity itself) create spaces to explore the local nuances that result from the Western-imposed modernity narratives. Much like Edward Said’s intent in his study of imperial literature in *Cultural and Imperialism*, Chakrabarty and Bier seek to better understand the whole by exploring and diagnosing all the parts, even the violent and messy contradictions.^{lxxiii}

While Haraway’s critique of the Anthropocene is clearly rooted in awareness of the full scale of global catastrophe facing all critters in the 21st century, the detailed focus on local events (even imagined ones, like the Children of Compost) limits a full engagement with the lived reality of the politics of modernity—namely that the modern world creates the opportunity for survival while at the same time causing the conditions for decline. A more detailed re-telling of Camille 1, or perhaps the decisions made by her parents (biological and otherwise) and larger (even global) community could open up an exploration of this challenge and offer more adequate explanations for massive population decline. Ultimately, such engagement would establish a story like Camille’s as something new emerging *from* the present system, recounting the evolution through modernity toward something new, rather than simply a return to pre-modern living with a science fiction spin.

In *Staying With the Trouble*, Donna Haraway offers a radical and compelling method for telling stories of response in the Anthropocene as one chance for some survival, but her approach gains richness, depth, and viability when allied with other critiques of modernity, especially those exploring postcolonial and indigenous concerns. As de la Cadena reminds us, something new can emerge from the present era of globalization by twinning together features of modernity with other ways of thinking and being—and as Haraway and Hemmings argue, it matters what stories we tell stories with. Collaboration with other voices critical of modernity helps fill in the gaps of Haraway’s manifesto to create the framework for new stories that can achieve collaborative *multibeing* response-ability within the ruins of the Anthropocene while retaining full awareness

of how we got to this point and attempting to create something new from the compost piles of the present.

Notes

- ⁱ Paul J. Crutzen, “Geology of Mankind,” *Nature* 415 (January 3, 2002): 23.
- ⁱⁱ Jenny Turner offers a quick summary of the debate over the term “Anthropocene” in her review of Donna Haraway’s work. See: Jenny Turner, “Life with Ms Cayenne Pepper,” *The London Review of Books* 39, no. 11 (June 2017): 23–27, page 23.
- ⁱⁱⁱ William J. Ripple et al., “World Scientists’ Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice,” *BioScience*, November 13, 2017, pages 1026–1028, <https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/bix125>.
- ^{iv} Ripple et al, “Warning to Humanity,” 1026.
- ^v Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016).
- ^{vi} Haraway, *Staying*, 1.
- ^{vii} Haraway, 10.
- ^{viii} Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Duke University Press, 2011), 1.
- ^{ix} Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, 9, emphasis in original.
- ^x Haraway, *Staying*, 33.
- ^{xi} Haraway, 58.
- ^{xii} Haraway, 58.
- ^{xiii} Haraway, 2 and others.
- ^{xiv} Haraway, 3.
- ^{xv} Haraway, 31.
- ^{xvi} Haraway, *Staying*, 118.
- ^{xvii} Ursula K. Le Guin, *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (Grove Press, 1997), 116.
- ^{xviii} Haraway, *Staying*, 119.
- ^{xix} Haraway, 96.
- ^{xx} Haraway, *Staying*, 130 and 132.
- ^{xxi} Haraway, *Staying*, 4.
- ^{xxii} Haraway, *Staying*, 49.
- ^{xxiii} Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg, “The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative,” *The Anthropocene Review* 1, no. 1 (January 7, 2014): 62–69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053019613516291>, 64.
- ^{xxiv} Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Free Association Books, 1991), 177.
- ^{xxv} Haraway, *Simians*, 154 and 181.
- ^{xxvi} Lewis quoted in Jenny Turner, *Life With Ms. Cayenne Pepper*, 27.
- ^{xxvii} Turner, 27.
- ^{xxviii} Arturo Escobar, *Territories of Difference: Place, Movements, Life, Redes* (Duke University Press, 2008).
- ^{xxix} Escobar, 163, emphasis in original.
- ^{xxx} Escobar, 308.
- ^{xxxi} Marisol de la Cadena, “Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections Beyond ‘Politics.’,” *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 2 (May 2010): 334–70.
- ^{xxxii} De la Cadena, 335.
- ^{xxxiii} De la Cadena, 341.
- ^{xxxiv} Stengers, quoted in de la Cadena, 335.
- ^{xxxv} Haraway, 89.
- ^{xxxvi} Haraway, 50.
- ^{xxxvii} Mark Elvin, “A Working Definition of ‘Modernity’?,” *Past & Present*, no. 113 (1986): 209–13, 210.
- ^{xxxviii} Elvin, 210.
- ^{xxxix} Elvin, 211.
- ^{xl} Elvin, 212.
- ^{xli} Paul J. Crutzen, “Geology of Mankind,” *Nature* 415 (January 3, 2002): 23.
- ^{xlii} Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene* (Penguin Books Limited, 2018).
- ^{xliii} See Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2011), Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain*

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- and France C. 1500-C. 1800 (Yale University Press, 1995), and Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1981).
- ^{xliv} Malm and Hornborg, “The Geology of Mankind,” 64.
- ^{xlv} Malm and Hornborg, 63.
- ^{xlvi} Malm and Hornborg, 63.
- ^{xlvii} Malm and Hornborg, 66.
- ^{xlviii} Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2009).
- ^{xliv} Chakrabarty, *Provincializing*, 43.
- ^l Chakrabarty, 43.
- ^{li} Chakrabarty, 43.
- ^{lii} Chakrabarty, 7.
- ^{liii} Chakrabarty, 4 emphasis in original.
- ^{liv} Haraway, *Staying*, 15.
- ^{lv} Jeanne Morefield, *Empires Without Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 4.
- ^{lvi} Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton University Press, 2015).
- ^{lvii} Tsing, *Mushroom*, 3.
- ^{lviii} Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing et al., *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
- ^{lix} Tsing et al, *Arts*, G1 and M2.
- ^{lx} Tsing et al, *Arts*, M3.
- ^{lxi} Tsing et al, *Arts*, G8 and G12
- ^{lxii} Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Duke University Press, 2016).
- ^{lxiii} Stoler, 350.
- ^{lxiv} See Haraway, *Staying*, pages 20-29 for a discussion of the *PigeonBlog* project designed to use pigeons to monitor air pollution levels in Southern California.
- ^{lxv} See Haraway, 134-168, for the entire story.
- ^{lxvi} Haraway, 166.
- ^{lxvii} Haraway, 166, and Turner, *Life with Ms Cayenne Pepper*, 27.
- ^{lxviii} Haraway, *Staying*, 144.
- ^{lxix} Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser’s Egypt* (Stanford University Press, 2011), 5.
- ^{lxx} Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood*, 6-7.
- ^{lxxi} Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” *Feminist Review*, no. 30 (1988): 61–88, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1395054>.
- ^{lxxii} Chakrabarty, *Provincializing*, 43.
- ^{lxxiii} Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (Vintage Books, 1994).

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