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n+1 Magazine

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Monstrous, Duplicated, Potent. On Donna Haraway

Published in [Issue 28: Half-Life](#)
Publication date [Spring 2017](#)

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Mai-Thu Perret, *Harmonium*. 2007, neon. 100 × 57". Courtesy of the artist and Aargauer Kunsthaus, Aarau.

Donna Haraway. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke, 2016.

THE FIRST TIME I encountered Donna Haraway, in 2010, I was a graduate student in England doing a one-year master's in geography. The program—a cash cow for the university, I eventually realized—was an odd mix of critical theory and environmental-management advice. Readings alternated between Bruno Latour and lectures from BP executives about their sustainability program. As a form of counterprogramming, one of my classmates organized a reading group on Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*.

On first read, I was dazzled and bewildered. Desperate to impress the organizer, who I thought brilliant, I strained over it line by line in hopes of insight. In the end, I mumbled through our meeting. I didn't understand the *Manifesto* until I'd read it three more times. In truth, I probably still don't. But for a young woman struggling to understand the world after Hurricane Katrina and a global financial crisis, Haraway beckoned. She offered a way to make sense of the things that seemed absent from politics as I knew it: science, nature, feminism.

The *Manifesto* proclaims itself to be against origin stories, but its own is hard to resist. In 1982, the Marxist journal *Socialist Review*—a bicoastal publication originally titled *Socialist Revolution*, whose insurrectionary name was moderated in the late 1970s as politics soured—asked Haraway to write five pages on the priorities of socialist feminism in the Reagan era. Haraway responded with thirty. It was the first piece, she claimed, she had ever written on a computer (a Hewlett-Packard-86). The submission caused controversy at the journal, with disagreement breaking down along geographic lines. As Haraway later recalled in an interview, “The East Coast Collective truly disapproved of it politically and did not want it published.” The more catholic West Coast won out, and the *Manifesto* was published in 1985 as “A *Manifesto* for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the 1980s,” though it has been known colloquially as the *Cyborg Manifesto* ever since.

In one sense, Haraway did what she was asked: she outlined the contemporary state of political economy from a socialist-feminist perspective. Her reading of the shift to post-Fordism was loose but lucid. The rise of communications technologies made it possible to disperse labor globally while still controlling it, she noted, scattering once-unionized factory jobs across the continents. The gender of industrial work was changing too: there were more women assembling computer chips in East Asia than men slapping together cars in the American Midwest. Automation was lighter and brighter: in place of hulking industrial machinery, our “machines are made of sunshine”—but this light, invisible power nevertheless caused “immense human pain in Detroit and Singapore.” Family structures were changing: mothers increasingly worked outside the home and headed up the household. The result was what Haraway, drawing on Richard Gordon, called the homework economy—a pointed term for what's euphemistically and blandly called the service economy.

The *Manifesto* offered a new politics for this new economy. Prescient about the need to organize the feminized, if not always female, sectors, Haraway explicitly called leftists to support SEIU District 925, a prominent campaign to unionize office workers. She also criticized the idea of a universal subject, whether held up by Marxists (the proletariat) or radical feminists (the woman). A new politics had to be constructed not around a singular agent but on the basis of a patchwork of identities and affinities. How, then, to find unity across difference, make political subjects in a postmodern era, and build power without presuming consensus? “One is too few, but two are too many,” she wrote cryptically. “One is too few, and two is only one possibility.” Acting as isolated individuals leads nowhere, but the effort to act collectively cannot leave difference aside. Women of color, Haraway suggested, following Chela Sandoval, could not rely on the stability of either category; they might lead the way in forging a new, nonessentialist unity based on affinity rather than identity.

This is where the metaphor of the cyborg comes in. For Haraway, the cyborg is a hybrid figure that crosses boundaries: between human and machine, human and animal, organism and machine, reality and fiction. As a political subject, it is expansive enough to encompass the range of human experience in all its permutations. A hybrid, it is more than one, but less than two.

In place of old political formations, Haraway imagined new cyborgian ones. She hoped that “the unnatural cyborg women making chips in Asia and spiral dancing in Santa Rita Jail” would together “guide effective oppositional strategies.” Her paradigmatic “cyborg society” was the Livermore Action Group, an antinuclear activist group targeting the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, a nuclear-weapons-research facility in Northern California. The group, she thought, was “committed to building a political form that actually manages to hold together witches, engineers, elders, perverts, Christians, mothers, and Leninists long enough to disarm the state.”

What set the *Manifesto* apart from other reconceptions of feminism was its embrace of science. The cyborg was a figure that only a feminist biologist—herself an unlikely figure—could imagine. While by the 1980s many feminists were wary of biological claims about sexual difference, evading charges of essentialism by separating sex from gender (biology might give you a certain body, but society conditioned how you lived in it), Haraway argued that failing to take a position on biology was to “lose too much”—to surrender the notion of the body itself as anything more than a “blank page for social inscriptions.” Distinguishing her attachment to the body from the usual Earth Mother connotations was its famous closing line: “I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess.”

Who wouldn't? The cyborg's popularity was no doubt fueled in part by the vision of a bionic babe it suggested—a *Furiosa* or the *Terminator*—though it couldn't be further from her meaning. Asked what she considered a true moment of cyborgness in 1999, Haraway responded, “the sense of the intricacy, interest, and pleasure—as well as the intensity—of how I have imagined how like a leaf I am.” The point was not that she shared some biological commonality with a leaf, or that she felt leaves to be kindred spirits (though she very well might have). What made her giddy was the thought of all the work that had gone into producing the knowledge that she was like a leaf—how incredible it was to be able to know such a thing—and the kinds of relationship to a leaf that such knowledge made possible.

Despite her frequent reminders that it was written as a “mostly sober” intervention into socialist-feminist politics rather than “the ramblings of a blissed-out, techno-bunny fembot,” many still read it as the latter. *Wired* profiled her enthusiastically in 1997. “To boho twentysomethings,” they wrote, “her name has the kind of cachet usually reserved for techno acts or new phenethylamines.” (More recently, the entrepreneurial synthetic biologist Drew Endy deployed the *Manifesto* in support of his bid to label synthetic biological products as “natural” under federal guidelines to increase their appeal to cautious consumers.)

Its Reagan-era coordinates may have changed, but the *Manifesto* remains Haraway's most widely read work. The cyborg became a celebrity, as did Haraway herself, both serving as signifiers of a queer, savvy, self-aware feminism. Yet she has grown weary of its success, admonishing readers that “cyborgs are critters in a queer litter, not the Chief Figure of Our Times.”

Somewhat counterintuitively, it's Haraway herself who sometimes seems the Chief Figure. There's no Harawavian school, though she has many acolytes. She does not belong to any particular school herself, though many have attempted to place her. You can't really do a Harawavian analysis of the economy or the laboratory; other than the cyborg, she's produced few portable concepts or frameworks. Her own individual prominence runs counter to her view of intellectual work as collectively produced. Yet for thirty years she's been ahead of intellectual trends, not by virtue of building foundational frameworks but by inspiring

others to spawn and spur entire fields, from feminist science studies to multispecies ethics. Her work tends to emerge from problems she sees in the world rather than from engagement with literatures, thinkers, or trends, yet it manages to transcend mere timeliness.

Her new book, *Staying with the Trouble*, is a commentary on the most pressing threat of our era: catastrophic climate change. It's hard to think of someone better suited to the task. Climate change requires ways of thinking capable of confronting the closely bound future of countless humans and nonhumans, the basis for certainty in scientific findings, the political consequences of such knowledge, and the kinds of political action that such consequences call for. If Haraway has long practiced such hybrid thinking, that also means the problem best suited to challenging her thought—to testing its mettle, and its usefulness to our political future—has decisively arrived.

AFTER GRADUATING COLLEGE with a triple major in zoology, philosophy, and literature in 1966, Haraway went to Yale for a doctorate in biology. Her colleagues there were involved in political activism on “their issues,” working against chemical warfare and biological racism. But Haraway was miserable in the lab. She argued with fellow students about the nature of cells: where her classmates saw them as discrete objects existing across the eons, Haraway thought of them as the way that broader biological processes had been bounded and defined at a particular point in time. Frustrated, she considered dropping out, but found a mentor and champion in G. Evelyn Hutchinson, known (ironically, given Haraway’s disregard for patriarchs) as “the father of American ecology.” Hutchinson’s lab group read philosophy and literary theory: Alfred North Whitehead, Martin Heidegger, Charles Sanders Peirce. Under Hutchinson’s supervision, she wrote a dissertation heavily influenced by Thomas Kuhn’s 1962 landmark *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn had caused an uproar with his argument that rather than steadily progressing toward truth, the production of scientific knowledge was marked by conflict and upheaval. What scientists had once been certain was true would eventually be considered wrong. Each emerging framework was often incommensurable with what had come before. Kuhn called this phenomenon a “paradigm shift.” A classic example was the transition from Newtonian physics to Einsteinian relativity. Haraway’s dissertation, “Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields: Metaphors of Organicism in Twentieth-Century Developmental Biology,” drew on Kuhn’s idea of interpretive frameworks in describing the rise of the organicist paradigm to replace the previous dueling frameworks of vitalism and mechanism. It’s rarely read and now out of print, not to mention style. But it remains an important text for understanding Haraway’s view of biology as a “way of knowing the world” shaped by both human language and nonhuman matter. Where others focused on one pole or the other, Haraway held the two together: the raw stuff of the world and how people made meaning from it. Her commitment to both, she tended to think, was the product of her Catholic upbringing. “If you grew up Catholic,” she said in an interview, “your semiotics from the get-go had to do with the *implosion* of sign and flesh, not the separation.”

In New Haven, Haraway lived in a commune with a mix of grad students and local residents. One was a member of the Black Panther Party at the time of the trial of Bobby Seale and the “New Haven Nine”; another was Jaye Miller, a PhD student in history who became Haraway’s lover and, eventually, first husband. That he was gay posed no obstacle to either: Haraway tends to describe their relationship, fondly and with gleeful provocation, as akin to “brother-sister incest.” Together they moved to the University of Hawaii, where Miller taught intellectual and world history and Haraway taught biology and the history of science to “non-science majors” (“a wonderful ontological category,” as she later put it) destined for hospitality jobs.

When they eventually decided amicably to split up, Haraway left Hawaii for a job in the history of science at Johns Hopkins. There she met her eventual second husband, Rusten Hogness, a PhD student in the department who audited her classes (“I was sure he was gay, which is why I liked him”), and Nancy Hartsock, a Marxist-feminist political theorist and editor of the radical feminist journal *Quest*. Together she and Hartsock started a women’s studies program, joined a Marxist-feminist group addressing violence against women in Baltimore, and read feminist science fiction. Haraway sought to integrate her politics into her academic work, writing a number of essays examining the history of biology from Marxist-feminist perspectives and attempting to develop a radical epistemology.

In a 1980 letter to the *Radical Science Journal*, a short-lived publication espousing a Marxist critique of science edited by leftist scientists and historians of science, Haraway outlined her views of “radical science” and its direction. “I believe many radicals have been drawn to a critique of science from a betrayal of initial deep pleasure in science,” she wrote. “Our pleasure has become impossible and blocked by the consciousness of the multiple levels at which we have been constrained to learn domination.” To reappropriate scientific knowledge was revolutionary, and to find satisfaction in science a “major political need.” In particular, Marxist-feminist scientists had to build knowledge that could undo domination, but they could not simply critique science as a form of domination or adopt a position of skepticism. Nor could they stand aside and critique knowledge-making practices from within the academy: they had to involve themselves in active social struggle.

Hopkins disapproved of Haraway’s political writing, asking her to erase with correction fluid the more embarrassing publications on her CV. The request was well intended, in the spirit of advice for her tenure file; she complied but was denied a promotion anyway. Years later, she recalled wondering, “How do I keep my job, work on what I really want to, keep doing the political work that really matters to me and write about animals?” In 1979, Hartsock and Haraway applied jointly for an opening in feminist theory—the first such position in the country—in the History of Consciousness Department at the University of California at Santa Cruz (“which made everybody think we were lovers”). When the school declined to consider the joint application, Hartsock withdrew from consideration and Haraway alone was hired.

Established as a loose agglomeration of interdisciplinary courses and affiliated faculty in 1965, the year UCSC began operation, History of Consciousness had no full-time faculty or required coursework for years. Instead, it was organized by a number of student affinity groups: feminisms (lesbian and straight), praxis (Gramscians), mind and world (acolytes of the systems theorist Gregory Bateson). However much the name suggests drug-enabled mind expansion—certainly much in evidence at Santa Cruz—it was intended to allude to the likes of Hegel and Freud. By 1980, the department was undergoing a serious remaking at the hands of the historian Hayden White and the anthropologist James Clifford, who hired the department’s first full faculty and transformed it into a bastion of radical and unconventional thought.

The year Haraway arrived, Huey P. Newton was awarded—somewhat controversially—a PhD for a dissertation he’d partly written in prison. The feminist scholar Teresa de Lauretis arrived shortly after Haraway. Fredric Jameson taught briefly. Angela Davis lectured there during the 1980s and became a full professor in 1991. At Santa Cruz, the California mythology was distilled into two thousand acres where the redwoods met the Pacific, and nowhere was the intellectual freedom of the landscape more evident than in HistCon. HistCon and California were liberating for Haraway, decisively shaping her thinking and outlook.

Simians, Cyborgs, and Women, published in 1991 but consisting of essays written between 1978 and 1989, is a document of this transition. The early essays, written at Hopkins, are more Marxist and straightforward than anything Haraway has written since. They address the economy of sex and reproduction in primates, how and why humans acquire “culture,” and how the history of biology has contributed to systems of domination. Many of the essays deal with language and storytelling, deepening the attention to metaphor and language that defined her dissertation; “grammar is politics by other means,” she declares in one essay. As the book proceeds, you can sense the move to Santa Cruz: her writing, to that point radical in content but legible as academic work, becomes more unorthodox, more experimental.

Besides the Cyborg Manifesto, the major piece in the collection is the 1988 essay “Situated Knowledges,” a response to “feminist standpoint theory,” a field developed in part by Hartsock. Drawing on Marxist epistemology, standpoint theory held that so-called objective knowledge—representing the view from

nowhere—was inevitably partial. Where the capitalist saw equal exchange, the laborer saw exploitation; where the (male) laborer saw home life, the wife saw unwaged labor. That did not mean all views were equivalent, though, or that there was no reality to be seen.

Haraway rejected the “god trick” played by both relativism and objectivity. Denying the possibility of truth altogether was as unsatisfactory as accepting it uncritically. It avoided grappling with the stubborn matter of the world—about which Haraway the biologist still felt passionately—and let feminists dismiss entire areas as subjects for men, giving them “one more excuse for not learning any post-Newtonian physics and one more reason to drop the old feminist self-help practices of repairing our own cars.” How, she wondered, could we have a simultaneous account “of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own ‘semiotic technologies’ for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a ‘real’ world, one that can be partially shared and friendly to earth-wide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness”?

Her solution was in the title. “Situated knowledge” consisted of “partial, locatable, critical knowledges” that sustained “the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology.” Situated knowledge did not insist there was no reality, only that it was necessary to look from many perspectives in order to see the whole. Politics worked similarly: true solidarity required recognizing the ways that others’ positions differed from, and converged with, one’s own.

HARAWAY’S NEXT BOOK was a major work on primatology published in 1989, the result of nearly fifteen years of research. *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* was a five-hundred-page sui generis work of empiricism and theory, inimitable and impossible to summarize. If it is about any one thing, it is about human nature, the ways that science has claimed to understand it, and the projects toward which such understanding has been put.

Primatology made claims about society grounded in science. Deriving human nature from observing apes and monkeys, many primatologists argued that hierarchy, aggression, and domination were natural and therefore unavoidable. The study of primates had served to naturalize human history, and in so doing, to depoliticize it. But primatology was also a historical, and therefore narrative, field. It told stories about the natural world: not necessarily false stories, but stories nonetheless.

Haraway didn’t only argue that the world “outside” science had affected it. The pioneering taxidermist Carl Akeley had, to a degree, projected the views of white hunters in Africa onto gorillas; subsequent generations of female primatologists had imported feminist analyses of gender relations into their research. But this wasn’t because they were politically retrograde or naive; it was because the boundary between science and society was porous. To read “primatology as science fiction” and “science fiction as primatology,” as Haraway proposed in a chapter on Octavia Butler’s novel *Dawn*, was to see biology as a site “where possible worlds are constantly reinvented in the contest for very real, present worlds.”

The genius of *Primate Visions* lies in the richness and density of its cases and references. As Haraway once explained, “my examples *are* the theories.” The deliriously titled chapter “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908–1936” examines the dioramas of the Akeley Hall of African Mammals in the American Museum of Natural History via a multiperspectival reading of Akeley’s life and work, tracing his movement from colonial safaris to the reconstruction of the jungle in Gilded Age New York. To take a sample passage:

Frankenstein and his monster had Mont Blanc for their encounter; Akeley and the gorilla first saw each other on the lush volcanoes of central Africa. The glance proved deadly for them both, just as the exchange between Victor Frankenstein and his creature froze each of them into a dialectic of immolation. But Frankenstein tasted the bitter failure of his fatherhood in his own and his creature’s death; Akeley resurrected his creature and his authorship in both the sanctuary of Parc Albert and the African Hall of the American Museum of Natural History. Mary Shelley’s story may be read as a dissection of the deadly logic of birthing in patriarchy at the dawn of the age of biology; her tale is a nightmare about the crushing failure of the project of man. But the taxidermist labored to restore manhood at the interface of the Age of Mammals and the Age of Man. Akeley achieved the fulfillment of a sportsman in Teddy Bear Patriarchy—he died a father to the game, and their sepulcher is named after him, the Akeley African Hall.

The taxidermied apes in the Akeley African Hall told a story of sexual divisions of labor, family structures, physiological hierarchy. The arrangement of the dioramas themselves told a story of evolutionary progress. Both reflected and justified human social relations in keeping with the theories of eugenics and social order that were popular among progressives in the early years of the 20th century.

If five hundred pages of such prose is too daunting, watch Haraway perform chapter seven, “Apes in Eden, Apes in Space: Mothering as a Scientist for *National Geographic*” on YouTube. The video zooms from Jane Goodall’s visits to the “wilds of Tanzania” to HAM, a chimpanzee shot into space in 1961, to Koko, the gorilla who learned American Sign Language in the San Francisco Zoo and adopted a kitten in lieu of having a baby. With her hands full of yarn, Haraway gleefully proposes to “take culture apart,” to “pull on a thread and begin to untangle the ball of meanings, and begin to trace through one thread and then another, what gets to count as nature, for whom and when, and how much it costs to produce nature at a particular moment in history for a particular group of people.” A minute later, she cuts into a Pepperidge Farm cake (formerly boycotted, she notes, because of a Nestlé bottle-feeding scandal) as if it were history—to reveal the layers of meaning, she proclaims, as she licks frosting off her fingers. She talks about Koko while wearing a T-shirt screen-printed with gorillas in rainbow colors; she describes what it means to be a cyborg while wearing a shirt printed with the ecofeminist slogan LOVE YOUR MOTHER above a view of Earth from space—a view that, she points out, was made possible by the cold war space race, but had since been reappropriated for antinuclear protests on Shoshone land.

Historians of science recognized the book as a tour de force, and it quickly became a classic. Primatologists hated it. Haraway seemed to be accusing them of racism, sexism, ignorance. One review in the *Journal of Primatology* described it as a “jeremiad against science.” Haraway was dismayed: she had attempted to take seriously the work of primatology as understood by its practitioners, to whom she felt responsible. The subtleties in her argument were often lost on outside observers, for whom all critiques of scientific objectivity and studies of scientific practice were lumped together as hopelessly po-mo—by then a term of academic abuse. As the field known as science studies grew, so too did the reaction against it. But detachment from or distrust of science was not what led Haraway to repeatedly interrogate how we come to understand it. Rather, it was her genuine curiosity about the world—and her genuine desire to change it.

CALIFORNIA WAS A GOOD PLACE to write about science, technology, and money in the 1980s and '90s. As US federal funding for scientific research declined, a growing number of universities entered into funding arrangements with private companies. They were further encouraged by the 1980 Bayh-Dole Act, which gave scientists an incentive to patent publicly funded research and prompted a surge in partnerships between academic and commercial institutions, particularly pharmaceutical corporations. That same year, the landmark Supreme Court case *Diamond v. Chakrabarty* held that living organisms could be patented, giving rise to a wave of biotech companies headquartered in the Bay Area. Computers, which in the 1960s had seemed part of a dreary bureaucratic order, now hummed with the promise of liberation.

Meanwhile, a new political coalition was forming, if not the one Haraway had imagined. Biotechnology seemed poised to remake life itself at the most fundamental level. Technofuturists imagined a time when humans could upload their brains to immortal machines. The cyber-counterculture was an early adopter of the rising conservative movement, and *Wired* put Newt Gingrich on its cover in 1995, two years before it profiled Haraway, describing him as “Friend and Foe.” “Cyberspace and the American Dream: A Magna Carta for the Knowledge Age,” a technocapitalists’ manifesto published in 1994 by the Progress and Freedom Foundation, declared that “the central event of the 20th century is the overthrow of matter.” It went on to argue that private property would be the future of cyberspace. The Christians, engineers, perverts, mothers, and others were there—but less often the Leninists.

Haraway was well positioned to see and understand this shift. Her 1997 book on biotechnology, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™*, at first sounds cringingly topical, an academic’s embarrassing attempt to be “with it.” On closer inspection, the title is sort of brilliant. FemaleMan© was a branded version of the main character of Joanna Russ’s 1975 novel, *OncoMouse™* a lab rat genetically modified and patented for use in Harvard breast-cancer experiments. Dated web orthography aside, its analysis of genetic technology is searingly perceptive and holds up. Genetically modified food was then being heralded as a way to provide abundance, while genetically engineered designer babies were simultaneously warned to be the new face of eugenics. The race to sequence the human genome pitted an international scientific effort undertaken in the most idealistic tradition of science for humanity against the nakedly commercial ethos of the venture capitalist J. Craig Venter, who had launched his own privatized project.

Haraway navigated a position between left-wing squeamishness about genetic technologies and tech-industry speculation on organisms and bodies. She was enamored of boundary-defying tomato-flounder hybrids, just not of patents on them. It was crucial to distinguish between the two rather than allow the debate to be about the promise and dangers of “science” per se. “Genes for profit are not equal to science itself,” she declared, “or to economic health.” The focus on the gene was a form of reification; genes, like cells, were not discrete objects but historically specific ways of understanding ongoing biological processes. The rise of the gene as the key to disease, personality, and “life itself” had to be understood in relation to the rise of biotechnology as an academic field in the late 20th century, and its near-simultaneous commercialization.

Haraway wasn’t the only one writing on such developments. A slew of books analyzed the racial politics of the universal genome, critiqued the biological determinism of DNA diagnoses, and considered the implications of genetic technologies for reproductive relationships. But no one else had her range. Only Haraway was able to move from intellectual property in cells and genes to the vampire as a figure troubling biological notions of race and species to readings of paintings that the artist Lynn Randolph had produced in correspondence with her.

In some ways her scope was a drawback, leading some to classify her as primarily a cultural critic. Yet the first figure named in the title—the modest witness—was an explicit engagement with contemporary work in science studies. Bruno Latour’s *Science in Action* had argued that scientific knowledge production was a trial of strength characterized by naked power struggles; Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer’s *Leviathan and the Air Pump* compared Thomas Hobbes’s and Robert Boyle’s views of experimental science in producing truth. In contrast to these projects, which were interested in how exactly science is made, Haraway’s concern was to understand how science made its way in the world. The modest witness showed how race and gender operated in the lab, as well as how they were made there. But she wasn’t simply critical: like the cyborg, the modest witness was an immanent, implicated figure, oppositional to its origins in colonialist Enlightenment projects but never only that. “I also remember the dreams and achievements of contingent freedoms, situated knowledges, and relief of suffering that are inextricable from this contaminated triple historical heritage,” Haraway insisted. “I remain a child of the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and technoscience.”

In the early 2000s, Haraway turned her attention to a new figure in her menagerie: the companion species, to which she devoted a manifesto and eventually a book. *When Species Meet* explained the new subject as a political choice. Cyborgs had been appropriate for the Reagan years, but their time had passed. Dogs, she thought, might prove a better guide to ethics and politics in a time of ecological crisis, helping humans move beyond narrow anthropocentrism. Yet this manifesto had more to say about kin-making and agility competitions than political coalitions and oppositional strategies. Ethics was its true terrain—what was the good life for a nonhuman and how could we know?—explored via competing theories of dog training.

Haraway had always figured in her own work as a matter of both principle and methodology. But here she focused more than ever on her own life: the feminist praxis of situated perspective inched toward memoir in sections like “Notes of a Sportswriter’s Daughter,” which explained how her love of language had been instilled by her father, a writer for the *Denver Post*, and extensive notes on her adventures in agility training with her Australian shepherd Cayenne Pepper. Reading a chapter composed almost entirely of email exchanges detailing everything from Cayenne’s progress in pole-weaving to an enthusiastic bout of oral sex with a friend’s dog (“she is one turned on little bitch with Willem, and he is INTERESTED”), it’s hard not to cringe—which, one suspects, is the author’s intent. (Haraway seems constitutionally incapable of embarrassment and delights in making others squirm.) Still, in an era of pet spas on every corner and kombucha in every bodega, it seemed worryingly easy to assimilate Haraway’s multispecies bent to bourgeois lifestyle trends without a sharper political thrust.

The politics wasn’t entirely gone, though. Nor was the Marxism. In a chapter discussing dogs as both commodities and consumers of commodities, Haraway argues that being a pet was a “demanding job” requiring emotional intelligence and control. And dogs needed jobs where they could be useful, ones that wouldn’t leave them “victims of human consumerist whims,” trendy tastes, and fickle affections: better to be a sheepdog than a Dalmatian. Dogs with jobs! I think about it every time I see a poster in the library advertising therapy-dog sessions for overworked grad students or pass a service dog at a crosswalk—and also when I watch police dogs snarl at water protectors at Standing Rock or attack black children in footage from Birmingham.

LIKE MOST OF HARAWAY’S BOOKS, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, published in 2016, is a compilation of essays, albeit more loosely linked than usual. The most topical entries represent Haraway’s intervention into the Anthropocene versus Capitalocene debate that has captured the academic imagination over the past few years. The Anthropocene names the geologic era in which humans have been the predominant force shaping the planet, though its periodization and existence are much debated. The idea of the Anthropocene implodes familiar categories: there is no separating human social activity from biological activity, nor from geologic activity. Critics of the concept have suggested that the geologic era should be known as the Capitalocene, to recognize that a specific economic system, rather than all of humanity, has been responsible for the most profound reshaping of nature. It’s easy to dismiss the “-cene debate” as an academic fad, but at its heart are fundamental questions: the place of humans in the natural world, the relationship of capitalism to modernity, the role of a scientific discipline in declaring a new era of human existence. These are, of course, the kinds of questions that Haraway has been asking for years; it is a debate made not so much *for* her as *by* her.

Haraway prefers the Capitalocene to the Anthropocene, the Latin-Greek hybrid notwithstanding—but preferable to both is something she calls the Chthulucene. This is not, she insists, a reference to H. P. Lovecraft’s sea monster Cthulhu (a “misogynist racial-nightmare monster”) but—note the additional *h*—to the Greek *chthonios*, meaning “of, in, or under the earth and the seas.” The chthonic are bound to Earth, and to staying with the trouble of the world.

Wordplay as argument runs rampant throughout the book, ranging from the humanities to posthuman to compost to humus. Her favored phrases—*bumptious*, *critters*, *exuberant*—when repeated across essays, come to feel more like tics. Her favored thinkers, too, often seem like crutches: Ursula Le Guin and Octavia Butler continue to inspire her, as they have for the past three decades, and personalities from HistCon past and present figure heavily. (The Marxists, though, are mostly gone, replaced by multispecies feminists and pragmatist philosophers.) This remains a rich and ecumenical array of texts for understanding the state of our planet, but Haraway's own world feels surprisingly small.

The most relentlessly recurring phrase in *Staying with the Trouble* is an acronym: *SF*. In *Primate Visions*, Haraway cited *SF* as a reference to the set of literatures known as science/speculative fiction and fantasy, but it has since accumulated new terms, permutations, and meanings: *speculative feminism*, *science fact*, *string figures*, *speculative fabulation*, *so far*. *SF* here is both literary genre and “practice and process; it is becoming with each other in surprising relays: it is a figure for ongoingness in the Chthulucene.” Becoming-with is crucial. More forcefully than ever, Haraway insists that none of us are individual selves, but are instead hopelessly entwined with other humans, species, critters, worlds—and that this, she argues, constitutes grounds for hope.

One of the benefits of seeing wordplay as politics is that it makes for good slogans. Previous Harawavian slogans were attached explicitly to presidential terms: the Cyborg Manifesto's “Cyborgs for Earthly Survival” is explicitly a response to the Reagan era's restarting the arms race; the slogans of the Companion Species Manifesto, simultaneously more mystifying and more militant (“Run Fast, Bite Hard!” and “Shut Up and Train!”) are posed as a response to the “terrifying times of George H.W. Bush and the secondary Bushes.” The new book has two slogans, and neither is linked to any particular political figure: “Stay with the Trouble” and “Make Kin, Not Babies.” The latter is an obvious reference to the Sixties classic “Make Love, Not War,” and Haraway's attempt to recuperate population politics—long verboten on the left—for feminist praxis.

“Make Kin, Not Babies” is most explicitly explored in the final chapter, the only section not previously published and the most significant departure from Haraway's previous work. In it, she tries her own hand at *SF* (speculative fiction/science fiction/science fact/speculative feminism), or at least describes her attempt to do so, summarizing a story concocted in a writing workshop run by the philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers. Assigned the task of imagining a child and its progress through five generations, Haraway's group—comprising herself, the animal philosopher Vinciane Despret, and the filmmaker Fabrizio Terranova—writes about a child called Camille. The Camille Stories aim to suggest “near futures, possible futures, and implausible but real nows.” As they will inevitably err politically and ecologically, it is up to readers to correct them with fan fiction.

All the Camilles belongs to an “intentional, migratory community” composed of a few hundred humans diverse across class, race, gender, and so on (already the makings of a utopian fantasy). Known as the Children of Compost, they move to “ruined places” and aim to heal them. Within these Communities of Compost, decisions about reproduction are made collectively. Children are understood to be “rare and precious” and expected to have at least three parents of any gender—though no one is ever forced to bear a child or prevented from having one if they so choose. Children born by community agreement, however, are born as symbionts with nonhumans chosen by their parents.

To be a symbiont means to be committed to a specific companion species in a deep way: to learn about, care for, and take on the very genetic material of one's animal other. Camille's symbiont is a monarch butterfly; others are paired with kestrels, eels, crayfish, and salamanders. So Camille gets genes that let per (Camille's gender pronoun of choice) sense the chemical signals of flowering plants, eat toxic milkweed, and take on the distinctive orange-and-black patterning of an adult monarch butterfly. Later generations of Camilles become more deeply entangled with the monarchs, as technology and sensibilities permit.

The first Camille is born in 2025, when the world's population numbers eight billion; the last dies in 2425, when the population has declined to a “stable” three billion. Haraway implies heavily that this is in part because the unconventional reproductive practices of the Communities of Compost are so “successful and infectious”; we get no further details, though we could surely use them. The world is gradually remade in other ways, too, via “profound economic restructuring, reconfiguration of political control, demilitarization,” but there is little said on these either. It is a strangely immaterial account for a self-professed Marxist; where Haraway once wrote about reproduction as an economic phenomenon, it now appears simply a matter of social norm bordering on lifestyle choice. Nor does she argue that remaking the family will remake capitalism, as Marxist feminists often have. She is interested in making kin primarily in order to avoid making babies.

Death, meanwhile, occurs on a catastrophic scale but is mentioned only in passing; mass-extinction events are a backdrop to the Camilles' lives. The most significant recognition of these catastrophes comes when the fifth-generation Camille becomes a Speaker for the Dead—a designated mourner and rememberer, and a reference to another work of *SF*, this one Orson Scott Card's. (Card is also infamous for his homophobia; his deployment in service of queering the species is presumably one of Haraway's blasphemous jokes.) This is a troublesome place to end up. Although Haraway claims to be developing a politics for a damaged world, what we get feels more like an elegy.

Thinking is a crucial practice for staying with the trouble, and Hannah Arendt and Virginia Woolf are her guides to it. Haraway is fond of Arendt's comment that thinking is a process of going visiting, of stretching one's imagination toward others in a way that Eichmann famously could not. She resolutely counterposes this practice to something smacking more overtly of politics, insisting that “visiting is not a heroic practice; making a fuss is not the Revolution; thinking with each other is not Thought.” Meanwhile Woolf's injunction in *Three Guineas*—“Think we must”—functions essentially as a third slogan for *Staying with the Trouble*, and a refrain throughout.

But Woolf's mandate was paired with an analysis of material conditions. Thinking is necessary—but for that, one needs guineas. (Now, there's a companion-species manifesto for you!) Woolf's thought, moreover, led her to rage: *Three Guineas* is a searing antiwar polemic, one in which Woolf calls to spend a guinea not on rebuilding a woman's college (or, perhaps, a women's studies program) but on the rags, petrol, and matches with which the “daughters of educated men” could set light to the hypocrisies of jingoistic universities once and for all. Would that Haraway had followed suit! She teeters on the cusp—“Revolt!” she cries, “Think we must; we must think.” But, she notes, “the devil is in the details—how to revolt? How to matter and not just want to matter?” And then, like a monarch butterfly, she flits off to something else.

By the end of the book, we've learned all manner of detail about the *Acacia* tree genus, made up of fifteen hundred species, living in climates ranging from desert to tropics and found in ice cream, beer, and postage stamps. We learn about the *Pimocia chthulu* spider, Haraway's neighbor in the North Central California redwoods and another inspiration for the Chthulucene. We learn about the history of Premarin estrogen tablets, made out of horse urine, and their effects on both midcentury reproductive politics and Cayenne Pepper's bladder. Haraway remains a keenly curious, sharp observer of her world, and for her, such stories are not merely tales of surprising connections, but important ethical lessons. “The details matter,” she insists: it is in the details that we move beyond general principles toward the actual beings with which we are connected. “It is the details that force us to stay with the trouble, that help us recognize the trouble when we see it, and that make us think about how we should act in response.” Details of how to revolt, though, are notably absent. This is intentional. Studying past revolutionary projects, members of the Communities of Compost are disappointed in what they understand as the “foreclosures of utopias.” They turn instead to *SF*, which, in staying with the trouble, “kept politics alive.”

“Staying with the trouble” is a stance derived from the process philosophies that have guided Haraway's thinking since her days reading Peirce and Whitehead in the Hutchinson ecology lab. Rejecting the artificial boundaries of beginnings and endings, process philosophies are a necessary rebuke to escapist fantasies of starting over, whether on Mars or in California, and a useful reminder that we are always remaking ourselves with others, human and otherwise. Process comes paired with a pragmatist orientation toward practices over ideals. People congregate around shared problems—water shortages in California, for example—and try to solve them, even if they don't agree on the underlying cause—say, climate change. (This approach bears resemblance to the unlikely coalitions of most actually existing climate politics; in particular, the Communities of Compost bring to mind Blockadia, Naomi Klein's constellation of local movements against

fossil-fuel development.) The combination usefully directs attention to the ongoing and oft-overlooked work of doing politics: “Stay with the Trouble” is a slogan apt less for the work of thinking than that of organizing.

But Haraway’s suspicion of a teleological and ideologically dogmatic Marxism leads her to abdicate the question of political ends almost completely. There is little sense of how a group might transcend the conditions that originally brought them together, or organize a collective toward a long-term political goal. How might struggle itself transform our situated selves and partially shared purposes such that they might become more fully shared over time?

Twenty years ago, Haraway had declared in the postscript to *Modest_Witness*, “I am sick to death of bonding through kinship and ‘the family,’ and I long for models of solidarity and human unity and difference rooted in friendship, work, partially shared purposes, intractable collective pain, inescapable mortality, and persistent hope.” But here, kinship is the only model of solidarity on offer. It’s no wonder we’re left generating empathy for other species via genetic modification.

LAST DECEMBER, I went to Santa Cruz with friends. I’d made no attempt to contact Haraway in advance, but went to the building that housed the HistCon Department anyway. It was locked. I walked around the empty campus to soak up the vibes (“research”). Wandering through the redwoods at twilight, watching deer graze as the sun set over the Pacific, it was hard to worry about Donald Trump or the ocean’s gradual rise. And yet—though the HistCon utopia had succeeded on its own terms—the department was dying by attrition: as Clifford, Haraway, Davis, and other faculty luminaries had retired, they hadn’t been replaced—budget cuts, of course. The fields it had spawned—Chicano studies, gender studies, queer studies—were being killed off, too, and embattled or cloistered where they survived. Back East, my friends and I were involved with our rich private universities’ unionization campaigns; how to organize the production of knowledge seemed less pressing than how to organize our colleagues so that we might assert some collective power over our work and our uncertain futures. The life Haraway had lived, and the conditions that made it possible for someone like her to emerge, felt like a speculative fiction of what intellectual life could be that had, for a brief moment in time, been spectacular fact.

I still think about Haraway all the time. In the past few months, the new category of “alternative facts” emerged, and postmodern academics were blamed. Human strangers on the internet continued to ironically mourn the death of a captive gorilla. The left returned yet again to disputes over the significance of race, gender, and class in building power. The tech entrepreneur Elon Musk proposed to leave the troubled Earth behind for a colony on Mars, provided one could afford the trip. Hundreds of thousands of people converged on capitals around the country wearing hand-knit hats intended to signify sexual anatomy in the image of a domesticated animal. Though the world seems to be getting more Harawavian by the day, it’s been that way all along.

But if Haraway remains invaluable for understanding that primates, science fiction, and sex are central to politics, she’s proved less helpful in figuring out what to do about it. This, too, has been the case all along: for all the Manifesto’s lasting political acuity, its cyborg societies, focused as they are on their own never-ending formation, appear ill suited to addressing climate change or capitalism. Those problems require building not only unwieldy new coalitions but *power*, to be used in service of ambitious goals on terrain more expansive than the space of the commune—to win over the state, perhaps, rather than merely disarm it.

Haraway never claimed to have all the answers. Pointing out the limits to her project feels more like intellectual matricide than the fan fiction she requested. Then again, Haraway never wanted to be a mother. She imagined in the Manifesto that “a world without genesis” could also be “a world without end.” Critique doesn’t have to kill: it can simply lop off a limb, letting what remains regenerate, salamander-like, into something “monstrous, duplicated, potent.”

Haraway wants to stay grounded in the mundane, the mud, the humus, the compost. But the trouble that she refuses to stay with is, in fact, that of politics. What could be more mundane than that old bore, more down in the mud than that dirty game? But this is the trouble that we most need to stay with—not because it is generative or exuberant in the manner of a dazzling essay, but because it is unavoidable, monstrous, repetitive, and, most of all, potent.

Might politics itself be utopia? In the science-fiction author Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Pacific Edge*, the final novel of his Three Californias trilogy, utopia is not a final destination but “struggle forever.” An ongoing process, yes—but one that fights for a better world. Struggle forever—now there’s an SF I can believe in.