

Holding Space

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There is no holding time. Time cannot abide. Neither with us nor for us. We worshippers of Anthropos – the figure of the white able bodied heteronormative male – decimate the Earth in a distortion of time – to live forever, to substitute extraction and accumulation in order to convince ourselves we as a species and individuals own time, have all the time in the world, all the world in time. Late capitalism increases our sense of velocity, accelerating us toward a nihilist's apocalypse, or eternal life abstracted from duration, and from sensation. Deep ecology, deep geology, show us how ridiculous our hubris, this arrogant pride, is. One day we will be simply another layer of strata. A mourningful memory within the Earth, even while leaving it devastated. We seek to own time but time does not care.

We can hold space. Like time, space is the infinitesimal and the infinite, awe-fillingly grand and poignantly intimate simultaneously. Space is the way in which duration becomes a potential for communion with alterity, pure difference, otherness without definition. While time makes all organisms and all relations in perpetual metamorphosis, space is the necessary illusion which allows us to stop and think. Space insinuates a place, a vacuum in which there is a need for occupants. The Earth as a space waiting for a cast of human characters to give it meaning. But no. Space is already voluminous. The space of Earth is a million million relations, and a singular ecology of consistency. Space, Anthropos tells us, lacks. It is empty. It needs filling. Of course, because Anthropos is the phallogocentric figuration of hubris, who thinks the Earth exists for him, rather than he taking up an inconsequential space amongst the many, varied overlapping palimpsest spaces the Earth's diversity hosts.

Space beyond Anthropos is teeming. Space is like the silence we perceive from the nonhuman animal. If we listen, it is filled with expression. The space between entities – human, nonhuman, like, unlike – is another voluminous inner world. The space between entities is the moment of ethics, the point of care, the instance of mediation. There is no emptiness, no lack. This space folds within folds, like the multi-pleated, labial space which challenges the colonialist invasion of the penetrating phallus. It is multi directional and it touches. The perspective of space in this labial configuration is also many, Legion, the witch and the beast, refusing the fantasy of Anthropos' singular arrogant God's eye. Bunting-Branch shows us this in the perspective of her animated figure. She looks down, not on the Earth from a God's eye view as some Vitruvian Olympian, but as one perspective of many which makes the body itself look and feel strange, a phenomenological homunculus, the body as a sensing experience felt, rather than a template of what the Human appears to be. Here also is the space made. Near this body space awaits an entity, or many, for care. Making space makes no demands,

assimilates via no conditions. Its patience is matched by its radical compassion. Space awaits not what one is, but that one is. The eye, and the I, are simply questions contingent on the needs or pleas of who arrives no matter their genus, species, individual singular incarnation. Even proximity is made strange.

When we hold space for the other with compassion, we may also be holding space with the grace that leaves the other be. Grace offers the ability to express care over long distances (because our world is global, what we consume is the result of exploitation from afar). How can we think and act and create activism which never receive the aggressive 'pay off' of neo-capitalist 'charity' - to simply act rather than performatively announce charity and activism as part of identity and greenwashing. Space is made strange being near and far, yet the touch remains, thinking those in need of space without knowing them. Thinking ourselves as producers of care, rather than reproducers of humans, having to be novel, to be artists, at every turn, in order to accommodate through the spaces we make. These activisms are not economic exchanges, evaluated through worthiness or trends in salvation. They offer what Bunting Branch calls a violent comfort. Activism in the face of resistance by our species, demands for the whys and the imperial knowledges that reify and fix hierarchies of worthiness, or impose a voice upon the voiceless by deciding what they need and why.

Our obligation, our gift, can easily turn to the poison from whence the word comes, when we taint it with the demands of Anthropos. So we must remain in the space of the gift before it becomes poison. This itself is a form of 'holding space' - a waiting, an understanding of time that is quiet and liquid and flows like a shifting sea, sometimes with great crashing waves and sometimes with barely murmured lappings. Sea and shore, the liquid mucosal relationality between entities, sticky, viscous, showing the connectivity between all entities rather than hard outlines in space, defined and existing only as they relate with one another, supple, sensitive. Hearing the unheard, neither anything more than the need of the other. The negative space Anthropos describes when he speaks of veganism, antinatalism, even femininity, is the space of the shoreline. It creates the world anew, through relations alone. No signification and valuation of entities, thereby demanding they count within a space or be removed from a space. Every space is an entity of relationality which defines the constellations of life creating borders which are neither fixed nor frontiers, a new anti-nationalist understanding of borders no longer between spaces, species, peoples, fluid spaces of compassion and multi-faceted folded perspectives of imagination.

How can we respire with the Earth? The spaces within us hold us. We breath the Earth in. Every memory is held within these molecules. We are chimera. The multiple within one and the one made of many. We are literally held up by the bacteria within us. We are ecology. Our cellular activity fosters a world. We breath out. Unconsciously. What else do we do unconsciously? Everything? As hairy fleshy mammals, we breath, we circulate our blood, we flourish through microbiomes affecting our mood. We are not logos. We are matter. We are as frail and vulnerable and beautiful for being so, as the fractal elements we resemble, from the insect to the entire Earth, from the domestic pet to the devastated 'agricultural' animal, all flesh, all temporal. They are not worthy because they resemble us. We are worthy of an

obligation to a joyful activism because all we are belongs to them, those victims of Anthropos.

While we are at the mercy of time and hubris, how can we show mercy upon the Earth with joy and with love? To be born, Irigaray tells us, is to be with the animal, the vegetal, with fluidity and with compassion, as if we were air, wind, flow, circulation. None of these can be translated to language. Data, signs, all in their frenzied over signification, are empty spaces of information which extract the world of its matter and what matters. The virtual is not visceral. Information includes no tears. Irrelevant to what we tell ourselves, the cry of the animal, the tears of matter, are all matter, all that matters. Yet to be born involves joy in what these tears catalyse. Traditionally women's work, queer work, holding space is the rewilding, the hysteria, the madness, the creativity which is unspeakable because untranslatable to human language, itself what Serres would call a skeleton facing a ghost. Our action is matter, it is the void. And we wilding creatures understand the void is not empty, it is not threatening, it encompasses the cosmic everything.

Where is our limit? Where is your limit? Who are this 'we'? What space can we hold, as individuals who are a multiplicity. As collectives who are one. We must at the very least, be the abject treacherous to our species; its violent extractionist impulses – the ways in which humans extract every resource from the Earth, animal, vegetal and mineral, the effects of which poison the planet and its inhabitants; its obsession with sovereign subjectivity – identity announced as fixed, the focus of our narcissistic humanity concerned only with 'who am I', refusing fluidity and metamorphosis. The violent comfort of the death of subjectivity is also the joy of pure potential, the very definition of the ethical encounter. Becoming-liquid, becoming-mucosal, becoming-with the gracious Earth and delivered from the catatonising affects of being data, hyper-described self, lists and possessions and positions and simulacra, the empty image without substance. Holding space is a gift, activism is a gift. The precise point where Anthropos would decry this gift as poison is the moment we die to the narcissistic ego of the human to be born to infinite potentia, pure potential rather than limited possibility. This is Spinoza's definition of ethics – the ways in which two or more entities express their lives and the ways in which these expressions affect all other entities around them. To create thriving relations we have to rethink our potential to be in different ways, from different perspectives, always aware of the affects our expressions have on others, human, nonhuman, organic, inorganic, the world. This means our reason for being and our immortality comes from our effects on others. A nuanced and sensitive awareness of our short and long term affects creates a far greater and less arrogant legacy than simply and selfishly reproducing ourselves. The obligation to reproduce both impacts the world in terms of consumption and human encroachment, and defers ethical creativity to an anthropocentric system of reproduction for no other sake than the perception humans are of value in and of themselves more than any other organism, species or ecology. Becoming-unthinkable, we, as singulars, as collectives, become works of art whose only referents are the wild, unspeakable spaces between the spaces between, where all relations and encounters thrive and where the Earth flourishes. Without martyrdom or sacrifice, this is the space of life.

References and further reading:

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Glossary:

Alterity

Otherness. The state of being different, or other.

Anthropos

The figure of the white able bodied heteronormative male that is commonly taken as the human standard (as in, "mankind").

Chimera

A being composed of many different parts. Also, an illusion or creation of the mind.

Extractionist

The impulse to extract every resource from the Earth, animal, vegetal and mineral, the effects of which poison the planet and its inhabitants.

Greenwashing

Giving a false or misleading impression about the environmental benefits of a product or practice.

Homunculus

A miniature, fully-formed person once believed to be contained within an individual sperm (as a way to understand human development within the womb). The term also refers to an artificial human created through alchemy, or imagined in fiction.

Hubris

Excessive pride or self-confidence that can risk danger.

Late capitalism

Post-industrial society shaped by global markets, speculative financial capital, and advanced technology (as experienced in the present-day UK).

Metamorphosis

Change of physical form, structure, or substance by natural or magical means (as when a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly).

Mucosal

Bodily surface moistened by mucous.

Neo-capitalist

Modern political ideology that blends traditional capitalist and socialist principles to maximise profits. As seen in the UK, with privatised national utilities that are run as companies for shareholder profit.

Palimpsest

A layered surface that reveals a history of previous use.

Phallogocentric

An interpretation of meaning that privileges the masculine. Consciously or unconsciously making the masculine central to society, language and logic.

Phenomenological

Subjective experience of reality, as it is felt by the person experiencing it. An interpretation of reality drawn from the scientific study of observable phenomena, rather than theoretical ideas.

Potentia

Power or life force with pure, infinite potential.

Reify

To make an abstract concept real.

Simulacrum

The empty image without substance. A hollow representation or imitation.

Sovereign subjectivity

A concept of the human as autonomous and self-actualising, as opposed to being shaped in relation to others.

About Patricia MacCormack:

Patricia MacCormack is Professor of Continental Philosophy in English and Media at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge. She is the author of *Cinesexuality* (Routledge 2008) and *Posthuman Ethics* (Routledge 2012) and the editor of *The Animal Catalyst* (Bloomsbury 2014), *Deleuze and the Animal* (EUP 2017), *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Cinema* (Continuum 2008) and *Ecosophical Aesthetics* (Bloomsbury 2018). Her newest book is *The Ahuman Manifesto: Activisms for the End of the Anthropocene*. She recently completed a Leverhulme Fellow researching and developing *Death Activism* and completing the monograph *Death Activism* for Bloomsbury. She is also the author of numerous journal articles and anthology chapters.