

From Earth-Systems Science to the Sky-Earth System

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The whole world was Sky, then - The Watunna

If European colonialism unified the globe, forcing us to think in terms of a world-system, then the Anthropocene made it necessary to think in terms of the earth-system, a planet among planets, with specific astronomical features and internal mechanisms of self-regulation. The Gaia hypothesis of Lovelock proposes that the earth is itself biotically regulated across its history, and the Gaia theory of Latour and company extends this insight: the planet is not an underlying substance from which worlds arise, as so many cultures to a single nature, but itself composed of worlds, unfolded from those interested actors who mutually “regulate” the earth-system. I now propose that we take a third step: from the earth-system to the Sky-Earth system.

Sky-Earth systems science is a transcendental generalization of earth systems science, as it treats the “mixture” of earth systems science and Modern ontology, whether that be in the form of the planet as Nature and material substance, or scientific objectivity, or in the lingering Naturalism of the equation, $\text{earth}=\text{immanence}$, which defines Gaia theory. It is arguable that Modern cosmology in fact begins with the attempt to flatten Sky and Earth, by claiming that the universality of physico-mathematical laws cancels out the transcendental duality of above and below.

The Sky-Earth system is neither another name for Nature, nor is it

reducible to a generalized horizontalization of relations, or a ‘relationalization’ of substance. Nor is the Sky-Earth system a “local” return: the earth is any “earth,” as the flat perspectival field expanding out from any center, and the Sky is the universe, because wherever you are there is a Sky.

The Sky-Earth system is a generic phase space, in which the Human is “immanent” to the Universe – because identical to it at its center – while being unfolded according to a space of maneuver – a variable model – with both vertical and horizontal parameters. The God and the animal are any vertical and horizontal Other, as the two singularities that bound the Human singularity (of the nature of a ‘point,’ ‘monad’ or “Big Bang”). As such they support a relativistic space-time frame for the generic cosmology, superposable with others.¹

Between the Sky and Earth is the World Tree: you are only ever climbing up and down it. It also appears as the Great River that passes from East to West, as in a Makuna myth in which, when the World Tree was cut at the end of the Mythic Past, it fell so that its branches formed the river of the Amazon. These are the linking terms of the system, the centers in-between, where each center is permutable with the others. In the Sky, the World Tree and River stretches out as the great band of the Milky Way, thus reflecting upward both horizontal and vertical relations into the Sky.

This upward reflection of the World Tree speaks to the nature of the Original Sky, as the identity of the Sky and Earth, prior to their separation. It has left its “trace” as a system of centers and orbs: centers, in the Human, animal, and God, all seen-in-themselves, as Human; orbs, in the inversion whereby the experiential field of the Earth becomes a dot in the Sky. Our “blue planet” is a blue star.

The identity of the Center of the Universe – where you are – and the Other side of the Sky – beyond the “fixed stars,” or any spatio-temporal limit – is the dialectical identity that brackets the space of maneuver between centers and orbs, terms and relations, locals and globals, figures and grounds, within the model that is the Sky-Earth system.

¹ One could imagine the model as a complex plane or unit circle, specifying a vector through its horizontal and vertical axes. The superposability of cosmologies would then amount to the superposability of vectors that never leave the Sky-Earth system.

In the beginning, Sky and Earth separated. But that tree is still there, if you know how to rebuild it. That's the task of Sky-Earth systems theory, to keep the Sky from falling.