

## From Hierarchy to Holism

by Leigh Brownhill

The shape of the hierarchy of labour power conveys its power and persistence. The hierarchy's formation in the intersection of three straight lines indicates the generally linear pattern that marks the prominent outlines of an exclusive, profit-extracting, money-value-generating society and political economy. Round things, like planets, genitalia or even cogs and wheels, do also appear in this linear world; but they usually do so as so many points on a spreadsheet, between which other lines are drawn, measuring supply or cost or shareholder value.

Capitalism's most prized industry, oil, produces the storms, fires and floods that, in the end, topple the long-standing extractive hierarchy of labour power, a social formation that *is* the private concentration of wealth, power and control, in particular over oil and energy and human creativity. Marquez said truth is stranger than fiction; so it is. Marx said capital produces its own gravediggers; in 2017, among their names were Harvey, Irma, Jose, Maria.

But as Hegel and physicists agree, nothing is destroyed until it is replaced. The collapse of capital's hierarchy of labour power, even if hastened by Mother Nature's revenge, is not a natural phenomenon that requires or has had no human agency; nor will a new kind of horizontally-organized world inevitably or effortlessly emerge to replace capital's hierarchy. Mobilized people are making this change. Countless practices of commoning already exist, in particular among people, in particular women, across the global South. Subsistence commoning is both the source of daily life for hundreds of millions of people and the centrepiece of land, food and energy sovereignty social and political movements, or what Vandana Shiva calls Earth Democracy. Commoning is not an anachronism, nor a default for those poor 'left behind,' but rather is a relation of people to the lands on which they live. This historically harmonious relationship, characteristic of Indigenous communities everywhere, has also been vigorously protected and creatively reinstituted (by peasants and other commoners) through struggle against imperialism and corporate enclosures over decades, neigh centuries, continuing today.

Rather than capital's triangular hierarchy, the shape of a horizontally-organized solar-commoning world is circular, or more precisely, spherical; for it recognizes and valorizes each person's (and other beings') direct relationship with the earth and waters below, and the sun and winds above. The commoning sphere's formation, in circles of 360 degree curved lines, indicates the generally holistic pattern that marks the prominent outlines of this imagined-yet-already-existing, inclusive, solar-powered, health- and ecology-value-generating society and political economy. Straight lines and spreadsheets do also appear in this spherical world; but they do so as part of the efforts of 99% of the human species to reconcile with Mother Nature, accounting for the damages of private property and corporations, redrawing social circles, recovering ecological cycles and measuring well-being, happiness and universal value holistically.



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