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**MODEL OF THE WORLD
IN THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPTIONS
OF HUNTERS AND GATHERERS**

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As one of the basic modes of social communication preliterate society used various graphic symbols. And although the set of these symbols was comparatively small, people put into them the entire multi-form spectrum of their conceptions about the world, in other words, the entire wealth of their intellectual life. Conceptual models expressed by graphic symbols were created, for instance, by the aborigines of Australia. To the present author the impetus to the disclosure of the essence and origin of these graphemes was given by an oral story of Kath Walker, a well-known aboriginal poetess, about the picture of the world which exists in the conceptions of the Australian aborigines. Kath Walker being a profound scholar of the traditional intellectual culture of her people, the data obtained from her are of particular interest. Incidentally, their authenticity is confirmed by other sources.

To initiate me and other members of her audience into the aforementioned world, the poetess above all drew a system of concentric circles which she referred to as a "circle of life". It is a diagrammatic presentation of an Australian community—the basic social and productive unit of the traditional society of hunters and gatherers. Inside this system of three circles are placed the women and children, between the second and the third circles are put the tribal elders, then come the adult men. Hunters and warriors, the protectors of their community, surround, as it were, the old men, women and children. Thus, we have a diagrammatic presentation of a social entity, of a "social space".

This, however, is not only a "social space", but also a "social time". Apart from a spatial, Walker introduces a temporal dimension into her scheme. The "circle of life" symbolizes not only the social structure of a community, but also the life cycle in time. As they die, people become reborn as new human beings, and the life of the community, being restored with every new generation, continues. This synchronic scheme is at the same time diachronic—the eternal "circle of life".

Another set of conceptions is connected with initiation rites, held in a special zone set aside on the tribal territory. The change of adolescent boys into initiated adult men is reflected in the following diagram charted by Kath Walker: on the right is a circle of boys, on the left a circle of newly initiated youths and between them lies what she calls a "sacred path". This path, a quarter of a mile long, is traversed by the initiates in eight to ten years, and as they move along it obtaining new knowledge, forming new habits, and gaining new skills, their social status rises until, when they turn 18 or 20, they eventually leave the left circle as "ready-made" men. It is clear that the progress along the "sacred path" should be understood not literally, but rather symbolically. The notion of "progress" here is an expression of the gradual gaining of knowledge and of the resulting rise in the social status, of the boys becoming fully initiated men possessing full rights. Although in the zone of initiation rites pictures such as Walker's diagram are also drawn on the ground, this diagram is not only their repetition. In this particular case the concrete spatial and temporal conception about initiation is combined with its abstract-symbolic conceptualization. Initiation, at the same time, is a metaphor for a "circle of regenerations". After all, in the course of initiation the neophytes, according to the conceptions of society, "regenerate" or become "reborn" for a new life.

Finally, the most important type of the activity of a primitive community is the economic development of its territory and its economic cycle. This time Walker drew two concentric circles which schematically represented the communal territory, and between them the community itself, already as the aforementioned system of concentric circles, showing with an arrow the community's movement around its territory. The economic utilization of the land—hunting and gathering—has the aim of preserving the ecological balance. Exhausting the resources on one of the group territories, it moves over to a new place so as to return to the original place after the passage of several natural and economic seasons. In this period the natural resources regenerate. Primitive hunters and gatherers are in constant movement, and this movement is understood to proceed along a closed circle around the centre of the communal territory, although in this particular case, too, the circle functions as an ideal, in a sense, abstract model. The third diagram reflects already not the relations within a primitive so-

cial community (first diagram) and not the socio-ritual process (second diagram), but a socio-economic process and the relations of a social entity with the surrounding natural world. And all the three diagrams combined add up to a certain generalized picture of "the world of an aborigine".

The system of concentric circles by which Walker symbolically depicted the community and which she referred to as the "circle of life" is one of the oldest and most widespread motifs. In the art of the Australian aborigines it occurs in rock pictures. Participants in rituals drew it on the ground and on their own bodies. It frequently occurs on tjurungas, which embody a chain of regenerations and re-embodiments of human beings. Each individual "had" his own tjurunga, and when he died, it went over to the individual into whom passed his totemic essence, into whom the man, as it were, became re-embodied. This is why the depiction of the "circle of life" on the tjurunga does not bear any accidental character. In a visual form it conveyed the idea believed to be inherent in this object, held sacred by the aborigines.

A circle or a system of concentric circles symbolized the birth-place of an individual or the place of origin of his totem or simply a certain place in space. According to N.B. Tindale, these symbols generalize the "idea of a home", of the place of habitation¹. In the graphic symbols of the aborigines of Central Australia a circle, concentric circles and a spiral stand for the place of habitation of people or their totemic ancestors—one of the most important system-forming notions modelling the aborigines' conceptions about the world, space, time and life cycle². As he relates about the deeds of mythical beings, a Central Australian aborigine, like Kath Walker, begins with a picture of a circle, which designates the habitation or home of this mythical being, and the subsequent events unfold around it³. This is how around a circle, understood as a certain centre, a myth models the world.

From one circle to another or from one system of concentric circles to another frequently extend straight or winding lines. Each line is a stretch of a certain distance expressed in a traditional system of measures, for instance, days of travel. Ancient petroglyphs of Central and South Australia and Tasmania (ethnically and culturally connected with Australia in the distant past) have many such pictures hacked out on them. On the rocks of Mt. Cameron West (north-western Tasmania) a series of circles are inscribed in a big circle⁴. It is, as it were, a symbol of several social entities forming part of a big entity and comprising a

certain unity. Incidentally, researchers usually interpret such graphemes in naturalistic terms as attempts to depict phenomena of the surrounding world. Thus, without any grounds, is denied the ability of the Stone Age people for abstract thinking and for creating abstract symbolism.

Whereas a tribe of the Australian aborigines or other hunters and gatherers was an amorphous social unit, a community, on the contrary, had a clearly expressed structure. Every tribe fell into many communities, all of them independent, socially and economically autonomous and having their own hunting grounds. Communities were distinguished by customs, rituals, religious beliefs and sometimes languages (or dialects). Economically and socially, people were above all community members. That was why in a traditional hunting and gathering society man's social horizons were usually confined to his community and its immediate neighbours, with whom his community maintained close marriage, exchange and other relations. Representatives of societies located outside the scope of direct intercommunal contacts were believed to have properties of dangerous beings who had alien and strange customs, spoke obscure "non-human" languages and were therefore denied recognition by full-fledged people. Speaking about the people of their community, the Australians not infrequently considered it alone to be "their people". Similar phenomena are also observed in the group self-consciousness of the Bushmen. For instance, the Bushmen Kung San did not recognize as members of their own people individuals coming from remote communities even if they spoke the same language. At this level of social development the "distance factor" was one of the key ethnoforming factors. And the fact that the community was the centre of the social world of an individual left a stamp on his entire world outlook. It was ethnocentric and sociocentric, the social medium implying, above all, the community. The connection between the community (or a group of related communities) and the land found expression in regional mythology, which told people how the world they populated, limited to their comparatively small community, had come into existence and how they had come into existence themselves.

The historical sources of ethnic structures lie in the primitive community. It is a community which reproduces itself from one generation to the next biologically, psychologically and culturally, as the bearer of a specific culture and self-awareness and sometimes of a specific language or dialect, as a community which opposes itself to other communities, in other words, as the earliest social unit having the properties of an ethnos⁵.

The community of a member of a hunting and gathering society was the reference point in the development of the world, both in terms of practical actions and in terms of conceptions. It was not a coincidence that at the centre of the system of circles symbolizing the community Kath Walker placed a point—not only the centre of an aborigine's social world, but also the centre of the Universe, since the entire surrounding world is patterned on the model of a community. The community is the reference point in world modelling. The system of concentric circles in this graphic symbol depicts more than a community. It is a cosmos or sociocosmos with the world axis in its centre. According to the conceptions of a member of this society and this level of social integration, his social world—his community and perhaps a group of closely connected communities—is always located in the centre of the world. The individual views the world, as it were, from within his own community, in which he was born and in which he spends the greater part of his life. Developing the world, cognising his natural and social environment, man, as it were, looks father and farther, his horizons spread more broadly, and this finds visual expression in the system of concentric circles like the annual rings of a tree.

The primitive community as a world-forming model combines the three conceptions which are so pithily expressed in the Russian word "mir" (meaning both "world" and "peace")—the world as a social entity, or community, the world dominated by peace and a social environment dominated by stable harmonious relations between people, and, finally, the world as the Universe. Ascending from one meaning to another, we, as it were, follow ancient consciousness, which ascends from a social entity to the cosmos. For this consciousness the community was a little world, a microcosm. On it this consciousness built its conception of the great world—the macrocosm.

The idea about the settlement of a human entity as a circle, even when in reality it had a different shape, has struck deep roots in human consciousness. It is to be found among many peoples, for instance, the Indians of North America. For some members of the Winnebago tribe the village had the shape of a circle with the huts located all over its expanse divided into halves. In the consciousness of other members of the same tribe it also had the shape of circles—concentric circles, the huts being inscribed in the internal circle, while the external circle stood for cleared ground bounded by forest. Thus, in the consciousness of members of the same tribe, depending on their affiliation to one half of the tribe or the other, changes even the structure of the

settlement, although both structures go back to a common archetype, rooted in social consciousness—a circle. C. Lévy-Strauss refers to the former structure as diatomic and to the latter as concentric⁶. Both exist in reality as well—in North and South America and in Melanesia. B. Malinowski, for instance, describes the village of Omaracana on the Trobriand Islands. In plane the village looks like a system of concentric circles. In its centre it has a square—the place of meetings and festivities, around it are storehouses of “sacred yam (the central, or sacral part of the village), and around them are family huts (its peripheral, or profane part)⁷. A more elementary but basically the same structure of the settlement is characteristic of many hunters and gatherers. Thus, in the settlements of the Andaman Islanders the family huts were located around an open expanse where social ceremonies and rituals were held. It was also the location of a common hearth. If one communal hut was built it was round in plane itself. The free space in its centre, just as the square in the middle of the village, was intended for meetings and rituals. A communal hearth happened to be located here, too. In other words, it was a replica of the settlement, but under one roof. The circular or elliptic plan of settlements characterizes the Semangs, too. In common with the Andaman Islanders, the Semang dwellings surround an open internal space. The same is observed among the Mbuti pygmies of Central Africa. The Mbuti huts stretch along the perimeter of a forest clearing forming a circle in whose centre is an open expanse—the place of rituals and other social functions. In the middle of a site not infrequently burns a bonfire—the focus and a symbol of communal life⁸. In all these cases, just as in the Trobriand village, the central, sacred part of the settlement is surrounded by a peripheral, profane part. The centre of a community is the centre of a circle, the starting point of the development and structuration of the environing expanse. It is developed in every direction from the settlement, and this development bears both a concentric and a radial character. And the very circular plan of the dwelling and settlements goes as far back as the Stone Age. Developing the expanse practically, people also develop it conceptually, extending their conceptions to it.

According to M. Eliade, both the character of the development of an inhabited expanse by a traditional society and the structure of its settlements are a reflection of mythological cosmogony, an expression of cosmic symbolism⁹. In reality, the causal relationship here bears the direct opposite character. At the basis of the cosmic symbolism of the archaic social medium lies its own structure, this medium's relationship to the Earth and to the place of habitation and the process where-

by it develops the expanse. The sacralization of the expanse, which M. Eliade writes about, has a real, earthly, social origin. In contrast to his assumption, an earthly, social model is not a reflection of conceptions about a cosmic model. On the contrary, the conception of a cosmic model springs from the real life of primitive society and is determined by the conditions of this life, including ecological, and has deep sociohistorical roots.

The origin of the ancient graphic symbolism, which conveys the image of the world is also shown by the archaeology of the Stone Age, beginning from the Early Palaeolithic. It points to the conscious, purposeful division of labour and the entire social life in space and time, to the "human" character of the development of space and time, in other words, to their "humanization". The spatial organization of this activity can be given a geometric expression: in the main, it was ring-shaped (an artificial dwelling, frequently round in plane, and the territory around it, being developed by people) and linear-radial (the movements of hunting and gathering groups from their places of habitation and back). The world's oldest dwelling in the Olduvai Gorge, in Eastern Africa, was round in plane. A stone circle which, according to archaeologists, formed the dwelling's fence, has survived¹⁰. Possibly, this shape of the inhabited expanse, both of the dwelling and of the settlement, was the most economical and best adapted to the surrounding expanse and its ecological conditions and offered effective protection from the hostile environment. It was, as it were, the external protective shell of the primitive social medium. Its spatial organization retains this character among the modern hunters and gatherers as well. On the development of space, geometric in character, was superimposed its socio-psychological development: man's self-identification bore a distinctly localized character. It was confined to the entity to which he belonged and to the territory inhabited and developed by it.

It can thus be assumed that the structure of an inhabited expanse since deep antiquity has been built of the following elements: (1) a community as the primary and universal social entity, isolated from the surrounding social world; (2) the territory which belongs to it, isolated from the surrounding space; (3) the dwelling of a small kinship-based group or a family as an expanse isolated from this territory.

While these three elements show the development of space, the fourth element—the ecologically conditioned seasonal, cyclic character of economic activity—shows the development of time. The development of space and time had an expression in representational symbolism, widely disseminated in the Palaeolithic. Circles, including concentric,

spiral, meander, and labyrinth all are symbols of "humanized" space and time, indicating comparatively complex abstract conceptions which have survived even in modern primitive societies. The polysemy and multifunctionality of the motifs of fine art enabled a primitive artist to reflect, using limited pictorial media, the wealth and multifariousness of the surrounding world and of his own inner world. A composition of several symbolic elements could have coded in it the content of a whole myth and of a whole system of conceptions about the world. And the symbolic graphemes of primitive art which lie at its sources date from the oldest conceptions about the world, and are rooted in the development of it by man have become universal archetypes of human culture.

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