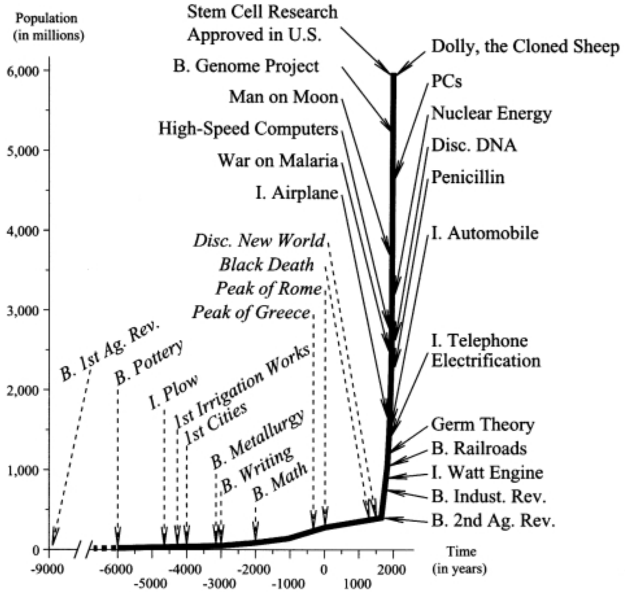
THE MATHEMATICS OF PLANET EARTH

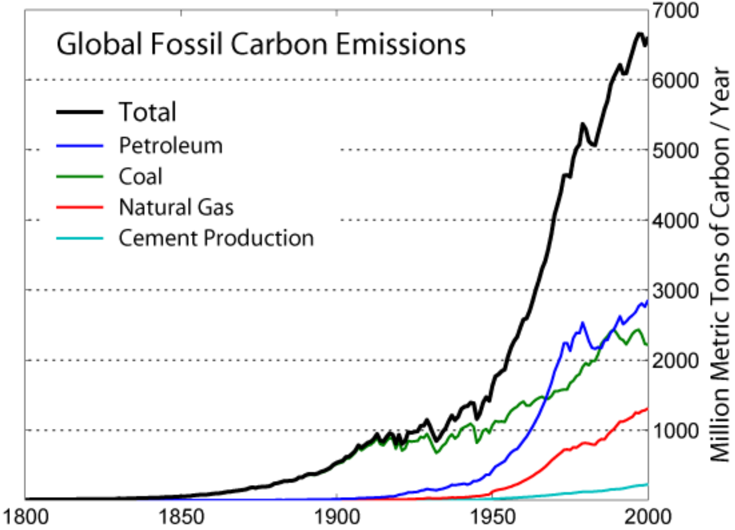
John Baez

British Mathematical Colloquium

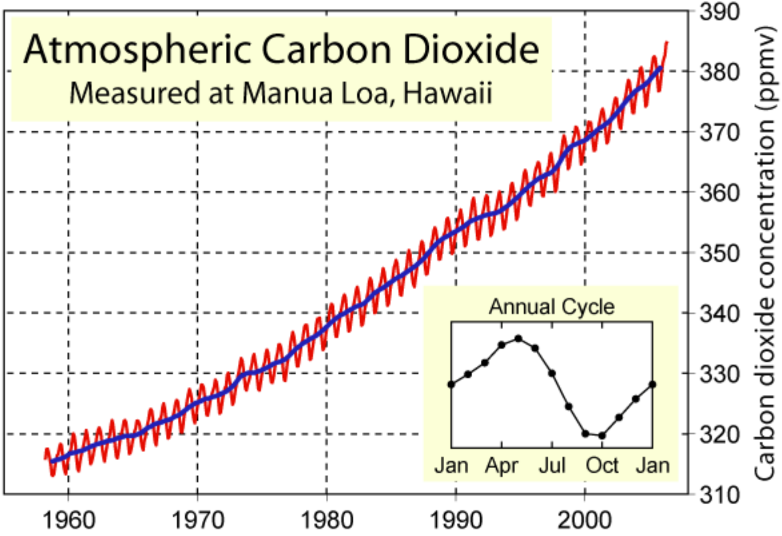
25 March 2013



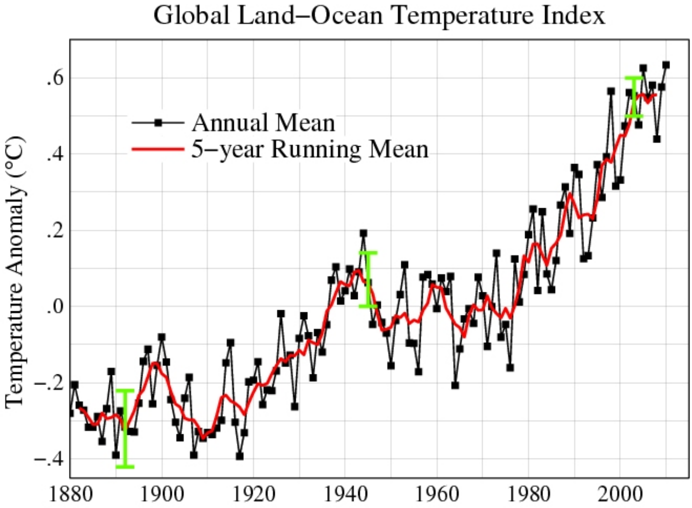
Robert Fogel - *The Escape from Hunger and Premature Death, 1700-2100*



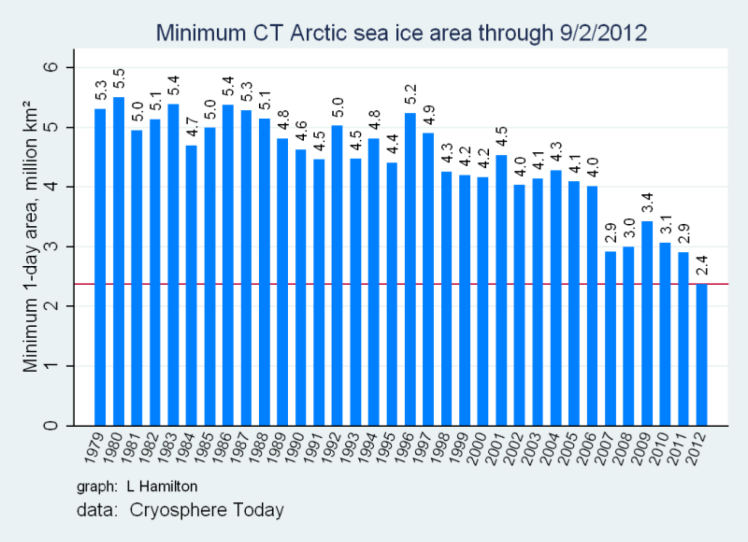
Global Warming Art



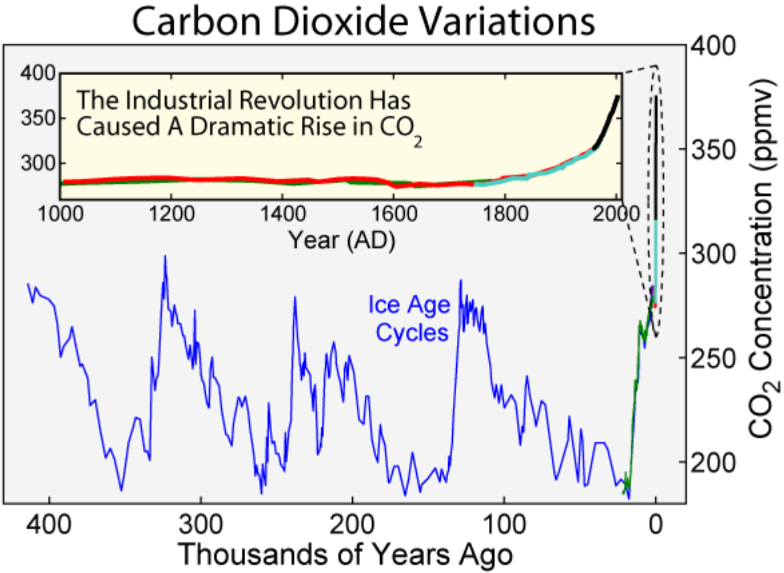
The Keeling Experiment — Global Warming Art



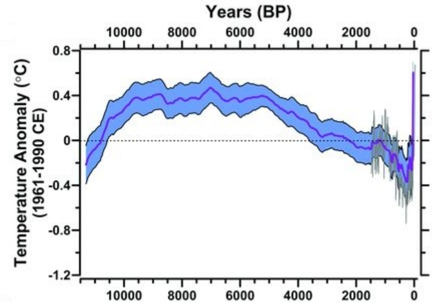
NASA Goddard Institute of Space Science



The Cryosphere Today



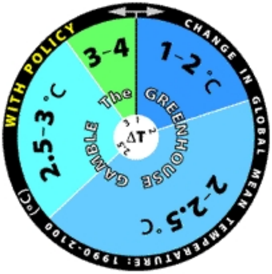
Antarctic ice cores and other data — Global Warming Art



Reconstruction of temperature from 73 different records — Marcott *et al.*

The climate gamble:

Warming Possibilities in 2100
Under No Policy Scenario



Warming Possibilities in 2100
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This is based on a recent MIT paper comparing a world where we continue what we're doing, and a world where we take aggressive action.

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Furthermore, species are already moving 6 kilometers closer to the poles each decade, and the oceans are becoming more acidic. The rate of extinction, already about 10 times its average level, will increase.

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Invent the math we need for life on a finite-sized planet.

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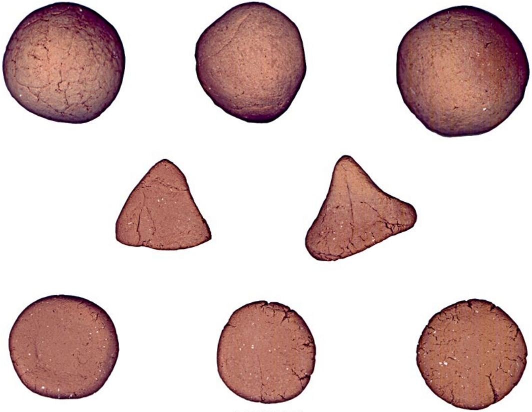
By now we use about 25% of all plant biomass grown worldwide! If this reaches 100% there will be, in some sense, no 'nature' separate from humanity.

Starting shortly after the end of the last ice age, the agricultural revolution led to:

- surplus grain production, and thus kingdoms and slavery.
- *astronomical mathematics* for social control and crop planning.
- *geometry* for measuring fields and storage containers.
- *written numbers* for commerce.

Consider the last...

Starting around 8,000 BC, in the Near East, people started using 'tokens' for contracts: little geometric clay figures that represented things like sheep, jars of oil, and amounts of grain.



MS 5067/1-8
Neolithic plain counting tokens. Near East, ca. 8000--3500 BC

The Schøyen Collection

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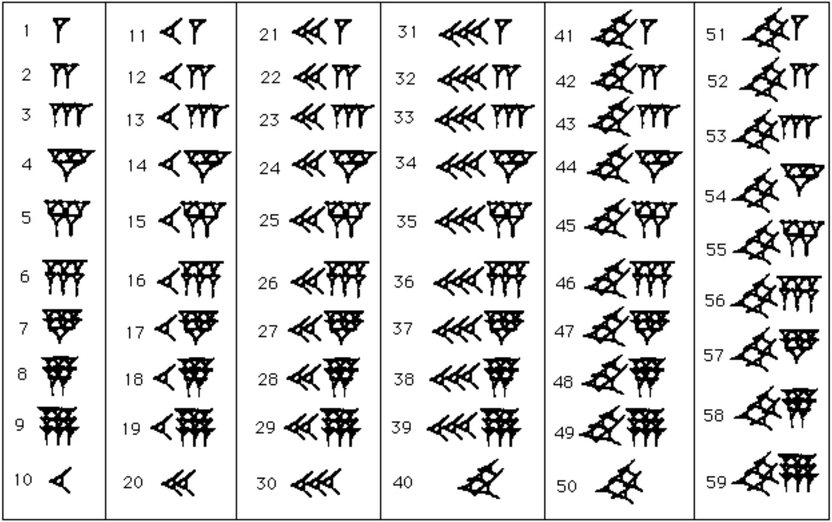
Eventually they gave up on the tokens. The marks on tablets then developed into the Babylonian number system! The transformation was complete by 3,000 BC.



J. J. O'Connor and E. F. Robertson, Babylonian Numerals

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By 1700 BC the Babylonians could compute $\sqrt{2}$ to 6 decimals:

$$1 + \frac{24}{60} + \frac{51}{60^2} + \frac{10}{60^3} \approx 1.414213...$$

Yale Babylonian Collection, YBC7289

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Math may undergo a transformation just as big as it did in the Agricultural Revolution.

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So, this machine should be self-reproducing. It should turn some of the CO_2 into new machines.

Even better, these machines should spread without human intervention.

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For sophisticated ecotechnology we need to pay attention to what’s already known—permaculture, systems ecology and so on. But better mathematics could help.

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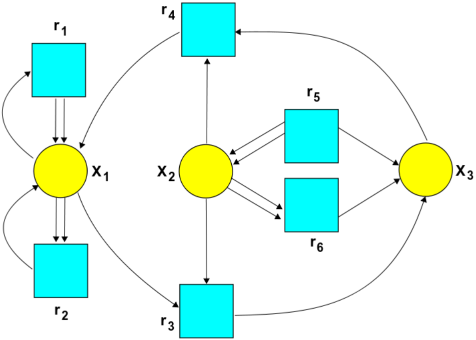
My own work on networks is motivated by ecology, but it's rather abstract, so I won't talk about it here.



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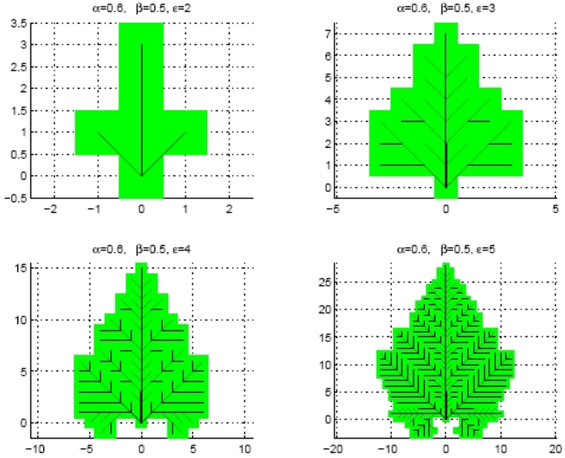
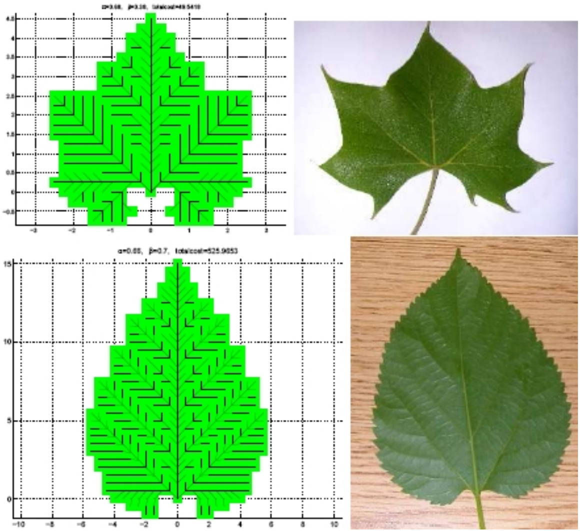
Yes! A mathematician at U.C. Davis, Qinglan Xia, has written a paper called *The Formation of a Tree Leaf*.

He models a leaf as a union of square cells centered on a grid, together with 'veins' forming a weighted directed graph from the centers of the cells to the root. The leaf grows new cells at the boundary while minimizing a certain function.



The function depends on two parameters. Changing these gives different leaf shapes:



Qinglan Xia's work is definitely math:

Lemma 3.8. *Suppose (Ω, G) is an (ϵ, h) leaf and $(\mu, \Theta) = \phi_h(\Omega, G)$. Then the total mass of the Radon measure is bounded above by*

$$\mathbf{M}(\mu) \leq \pi (R_\epsilon + h)^2$$

and the total variation of the vector measure Θ is bounded by

$$\mathbf{M}(\Theta) \leq \epsilon \pi^{2-\alpha} (R_\epsilon + h)^{4-2\alpha}.$$

Proof. Since $\Omega \subset B_{R_\epsilon}(O)$, the mass of μ is given by

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{M}(\mu) &= ||\Omega||\, h^2 \\ &= \text{area}\left(\bigcup_{x\in\Omega}\left\{x + \left[-\frac{h}{2}, \frac{h}{2}\right] \times \left[-\frac{h}{2}, \frac{h}{2}\right]\right\}\right) \\ &\leq \text{area}\left(B_{R_\epsilon + h}(0)\right) = \pi (R_\epsilon + h)^2. \end{aligned}$$

Also, since $w(e) \leq ||\Omega||\, h^2$ for each $e \in E(G)$, the total variation of Θ is given by

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{M}(\Theta) &= \sum_{e \in E(G)} w(e)\, length(e) \\ &\leq \left(||\Omega||\, h^2\right)^{1-\alpha} \sum m_\beta(e^+)\, (w(e))^\alpha\, length(e) \end{aligned}$$

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It's just beginning to be born. I hope you can help out. Check out the Azimuth Project!