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## Poaching at the Multispecies Salon

### Introduction

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Animal others and multispecies familiars have been of concern to anthropologists at least since Lewis Henry Morgan's 1868 monograph *The American Beaver and His Works*. But, during the 20th century, such critters became marginalized in the anthropological imaginary. Biological anthropologists came to focus on the primate kin of *Homo sapiens*, while cultural anthropologists began to shine the spotlight almost exclusively on *anthropos* (Kirksey & Helmreich 2010). As the science wars of the 1990s generated serious fault lines in the discipline, many contended that the sciences of human biology had little to say to cultural analysis. The "sacred bundle" of the four-fields (cultural, biological, linguistic, and archaeological) began to come unwrapped (Segal & Yanagisako 2005).

An emerging cohort of "multispecies ethnographers" is reengaging with elements of biology. These scholars have started to bring creatures from the margins of the discipline – organisms often regarded as part of the landscape, as food for humans, as symbols – back into the crosshairs of ethnographic studies and cultural analysis (reviewed in Kirksey & Helmreich 2010). There has been a recent flurry of work about natural-cultural history that departs from scholarship in science studies (i.e., Haraway 1991; Latour 1993) and animal studies (i.e., Haraway 2003; Franklin 2007), to explore human entanglements with fungi, microbes, as well as charismatic megafauna and flora. The 2010 meetings of the Society of Cultural Anthropology – "Natureculture: Entangled Relations of Multiplicity" – was just one site where ethnographers began to revisit some of these foundational subjects of the discipline.

Multispecies ethnographers gathered in November 2010 during The Multispecies Salon – a series of panels, round tables, and events in art galleries that have been taking place biannually, on the margins of the Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), since 2006. The Multispecies Salon panel in New Orleans orbited around recently published and forthcoming texts by biological anthropologists, multispecies ethnographers, and scholars who represent kindred inter- and intra-disciplinary formations. We staged a lively discussion where authors-met-authors. Rather than conventional 15-minute papers about their own work, authors doubled as discussants, coming to the event with texts that they purloined from other participants. Panelists "poached" the writing of others.

## The Practice of Poaching

Poaching is an exercise in scholarly generosity. The Matsutake Worlds Research Group – a team of multispecies ethnographers who are using the “mycorrhizal life” of matsutake mushrooms as a figure for illuminating the workings of capital and power, and nature and culture – developed the practice of poaching as they experimented with modes of collaboration. They write:

What does it mean to “poach” another person’s paper, especially an unpublished one? We tend to rely on an individualistic model of innovation in anthropology, and the vast majority of papers and books by anthropologists are single-authored. We get credit for being the first person to coin a term or offer a new idea or theoretical framework in published form. If we use someone else’s published ideas, we are borrowing and must cite them. If we use someone’s unpublished ideas, we are stealing. How can we do collaborative work under the reign of such notions of intellectual property? (Matsutake Worlds 2010)

The Matsutake Worlds Research Group began to use poaching as a way to think outside such conventional models of knowledge production. Michel de Certeau speaks of “reading as poaching” (1984:165) in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. This assertion is part of de Certeau’s larger argument that consumption is not a passive act determined by systems of production. He suggests that reading is a foundational mode of modern consumption, and therefore, of everyday life. In contrast to the “private hunting reserves” (1984:171) cultivated by elite literati, who alone claim rights to inscribe meanings to texts or landscapes, reading as poaching allows one to “convert the text through reading and to ‘run it’ the way one runs traffic lights” (1984:176).

The English word “poach” is related to the French word *pocher*, to push or poke with a finger or pointed instrument, to pierce (Matsutake Worlds 2010). At the Multispecies Salon, panelists poached each other’s papers, like chefs “poach” pears, using red wine and honey to intensify and transform the flavor of the fruit.

## A Swarm of Poachers

A curatorial swarm – a team of six intellectuals – staged an art exhibit, The Multispecies Salon, alongside the 2010 meetings of the AAA in New Orleans. Swarming, a form of collective action modeled after honeybees, has been celebrated (by the likes of Hardt and Negri) as a form of radical politics: “In the swarm model suggested by animal societies... we see emerging new networks of political organizations... composed of a multitude of different creative agents” (2004:92). Over eighty artists, a multitude inspired by the tactics of swarming, participated in the Multispecies Salon. The Swarm Orbs, a group of knee-high spherical robots, were just one artwork that embodied these animal-machine becomings.<sup>1</sup> These kinetic sculptures were built “to explore the aesthetic possibilities and the emergent behavior of artificial systems” by a collective of self-proclaimed “tinkerers” – biologists, physicists, psychologists, computer scientists,

and artists – with a \$50,000 grant from the Black Rock Foundation.

As Eugene Thacker notes, the figure of the swarm has generated mutations in the body politic that are “structurally innovative but politically ambivalent” (Thacker 2004). Lately, Pentagon strategists have appropriated the tactics of swarming. Jake Kosek, an ethnographer whose work was offered up for poaching at the Multispecies Salon, studied the ambivalent nature of the swarm by deploying time-tested methods of multi-sited ethnography – “following a thing” (Marcus 1995). Focusing his study on a single species, the honeybee (*Apis mellifera*), Kosek followed figural and literal swarms from his own backyard hive in northern California, to military laboratories, and to the hinterlands of Afghanistan.

As U.S. military strategists replaced their AirLand Battle tactics with strategies of swarm warfare, Kosek began to study the zoological consequences of war (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1988:243). “Military understandings of the swarm are not solely metaphoric,” according to Kosek, “but make possible new assemblages of people and animals, new forms of social relations, and new technologies” (2010:665).

Kosek describes one of the most technologically sophisticated forms of these animal becomings on the frontlines of the Global War on Terror. Bush Administration officials began an assassination campaign with drones, killing alleged terrorists and civilian bystanders with these remotely-piloted aircraft. The Obama administration promoted these unmanned vehicles “as technical solutions to the legal, moral, and political conundrum surrounding targeted assassinations” (Kosek 2010:667). The first generation of drones did not fully actualize military dreams of swarming. John Sauter, a private contractor for the U.S. government, told Kosek that it was “an inefficient and laborious 20th century technological warfare practice of including humans in every aspect of technological warfare decision making” (quoted in Kosek 2010:667). He went on to say that “a central aspect of the future of warfare technology is to get networks of machines to operate as self-synchronized war fighting units that can act as complex adaptive systems... We want these machines to be fighting units that can operate as reconfigurable swarms that are less mechanical and more organic, less engineered and more grown.”

A new generation of swarming drones has been developed to respond to all sorts of sensory input from ground sensors, cameras, intelligence, satellite information, and data from other drones. Drones now can communicate information to each other directly and react to received information in real time without mediation by humans. One controller can manage a central drone and the other drones follow – adapting, reacting, and coordinating. The first coordinated swarm drone attacks took place in December 2009, in which five drones attacked alleged Taliban fighters with ten closely coordinated hellfire missiles, killing fifteen people (Kosek 2010:668).

Perhaps these flying machines embody the nightmares of Hugh Raffles: “There is the nightmare of fecundity and the nightmare of the multitude... There is the nightmare of knowing and the nightmare of non-recognition... Nightmare begets nightmare. Swarm begets swarm. Dreams beget dreams. Terror begets terror” (2010:201–203).

Artists and other interlopers poached ideas about swarming from Hugh Raffles and Jake Kosek at the Multispecies Salon. Even as the figure of the swarm was flourishing within the modern militarized state, the Swarm Orb collective imagined that

their robots were playfully reappropriating the tactics and technologies of war. At the AAA meetings, they were given license to roam around the book exhibition hall on the third floor of the New Orleans Sheraton. In open spaces, where there are no people and few obstacles, the Swarm Orbs operate like the Pentagon's swarming drones: a central orb, which is controlled by a human, serves as a mother hen which the other orbs follow. But the book hall, a space lined with tables showcasing the latest anthropological texts, left little room for coordinated maneuvering.

If the Pentagon drones are terrifying specters, able to strike at lightning speed in coordinated attacks, the Swarm Orbs seemed to struggle to get through the maze of booksellers and legs of conference attendees. One casual ethnographer from McGill University observed that they were moving like his own child, a toddler. The robots rolled around the room tentatively, hesitating as if they were uncertain about where to go next. Perhaps these behaviors by the Swarm Orbs more closely resemble the patterns of honeybees than the attack drones of the U.S. government. "In my experience," writes Jake Kosek, "swarms are often gentle, sometimes confused" (2010:652).

In the New Orleans Sheraton three "orb wranglers," carrying a retrofit Xbox video game controller, each operated a single robot on manual control. Mingling amongst the anthropologists, hiding the controllers behind their backs, these wranglers tried to become hidden specters animating the machines. The orbs and their spectral wranglers certainly provoked ambivalence – contradictory emotions and capricious corporeal responses. Some anthropologists entered into a flirtatious dance with the orbs, moving in concert with them – following the robots and letting themselves be followed. Others were clearly unnerved. One conference attendee kicked an orb after it got too close, sending it spinning across the room and prompting the wrangler to emerge from the crowd to check the expensive sculpture for damage.

Alongside these fleeting encounters in the conference hotel, the curators of the Multispecies Salon populated three nearby galleries with work by a multitude of artists. Here art became a companion and catalyst practice for thinking through and against nature-culture dichotomies (cf. Kirksey & Helmreich 2010). The galleries became an ethnographic "para-site" that "blurred the boundaries between the field site and the academic conference" (Marcus 2000:5). Para-sites were originally developed by George Marcus to help generate unexpected ways of speaking and thinking with "moderately empowered people" who are implicated in great social transformations. At the Multispecies Salon we staged a series of para-ethnographic encounters – involving biologists, chemists, community activists, and artists – to explore the themes of "Hope in Blasted Landscapes," "Edible Companions," and "Life in the Age of Biotechnology." We are currently writing up gleanings from these encounters in collaboration with a team of para-ethnographers.

Swarming was the tactic, rather than the theme, of the Multispecies Salon in New Orleans. If the first two Multispecies Salon events at AAA (in 2006 and 2008) showcased works in progress by the emerging cohort of multispecies ethnographers, the 2010 event was an opportunity for these scholars to further explore connections among their already-published work. Multispecies ethnographers are studying the host of organisms whose lives and deaths are linked to human social worlds, bringing animals, plants, fungi, and microbes from the realm of zoe or "bare life" that which is

killable, into the realm of the bios, biographical or political life (cf. Agamben 1998). The poached essays in this special submission to the Kroeber Anthropological Society give a sense of where this (re)emerging mode of anthropological inquiry is heading.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Video of the Swarm Orb can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vQmDsKDQeU>

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## **Eating Well With Others / Eating Others Well**

Poaching Thom van Dooren

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In his article, “Vultures and Their People in India: Equity and Entanglement in a Time of Extinctions,” Thom van Dooren (2011) nicely illustrates that eating is a nodal point of life and death. The practices of eating – who eats (or does not eat) what and how – shape the web of relations among various life forms on the Earth. In this web of relations, species create their niches and become the forms of life as we know them today. Of course, humans are not an exception.

Van Dooren explains that in India, people use cows for plowing, milking and carrying things, but do not eat cows because of the Hindu reverence for cattle. Once cattle die, vultures eat them, clean up the environment and reduce the chance of disease transmission (e.g. anthrax) to humans. Thus, he argues, “together, vultures, people, cattle and others co-produced a unique environment.” But he also points out that India’s vultures are facing extinction. In the past two decades, they have been indirectly poisoned by diclofenac, a drug used as a painkiller for cows. With the decrease of vulture populations, cattle corpses have accumulated. In turn, dog and rat populations have increased, as has the danger for humans of being attacked by dogs and anthrax bacteria.

I found the meat of this story to be anti-romanticism. There are two significant points regarding the politics, or microbiopolitics (Paxson 2008:17), of multispecies relations: First, the story makes us realize that humans have cultivated their niches by unintentional collaboration with cattle and vultures, but as soon as a gap is opened in the multispecies chain of eating and living, other organisms try to fill that space. The niche humans created with cattle and vultures put pressure on other living forms, such as dogs, rats or anthrax bacteria. Mutual niche creation is a fortunate relation for some species but not for others. Our lives are based on the sacrifice and patience of other species that are not participating actively in the current collaborative chain of eating and living. As humans, we are making choices about what multispecies worlds we most want to live in – in this case, whether we should live with anthrax or with vultures.

Ironically, we often only realize the disruption of the chain of eating and living when the most vulnerable people are pressed to change their practices in their struggle to eat and live. According to van Dooren, diclofenac was used by poor people who needed their weak and old cattle to continue working. It was also the poor who were most affected by the disappearance of the vultures, as they had a higher chance of contracting rabies from dogs and anthrax from cattle carcasses.

This story makes me re-evaluate the citizen's forest revitalization project, called the Matsutake Crusaders in Kyoto, Japan.<sup>1</sup> (There is no connection with Christianity in their activities. Many of their activities are meshed with Shinto-animism and Buddhism.) The group is led by a charismatic microbial ecologist, Dr. Fumihiko Yoshimura. Their aim is to return the matsutake to the forests. Matsutake is a wild mushroom that has been long treasured in Japan as an autumn delicacy, and as a blessing from the mountain deity. The historical records show that in ancient and medieval times, matsutake was used for ritual gift exchange among aristocrats, and the peasants had to present matsutake to their lords as tax in kind. The harvest of matsutake increased up until 1940s, but has decreased drastically since the 1960s (Arioka 1997).

Matsutake is a mycorrhizal mushroom that requires a specific symbiotic relationship with its host trees – in central Japan, mostly red pines. Unlike saprobic mushrooms, such as shiitake, matsutake does not have enzymes to digest dead trees. Thus, matsutake form structures called mycorrhiza, which literally means “fungus roots,” by entangling with pine roots. Through mycorrhiza, matsutake exchange nutrients with live trees. The mechanism of this symbiosis still poses “puzzles” for scientists (Suzuki 2005). No one has yet artificially cultivated this mushroom. Thus, matsutakes are only harvested in the “wild.”

However, the “wildness” of matsutake requires attention. Dr. Makoto Ogawa, a prominent matsutake scientist, suggests that matsutake has been “unintentionally cultivated” by humans (Ogawa 1991). The typical niche for red pines and matsutake in central Japan is *satoyama* (village forest), the secondary forest near human settlements. In *satoyama*, humans have selectively coppiced and cleaned the forest ground to use wood, fallen leaves and grasses for fuel and fertilizer. The dry, open and cleared forest ground with poor soil nutrition is an ideal habitat for matsutake. Because matsutake is a weak competitor among fungi and microbes, if the soil is rich enough to provide food for other species, matsutake cannot thrive. In *satoyama*, the human usage of the red pine forest temporarily held up forest succession. Together, humans, red pines and matsutake have co-produced a unique environment to live together.

Many argue that the main cause of the decline of matsutake in Japan was the “fuel revolution,” or the introduction of propane gas in the rural communities. Some forestry specialists say, “propane ate up matsutake” (Arioka 1997:264). From the late 1950s to early 1960s, the rapid industrialization and urbanization deteriorated agricultural communities. Youth left for the cities to become industrial workers. The elderly were left behind. People in rural agricultural communities began using propane to ease the burden of collecting wood for fuel. The *satoyama* forests were neglected and piled up with fallen leaves and trees. Forest succession began. Red pines were pressured by broad leaf trees; accordingly, other fungi and microbes dominated the soil, and pushed matsutake away from the forest ground. The disappearance of the mycorrhizal

relationship with matsutake further weakened pine trees and made them vulnerable to pine wilt disease. Rural areas were left with dense, unhealthy forests. They became easy targets for industrial development. Many were turned into golf courses, suburban communities, factory complexes or industrial waste dumps.

Concerned with this situation, Dr. Yoshimura made some agreements with several land owners near a suburban bed town community at the outskirts of Kyoto City. He mobilized citizens to return the forest back to the state in 1955, before the fuel revolution. On weekends, about thirty volunteers gather and work on the forest. When I first visited their activity site with my research collaborator Anna Tsing in 2006, they were uprooting cedars, *konara* (*quercus serrata*), and other broad leaf trees. It looked as if they were clear-cutting the forest instead of restoring it. Their activities put multispecies politics in your face – as humans we cast ourselves “with some ways of life and not others” (Haraway 2008: 284).

The majority of the volunteers are retired urban residents. Every week, the members were busy cutting trees, burning the diseased trees, raking leaves and transporting all the forest litter out of the forests. The mass of cut trees, under grass and leaves was enormous. In order to consume the biomass, the group started a small vegetable garden at their base camp, and used the forest litter for fertilizer. The more they worked, the more fertilizer they collected. Soon, they expanded the vegetable field, and planted tea trees, persimmons, mandarin oranges. They also created rice paddies. They recreated not only the red pine forest, but also a miniature landscape of the whole *satoyama* ecology. In order to consume the logs, they built a kiln, and invited a pottery artist who taught them how to make pottery themselves. They were also planning to use the logs for charcoal making.

With this small insertion of *satoyama* landscape, Dr. Yoshimura saw the gradual increase of small animals and insects, familiar creatures that had long been absent in the area. He sees the potential of bringing back biodiversity to the monotonous landscape of the bed town community. By revitalising the *satoyama* forest, Dr. Yoshimura worked to rewind time. He borrowed the charisma of matsutake and mobilized people to redo history. The members, who joined the group in order to see matsutake, became active agents of recreating an ecological habitat, not only for matsutake, but also for other species in the *satoyama* landscape.

With a lack of human intervention, the forest succession will progress and reach the “climax” forest stage, in which broad leaf trees, such as oaks and quercus, will dominate. The Matsutake Crusaders’ activities urge us to rethink the meaning of the climax forest. It seems as if Dr. Yoshimura advocates for another kind of climax forest, the 1955 *satoyama* that includes human beings as a part of the interspecies relations; humans can be a part of the picture of the climax forest if they do not suffer too much from human exceptionalism.

The Matsutake Crusaders’ activities resonate with the recent arguments in *satoyama* ecological conservation in Japan. For example, conservation ecologist Izumi Washitani writes,

The environmental stress, such as the proper level of human disturbance is necessary for enhancing the diversity of plant species. Because if there was

no stress, only the competitive species would monopolize the resource and create vegetation consisting of only a few dominant species. The disturbance allows to accommodate various species' various necessities and their unique ways of livelihood. Disturbance transforms the natural landscape that is occupied by a few privileged species into a system in which multiple species live together (Washitani 2001: 14-17, my translation).

This reminds me of Donna Haraway's caution regarding the introduced species. She argues:

The crucial question is not, Are they original and pure (natural in that sense)? But rather has to be, What do they contribute to the flourishing and health of the land and its critters (naturalcultural in that sense)? That question does not invite a disengaged "liberal" ethics or politics but requires examined lives that take risks to help the flourishing of some ways of getting on together and not others. (Haraway 2008:288).

The same caution applies to human interactions with other species. Here, when we think of the multispecies connectivities, eating is central. Because one's eating and living also means killing other species, directly or indirectly. Eating and living rely on the sacrifice of other species, not only animals but also plants, fungi, and microbes. Haraway points out,

There is no way to eat and not to kill, no way to eat and not to become with other mortal beings to whom we are accountable, no way to pretend innocence and transcendence or a final peace. ... Multispecies human and nonhuman ways of living and dying are at stake in practices of eating (Haraway 2008:295).

The highlight of the Crusaders' weekly activities is their lunch. Around noon, the volunteers scattered in different patches of mountains come back to the base camp. They cook a meal combining their own garden produce, fish or meat brought by the members, and some gifts sent from supporters. Some members said sharing these blessings from the fields, forests, rivers and ocean in the lunch festivity helped them to get energized and persevere with the hard physical work in the field. I learned from their website that in the fall of 2010, they found two matsutakes in their forest ("Matsutakeyama Fukkatsu Sasetai (Matsutake Jujigun) Katsudo Hokoku [Matsutake Forest Revival Troop (Matsutake Crusaders) Activity Report]"). They picked one and shared the slices in soup. Dr. Yoshimura was cautious to claim their success because these matsutakes may have emerged due to the unusual weather in the summer. He continued encouraging the members saying that if they take good care of the forests with respect, the mountain deity will give them matsutake as a blessing.

The matsutake meal embodies the multispecies swarm. In a small slice of the mushroom, there exist the traces of the lives of red pines, as well as those of lives of other species – plants, fungi, microbes and others – who sacrificed their lives and gave way to the red pine-matsutake habitat. The lives of these other species, transformed into

fertilizer for the vegetable garden, were further appreciated by the group's members in their own eating and living.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This research is a part of a larger collaborative project, Matsutake Worlds. The Matsutake World Research Group consists of Timothy Choy, Lieba Faier, Michael Hathaway, Miyako Inoue, Anna Tsing and myself. For more on the project, see Matsutake Worlds Research Group (2009a) and (2009b).

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## **Poaching Mushrooms: Lessons from the Matsutake Worlds Research Group**

Poaching Shiho Satsuka and the Matsutake Worlds Research Group

*Natasha Myers, York University*

It was just a couple of months ago in a Japanese restaurant in Toronto that I had the pleasure of savoring the woodland flavors of matsutake mushrooms over a fine meal with Shiho Satsuka. The mushrooms were served up two ways: thinly sliced and grilled, or “poached,” so to speak, in a steaming broth. My favorite was this second method. We waited as the mushrooms steeped in a tiny teapot. Shiho poured the tea into delicate little cups and the mushrooms’ aromatic cloud billowed forth. The richly scented tea carried memories of woodland walks in pine groves. I believe I swooned. This was my first foray into the worlds of the matsutake mushroom.

Shiho Satsuka is a member of the Matsutake Worlds Research Group. Her collaborators include Anna Tsing, Timothy Choy, Michael Hathaway, Leiba Faier, and Miyako Inoue. This research collective traces the rhizomatic relations that entangle this mushroom in intimate and unstable ecologies and economies. In Japan the fruiting body of this mushroom is fetishized as both a delicacy and a monetary form. As the matsutake harvest in Japan declines with a changing landscape of resource use, the global market in matsutake grows. These matsutake researchers show us how matsutake are caught between the interests of transnational markets and expert discourses of forest management; how its fibrous body is pulled between vernaculars of scientists and the local and highly secretive knowledge of foragers; and how its ecologies are subject both to intensive efforts aimed at protection and simultaneous efforts to expand zones for harvest.

The feature of this project that I want to “poach” for my own work is a mode of attention; specifically an attention to what these matsutake mushrooms teach their ethnographers. Indeed, the matsutake have entangled this collective of ethnographers in their rhizomatic net. Once caught together, they have learned how to experiment with ways of seeing collectively, and this has refigured and refined their modes of attention. Theirs becomes a collaborative ethnographic project that takes seriously its collaborations with matsutake.

I am moved by the multivocality of this collaboration. This collective generates writing that does not seek a homogenous form. The collective multiplies its voices and harmonizes its modes of attention and sites to find what Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2011) might call “matters of care.” And while some of its members write alone, this larger collaboration includes more intimate minglings. For example, Shiho Satsuka and Tim Choy collect up their ethnographic insights under the pseudonym “Mogu, Mogu.” In China this translates as “mushroom” twice over while in Japan the phrase registers the kind of satisfaction in the belly one feels when they say “yum, yum.”

So how does this collective as a whole learn how to see, feel, taste, and smell, together? Donna Haraway (1997) and Karen Barad (2007) both theorize the concept of “diffraction,” which is a technique used in research on the physics of light and the chemical structure of materials. Though it may seem to be worlds away, diffraction is a

concept and a technique that can be extended to the Matsutake Worlds Research Group to think through the ways that they craft their interpretive practice. There is a practice that I would call diffractive anthropology. As Haraway and Barad show us, a diffraction pattern is produced when light of a certain wavelength is passed through materials whose physical properties can scatter that light. These diffraction patterns can be used to generate models of the configuration of such materials. But this is challenging work because once it has been scattered by an object, this light is not so readily focused. Diffraction patterns do not generate mirror image reflections of their objects and no single diffraction pattern can tell the whole story of that material. Direct representation is impossible.

Ways of seeing, however, can be improvised and cobbled together. Each diffraction pattern does offer salient clues that can be gathered up to interpret an object; this is because each spot in a diffraction pattern carries traces of all the relations that constitute the structure of the material. What I have learned by tracking scientists who use X-ray diffraction techniques to generate probable models of complex molecules like proteins is that diffraction techniques require engaging multidimensional objects from many different angles and through many different modes of attention (see Myers 2008). Diffraction patterns must be multiplied, overlaid, stitched together, and interpreted through other patterns. What results are tentative descriptions of how complex phenomena hang together. There is no direct visualization of any object; all seeing is a practice of *seeing with*.

I see the Matsutake ethnographers engaging in a kind of diffractive practice that takes as its object the social, material, affective, and economic relations that constitute the distributed flesh of the matsutake mushroom. Their method requires that they multiply their ways of seeing and learn how to read each other's diffraction patterns. In so doing, each member learns anew how to interpret relations in their field sites by trying on the light-beams of their collaborators' theories, concepts, and perceptions. With a shared object they learn to teach each other how to see, feel, smell, track, and taste matsutake well. This intersubjective perception enriches their sensory dexterities so that they can learn to – in Latour's (2004) sense of the term – “articulate” differences, and so hone their ethnographic practice. This is a project geared as much toward ethnographic training and retraining as it is toward primary research. Through this process they learn to thicken and amplify the relations that constitute the phenomena they care about.

The rhizomatic “beings and doings” of these mushrooms – to use Astrid Schrader's (2010) terms – push ethnographers to expand the range of nonhuman life forms, forms of life, and livelihoods that must be tracked in any multispecies ethnography. I am currently embarking on a new project that tracks artists and scientists whose experimental forms of life turn tropically around plant life (Myers 2010). The Matsutake Worlds research group reminds me that I need to learn how to see, feel, and sense plant worlds *with others*. This project takes collaboration seriously. In addition to forming a Plant Studies Collaboratory with anthropologists, historians, and other scholars, I am embarking on collaborations with artists and scientists who experiment with plant sensoria. The Matsutake researchers also inspire me to follow through the tangled routes of plants' subterranean microrhizal collaborations with fungi, and their active and intimate associations with other plants, and with insects, birds and plant-

loving herbivores. Indeed this research collective reminds me that any collaboratory must entangle an entire ecology of inquiries so as to multiply modes of attention and “matters of care” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2010).

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## **Conservation is Our Government Now**

Poaching Paige West

*Eben Kirksey, CUNY Graduate Center*

A multispecies *zeitgeist* is sweeping anthropology. A central reference point for this lively conversation is a question that was first posed by Donna Haraway: “what counts as nature, for whom, and at what cost?” (1997: 104). Paige West speaks to this question – exploring how the idea of nature was torqued during encounters among New Guinea highlanders, biologists, and other foreign ecophiles.

West illustrates how a hybrid environmental ethics was forged among competing political, economic, and symbolic systems. She offers us intimate portraits of long-distance, interspecies love. Describing photographer David Gillison’s affair with the Bird of Paradise, she unravels a fetish logic that separates particular species from ecosystems and explores how commodification extracts nature from social relations. Chronicling ambivalent emotions – desire, mourning, and anxiety – she opens a window into the affective dimensions of trans-cultural and multispecies contact zones (West 2006: 131-134).

Set in the Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area, a place that was formed amidst countervailing institutional agendas and jockeying by diverse agents, this ethnography attends to how conservation was enacted amidst material and social inequalities. Some residents of Maimafu, a village in the Management Area where West conducted her fieldwork, engaged with environmentalists in hopes of chasing after the elusive idea of development. Even as some men from Maimafu reaped modest benefits from these social relations with foreigners, as they gained access to symbolic capital and modest sums of money, this conservation project initially did not directly benefit many women. It reinforced local regimes of patriarchy.

At a pivotal moment in the book, West describes a Papuan woman named Nanasuanna – one of her trusted interlocutors – who confronted the conservationists. She stood up at a yearly meeting with visiting foreign and Papuan NGO workers, waiting for the assembled men to recognize her turn to speak. After the director of the conservation organization group asked “Wife of Nelson, do you have something to say?”, Nanasuanna began an impassioned speech: “We women are the backbone of the community. We are the backbone of life. You men tell us that we do not know things. You tell us that we know nothing. But we do. We know. We know gardens. We know houses. We know children. We know how to work. We know how to make a net bag... These are the things that make life possible” (2006: 122). This speech marked a watershed event in Maimafu village. Following this encounter, women were given the opportunity to have a formal role in the Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area. Nanasuanna was thus able to partially articulate her visions of life and livelihood to an institution of environmental governmentality, using outsiders to gain traction within local regimes of social inequality.

The moment of political electricity during Nanasuanna’s speech-in-action at the conservation meeting generated emergent collaborations and novel articulations. Poaching this text – transforming its meaning, turning it to my own ends (Certeau 1998, Matsutake Worlds 2010) – I found Nanasuanna speaking to freedom dreams on the other half of the island of New Guinea, across the border in West Papua. Following an invasion by the Indonesian military in December 1961, indigenous West Papuans have been told that they do not know things – that only outsiders have authoritative knowledge of development, religion, and modernity; that they do not know how to govern themselves. In the face of this symbolic violence, and ongoing state violence, West Papuans are struggling to actualize hybrid ideals about freedom – visions of national independence and dreams of post-national economic justice (Kirksey in press).

At certain historical junctures, West Papua’s political struggle became an arboreal rhizome of sorts, like the banyan tree – the symbol of a dominant Indonesian political party (Lowe, this volume). This movement for justice and rights climbed up and around the architecture of domination – encircling Indonesian institutions, multinational corporations, as well as transnational organizations bent on governmentality and control.

Women form the backbone of human life in New Guinea – both in the independent country of Papua New Guinea and the emerging nation of West Papua. As the nationalist movement in West Papua approached a climax in the early 21st century, as this figural banyan seemed ready to choke off the host tree of Indonesian domination, the women of New Guinea were still maneuvering within pervasive male-dominated

institutions, making rhizomorphic articulations.

The emergent connections enabled by Nanasuanna's speech at the meeting of conservationists, certainly mirror strategies of political engagement used by indigenous West Papuans. Her words also recall Antonio Gramsci's ideas about the "war of position," the open-ended struggle that is ever-present in situations of hegemony. Gramsci writes of "molecular changes which in fact progressively modify the pre-existing composition of forces, and hence become the matrix of new changes" (2003: 108).

West's writing about the microprocesses of conservation practice in Maimafu village, in concert with her insights about ecofetishism and the commodification of nature, offers a framework for thinking about human agents who enlist particular species in regimes of biopolitical control. This book places conservation squarely within a matrix of ecological forces and social relations. Rather than point toward a utopic future, an imagined moment of naturalcultural harmony, West gives us thick description of molecular changes in the historical present. Perhaps schemes to protect nature in the global south will always be implicated in post-colonial, and neo-imperial, power dynamics. Perhaps ecosystems will always contain unloved others, creatures that escape regimes of cultivation and care (Rose and van Dooren 2011). Nonetheless, West offers visions of modest biocultural hope – *la lucha continua* with a multifaceted war of position to make conservation projects more just and equitable. Her work has prompted me to rearticulate the question from Donna Haraway that opened this short essay: Which species are protected, for whom, and at what cost?

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## Where Banyan Meets Cloud

Poaching Eben Kirksey

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“By infusing her paper with these ideas, he poached it like people “poach” pears, using red wine and honey to intensify and transform the flavor of the fruit.”

- Multispecies website

Having a chance to “poach” Eben Kirksey’s paper, “From Rhizome to Banyan” from his forthcoming book *Freedom in Entangled Worlds* (Duke), is a distinct honor. Having thus far read two chapters and an annotated table of contents, I observe that this is an extraordinary and also risk laden piece of fieldwork. In 1950, Yale anthropologist Raymond Kennedy was shot on the road between Bandung and Yogyakarta by five men in military dress. This specter hangs over all of those who have done critical research in Indonesia, but nowhere more so than in Indonesian Papua. Papua is a highly militarized province, far from world media attention, and closely guarded by the Indonesian military defending Indonesian (and American!) state interests in Indonesia’s rich Grasberg gold mine, the richest gold mine in the world. Likewise traveling through the halls of British Petroleum, the US Congress, and the National Security Archives entails its own unique risks, and Kirksey’s is a remarkable set of field site articulations.

What I was curious about in reading Eben’s paper through mine is the process we both engage in, of poaching (in the other sense of illicitly taking) nature for the benefit of culture. Critiquing Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome, Eben writes of the “banyan,” Sukarno’s symbol for the Golkar party, reworked by Suharto as a symbol of the regime and the developmentalist state, and then understood by the Indonesian people as a site under which nothing can fruitfully grow. Beginning life as a deposit of feces and seeds, the banyan contains both putrefaction and emergence, and Eben deploys it usefully as a metaphor for the contaminated politics of possibility of Papuan resistance fighter and government collaborator Theys Eluay.

Likewise, I propose the “viral cloud” as a metaphor for the uncertainty of influenza events in the Indonesian H5N1 outbreak (Lowe 2010). Based on the presence of different genomes found in individual influenza viruses, the viral cloud stands in for the “cluster of different biosocialities at play and at work in the H5N1 Influenza epidemic in Indonesia.” The cloud indicates the political fog of viral security where good and evil, possibility and dead end, are opaque.

In raiding nature to make cultural meaning, we are looking to nature for new approaches to political theory, in Eben’s case and mine each seeking spaces of multispecies, natural/cultural hope within always already compromised political spaces and life chances. Contra 1990s raised-fist anthropology or 1970s ecology, we are not seeking a politically utopian biosocial climax community, but rather how to exist within a post-socialist, climate changed, war infested, species reduced, peak oiled, and thoroughly invaded and securitized world, which never-the-less continues to grow and emit possibilities for hopeful natural/cultural configurations.

Eben writes that “the particulars of banyan biology offer a novel perspective

on revolutionary political projects – displacing dominant ways of understanding ‘resistance’ with a figure that illustrates principles of collaborative engagement.” But also cloudy uncertainty, since the fig may either strangle or provide sweet fruit.

Following scientists in action, and such, has taught cultural theorists to pay attention to the details of the biological as never before, and allowed us to be more open, like our cousins in biological anthropology, to the obvious biological nature of the human. But is the reverse then true, that nature, in the form of cloud or banyan, is also human? Is this practice of raiding nature for metaphor so easily accomplished because the relationship is more than metaphorical? Could nature also be part human? Not in the sense that nature is given meaning or contested by humans, but in the sense that nature/cultures are once more not divisible when it comes to patterns for contestation, occlusion, or possibility?

Eben’s banyan reminds me of another banyan in the courtyard of the cultural studies program at Sanata Dharma University in Yogyakarta where I have taught for the past two years. This banyan, people told me with pride, was planted by Sukarno. It came to represent, not the strangulation of Suharto’s Golkar party, but the tenacity of Sukarnoist dreams during the Suharto period, and the revival of those freedom dreams after Suharto. This banyan was an umbrella under which, in 2008 and 2009, former accused Communists would read their work, and where critical and politically innovative dramatic performances would take place. It is here where banyan meets cloud, that even the metaphor can be rescripted to produce unexpected meanings.

While Eben’s banyan is both domination and subversion, growing down toward the dirty but nourishing soil of history and up toward the light of future possibilities, the viral cloud suggests that genomic-cum-social pasts and presents are tied to but do not contain the future for either humans, influenza viruses, or metaphors. The banyan and the cloud suggest unexpected connections, identities, and existences; new relations between pessimism and optimism; and finally, a chance to use metaphor and the arts, rather than rational calculation, to prepare for our future.

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## Fermenting Ethics

Poaching Heather Paxson

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Heather Paxson's article, "Post-Pasteurian Cultures: The Microbiopolitics of Raw-Milk Cheese in the United States" (Paxton 2008) introduces the concept of *microbiopolitics* through an ethnography of raw-milk cheese cultures in the U.S. and abroad. Playing off of Foucault's concept of *biopolitics*, the governance of populations through the subjugation of bodies (Foucault 1978), Paxson uses the micro-biopolitics of raw milk cheese to illustrate the way in which "dissent over how to live with microorganisms reflects disagreement about how humans ought live with one another" (2008:16). Following Pasteur's discovery of microorganisms, biopolitics became in part a matter of finding a "pure relationship" between humans that could exclude microbial agency (Latour 1988). Although Foucault introduced biopolitics in *The History of Sexuality*, he suggested that he could have just as well written a genealogy of food, and so it is fitting that a post-Pasteurian microbiopolitics is thus a matter of finding a right relationship between humans and microbes through the literal and figurative fermentation of food cultures (Zwart 2000). As an ethnography of new-yet-ancient methods of cheese making, Paxson poses an unresolved challenge – what will a right relationship look like?

Raw milk contains a diversity of microorganisms, some good for making cheese, others not very good for human alimentary systems. Cheese-making requires fostering conditions in which preferred microbial cultures can flourish and produce the desired type of cheese. Ancient methods of cheese making made use of regional microbial cultures embedded in the walls of cheese houses and caves to inoculate milk. Following Pasteur's introduction of sterilization techniques to cheese making in 1863, milk is often heated to kill all resident bacteria in milk, whether pathogenic or not. In the United States, federal regulations require raw milk cheese to be differently classed, with the result that young raw milk cheese is illegal to sell. Recent coalitions of foodies, farmers, conservative Christians, and libertarians have coalesced around resistance to these regulations, arguing that raw milk cheese is safer, healthier, and more delectable than the dominant pasteurized milk cultures.

These coalitions are at the center of a potential shift in what Paxson calls microbiopolitics, "the recognition and management, governmental and grassroots, of human encounters with the vital organismic agencies of bacteria, viruses, and fungi" (2008:18). Where Pasteurian ontological politics identifies microbial life as a threat to be rationally managed by the government for the health of consumer-citizens, the new post-Pasteurian ontological politics claims that microbes are essential allies in the pursuit of human well-being, and they form a nexus around which right relations between farmer, land, animal, and eater must be constructed. Paxson writes that "microbiopolitically, raw-milk cheese might be forwarded as a biotechnology for regionalism or, in more contemporary argot, for localism, the expression of a people's connection to a piece of land" (26).

Paxson cites the now-oft-cited statistic that 90% of the genetic material in "us" is "not us," but rather belongs to "our" microbiome. Despite being a committed post-

Pasteurian, no matter how many times I hear this I still experience a little ontological whiplash. Much like a fine cheese, we have a microbial rind holding us together. If Paxson is preparing a book from this project, I strongly suggest she title it “We Have Never Been Eukaryotes.” Since this piece was published in 2008, the concept of our microbiome appears to be rapidly inoculating scientific practices and popular cultures. Yet, it is not clear what we will make of post-Pasteurian life. When the microbiome shows up in the science news, you will see a gesture toward this whiplash, but it is quickly subverted by the reductionistic impulses of biomedicine – will we solve obesity by manipulating gut bacteria? Will microbial ecologies fill in the causal gaps in the story of human diversity that human genome projects have failed to explain? These questions are unfortunate because they are in concert with the worst of our biotechnological impulses. When we are faced with worldly problems our impulse is to strip away the world in search of a solution – if we have unfriendly bacteria in our cheese, the solution is to wage war on all bacteria. Paxson’s work is a welcome corrective to this impulse because she invites us to dwell with the biopolitics of the post-Pasteurian shift – how will we organize a good life with our tiny messmates?

Importantly, the good life Paxson gestures toward does not look *pre*-Pasteurian. There is no room for pretending that humans can easily get along with all microbial life in all forms. What makes the subjects of her ethnography post-Pasteurian is that their practices are grounded in an onto-ethico-epistemology of the fundamental relationality of micro- and macro-lives – there is no “me” without “we,” and most of the time the “we” is so small that we cannot see it and so multiple that we cannot count it. As with most farmers, these commitments are deeply practical and don’t leave much space for sentimentality: there are procedures for keeping one’s shoes clean, there are microbial cultures imported from France, and there are thoroughly empirical claims about cholesterol, digestion and immune system functions. This, I suggest, is the purpose of multi-species ethnography – figuring out how to re-narrate life on earth with a fidelity to interdependence, but without the pretense that a good life can exist without a little sanitation. And as a philosopher among anthropologists, I would also like to insist on the ethical dimension of this project. As María Puig de la Bellacasa argues in the context of permaculture farming, the ethics of food technoscience cannot be a matter of searching for stable norms managed by humans alone but must be understood as constructing an alter-biopolitics of new material configurations that can sustain the co-flourishing of humans and non-humans alike (Puig de la Bellacasa 2010). Pasteurian biopolitics survives amidst an ethos of sterilization, a denial of the rind that holds us together. This alter-biopolitics must learn to address questions about who lives and dies once that denial is subverted. What we see in all of these multispecies narratives, is that there is no neutrality when the “we” that is the “me” constitutes our bodies. We all have stakes in who is on our boots and whose fingers poke holes in our cheese.

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## **“We Both Wait Together”**

Poaching Agustin Fuentes

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Poachers, whether of animals or of papers, must first themselves be captured by their prey, attached and drawn to it. Some papers capture you slowly, through a diffuse and pervasive intoxication; others capture you swiftly and instantly, springing a trap in one paragraph or even one sentence. In the case of Agustin Fuentes’ paper “Naturalcultural Encounters in Bali” (2010), I can pinpoint the precise moment when the trap was sprung and I became utterly captured by his account of Balinese temple macaques and their humans. The line comes from a Balinese bus driver sitting outside a temple on a slow tourist day. Speaking of the macaques who are sitting nearby, enjoying the same shade, the driver says: “They are here, we are here, as long as they don’t damage the (side) mirrors on my minivan, we both wait together” (2010:612). What are they waiting for? Fuentes quotes a young tour guide in another temple: “We are both waiting for the tourists, we’ll both go to work soon” (612).

Fuentes’ paper describes interspecies interactions between macaques and humans in Bali from a novel and methodologically experimental perspective: himself a primatologist by training, Fuentes brings together the insights of primatology and socio-cultural anthropology in order to map the multiple ways in which the biological, social, epidemiological, economic, cultural, and geographic worlds of these two primate species intersect and interface. His paper describes Balinese temples as spaces of encounter for the multiple and diversely aligned (or misaligned) interests of macaques, local ritual specialists, farmers, primatologists, and tourists. A similarly entangled naturalcultural world is the focus of my own ongoing ethnography of a research station in the South African Kalahari (Candea 2010): it involves not macaques but meerkats, not temple specialists engaged in otherworldly macaque-mediated transactions, but behavioral biologists, who track the meerkats in search of insights about the evolution of cooperation or altruism. In other respects, our accounts resonate: in the Kalahari, as in Bali, there are tourists who are in search of an authentic interspecies encounter and who, by local standards, seem to “get it wrong,” just as there are local farmers who

are happy with a clearly demarcated boundary, and politely uninterested coexistence with the macaques and meerkats, respectively. Unlike Fuentes, however, I am coming to this natural-cultural, scientific-social tangle from a social-cultural anthropological background. It is almost as if Fuentes and I were turning opposite corners to behold the same scene. Almost, but not quite – for the symmetry of that metaphor belies a subtle but important difference in our perspectives. Interdisciplinarity is part of the method in Fuentes' account; it is part of the ethnography in mine. It is this asymmetry between our accounts that forms the ferment, the productive surplus which this “poach” is trying to capture.

Take for instance this image of macaques and tour guides waiting together to go to work on the tourists. It struck me because of its resonance with another instance of waiting together, drawn from my own fieldwork. Every morning before sunrise, I would walk with one of the volunteer meerkat researchers to the burrow where a particular meerkat group had spent the night. Then, the volunteer and I would sit and wait quietly for the sun to rise and the meerkats to emerge from their burrow, groggy and skittish, so we could go to work.

These two ethnographic vignettes of waiting together form a slightly odd pair. Not unlike the tour guides and the macaques themselves, the two situations clearly have some things in common, but the differences between them are just as striking. On the one hand, both cases involve a triangular relationship, in which two parties share a focus on an absent third party. In both cases, there are humans and non-humans involved, and in both cases, the two parties waiting together are in a relationship of significant otherness, if I may poach Donna Haraway's phrase (Haraway 2003), a relationship that involves and marks a difference. But in the first case the difference is inter-specific (macaques and human tour-guides, waiting for human tourists), while in the second, the difference is interdisciplinary: a biologist and a social anthropologist, waiting for the meerkats. The question is, what difference does this difference between differences make?

First of all, asking about differences between interspecific and interdisciplinary differences reveals a particularly neat parallel *within* Fuentes' paper: a correspondence between the interspecies encounters the paper describes, and the *interdisciplinary* tools which are used to describe them. In order to study interspecies encounters, Fuentes deploys and expands the biological concept of niche construction to great effect (Fuentes 2010:603-605 and *passim*). Macaques and humans co-construct a natural-cultural niche, which involves gifts and thefts of food, but also various affective, economic and epidemiological flows. Simultaneously, Fuentes is making his own move of *interdisciplinary* niche construction. The paper, alongside a number of Fuentes's other recent publications, exemplifies and partakes in the construction of a new interdisciplinary space named “ethnoprimatology,” which “attempts to integrate models of behavioral and ecological data collection from primatology, ethnographic practice (formal and informal) from social anthropology, and demographic, sociostructural and community-based assessments from geography, sociology, and a broader anthropology” (2010:601).

Reading together, as I am doing here, the interspecies and interdisciplinary aspects of the paper produces unexpected interpolations, as questions and images bleed over from one to the other. For instance, in talking about interspecies niche construction,

Fuentes highlights the multiplicity of possible relations, ranging from affection to violence: he describes affectionate temple workers some of whom encounter macaques as emissaries of spiritual forces, local farmers who tolerate macaques but expect them to respect private property and will attack them if they raid crops. He also describes tourists who mistakenly believe themselves to be in a harmonious interspecies “relationship of touching and intermingling with fellow primates” (613), and can pay the price for their error, such as the Swiss woman who after taking a macaque baby from its mother for a quick interspecies cuddle ended up with 140 stitches.

One could ask symmetrical questions of the interdisciplinary project outlined in the paper. The idea of an integrated interdisciplinary approach maps most directly onto the theologically harmonious relationship between temple workers and macaques. But what is the interdisciplinary equivalent of the farmer’s neatly drawn and policed boundaries, of crop raiding and retaliation? I am thinking here of Fuentes’ own run-ins with unsympathetic reviewers who asked, “Where is the science?” (602). What might be the interdisciplinary equivalent of the Swiss tourist’s over-familiarity, of thinking one is in a harmonious “relationship of touching and intermingling” when one is in fact just an interloper into an unfamiliar world? As a social-cultural anthropologist blundering in a post-doctoral way into the issues and concerns of Science and Technology Studies (STS) and the philosophy of science, I sometimes fear it is only a matter of time before I inadvertently grab someone’s baby and get my 140 stitches.

And what, to return to my initial example, might be the interdisciplinary equivalent of “waiting with?” In order to answer this question, I will take a detour through Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s kinship mnemonic for distinguishing between western mononaturalism and the ontological orientation he describes as amerindian perspectivism (2004; 1998). Viveiros de Castro reflects on an equivocation around the Cashinahua term *txai*. In his example, Brazilian visitors whom the Cashinahua addressed as *txai* correctly identified that the word expressed an emphatic sense of welcome through the idiom of kinship, and consequently translated it as “brother.” As Viveiros de Castro notes, however, *txai* means anything but brother: it means something more like “brother-in-law,” referring to “any man whose sister ego treats as an equivalent to his wife” (2004:17). Viveiros de Castro expands on this contrast: Western mononaturalism is epitomised by the dictum that all men are brothers, related by their common biological or at least metaphorical tie to a common ancestor. Evolutionary biology underwrites and expands this way of thinking relationship well beyond the human, tracing the biological relatedness of life forms. By contrast, Viveiros de Castro argues that amerindian perspectivism is epitomized by the thought that all men are not brothers but cross-cousins, or potential brothers-in-law:

As a general model of relationship, the brother-in-law connection appears as a cross connection with a mediating term, which is seen in diametrically opposite ways by the two poles of the relation: my sister is your wife and/or vice-versa. Here, the parties involved find themselves united by that which divides them, linked by that which separates them (Strathern 1992:99-100). My relation with my brother-in-law is based on my being in *another* kind of relation to his relation with my sister or my wife (Viveiros de Castro 2004:18-19).

So where does this leave our macaques, tourists and meerkats? Well, one might say, “waiting with” is also a relation based on being in another kind of relation to a third term: the macaques and the tour guides are in a very different relationship to the tourists, just as I and the volunteer are in a very different relationship to the meerkats. Which is partly why “waiting together” is a very odd and provisional kind of relationship. It is “inter-patient,” rather than straightforwardly “inter-active” (Candea 2010:249).

There is a model of harmonious interdisciplinarity which flows from the mononaturalist mold: humans and alloprimates are biological brothers, and this is what enables anthropologists and primatologists to be brothers too: in this story, we, of course, are the younger brothers, who inherit the slightly murky terrain of the socio-cultural, while our elder biologist brothers build a solid house on nature. By contrast, a model of interdisciplinarity as “waiting together” would stress the divisions at the heart of what unites us. In sum, I am suggesting that Agustin Fuentes’ article, poached in meerkat juice and amerindian perspectivism, might end up tasting like a manifesto for an inter-patient interdisciplinarity.

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## Bear Story

Poaching Jacob Metcalf

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Jake Metcalf's "Intimacy without Proximity: Encountering Grizzlies as a Companion Species," examines not only how specific human-bear encounters have proceeded, but also asks us to consider how such encounters *should* proceed. They should proceed, he argues, with an aliveness to bearish difference, to the way human-bear relations diffract and produce relatings, with neither actor fully determinate in form or attitude before inter- or intra-action. He gives us a sympathetic but careful reading of Timothy Treadwell, the loner in Alaska made famous in Werner Herzog's 2005 film *Grizzly Man*, and he also goes after Herzog's incuriosity about bears, or, rather, his false hope to find something "human" in them.

In reading this paper, I kept returning to Donna Haraway's notion of "encounter-value" in *When Species Meet*, of which she writes, "encounter value is about relationships among a motley array of lively beings, in which commerce and consciousness, evolution and bioengineering, and ethics and utilities are all in play. I am especially interested here in 'encounters' that involve, in a non-trivial and hard-to-characterize way, subjects of different biological species" (Haraway 2008:46).

What *is* encounter – or, better, what is *value* – in Metcalf's account? It is perhaps in accounting – as Metcalf says, "I am called to offer an accounting for the long history of stories in which humans, bears, origins gods, and sexuality are entangled" (Metcalf 2008: 117). He then gives us a number of bear stories.

Joining this strategy, here is another bear story, from an old 1940s recording salvaged from a thrift store by a group of sound artists dedicated to retrieving audio ephemera from the twentieth century. The recording is of a joke, and it was meant for friends of its teller, Everett Steiner:

Ladies and gentlemen, you'll now hear the bear story, by Everett Steiner. A Rocky Mountain hunter met a bear in a level trail on a mountainside with a cliff on one hand and a perpendicular precipice on the other. This bear hunter can neither dodge to the right nor to the left. There is no friendly tree near. His only weapon is his knife and all of his wit to fight. It was to be the bear fight of his life. He knelt down and made this prayer: "Oh Lord, I am now 40 years of age. I have never prayed to thee before in all my life. I'm not like the Methodist and the Baptist, who are constantly worrying thee with their little cares. All I have to say is if you're not on my side, don't be on the bear's side, but lay low and say nothing and see the biggest bear fight you ever read about" (on Fay and Simon 2002).

While in Everett Steiner's Bear Story, we hear the usual stereotype of bears and humans as *a priori* antagonists, I want to draw attention to a curlicue in the story. In this tale, God is asked to "lay low." So – a question: How does God or how do gods lay low in our multispecies stories? And what would happen if, as with Dipesh Chakrabarty,

we asked for a genre of history – of naturalcultural history – that made room for the supernatural?

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