The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography

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Review by Georgia James on Kirksey and Helmreich's work

What does it mean to look at multispecies in research?

- “A project allied with Eduardo Kohn’s “anthropology of life”—’an anthropology that is not just confined to the human but is concerned with the effects of our entanglements with other kinds of living selves’ (2007:4)- multispecies ethnography centers on how a multitude of organisms’ livelihoods shape and are shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces.”

- “Animals, plants, fungi, and microbes”(pp. 545).

Human Exceptionalism

- Haraway tells us to appreciate the “foolishness of human exceptionalism” (pp. 456).

- What of the academics and pattern in this research area?

Anthropos

- "*Anthropos* – the ethical and reasoning being that Enlightenment Europeans conjured as their inheritance from Classical Greece (Herzfeld 2002 pp. 548)".

- "calling for cultural anthropologists to unbind themselves from the objects and epistemologies of biological anthropology" (pp. 548).

The Anthropocene

Creutzen and Stoermer (pp. 549)

- “two hundred years ago, around the time the steam engine was invented, when human activity ‘gradually grew into a significant geological, morphological force” (2000:17).”
- “Crutzen and Stoermer argue that the Holocene has now phased into the Anthropocene”.
- “In this frame of reference, Anthropos has become an ambivalent figure, possessed of an agency scaled up to embrace and endanger the whole planet .”

“Henry Morgan’s 1868 *The American Beaver and His Works.*” (pp. 549)

A bit of history

- “Gregory Bateson”
  - “human-dolphin communication (Bateson 1972, 1979). His theory of play and fantasy, and criteria of mental processes, broke down essentialized differences between human and nonhuman minds (Bateson 1972)” (pp. 550)

- Feminist scholars “were among the first to realize that the discipline should turn its attention to the making and remaking of biological knowledge and substance, particularly as it impinged on notions of relatedness” (pp. 550)

The Voice

- “Latour sees parallels between politicians who speak for other people and biologists who speak for nonhumans (2004)”.

- “Non-human is like non-white” (Star, 2008).

(Panther cap Mushroom, 2022)

The Multispecies Salon

- “sought to blur the line between ecoart and bioart” (pp. 557)
- “One installation featured milk cartons and junk mail picturing missing amphibians in the place of missing children – creatures such as the golden toad of Monte Verde, Costa Rica, now presumed extinct. The piece asked, ‘Have you seen me?’”. (pp. 557)

(The First Transgenic Rabbits, 2013)

Caitlin Berrigan

+Berrigan has Hepatitis C.

+Blood and the dandelion for fertilizer.

+“Enacting a relation of shared suffering, of mutual care and violence (cf. Haraway 2008)” (pp. 559)

(Berrigan, 2010)

Mix up

- *Wolbachia* transform the bodies and the reproductive dynamics of their invert hosts. When female wasps of certain species are infected with the bacterium they become parthenogenic – meaning they no longer need to have sex with males to produce viable offspring. *Wolbachia* perform a sex-bending trick in some crustaceans and in at least one insect species – changing genetic males into reproductively viable females." (pp. 559)

- "Oncomouse™, a patented organism hosting human breast cancer genes (Haraway 1997)" (pp. 559)

- "Human genes are being incorporated into a diversity of common laboratory organisms – from rats and mice, to fruit flies, to *Escherichia coli*, to nematode worms." (pp. 559)

Marnia Johnston

- "The paranoia of the U.S. was kind of a swarm"

- "CIA attention, and later FBI Weapons of Mass Destruction Directorate, left a chilling effect on Johnston's bioart. Turned back to ceramics." (pp. 561)

- "Fearing their own kin, and suspicious of the motives of others, Paranoia bugs are always on the lookout – to make sure they don't get eaten." (pp. 561)

(Johnston, 2010)

Positives and Negatives of Multispecies Study

- Positives:
  - Environmental positives.
  - It fights biological prejudices.
  - Combination of disciplines.
- Negatives:
  - “homo sapien” guilt?
  - Participant rights?

Some Questions to Think About

- Should Anthropos be the verbiage to express anthropology anymore?
- If human exceptionalism is finally dying, how do the separations between disciplines change?
- What is human? If there are multispecies genes, how can we separate anything, is everything a part of another?

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