

Aion (1959), which is a history of western understandings of Selfhood, Jung cites the alchemist Athanasius Kirchner (*Arithmetica*, 1665), who sums up the idea nicely for us and thus reminds us what science originally set out to accomplish:

Everything perceived by the senses must ... be elevated to 'reason,' to 'the intelligence' and to absolute unity. When in this way we shall have brought back the absolute unity from all perceptible, rational and intellectual multiplicity into the infinitely simple, [...] then nothing more remains to be said. (Jung 1959, 265, f111)

Note

1. The Corpus Hermeticum from *Thrice Great Hermes: Studies in Hellenistic Theosophy and Gnosis, Volume II* at The Internet Sacred Text Archive.

Disclosure Statement

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Reference

- Jung, C. G. 1959. *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*. New York: Bollingen Foundation.

An Anthropology for 'the Assemblage of the Now'

Paige West

Department of Anthropology, Barnard College and Columbia University, New York, NY, USA

At this point within anthropology, it has been well documented that conservation organisations are institutions of governance and governmentality, that the projects that they devise offer particular visions of the world, and that these visions impose order on human/non-human assemblages. Conservation projects thus offer a vision of how the world is and how it ought to be, as well as a plan to alter the world so that it conforms to that desired vision. Sometimes these impositions of order succeed and sometimes they fail. It is also well documented that people, including conservation scientists, anthropologists, and the indigenous and non-indigenous inhabitants of various conservation areas, all assume (1) that their perspectives on how the world works mirror the actual structure of the world, (2) that their ideas about how the world should be, mirror the moral/ethical logics and the appropriate socio-biophysicality of the real, and (3) that their own plans for getting to the best socio-ecological world possible are the most appropriate plans. Sometimes these perspectives, ideas, and plans intersect and sometimes they do not. Finally, anthropologists have shown, repeatedly, that all of this is intertwined with

the circulation of capital and the material and nonmaterial infrastructures that allow for its circulation.

In the past 15 years, a series of excellent book-length ethnographies of environmental conservation efforts have been published; these have both critiqued and praised conservation and have pushed the anthropological thinking about conservation forward. Indeed, they have contributed to the view that I have articulated above. For example, if I look at the stack of books on my desk right now, I see the seven conservation-related anthropological texts that offer extraordinary insights into the workings of conservation. Each of these books shows us that the complicated, historical, multiethnic, multiracial, multi-species assemblage that is 'the now', can be understood with careful attention from anthropologists. A short review of these works will help to locate my understanding of the anthropology of conservation.

In *Environmentality* (2005) Arun Agrawal shows how villagers in Kumaon, India transitioned from forest burning to forest conservation over the course of the 1900s. With this he shows how environmental consciousness emerges, changes, and is refracted through colonialism, the state, and various conservation and development institutions. In *A Future for Amazonia* (2012) Michael Cepek shows how environmental conservation efforts on Cofan lands in Ecuador became a political movement that allowed Cofan to defend their lands and culture and created the conditions for them to fight against oil companies, armies, colonising farmers, and others, and to gain scientific expertise and political agency. In *Stealing Shining Rivers* (2012), Molly Doane shows how externally generated conservation interventions in Chimalapas, Mexico, moved through every fad in conservation over a 20-year period (1990–2010), rarely taking into account either the actual biophysical environment, the indigenous people and farmers living in the area, or the Mexican state. She clearly shows the detrimental effects to both people and ecology of this lack of attention to the on-the-ground. In *Governing Indigenous Territories* (2013), Juliet Erazo examines the intersections of native land rights movements and the push for collective titles in the context of shifting global priorities around conservation and development in Ecuador. Through her analysis of how indigenous sovereignty intersects with state power and expectations, outside interests, ecological history, and other social movements, she shows the complexity of human–landscape relations in modern nation-states and makes clear that we must attend to states if we are to protect both the environment and the people who live in it. In *Territories of Difference* (2008), Arturo Escobar shows how extraordinarily complex processes of politics, ethnic identification, social movements, and ideas about territory, social and ecological justice, and recognition of culture and sovereignty play out in the face of capitalist extraction in the highly biologically diverse and variously protected Pacific rainforest region of Colombia. With this he shows that race and ethnicity must be part of our conversations about how to best conserve. In *Emergent Ecologies* (2015), Eben Kirksey writes about how new forms of conservation can emerge as hopeful in our current global environmental crisis if we all (anthropologists, conservation scientists, and local people) work together to reframe our approach to environmental problems. He does this with attention to both the circulation of capital and humans (Kirksey 2015). And finally, in *Friction* (2004), Anna Tsing disentangles the interfaces between rainforests, capitalists, environmentalists, people who live in rainforests, and many others in Indonesia. She shows that environmental conservation

efforts are never simple and in situ, but rather that they are nodes in global networks and assemblages.¹

There have also been a large number of review articles focusing on the anthropology of the articulation between humans and their environments. Some have focused specifically on the anthropology of conservation (Little 1999; Orlove and Brush 1996; West and Brockington 2006; West, Brockington, and Igoe 2006). Others have focused specifically on the relationship between indigenous peoples and environmental politics (Dove 2006), the environmental anthropology of climate change (Crate 2011), and environmental anthropology more broadly (Biersack 1999; Kottak 1999; Orr, Lansing, and Dove 2015). These all build on earlier reviews (Vayda and McCay 1975). Finally, there are excellent readers that focus on how the environment is approached in anthropology that have chapters and sections specifically on conservation (see Crumley 2002; Dove and Carpenter 2008).

I, personally, have spent the past 17 years writing about conservation in ways that have been meant to create conditions whereby conservation-related actors come to understand that all externally conceptualised or generated conservation interventions carry with them a set of ontological propositions and epistemic practices that are *ex situ* to most socio-ecological systems that exist in ecologically diverse places (West 2000, 2001, 2005, 2006, 2016), that this mismatch creates conditions whereby conservation fails (West 2006, 2008; West and Kale 2015),² and that global capitalism alters human subjectivities and ecological systems in ways that are bad for both (West 2012, 2016). Additionally, I have worked in conservation in Papua New Guinea as a co-founder, board member, and volunteer mentor and teacher for The Papua New Guinea Institute of Biological Research and as the head grant-writer and volunteer anthropologist for Ailans Awareness, two small NGOs focused on small scale conservation projects created by indigenous peoples and their national conservation scientist colleagues (see Aini and West 2014; West and Kale 2015).

Sadly, 'Nobody likes Dichotomies (but sometimes you need them)', fails to engage any of this work, or any of the other of the hundreds of articles and books that give a nuanced and careful analysis of conservation practices, in a substantive way. What the paper does do is set up a poorly constructed 'straw man' positioning the paper's approach against something it calls the 'rights to nature' approach. The paper, although winding through a range of polemics, bases the argument that there is a 'rights to nature' approach on a selective misreading of the literature. Indeed, the paper selectively cites a limited set of literature, picking out points that set up polarised positions, rather than capturing the richness of the anthropology of conservation literature or the nuances of the issues at hand. The paper tenuously links the shakily constructed 'dichotomy' above to other so-called dichotomies (Anthropocentrism/Ecocentrism, ENGO/Local Communities) before it spirals into a deeply problematic section accusing scholars who attempt to understand the complexities of the social impacts of conservation of 'political correctness' and, in which the author attempts to show that indigenous people can be really bad sometimes and that because of that, anyone who dares to demonstrate instances where colonial, post-colonial, or neo-colonial interventions into their lives are disastrous is not doing scholarship, but rather demonstrating 'political correctness'. The basic argument is as follows: any scholarship that is critical of conservation has an anthropocentric bias that gives preference to local people over dying animals. This argument does not make

sense given the literature that I have reviewed briefly above. The end of the paper, in a strange move, shifts focus to something the author calls ‘industrocentrism’ which ‘equally affects ecosystems and cultural systems’. The fact that many of the authors the paper critiques actually make the argument that capitalism and global, industrialised political economies (and the subjectivities that come with them) are the key factors in both the loss of global ecological and cultural diversity, seems lost here (for example Castree 1995; West and Brockington 2012).

It is too bad that the paper did not demonstrate a more broad and careful reading of the literature, since the point that we need to re-think is how we theorise the global assemblage of all life today (given our current socio-ecological planetary conditions). And in my most generous reading of this paper, that is what I think motivates it. In the rest of this comment I will lay three of the many things that I feel are crucial for the future of the anthropology of conservation specifically, but also for environmental anthropology more generally if we want to push this vibrant and important field forward in ways that help us move to an anthropology of the Assemblage of the Now.

As a scholar of socio-ecological relations, I have recently begun to think of with the phrase ‘The Assemblage of the Now’ to remind myself that narration of, and nostalgia for, any ‘prior’ state of the world is inextricably tied to a perspective from late liberalism, indeed that the idea of ‘the governance of the prior provides an essential formation of tense and event to the governance of difference in late liberalism’ (Povinelli 2011, 34). The formation of tense in our very thinking and our fixation on what *was*, occludes our understanding of *what could be*. As Povinelli argues with regard to settler states and how they attend to indigenous peoples, ‘the logic of the priority of the prior’ becomes the fundamental ‘foundation of governance’ (Povinelli 2011, 36). Yet, with regard to various manifestations of socio-ecological assemblages, which are what I think the anthropology of conservation wishes to understand and theorise, any prior thinking embeds the very structures of social and economic power that have contributed to our current planet-wide socio-ecological catastrophe. So, my first point is that we need to engage with an auto critique through which we come to understand any scholarly or activists motivations we have and that derive from this kind of prior thinking.

Second, and clearly not unrelated, we need to go through a process of decolonisation in terms of our epistemic practices. As a field we have continued to rely on the hallmark methods of cultural anthropology even when these methods have been critiqued, discarded, and re-invented by indigenous scholars. We are at a watershed moment in the history of our planet and it is glaringly clear to anyone paying attention that the fate of humans and non-humans are inextricably linked. Our methods must robustly uncover worldings and new possible worlds, and our old method set and approach will not push knowledge far enough to meet these challenges we face today. Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (2012) groundbreaking book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, gives us a ‘why’ and ‘how’ for decolonial knowledge production practice. I don’t have space to review it adequately here. In short, she argues that for any field to overcome the legacies of its colonial origins, it must self-examine how it has historically produced knowledge, how those process have been tied to dispossession, occlusion, erasure, and violence, and how its methods of both so called ‘data collection’ and writing do not and do fit with indigenous and other-colonised or marginal peoples epistemic practices. Finally, it must be willing to radically transform methodologically in order to co-

produce knowledge, sometimes, and know when it is not the place of outsiders to know and make knowledge at all (see also Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith 2008; Kovach 2010; Tall-Bear 2014). Part of a de-colonising practice also means engaging with the work of our indigenous scholar colleagues. It is still too rare in the anthropology of conservation and environmental anthropology that we see a careful engagement with indigenous scholarship on space and place (Gegeo 2001; Ka'ili 2008; Mahina 1992, 2010) sovereignty (Coulthard 2014; Kauanui 2008; Simpson 2015), dispossession (Barker 2011), socio-ecological assemblages, (Tallbear 2013), environmental politics (Kabutaulaka 2008, 2000, 1997a), and representation (Kabutaulaka 1997b; Stella 2007) among many other topics.³

In addition to having some hard conversations about our methods of collection, we need to have equally hard conversations about our methods of sharing knowledge. First, we need to think about our insistence on publishing only in pay per view peer-review journals and in expensive monographs. I'm not advocating that we stop doing either, rather I'm interested in us having a more robust voice from within the anthropology of conservation and environmental anthropology in debates about what other forms of publication might come to 'count' for securing jobs, tenure, and promotion. Additionally, we need to think carefully about our own assumptions about what a 'prestigious' or 'important' publication looks like. How many times have we heard a colleague make derisive comments about a junior scholar's publishing on a blog instead of 'focusing on the book' or 'getting another peer-review out there'? Given the number of people who read the average anthropology journal article, might it make more sense for us to see a broad range of publications as important and worthy? Since almost all of the people we write about and collaborate with in our research sites – conservation-related actors, indigenous community members, local political leaders – have internet access, we should begin to value blog posts, on-line articles in popular media, and the like as these sources are most certainly read more often than our other forms of scholarly production.

We also need to think about who can read what we write no matter where we put it. I take it for granted that hard and complex thinking often results in complicated arguments and articulations. I'm not calling for a dumbing down of anything. Rather, we need to think about how our writing habits and practices exclude the conservation actors and locals who live in the places we write about from the knowledge we produce. How could we write in ways that return knowledge in an accessible form to the people we work with? And how could we encourage our field to value clear writing? As above, how many of us have been in situations where we have heard our colleagues put down someone as 'not very smart' or, the ever-dreaded, 'not very theoretical' because their work is easy or a pleasure to read? As scholars we produce knowledge, and I am not one of those people who assumes that all knowledge must have a practical application as defined by some agency, organisation, or the state (as in the case of recent moves by the United States Congress to enforce a kind of rule demonstrable economic or social benefit to American for projects funded by the National Science Foundation). Rather, my sense is that the knowledge we produce may well be for the sake of knowledge production yet I am troubled by the increasingly difficult-to-access language used in environmental anthropology. What if our pure knowledge is someone else's answer to a socially and ecologically equitable way forward for a community-generated conservation project and they can't find an access point into any of our publications?

Thinking with *The Assemblage of the Now*, a revised and decolonised anthropology of conservation could begin to tackle the following crucial questions: What is the lived experience or quality of life, for all beings, in the socio-ecological now and how does one capture it textually? And if we believe that our textual practices can help to push forward new ways of thinking and knowing, perhaps even alternatives to dominant powerful ways of thinking and knowing, how do we narrate the now? And finally, what forms of narration can carry epistemological weight in ways that might help with futures otherwise?

Notes

1. I literally picked these books because they are sitting on my desk in front of me as I write this, I could have also cited a very long list of truly excellent work on conservation by many other scholars.
2. It is worth mentioning here that the key architect of the conservation project that I write about in my first book (West 2006) has now published his own book-length account of the project that comes to the same conclusions I did regarding the mismatch between external ideas about conservation and local practices (Mack 2014).
3. This is a very small slice of the literature connected to the anthropology of conservation and environmental anthropology by indigenous scholars. Much like the monographs mentioned in footnote 1, these are books and papers that are literally on my desk right now for a course I'm teaching in the fall.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Rejoinder: Discussing Dichotomies with Colleagues

Helen Kopnina 

Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology Department, Universiteit Leiden, Leiden, The Netherlands

Strang

I very much appreciate Veronica Strang's references to an indigenous all-inclusive worldview, in which they offer 'not "romantic harmony" with a thing called nature, but something much more interesting: a model of how to think about human-non-human relations integratively, and without reifying alienating dichotomies'. However, as in the case of my reaction to Reuter (below), pragmatically speaking, can we really use the indigenous worldview as an alternative on a global scale?

Also, I absolutely agree that a dualistic vision of nature and culture should have no place in holistic ways of thinking. Yet, to me, this means that humans and non-humans should

CONTACT Helen Kopnina  h.n.kopnina@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

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