

# Earth Stalked by Man

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To take the concept of the Anthropocene seriously requires engagement with global history. But what 'global' shall this be? In honour of the work of Marilyn Strathern, this essay explores that planetary Anthropocene composed of fragments that do not fit together at all, and yet necessarily do. At the centre of my concerns are the awkward relations between what one might call 'machines of replication' – those simplified ecologies, such as plantations, in which life worlds are remade as future assets – and the vernacular histories in which such machines erupt in all their particularity and go feral in counter-intentional forms. Such eruptions are manifestations of post-Enlightenment modern Man, the one who got us into the mess we call the Anthropocene. Yet, in contrast to approaches that begin with the unified continuity of Man (versus indigenous ontologies; as scientific protocol and so on), this article explores contingent eruptions and the patchy, fractured Anthropocene they foster.

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Too-rapid climate change; massive extinctions; ocean acidification; slow-decaying pollutants; fresh-water contamination; critical ecosystem transitions: industrialization has proved far more deadly to life on earth than its designers might ever have dreamed. Addressing this disaster offers one of the great challenges for all thoughtful people today. How might anthropologists turn their attention to this set of issues? This article suggests we might do something that comes easily to those trained in our discipline: tap our constitutive ambivalence about the Enlightenment figure Man. Working through this figure might provide a better description of current environmental nightmares. Our condition, I argue: Earth stalked by Man.<sup>1</sup>

Another way of addressing these concerns has been offered in the term Anthropocene, the proposed geological epoch in which human activities outstrip glaciers in changing the face of the earth. Some propositions about the Anthropocene are neutral or even triumphalist; most, however, draw attention to the spreading dangers of environmental catastrophe.<sup>2</sup> The term is contested; indeed, humanists and social scientists have been particularly vigilant in pointing to its weaknesses (see e.g. Haraway 2015; Malm and Hornborg 2014). Yet perhaps the term's worst problem – its up-front reference to Man – might be its most revealing feature. Taking Man as a serious power neither to be dismissed nor to be innocently followed is just what we



need to notice ‘patchy Anthropocene’, that is, the uneven and unequal terrain of Earth stalked by Man.

Anthropology/Anthropocene: each offers the prefix ‘anthropo-’, attesting to its roots in the genealogy of Enlightenment Man. Yet each rebels against this legacy – in different ways. Anthropology refuses Man’s encompassment and tears His mantle into fragmented perspectives and ways of life. Anthropocene refuses the heroism of Man’s struggle against His great antagonist Nature and reveals the terrors of His planet-wide destruction. These reactions are different. Might they find traction with each other? Anthropocene asks anthropology to take questions of liveability seriously. Rather than merely follow around scientists to question their authority, we are urged to return to better descriptions of the world. In turn, anthropological multiplicity breaks up the imagined unity of Anthropocene, refusing universal temporality. ‘Patches’ of difference emerge, forcing heterogeneities of scale into its calculations. Together, there is work worth doing here.

But who is this guy Man? His Enlightenment origins gave rise to our discipline and still empower us to write. Yet His generalization always includes some of us more than others, and that has been the major finding of our discipline. He has a gender, a race, a religion, a theory of property and an idea about self; these make it possible for Him to generalize. It is difficult to generalize from a black Muslim woman; it is only possible to generalize from a white Christian man. At the same time, He surpasses Himself and proliferates; His effects are not limited to His class, race, and gender. This is familiar terrain for anthropologists. We know both how to cut Him to size and to measure His oversize effects on culture and history. Putting this Man into the Anthropocene gives the concept traction for our discipline – and leads to better description.

Anthropological ambivalence about Man can frame a central problem in studying the Anthropocene: Is it global? Like Man, yes, of course ... and no. It is global, by definition: Climate change models, for example, are all about the global circulation of air and water. You cannot ‘do’ climate change in just one place. The same with the extinction crisis: if you exterminate a species in one area only, it’s not extinction; extinction means the whole world has lost that species. And I remember how quickly the radiation from the Fukushima disaster was noted in Finland – despite the winds getting there the long way around. When radioactive waste from Fukushima washed up on the California coastline some time later, it was only further confirmation that radioactivity, like all forms of pollution, is a global problem.<sup>3</sup>

And yet, is it? The California coastline is a place, as is the forest in Finland where Fukushima radiation was measured. None of us live in a global system; we live in places. This doesn’t mean we don’t travel, but we travel from place to place, not in abstract globality. Anthropocene matters because liveability is threatened by the repercussions of human activities. And we experience liveability only through places. Anthropocene is enacted in places even as it is global circulation. This is not the same situation as, say, supposedly global corporations that exist in fact only in particular places. There, the ideology is global and the enactment is local. Anthropocene is global; it only makes sense on a planetary scale. **And yet Anthropocene is also always parochial, perspectival and performative.** This is not just because various people imagine Anthropocene differently, or even just because global systems impact on various kinds of people

differently. It's more than this. Anthropocene is patchy because it is composed of varied assemblages of liveability. It exists only in and through those patches.

I came to this perspective because of my contingent slide into Anthropocene territory. I was asked to draw together a transdisciplinary research group in Aarhus, Denmark. 'What should I propose?' I asked. 'Make it about climate change,' said my hosts, thinking of the funding. I wrote about anthropogenic landscapes (multi-species landscapes in which humans play a part) since that was my research, but I gave the proposal the name 'Living In the Anthropocene' to appeal to collaborators. And it worked: the term has drawn scientists, artists, philosophers and anthropologists into common conversation, and this is great. But my start from landscape made me see Anthropocene through that lens. Landscapes are uneven – what I call patchy.

From the first, then, I've thought of Anthropocene through the figure of the plantation. By plantation I mean those ecological simplifications in which living things are transformed into resources – future assets – by removing them from their life worlds. Plantations are machines of replication, ecologies devoted to the production of the same. As many anthropologists have shown, disentangling things in this way is really exotic. To make resources – that is, disentangled things – requires cultural work. Let's call this work 'alienation' whether it involves humans or non-humans. Alienation creates the possibilities of machines of replication, which turn out to be efficient producers of assets, which can be turned again into future assets – and indeed help produce that model of the future we call progress. Alienation produces the environmental dilemmas we call Anthropocene. Anthropogenic climate change, the extinction crisis and radioactive pollution, my examples so far, are all produced through the search for assets through simplified ecologies and the industrial processes these ecologies have made possible.

The advantage of thinking through plantations is that the patchy Anthropocene is immediately apparent. As ubiquitous as plantation landscapes are in our world today, they are not everywhere. There are many landscapes of multi-species entanglement, such as, for example, woodlands. And yet plantations are energized by the possibilities of proliferation. Proliferation: a word that comes to us from cancer and nuclear weapons. Cancer, almost by definition, cannot be everywhere; cancer develops in organisms of non-cancerous cells. And yet, it proliferates. So, too, with nuclear weapons – and plantations. In the uneven proliferation of plantation ecologies, the patchy Anthropocene becomes apparent. And here I arrive back at Man, capital M, who makes resources for progress through plantations. But what kind of stalking and what kind of Man is this? In what follows, I alternate between reflections and tall tales. My tall tales are necessary allegories, simultaneously evidence-based and crafted to offer new figures for thought.

## Reflection 1: The Patience of Marilyn Strathern

When I think about ambivalence inside categories, the anthropologist who comes to mind is Marilyn Strathern. Strathern guides us to things that do not fit together – and yet somehow are together. In contrast to a Marxist 'contradiction,' for Strathern bifurcations do not lead anywhere; there is no synthesis but instead a chance to reflect on

the categories. She asks us to patiently sit in a muddle, not trying to solve it, but to take the time to consider incommensurability (e.g. Strathern 1991). There are several kinds of patience here. First, the prose slows us down. Second, it forces us to consider multiplicity through conflicting scales, with their connections and disconnections. Third, the work shows a path combining the urgency of action with attention to complexities.

I find all this helpful for considering the Earth stalked by Man. Man is a both/and problem: both limited and everywhere. Thus too His avatar, the plantation landscape. Plantations spread everywhere; they are modern proliferation. As machines of replication they manufacture proliferation. Yet, everywhere, they are formed in vernacular histories, which tie them to the contingencies of encounters and the peculiarities of places. They can never be everywhere because they depend on the entangled landscapes they disentangle. And yet each eruption of the plantation spreads the generality of everywhere-ness. There is a muddle here: the plantation creates the generality of disengagement; yet only a non-general, local apparatus can make this generality emerge.

This is not exactly a Strathernian bifurcation; still, I take the liberty to place it within Strathern's insights about feminist anthropology. My analysis here is feminist in two senses. It is feminist through comparison, in its relation to Strathern's impasse of multiplicity and scale. It is also constitutively feminist, in my own outrage at the destructive works of Man. This combination takes me to Strathern's article 'An Awkward Relationship: The Case of Feminism and Anthropology' (Strathern 1987). That article really challenged me because it started with categories that seemed quite wrong: feminism was universalism and anthropology was cultural relativism. The dichotomy undermined the very enterprise on which she was embarked – and I think that was the point. Neither universal nor relativistic, Strathern's feminist anthropology emerged within an untenable set of distinctions, forcing us not to disentangle perspectives but to use them to reveal their contradictions. We cannot choose; we must impossibly accept both/and. In contrast to forms of structuralism in which dichotomies are algorithms to set the world, like a machine, in motion, Strathern's bifurcations stop the world in its tracks. They make the muddle, slowing us down to sit in it. To sit patiently in my muddle, let me turn to a story.

### **Tall Tale 1: The Three Thousand Little Pigs**

In Denmark, where I am living these days, the farming of pigs for export is the country's biggest agricultural industry and, according to most people I talk to, it helps define national character. Pigs are raised in big operations of several thousand animals, but it is important to spokesmen that these are 'family farms'. Denmark became a modern nation through the mobilization of an agricultural cooperative movement, and dreams of modernity have from the first been tied to a countryside of imagined family farms. Pigs are both universal assets and vernacular Danes: the muddle of Man.

In March 2015, Inger Anneberg took me on one of her research trips to a pig farm in central Jutland (Anneberg et al. 2013; see also Hamman 2006). I am not a scholar of pigs. Still, the farm provides such a vivid image of 'machines of replication' that I take the liberty to describe it.

Let me take you first to the building in which breeding sows are penned. The most impressive thing, to me, was that each animal was classified and managed according to its reproductive status, which is minutely known. We began our tour with the young sows that were becoming reproductively active for the first time. These were held together in a pen close to the main door, for easy observation. Through tracking the colour of their external genitalia, the farmers know exactly when each sow is coming into heat. Each sow's back is marked with a coloured stripe that indicates the day. As soon as the vulva is red enough, the sow is inseminated. And as soon as pregnancy is confirmed, the sow is shifted into a series of different pens, each indicating exactly how many days the pregnancy has proceeded. Social life in the pens has been encouraged by EU discussions, which respond to the recent recognition that pigs are social beings. But such sociality is carefully managed in relation to exactly how pregnant the sow is: at first, she needs the option for private space; later, she must function in a group, unless ill. The farmers know exactly when she will give birth, and everything is prepared for the piglets. These sows have varied numbers of teats, from 10 to 18, and, since piglets have their special teats, the mothers cannot nurse more piglets than they have teats. But the farmers have calculated an average of 14 teats, and thus they adjust the insemination mix to make 14 piglets. Four extra piglets from a sow with 10 teats are given to a sow with 18 teats. And as soon as possible, the piglets are removed from their mother so that the sow can go back to making more piglets. Because the piglets are removed so quickly, before they have adequate immune systems, they are fed antibiotics; they are disengaged even from intestinal bacteria. All of this makes the sows reproduce to their maximum. The farm is a machine for replication: sows and piglets are assets, to be managed efficiently. Efficiency is accomplished by Taylorizing the process of reproduction and by removing impediments through a sterile and closely monitored living space.

Closely monitored, and yet the Danish family: this is the plantation in contradiction, both transcendent and localized. After all, the farmer explained, they are not like the hypermodern Dutch who have turned pig farms into warehouse-like factories. Here is a vernacular history in which Man emerges with Jutlandic characteristics; here is the local in which the global erupts. It is worth some further tales.

The great-great-grandfather of the farmer, whom I'll call Mads, started this central Jutland farm as a participant in a nineteenth-century nationalist mobilization to make moorland into modern family farms. The Danes had lost their best farmland in a war with Germany and, as the saying went, 'What was lost without shall be gained within' (see Olwig 2008). This national charter for modern family farms shaped subsequent contradictions. When Mads's parents decided to upgrade their mixed farm in 1980, they would have liked to move into dairy. But they looked at the numbers, Mads told us, and they realized that only pigs were possible. The numbers told them: family enterprise here is the plantation. Meanwhile, continuing the contradictions, Mads's parents found labour that might be both modern and family; his mother went to Romania and recruited a young man whose extended family has continued to supply the farm with labour ever since.

The knot combining intimacy and disengagement seemed particularly clear to me in a set of conversations about pig sexuality. Mads was explaining how to inseminate

the sows using a long plastic tube inserted into a sow's vagina. In contrast to a cow, a sow needs to contract some internal muscles to bring in the semen. Each time Mads described the process, he would stop dramatically, hesitate for a long moment, and then use the term 'orgasm' for this process. Once he was describing the patience necessary, since the sow does not immediately respond. A colleague of mine asked what he does during the wait: does he stimulate the sow? 'He texts his wife,' a Danish researcher jumped in. Mads immediately agreed and began to mime the process of intently texting while idly holding the insemination tube. To me, this suggested the tension between intimacy and detachment at the heart of the family-cum-industrial farm. This is sex, and this is not sex: thus the machine of replication takes on its Danish form.

And yet, too, there is something else, a hidden force that emerges in this muddle of general and particular – and that drives the two both apart and together. Consider the bacteria: antibiotic-resistant infectious bacteria that emerged in that most plantation-like of human spaces, the hospital, have spread to almost all of Denmark's pig farms (see NFI et al. 2012). The ubiquity of antibiotics gives them dominance there. To protect both pigs and us from infection, we are fully suited, from boots to hair; we look a little like Ebola nurses. Indeed, the spread of these bacteria has challenged a cherished national ritual: the visit of school children to the pig farm. Debates about pig farm safety re-establish the vernacular limits of the replication machine, even as they simultaneously support its further proliferations – as in our safety suits.

Virulence is business as usual on the plantation. Virulence both underlines the generality of the replication machine, in its proliferations, and parochializes it. The plantation itself begins to appear as a disease-like eruption, even as it breeds its own pathogens. Those mites on mites may shake it up – or extend it across vast new terrains. Sitting in this muddle, incommensurable elements of the puzzle we call Man emerge.

## **Reflection 2: *The Hidden Force***

*The Hidden Force* is the name of a novel by Louis Couperus, originally published in 1900, about the effects of colonialism in the Netherlands East Indies (Couperus (1900)1990). It takes me on a detour into the colonial worlds that helped produce anthropology as well as plantations. Man erupts in colonial encounters; colonial encounters show us Man as an eruption. The simultaneous production of Man's universality and the provincial, vernacular histories that tie Him to place are acutely visible in this space, in which incommensurability is everyday practice.

But let me begin more than a century before Couperus's 1900 novel to peek in on eighteenth-century Java, as described in historian Jean Taylor's amazing history, *The Social World of Batavia* (Taylor 2009). Here is a vivid illustration of what I mean by the eruption of Man. In those days, the tropics were seen as unhealthy for white women, and colonial officials arrived as single men. They got involved with local women, and they had mixed-race children. To take care of those children, they sent the boys to Holland for their education, but they kept the girls home – and married them to the next generation of young men arriving from Holland. To get anywhere in the colonial hierarchy, young men found it expedient to marry their senior's mixed-race daughters. But those young women were creatures of the Indies: they chewed betel, staining their

teeth red; they listened to gamelan music as servants held royal parasols over their heads. The European men were disgusted and terrified; they had to get out of the house. The men formed clubs, and together they discovered linguistics, archaeology, history and science. Western civilization emerged in their frantic endeavours to avoid their wives. Simultaneously provincial and full of universal spirit, this was an eruption of Man.

Colonial eruptions of Man were not limited to white men. In the early twentieth century, a group of elite young Javanese became enthralled with Man: becoming Man, they learned to be anti-colonial agitators and eventually built a revolutionary movement. This process is described in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's historical sequence, the *Buru Quartet*, and especially its first novel *This Earth of Mankind* (Pramoedya 1996). Pramoedya describes the coming of age of a proto-nationalist Javanese youth, whose horizons are expanded by the dream of modernity: this earth of Mankind. Despite the racist antics of his colonial teachers, who have the nerve to call him 'Monkey', he reaches out to this could-be universal. It opens his awareness to discussions of rights; it inspires his fight against colonial discrimination. Again, this is an eruption of Man. Those without white Christian Y-chromosomes can also navigate these waters.

Yet neither whites nor natives could avoid the hidden force: the virulent magic and maleficence of the colonial embrace. The hidden force emerges from the very architecture of Man, with its life-world disengagements. The purer the rationality of Man, the stronger the hidden force. The hidden force bedevils the colonial administrator in Couperus's novel of that name; unspeakable things happen, and without explanation. The protagonist tries to ignore the effects of his rationalization programmes on the colonial society he has helped to craft. But the unspeakable haunts him, slipping through the cracks of the walls, splattering his European wife with bright-red betel spit even though she is entirely protected, it would seem, in her bath. Like antibiotic-resistant bacteria, the hidden force emerges from the projects of Man. In the novel, it undermines those projects, limiting their imagined universality. Sometimes, too, this occurs in the world.

## Tall Tale 2: Fordlandia

The name is so redolent with myth that I can do no better to repeat it as the title of my tale. Fordlandia: the great entrepreneur Henry Ford's rubber plantation in the middle of the Amazon jungle, and the site of a dream of modern progress. Fordlandia: straight lines of whitewashed houses, gleaming machinery and, of course, the marching rows of clean-weeded rubber trees leading toward efficiency, wealth and power. Then, a few years later, Fordlandia: rusting ruins, encroaching mud and an abandoned water tower; nothing more. Fordlandia was an eruption of Man in Brazil in the late 1920s and 1930s. Even more than Danish pigs, Fordlandia takes us into the incommensurabilities of Man as He stalks the earth. Fordlandia is Man in His most general form, the machine of replication – and also at His most strange and particular, entwined and emerging from the petty contingencies of history. Then, too, there is the hidden force: the force of proliferation and also its limit.

Most commentators take on this site as an object lesson against one man's obsessions: Fordlandia appears as a homunculus from Henry Ford's brain. But I am

grateful to Evan Killick who not only drew Fordlandia to my attention but also sent me Barry Machado's fine dissertation on its history (Machado 1975). Machado offers an account in which Brazilians are key players, and in which history and politics matter. In particular, Machado makes sense of the fact that Ford hired a Norwegian American ship captain who, Ford knew, had no experience with either Brazil or rubber to design key features of his plantation. Why?

As Machado tells the story, through much of the 1920s, a network of imperialism and intrigue had made good use of Ford, the era's great entrepreneur. Henry Hoover, then US secretary of commerce, had spread the word that Americans must have their own rubber, a strategic resource that should be free from other imperial interests. The first efforts to follow this up looked to the Philippines, then a US colony, but Filipino nationalists blocked them. In this climate, Brazilian would-be comprador capitalists emerged, and they courted Ford, who had not previously been interested in rubber. In 1927, a secret cabal involving a Brazilian businessman, an American consular secretary, the Pará governor, a British facilitator and a local mayor succeeded in making Ford an offer he could not refuse. Ford signed and hired staff to open his plantation. But Brazilian politics was a hotbed of oppositional factions, and another group tipped local journalists about the machinations behind Ford's deal. In 1928, the journalists spread the story of the cabal all over the news.

Ford was shocked, according to Machado; he had never visited Brazil and had not been paying attention to the politics. But now the plantation was already coming into being. Ford fired his staff, American and Brazilian; instead, he hired an honest man he could trust: the Norwegian ship captain. The fact that the captain knew nothing about Brazil was a recommendation. Meanwhile, the governor of Pará changed, and the new officials were hostile to Ford, even cutting off his supplies, including rubber seeds. Ford responded by closing the plantation to the world: It was see-no-evil, hear-no-evil, speak-no-evil. Without local dialogue, the captain and his successors managed the plantation in an almost parodied version of white modern order (whether Scandinavian or US upper Midwest): an eruption of Man in both his most squeaky-clean general and his most entangled-in-contingency form.

From the first, it was a disaster. Plantation managers tried to make a modern place for labour, with wages instead of trade goods and with expectations of abstention from wine and women. The Brazilian workers, both caboclo and indigenous, found these conditions incomprehensible and refused to follow them. There were riots. But the crowning disasters came from the non-humans: as a machine of replication, the plantation sped up the growth not just of rubber trees but also of their adversaries.

To appreciate how plant pathologies became the hidden force, I need to tell you a little about the fungus that causes rubber leaf blight, *Microcyclus ulei*. I move here from Machado to mycology (Lieberei 2007). *Microcyclus ulei* infects only rubber trees. It spreads slowly and causes little harm where rubber is surrounded by other trees, as in the Amazon forest. But take a plantation in which all other trees have been removed and rubber trees have been planted cheek by jowl: a machine of replication. A new mode of fungal proliferation kicks in, already an attribute of the fungus, but energized by the plantation. Asexual spores with short lives and little ability to spread have little role for *Microcyclus* in the forest. But in the plantation, such quickly produced



spores merely have to pass from one leaf to a touching leaf to infect a new tree. This is particularly effective where, deprived of new seeds by a hostile administration, the genetic diversity of the plants is small. Meanwhile, the plantation is structured to speed up and synchronize the flush of young leaves; the fungus, which infects only young leaves, is caught in this new regime of growth – and in favourable years exceeds it. The architecture of the plantation promotes not just the growth of rubber but also the proliferation of rubber leaf blight. In Fordlandia, rubber leaf blight exploded, and all the trees died.

It seems important to tell you that rubber leaf blight was already well known in the 1920s. If Fordlandia had not shielded itself from outside influences, both local and foreign, perhaps things would have been arranged differently. Indeed, eventually some operations were moved to a drier site, Belterra, where workers assiduously top grafted, inspected and washed the trees to deter insects and fungi. Still, almost no rubber was produced throughout the entire experiment. To this day, no one produces rubber in plantations in Brazil; rubber plantations are limited to Asia and Africa, where Brazilian seeds were transported without accompanying fungi. It is telling that the United Nations has placed rubber leaf blight on its list of biological weapons (Lieberei 2007). It would not take a terrorist plot to spread the fungus, destroying plantation economies. The fact that this spread has not happened, so far, is testimony to the gaps between plantations, the patchy Anthropocene. And yet this history, enacted once as farce, inverting Marx, repeats itself as tragedy. But first:

### **Reflection 3: Man in Brazil**

To describe an eruption of Man in Brazil brings me into the terrain of one of the most exciting, and controversial, anthropologists of our time: Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. Viveiros de Castro empowers me to evoke a domain so great as Man. Yet even as I watch Man in the Amazon, Viveiros de Castro blocks my ability to see the contingencies of Man's eruption. Gift and poison: what an impasse!

Viveiros de Castro allows anthropologists to take a second look at Man, not to see his gender, his race or his constructions of family, property or governance, as we have for some time, but rather to examine his confrontation with Nature – that capital-N entity against which Man proves Himself (e.g. Viveiros de Castro 1998). Viveiros de Castro has stimulated a new kind of anti-colonial theory in which this kind of Nature, classified and cordoned off for exercises in alienation, no longer seems the only alternative. Furthermore, the Man who makes this Nature is best illuminated, in Viveiros de Castro's writing, as He confronts His Other in the Amerindian (Viveiros de Castro 2004). Just as the earlier critical postcolonialism coming out of Asia showed us modernity emerging first and foremost from Europe's Asian sites of Otherness, Viveiros de Castro shows the Man of Man-and-Nature coming into his own in Brazil.

Yet there is a difference between the respective anti-colonialisms of Latin American decolonial theory and the Asian postcolonial variety. Consider as a wonderful example of the latter Thongchai Winichatkul's demonstration of the making of modernity in the kingdom of Siam: Siamese elites made modernity in their negotiations with a European calculus of rationality (Thongchai 1997). From its inception, then, modernity has been

layered with the histories of the colonized and the excluded. In this story, modernity is a palimpsest of vernacular histories from all over the world; Man cannot be disentangled from the creative negotiations and struggles drawn into His bosom. In contrast, Viveiros de Castro purifies Man, seeking a structural essence in both the West and the Amerindian that remains untouched by history. He distains the mixed-up histories of mestizos to reclaim the long despised figure of the Amerindian, risen again as the protagonist of radical critique. There is a smart insight here. Rather than reducing the world to the rule of Man, in all its many variations, Viveiros de Castro revitalizes that kernel of alterity that might still shine through contamination to reanimate the world. I remember reading Michael Taussig's dismissal of the real Indian in the Amazon as unrecoverable; it was almost an afterthought (Taussig 1986: 135). Viveiros de Castro challenges our discipline by recovering him. The figure of the Amerindian makes other worlds seem possible – and reminds us of the continuing power of Man's proliferation.

My willingness to open up the question of Man draws on this insight. As a discipline, we had grown tired of Man, seeing Him as no longer relevant to our current concerns. We thought we had finished with Him; we stuffed Him in a back corner with other antiquities. But Latin American decolonial theory re-engages me with His continuing importance – and the continuing proliferation of His first principles. At the same time, I am not content to swallow Him whole. That Man who is only an enactment of Himself cannot emerge in a contingent eruption of the kind I introduced in Fordlandia. That Man just does and does – and there is no patchy Anthropocene, but only one in which He has already overrun us all. There is not much traction there for liveability. What I need, alas, is a Strathernian muddle: an awkward relationship between Thongchai and Viveiros de Castro. **I need Man as both historically layered and always generalized and generalizing.** In practice this means description that faces both ways: on the one hand, it offers more-than-local challenges; on the other, it calls up the friction of historical conjunctures. **Plantation proliferation is this kind of problem: proliferation is a structural and universalizing feature of Western modernity, but also a provincial, contingent effect of hybrid vernacular histories of race, class, gender, imperial expansion, state rule and more.** Everywhere, and limited: it is a perverse both/and, but it is what makes the project of an anthropology of the Anthropocene possible.

There is one more issue too that must be raised, and neither Man, pure or hybrid, nor His indigenous Others, pure or hybrid, are adequate for this one. Man's disengagements have allowed new ecologies of kinship, reproduction and death to emerge, but these are neither His intent nor even in His ken. Nor are they subjects of indigenous cosmopolitics. Neither Man nor His Others takes responsibility; neither has a plan. I have been calling this the hidden force – the excess of the colonial encounter, accounted for by neither side. The Anthropocene is 'hidden force' all the way down.

### **Tall Tale 3: The Death of Indispensable Companions**

Oliver Rackham was a British botanist who devoted his career to woodlands. He was not interested in little-visited wilderness, but rather the long inhabited places made by human and non-human histories. He watched the kinds of trees that come up in abandoned fields and recover after coppicing. If we care about liveability, whether for

ourselves or for others, the vitality and diversity of such anthropogenic woodlands is something to notice. Oak, beech, ash: we ignore such trees, but they are indispensable companions. Call it 'ecosystem services' if you want. We can't live without them. Rackham, a close observer, was distressed to see even the most common trees of his beloved woodlands dwindle: oak, infected by a mildew that stopped it from growing in the shade; beech, destroyed by imported grey squirrels; ash, the victim of a fungus.

I never met Rackham. Because I admire his work, I tried to invite him to a conference, sending him more and more frantic emails through January and the beginning of February 2015. Then, in the middle of February, I found that he would never answer emails again: he had died. Indispensable companions are both human and non-human.

Rackham's book *Woodlands* (Rackham 2012) started my descent into the patchy Anthropocene. Before I read it, I had thought of diseases, pests and invasive species as a necessary result of human travel and trade: part of what it means, perhaps, to be human. Rackham suggested something else. Casual introductions of pests are not the problem. Most ecologies can recover from casual introductions. For plants, it is the industrialization of the tree nursery industry with its large-scale global export of soils and plants that causes both the rate and virulence of the contemporary spread of pathogens – and the resulting decline of even our most common trees. This caught my attention. This is not the work of ordinary people. This is Man in his avatar the plantation. Worse yet, this is the plantation mixing itself into woodlands, the still-entangled ecologies of the non-plantation world. This is the Anthropocene's proliferation, in all its dangers. A whole avenue for potential research unfolds from this insight: follow the patchy Anthropocene through its industrial processes and their unintentional effects. Here I offer opening notes, a small plainsong for the decline of our indispensable companions.

European ash is the subject of Rackham's last book (Rackham 2014). There was no reason to plant ash; it comes up everywhere with human disturbance. There was no reason to import ash; it is a common tree throughout Europe. Yet container shipping has threatened this companion; with the capacity to put 18,000 trees, with their contaminated dirt, in a single container, the nursery trade was ready to ship coals to Newcastle. Container shipping: a floating plantation. With it came a killer fungus.

A hundred years ago, North Americans began importing plantation-nursery-grown white pines. There was no reason to plant white pines; they come up everywhere. There was no reason to import white pine. But the prices were right, and European plantation pines were imported. With them came white pine blister rust, which entered American forests, not just plantations, killing trees.

The industrialization of plant transfers has two effects. First, it moves pathogens around at a mind-boggling scale, blocking plant recovery. As Rackham put it: 'Catastrophes are not necessarily abnormal ... It is the rate of catastrophes – every few years instead of once in a millennium – that matters' (Rackham 2012: 427). He continues: 'Globalising tree-planting inevitably tends to globalise tree diseases, particularly *Phytophthoras* that can hybridise and generate virulent strains' (ibid.: 428). *Phytophthoras* are water moulds, the cause of the sudden oak death that is killing the oaks and madrones of my Santa Cruz woodlands. Here he has touched on the second way that plantations move beyond

their boundaries: plantations are breeding grounds for virulence. The industrial plant trade does not just move around pathogens; it breeds pathogenicity. Thus for rubber leaf blight, a new kind of proliferation became possible, augmenting the abilities of the fungus. Industrial trade also transforms pathogens. *Phytophthoras* hybridize and create forms that attack new hosts when they are brought together in the industrial plant trade (Brasier et al. 1999). The *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (Bd) fungus that is killing frogs around the world is, similarly, a new virulent form. Industrial trade seems to have stimulated both hybridization and spread: The close rub of bodies in the industrial trade facilitates fungal proliferation; meanwhile, industrial frogs gone feral contact other species, creating new possibilities for fungal evolution. The virulent form emerged in this interplay of many bodies and many species. The details of these stories change with evolving research. However, so far they only underline my point: the plantation form brings forth new biologies and ecologies.

'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy'.<sup>4</sup> These new ecologies refuse biology's modern synthesis, its eruption of Man. In the modern synthesis, living things are controlled by their DNA; neatly segregated, neither classification nor alienation is a problem. In contrast, these emergent pathogenicities tap the hidden terrain of the modern synthesis: epigenetics; environment; interspecies interactions. Some frogs exposed to pesticides die more easily of Bd infection (see e.g. Davidson et al. 2007). Killer fungi find new hosts when they proliferate in plantations. Human micro-biomes mutate at radiation levels proved safe for human cells, with threatening consequences. Man, in His orderly isolation, hardly knows how to react. This is not the doing of Man, He says. But then, what is it, and who will stay alive?

## Final Thoughts

My passion here has taken me away from the patience of Marilyn Strathern. Let me pull things back together – and return to Strathernian insights.

The term Anthropocene has caught the attention of many kinds of thinkers without yet fully gelling. One of the most popular ways the term gets used – and one I fear will continue to become more influential – is the 'good Anthropocene', that is, the Anthropocene in which more ecologies of alienation will fix all our problems. The Breakthrough Institute, for example, promotes a better Anthropocene through capitalism plus technology: Man will be in charge of supervising Himself.<sup>5</sup> But the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.<sup>6</sup> If new forms of human and non-human death arise in ecologies of alienation, more alienation will only exacerbate the problem.

I have stayed with the term Anthropocene despite all this because I see it as still open for concept-changing conversations. In this article, I have argued that there might be an anthropological concept of Anthropocene, that is, an Anthropocene in which anthropologists might play an important research role. This would be more than following scientists around and pointing out their foibles, although there could be room for that too. I want an anthropology that engages the world, human and not human, in both its entangled liveability and the new forms of death that have come to plague us.

This is the patchy Anthropocene – and that is a Buddhist kōan. Anthropocene is global; it can't exist in parts. Yet the truly global Anthropocene is the one in which we are all already dead, through environmental crisis. That we live speaks to patches of liveability among new forms of death. The conceptual impasse, then, is what we have to live in.

Stratherian ambivalence is helpful in thinking with this impasse. Strathern guides us to make good use of intractable contradictions. Our tools of analysis block our ability to see our objects; fine, she says, this is the dilemma to sit in. Patchy Anthropocene is that kind of dilemma.

Together with some colleagues of mine in Aarhus, I recently wrote a review of interdisciplinary conferences on the Anthropocene (Swanson et al. 2015). To keep ourselves amused, we made a Strathernian joke. The Anthropocene, we said, is 'less than one but more than many'. We were inverting Strathern's description of complexity in *Partial Connections* as 'more than one but less than many' (Strathern 1991: 35). What we meant was that Anthropocene thinkers, in which we included ourselves, had no idea what we were talking about even as we scattered the concept all over the place: less than one and more than many. I have tried here to take this joke into the world, that is, to show how it applies not to knowledge but to the world itself. The Anthropocene is less than one, whether 'one' is interpreted as systems, structures or cosmological hegemonies. Man does not fully rule. No 'one' covers the planet. Yet across the planet, something new and unaccountable spreads: feral biologies as the hidden force. Proliferation proliferates – and it is always more than many. Less than one and more than many: another kōan for the patchy Anthropocene.

And if there are patches of entanglement in this earth we have inherited from Man, perhaps our job is not just to notice them but also to do our best to keep them in place.

## Notes

1. This article was presented as the 2015 Annual Marilyn Strathern Lecture, May 2015, University of Cambridge.
2. The Anthropocene timeline is still under construction. While some archaeologists support a beginning date for the Anthropocene some 10,000 years ago, most other scholars argue for dates that reference much later ecological processes, ranging from the seventeenth-century Columbian exchange (Lewis and Maslin 2015) to the first atomic bomb in 1945 (Zalasiewicz et al. 2015).
3. For these news stories, see <[http://www.stuk.fi/ajankohtaista/tiedotteet/2012/en\\_GB/news\\_710/](http://www.stuk.fi/ajankohtaista/tiedotteet/2012/en_GB/news_710/)> and <<http://news.sciencemag.org/asiapacific/2014/11/fukushima-radiation-nears-california-coast-judged-harmless>> (both accessed May 2015).
4. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 5: 167–68.
5. See, for example, their 'Ecomodernist Manifesto'. Available at <<http://www.ecomodernism.org/manifesto/>> (accessed May 2015).
6. This phrase uses the title of a speech by Audre Lourde (1984) that has become an important part of the feminist canon.

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