Introduction

Ida Bencke and Jørgen Bruhn

> *My multispecies storytelling is about recuperation in complex histories that are as full of dying as living, as full of endings, even genocides, as beginnings. In the face of unrelenting historically specific surplus suffering in companion species knottings, I am not interested in reconciliation or restoration, but I am deeply committed to the more modest possibilities of partial recuperation and getting on together. Call that staying with the trouble.*
>
> — Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*

> *There are many kinds of life, said Spike [a robot], mildly. Humans always assumed that theirs was the only kind that mattered. That's how you destroyed your planet.*
>
> — Jeanette Winterson, *The Stone Gods*

I

Within Western institutional thinking, the human is constituted through an ability to speak, defined as the sole creature who holds language and consequently is capable of articulating, representing, and reflecting upon the world. Along with language comes the power of naming, of choreographing the semantic categories put in place, continually reproduced and negotiated to make sense of the world. Language is a kind of gathering technology that enables collectivity and continuity between bodies and ideas. It is also a tool of separation and control, which holds a promise of mastery.

Language is commonly thought of as that which sets "us" apart from the rest of species, as that which lifts and divides us from an otherwise mute or unintelligible materiality.

And yet, the world is made and remade by ongoing and many-tongued conversations between various organisms reverberating with sound, movement, gestures, hormones, electrical signals. Everywhere, life is making itself known, heard, and understood in a wide variety of media and modalities; some of these registers are available to our human senses, while some are not.

And still, we often think of ourselves as the sole creature in this universe capable of actively producing meaning. This is a story of separation through semantics: that we, as humans, are separated from the rest of nature by that crucial dividing line called language that runs between those who speak and those who are spoken of. In this story, Man is master of nature, and nature is consequently reduced to a

beautiful "out there," an exotic other, pacified, and devoid of voice, lacking both political agency and legal rights.

However, entering the vast and humming fields of multispecies storytelling comes with a set of urgent problems. Merging linguistics with the more-than-human world opens questions of anthropomorphism (i.e., adorning nonhumans with human faculties of speech) and problems of centering certain kinds of semiotic faculties on the expense of others. All too often, the human becomes a sort of spokesperson, a well-meaning ventriloquist assuming the right to speak on behalf of the nonhuman other and hereby confirming, rather than challenging, the normative taxonomical hierarchy of Western science.

At the same time, as the multispecies philosopher and animal trainer Vicky Hearne reminds us, while the obstacles to transversal conversations between species are many, our lived, everyday experiences of multispecies cohabitation tell us that in practice, "we" often manage to understand each other. Beyond the boundaries of species, of different kinds of bodies, different dialects and their different apparatuses of communication, meaning is reproduced and confirmed within more-than-human encounters. Haraway, Despret, and likeminded thinkers have accounted for a kind of generative, open-ended, and ongoing multispecies morphology in which bodies, materials and ontologies are always negotiated, in which the contours of "we" are always morphing and emerging anew through a kind of deep contact founded within play, intercession, digestion.

The question remains: how do we narrate and (re)present these encounters in ways that do not negate, annul, or overwrite the distinctive qualities and logics of a nonhuman semiotics?

A (self-)critical multispecies philosophy must interrogate and qualify the broad and seemingly neutral concept of humanity utilized in and around conversations grounded within Western science and academia. The notion of the human, as we know, comes with its own fraught history of exclusion. Who gets to be included in the "we" employed by scientific, social and political discourses, and who is pushed to the margins and beyond of this seemingly neutral category is a violent story of making invisible, of disenfranchisement, of marginalized bodies and their epistemologies.

And still, facing a not-so-distant future catastrophe, which in many ways and for many of us is already here, it is becoming painstakingly clear that our common imaginaries are in dire need of replacements. As Indigenous scholar and botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer asks, how are we supposed to avoid environmental collapse when we are unable to even imagine non-harmful ways of existence? How do we cultivate, nourish, and share those other kinds of stories that may hold promises of modest yet radical hope? As long as we keep reproducing the same kind of languages, the same kinds of scientific gatekeeping, the same kinds of stories about "our" place in nature, we remain numb in the face of collapse.

What is needed, it seems, is to change the story by radically reimagining who we are, what we may become and in alliances with whom. We may ask, what kinds of political, cultural, aesthetic, and scientific prejudices police our speculative abilities to think and act differently, and how do we break with the stories that enable and justify this policing?

This is not merely a question of thematics but one of form as well. In order to accommodate those different kinds of stories, we need to come up with new ways of telling them — with and for whom. Here, we return to the question of narrative

strategies, and media: what would our stories look like, were we to take the signals, traces and voices of other beings serious? What if we, instead of telling story upon story about nature, were to engage in collaborative storytelling activities with that humming, throbbing murmur of countless critters that all, collectively, make up "our" world?

Multispecies Storytelling in Intermedial Practices is a speculative endeavor asking how we may represent, relay, and read worlds differently by taking other species serious as protagonists in their own rights. What other stories are to be invented and told from within those murky and many-tongued chatters of multispecies camaraderie, allies, and collectivity? Could such stories teach us how to become human otherwise?

II

Like it so often happens, it was a coincidence that marked the beginnings of what was initially a loose idea, which then became a conference, exhibition, and performance event, and now this finalizing book project that — due to the medial affordances of the book as media type — showcases a small but illustrative part of the diversity and richness of the conference.

We, that is Ida Bencke and Jørgen Bruhn, had met at the university of Copenhagen years before and bumped into each other at a poetry reading with the Swedish poet Johannes Heldén, an intermedial, multispecies storytelling writer in his own right. Ida was an art curator and editor, interested in ecology and multispecies aesthetics and co-founder of the curatorial collective Laboratory of Aesthetics and Ecology; Jørgen was immersed in intermedial theory and ecocritical questions in the Linnæus University Centre for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies. We were both trained in literary studies and had interests in narrative forms in different media, and therefore it seemed obvious to open an investigation into the possible correspondences between media studies and multispecies thinking by way of a common denominator of both fields, namely storytelling. We formulated a broad title early on that circled in on what we wished to focus — Multispecies Storytelling in Intermedial Practices.

Multispecies philosophies and intermediality are both rich and emerging fields of research and practice in themselves, but, at our conference, we wished to instigate messy meetings, transversalities, and rich crosspollinations rather than traditional academic deep-diving that specify and clarify terminological intricacies.

In this project, therefore, we operated with generous working definitions of the key terms, meaning that *multispecies,* for us, signaled the lively, and in some cases quite revolutionizing, ongoing conversations pointing towards less hierarchical, less anthropocentric positions of more-than-human lifeworlds currently under construction.

The *intermedial* perspective signaled, in its basic sense, our wish to welcome all sorts of stories and contributions in all sorts of media, but it also indicated the a priori, intermedial notion that all media and all meaning making are basically intermedial. A conversation between two persons employs verbal language as well as gestures, and our clothes, our spatial position, and other aspects factor in, too. An eco-documentary produces its meaning by way of sound, images, editing, and often a narrating voice-over in a complex combination. A poem employs language,

but it also organizes the page in a spatial pattern, and the words not only represent an outer world or inner feelings but also has rhythmic and musical aspects. All media are mixed media. *Storytelling* was equally and openly understood as the immense field of different narratives and narrative voices or positions, human or not, across the fiction or non-fiction divide — all the different narratives in different media forms that engage in mostly contemporary artistic and philosophical dialogues but also in historical or political contexts. Stories that represent aspects of the world and stories that acts in and acts upon the world.

As always, the funding question came in as an early priority, and when applying for external funding we envisioned a relatively modest thirty- to forty-person exploratory workshop-slash-symposium with a strong setup of keynote speakers. Linköping University's Seedbox funding supported the idea. However, when disseminating the call for papers for the January 2019 conference in Växjö, it turned out that more than 130 people wanted to present work or discuss multispecies storytelling in intermedial practices with us. We were happy to see that our hopes for a truly transdisciplinary and global group of diverse guests came true. In the end, the generous engagement of so many wonderful minds, bodies and institutions manifested in three days and nights of talks, debates, art exhibitions, video screenings, performances, experimental workshops, experimental dinner sessions, and a lot of fun. The participants included an intergenerational mix of academics of many disciplines whose work met and merged with artists, designers, and activists who discussed burning issues while taking pleasure in each other's company.

III

It does not really make sense to try to paraphrase the three days' lively engagements, but the rich and diverse contributions to this volume are a sample of the diversity of the generous contributions. After a thought-provoking opening address from Dean of Faculty Gunlög Fur, briefly discussed in one of the contributions to the volume, Vinciane Despret gave the first keynote presentation at the conference, which also opens this volume. Her text opens on a modest, everyday experience — being awakened by a blackbird at 4 o'clock in the morning. Despret integrates this initial experience into speculations concerning animal behavior and continental philosophy, spiraling into visions of being together, and sharing life and the goods of the world, which ultimately ended up in questions of what it means to live. The blackbird's beautiful fabulations initiated ideas about how all animals inhabit the world. Octopuses, for instance: "As we see with octopuses, the habitat not only designs the shapes of relationships, but, what's more, it has the function of actively establishing social beings." Animals — and we humans, of course, are animals too — are defined by our habitats, and a bird's singing becomes a social vision. Despret borrows a reflection from Latour, when she notes that "the two meanings of the French term *partition* as a 'partaking agreement,' or more precisely as a 'sharing granted' and as a 'musical script,' can be brought together. A new vision of territory, and co-habitation, perhaps?" Seeing the traditional, territorial marking of animals as rather the event of sharing space, Despret surprisingly finds that "the territory reorganizes the aggressive functions [of animals] into expressive functions." The blackbird's song, then, demonstrates that in the animal kingdom, "we are far from the idea of the territory as private property, as a place

of exclusive possession to which our modern legal and philosophical tradition has accustomed us." As with so many contributions at the conference, Despret's talk was, deep down, about learning from animal practices without anthropomorphizing or romanticizing these animal life forms.

Also, Karin Bolender's contribution has a lot to say about learning from animals. Bolender, self-characterizing as "artist-researcher, and more recently as a maternal linguistic transmitter," opens her text with her memories from giving birth and dreams of a radical, multispecies beginning to a new life that, for medical reasons, turned into a wholly hospitalized birth. This probably saved her and her child's life, but it also hindered the dreamed-of, multispecies birth experience. Only a while after the actual birth is the child, then, "messily inoculated into a family full of barn-dust bodies and muzzles and mud, local grass hay, forest edges, and the millioning motes and swarms of untold, often sub-visible others that proliferate as both allies and enemies in every crack and fold." Being an artist and linguistic transmitter, she is not only offering her newborn some of the microbial tongues, but she acknowledges that "we each also pass on the seeds of linguistic 'mother tongues' to fetuses and neonates—all the heritable names, stories, cultures, and categorical cuts carried forth in particular languages and ontologies." From this personal birth story to larger learning and storying projects, she welcomes the readers of her essay and everybody else to the project of the Secretome, which "explores one creative proposal for how we might make space for mysterious, sub-visible agencies of microbial meshes in collective storying, at different nexuses of ecologies and imaginative encounters—with the recognition that they are always already involved in the stories of our collective lives in ways we barely grasp." Imagining new ways of living with other species, creating new homes and deterritorialized *terristories,* a phrase she lifts from Despret, Bolender ends her text on an inviting note: "Home is where the unknown is. *Welcome to the Secretome*."

Staying in the subject of learning from animals, Hörner/Antlfinger's "Tales of a Modern Parrot: Living Entangled Lives in an Interspecies Art Collective" describes decades of the artists' lives, living with and thinking about and creating art about and with animals. Describing such a long-time cooperation, the text also describes changes in the collective's work that reflects changes in philosophy and politics concerning general shifts in multispecies co-habitations. It offers valuable insights into "a more reflective kind of anthropomorphism. One that does neither overestimate, nor does it underestimate the similarities between human and non-human animals." Also, the parrots taught their human cohabitants and co-workers about new balances between work and play, a well-known relation for many artists – and perhaps academics, too — and the artwork with animals therefore poses fascinating questions relating to what "work" is. Does it make sense to say that pets work? And is it only human beings that create art?

In "The Laudable Cow: Poetics of Human/Cattle Relationships," Emily McGiffin begins by quickly going through the immense — and immensely inhuman — human-cattle relationship as we know it today in Europe and North America. McGiffin investigates aspects of the "growing human, environmental, and animal injustices of industrialized meat production" that "require us not only to shift our eating habits but also our sympathies, by rekindling relationships of kinship and care with the animals we are reliant upon." Her entry to these issues is sung and written poetry, from South Africa and North America respectively; observing that "when cattle are given a degree of independence to direct their own lives and

movements, they enjoy many of the same things people do. They like hanging out in parks. They like sunbathing on the beach or by a river. They like watching the surf." This aspect of cattle-human relationships is more evident, though, in the praise-poetry of South African poets than it is in the cowboy songs from the second half of the nineteenth century. For her, cowboy literature is less an expression of human-animal entanglements and more an aspect of the settler and capitalist mechanism of today.

For a conference hosted at a faculty of Arts and Humanities, there was unusually much talk about natural sciences, in particular biology and the so-called life sciences. Péter Kristóf Makai's article, "The Representation of the 'Tree of Life' Metaphor across Media," goes directly to one of the founding scientific set of ideas ruminating behind almost all the presentations at the conference, namely the idea of evolution. The article responds quite explicitly to the key words of the conference, namely "multispecies," "storytelling," and "intermedial practices." Establishing early on the central message of Darwin's revolutionary thinking — "that all life on earth is fundamentally connected: every species is kin to every other species that has ever lived on earth" — Makai directly goes on to posit this as a design or representational problem, noting that "[n]o visual metaphor has captured this fact so succinctly as the Tree of Life." In an archetypical intermedial methodology, Makai gathers a sample of different media responses to this "design problem" that ranges from documentary film to digital online-design and more narrative versions in popular science book and, finally, to a board game. All of these demonstrate "how evolution as an abstract scientific concept tests the limits of medial expression, broadening the affordances and constraints of the media in question." Representing evolution is a grand challenge because of both the complexity and in the numbers of species and the immense time frames. Another problem is that there are no protagonists in evolution, a basic fact that makes it difficult for creators in different media and different scientific or aesthetic domains to find suitable narrative forms. Many, therefore, succumb to what Makai with a neologism terms "protagonification."

Evolution, seen in the efficient light of comparative intermedial studies, tests the limits of visual metaphors (i.e., the tree itself), narrative form, and the idea of a central hero. One of the takeaways of Makai's investigation is Dawkins's insight that the comprehensive story he told in *The Ancestor's Tale: A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Life* could be multiplied in endless, different versions. Written as it is from a human point of view, "another book could have been written in parallel for any of 10 million starting pilgrims," which means all the different results of the overwhelmingly rich evolutionary process. That is yet another sign of how Uexküll's idea of the affordances created by each specific species' *Umwelt* are present, implicitly or explicitly, in so many of the contributions in this volume.

One of the explicit references to Uexküll is in the visual artist Fröydi Laszlo's text "The Plant-story? Listening and Multispecies Storytelling." Here, she invites the reader to come behind the scenes for a video art project, "The Pest." This piece mimics several genres, including the love story and the nature documentary. The description of the making of this project takes up less space, however, than a series of wide-reaching reflections relating to the philosophical backgrounds to Laszlo's artistic practices. Ernst Cassirer's Neo-Kantian philosophy of symbolic forms is proposed as an essential dialogue partner for contemporary multispecies considerations and media theory. Laszlo demonstrates that the supporting, central

aspects of Cassirer's philosophy is Uexküll's *Umwelt* theory. Laszlo argues for better ways to understand and to appreciate meandering in a world of human and nonhuman relations: the world, it is argued here, is much richer than conventional, anthropocentric worldviews can see, and Laszlo leads the way in meeting the world halfway between all the living features of human animals, animals, and plants.

Apart from Uexküll's realization of the different affordances that characterizes different species, another leitmotif in this book (often in critical discussions) is the idea of the Anthropocene. In her contribution, Melanie Boehi reminds the reader about the critical discussions surrounding the concept of the Anthropocene. She wishes to change the geographical and social imbalances and blind spots in the concept by thinking about an "African Anthropocene." Her starting point for doing this is the "impact of the climate crisis on the Adderley Street flower market" in Cape Town, South Africa. This setting enables her to open a discussion of "the complex entanglements of human and plant lives [that] make the Adderley Street flower market a suitable site for examining life in an African Anthropocene." The art project investigates how the flower vendors tell stories by way of their local produce, and, at the art show described by Boehi, the public was invited to do so too. Boehi describes the tradition of arranging flowers — selecting, collecting, organizing — as a form of storytelling that "allows humans to make arrangements together with plants, and be themselves arranged by plants." Adding layer after layer to her argument — flower arrangements, flower wrapping papers, sound — Boehi shows how these media types "inhabit a space between conventional forms of media, and how they are constantly evolving from one form to another: Flower arrangements turn into stories; flower wrapping papers are recycled into newspapers; and a music composition becomes a flower arrangement." Storytelling and intermedial practices from the living, and dying, languages of plants.

To politicize the too easy globalist heritage of much talk about the Anthropocene is also an issue in "'You have to learn the language of how to communicate with the plants' and other selva stories" by Kristina Van Dexter. Van Dexter leaves the Global North to discuss aspects of the ongoing war in Colombia after the peace settlement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 2016. Blending field notes of interviews with historical overviews, photographs, and Colombian original texts, Van Dexter explores new ways of thinking about war, peace, and the forests, selva. Selva, though, is much more than concentrated amounts of trees as a conventional anthropocentric view would have it: "the selva refers to the living forests of Amazonia, a lively entanglement of soils, seeds, trees, pollinators, forest spirits, and farmers." The Selva are communicative, social, life-producing environments under threat of both the increasing number of cattle, and the coca industries. Van Dexter wants to create a response to ecocidal destruction, which requires the act of writing; writing witness and the telling of stories that entangle us within the selva's temporalities and communicative relationalities." And therefore, the essay "looks to the selva's relational poetics and generative rhythms death nourishing life for guidance on how to inherit ecocidal destruction toward the possibilities of peace." Farming in the spirit of selva means defying several threats and temptations and applying traditional practices — for instance, singing to and with coca and tobacco plants — to try and reestablish the lifegiving relations to selva. Under dire conditions and very high risks, the writer manages to create

hope by contributing with yet another nice neologism appropriate to this particular setting, when she is talking about "restorying peace."

The politics of the Anthropocene and other definitions is also central for Cassandra Troyan and Helen V. Pritchard. In "The Anti Menagerie: Fictions for Interrogating the Supremacy of World-shaping Violence," they take the cue from the inaugural conference speech from Dean of the faculty of arts and humanities Gunlög Fur, who is a postcolonial historian by training. Troyan and Pritchard acknowledges the need for historical facts concerning the ideological backgrounds for contemporary and historical Anthropocene effects, but they want to add to the academic perspective of history: "Fur's analysis as a historian is greatly appreciated and crucial in contextualizing this moment, yet we believe the work of fiction provides a critical intervention by calling into question the relations between fact, fiction, narration, and who is given the voice and authority to be able to make claims to the category of history, in or of itself." Therefore, the strategy of this text is to "propose multispecies solidarity stories" that "address the role of colonial rule in actively constructing a narrative of dominance and subjugation to all living organisms under its purview." Following this critical frame, the authors offer what may perhaps be characterized as speculative, multispecies storytelling, that deconstructs and narrates versions of possible weird and queered multispecies constellations; recognizable and uncanny fables for life in the contested world of the Anthropocene.

Troyan and Pritchard's menagerie is hardly paraphrasable, nor is Gillian Wylde's work printed here. Titled "*#FEELSWeoutheregettinthisbread,*" Wylde sets in motion funny, burlesque, but also strangely alienated settings and situations that might have been picked up at more or less random internet travels. She collects and represents "multispecies inter-relationships and stories that circulate rapidly and widely on the internet" and, by cutting up, rewriting, adding and subtracting, shows "how they replicate, mutate and evolve." Intertextually dumbfounding, where the colorful illustrations add to the complexity, the text finds, or, rather produces a voice and vision that seems disembodied and floating and immersed in many bodily matters at the same time. The result is text and images that you have probably not seen before, and that, without explain crutches or pedagogical hints, creates and critically comments on the commercialized and click-baiting, multispecies, internet life.

From Wylde's digital visions and down to something analog: a lake, and what to learn from it. In "Learning from the Lake," Katie Lawson asks if "curatorial work — as a kind of storytelling — [can] be reshaped by aqueous thinking, by multispecies and more-than-human relationalities, by watery territories." Lawson critically questions her own and others' curatorial efforts in the exhibition with the same name as her article and she is well aware of the limitations of an art show or an ecofeminist philosophical treatise when facing the grand challenges of what she, like many others, only hesitatingly names the Anthropocene. However, after considerations she chooses to believe that exhibitions, storytelling, thinking "does hold the potential to present possibilities for being otherwise, to prefigure certain kinds of ethical relations with water or watery others." Lawson discuss ecofeminist attempts to find new fluid logics, insists on thinking metaphorically and concretely at the same time, and offers glimpses into the art exhibition that included the work of Maggie Groat and Kelly Jazvac. These artists, along with the lake and the

tradition of (eco)feminist theory, all contributed to Lawson's curated show, and their artistic work helped Lawson create her curatorial, ecofeminist metaphors.

In "Lagomorph Lessons: Feminist Methods for Environmental Sensing and Sensemaking," Maya Livio asks, "[w]hat is at stake when already marginalized nonhuman beings are leveraged as sensemaking apparatus, and how can these practices be made more ethical and just?" She modestly offers her work "as a few preliminary provocations, tactics that might serve as methodological breadcrumbs for more ethical sensemaking with nonhuman beings." It is all about the pikas: the "(*Ochotona princeps*) is a small lagomorph, a relative of rabbits and hares," but they are not only that. Rather, the pikas that are often considered as an "indicator species" should not be seen only as an indicator for human life; rather Livio discuss them as a sign of the broader nonhuman turn in thinking and the arts. Coworking with pikas opens up new ways of multispecies sensemaking and cooperations, where nonhuman species are not only instruments or indicators for human utilitarian interests. Thermoregulation, a truly central notion in times of global warming, is at center in the pikas' sophisticated adaptation strategies to changing surroundings. Livio's reflections touches upon questions of nesting, burrowing, and other technologies of making homes, and her article's thorough description of the preparations for the intermedial film project *Thermopower* offers insights to both the possibilities of rethinking human-nonhuman relations in arts and science and to which degree this definition includes questions of storytelling and intermediality. "Through sensors placed inside their bodies, biologists have learned about thermoregulation. More ambiently, pikas have helped me to make sense of multispecies, thermoregulatory processes and to notice how technological thermoregulation maps thermopower across species lines." Pikas, for Livio, are like the canaries in the coalmines, and she seems to ask implicitly whether we humans too are canaries in the fossil-fuel-driven, capitalist coalmine.

Moving from the larger mammals to Kafkaesque bugs, Adam Dickinson opens his piece, "The Blattarians," dramatically, stating that "[w]e write our environment as our environment writes us." The phrase mirrors major insights of his books, *The Polymers* and *Anatomic,* which are part of Dickinson's attempt to create a "metabolic poetics." He describes his poetics as "a research-creation practice concerned with the potential of expanded modes of reading and writing to shift the frames and scales of conventional forms of signification in order to bring into focus the often inscrutable biological and cultural writing intrinsic to the Anthropocene and its interconnected global and local metabolic processes." Partly by experimenting with his own body, he moves to the question of heat and thermoregulatory processes, nicely echoing Livio's contribution to this book. Dickinson implicitly constructs yet another kind of poetic "canary in a coal mine" experiment when he tested his physical and cognitive performances when put under the pressure of 1.5 degrees raised temperature — referring to the 1.5 limit of the Paris Agreement. Moving his heat experiments from his own body to cockroaches in a de-hierarchizing gesture, Dickinson investigates how they react to two things: the first, a two-degree change in temperature and, second, a habitat change to see how they react upon literally living upon a paper copy of Kafka's famous text on the transformation of a human being into a cockroach. The poems testify to a multispecies practice by being created in a mixture of human intention and agency, nonhuman animal agency (including excrements that, when reproduced look quite beautiful), and his personal dreams. The poems are "illustrated," or, rather, accompanied

by photographs and thermal camera copies documenting the cockroach work-in-progress. Adam Dickinson generously let us use one of this great photos for the front cover of this book.

Carol Padberg's text, "WERT: Interspecies Weaving and Becoming," posits the ancient craft of weaving textiles within an experimental, multimodal, and multispecies art and research practice. Weaving wearable sculptures with wool and mycelium, Padberg's practice assembles at least two different weaving practices, one of the human and the other of the mycelia that spread its "hyphal threads into multiple directions" in order to break down organic matter and grow. Padberg's practice is one of radical collaboration: "For four years we have been making these ecological weavings. As we weave, we are part of a multispecies expanded art practice that includes local sheep; dye plants from our garden; and the chickens, insects, worms, and protozoa that maintain our soil's vitality. Our creative group includes representatives from each major family of Eukaryota organisms: animals, fungi, plants and protists." The sculptures are later put to use in somatic workshops, where the human participants are invited to wear the weaving, assisting a kind of multispecies sensorial experience and allowing the mycelia to enter the human body, making tangible the multispecies morphology that always already exists at the very core of any living entity or body: ''By helping humans to sense fungal beings through their skin, we are cultivating the human ability to sense fungal communities that already live right on their skin, as well as microorganisms that live in their gut and in their lungs. Rehabilitating these senses helps to increase human awareness of the interconnectivity of the myriad forms of life on planet earth."

From the ancient technology of weaving to a contemporary technology of remote-camera viewing in capturing wildlife: Elizabeth Vander Meer's contribution explores the ethics and power dynamics of capturing the lives of animals via camera traps and discusses what kinds of stories this particular technology is able to unfold. Between dominance and care, distance and proximity, Vander Meer investigates the unique gaze facilitated in and by remote camera viewing, as well as the ethics and politics of this gaze. Her text blends media and discourse analysis with autoethnography, discusses questions of affective logics, micropolitics, and biopower, and considers practices of both care and harm expressed in different ways of viewing and narrating the lives of indigenous wildlife.

When Loup Rivière presented a draft at the conference for what is here printed as "Dancing is an Ecosystem Service, and So Is Being Trans," the atmosphere was intense, highly expectant, and curious. After Loup Rivière's performance the night before with her Dance for Plants group at the opening of the exhibition at Växjö Konsthall, the audience possibly hoped to get the dance practice explained and framed. It was, but many other aspects are opened in the rich text, too. First, perhaps, it offers a manifesto for radically different and liberating ways of seeing and being in the world. Initially, the text gives an explanation of *dancing for plants,* an activity that turns out to have political as well as philosophical outcomes. The philosophical system service of dancing for plants is "to become capable of dancing in their presence, not seeking to transform into them or to imitate them but rather to present yourself to them, to dance for them and *because* of them, to let them become, for a while, a reason for you to be in the world." Going further, however, means that any idea of Ecosystem Services needs to be criticized, rethought, and rearranged. Actually, Ecosystem Services must be transformed into

the diametrically opposite to what was originally meant to specify — as quoted by Loup Rivière, "production of oxygen in the air, the natural purification of water, the biomass that feeds domesticated animals, the pollination of crops, etc. Also included are the 'amenities offered by nature like the beauty of landscapes.'" A first, remarkable rhetorical turn of the text is to make the dance for plants practice, defined as a relay-function or putting things into relation, a blueprint for another life practice, namely being trans. The second rhetorical turn is to make the practice of being trans a kind of blueprint for all beings in this world. This turn occupies the last third of the text where the reflective mode changes into a mode very directly related to the reader: to me, and to you.

IV

Multispecies Storytelling in Intermedial Practices was a many-armed event whose tentacles touched a large number of people and institutions. As an extension and parallel dimension to the conference, Växjö Konsthall opened a group exhibition co-curated with Ida Bencke with the same title, hosting art works and performances. Växjö Konsthall proved to be the perfect host environment for generous and playful conversations around experimental artistic practices and multispecies thinking. In addition, the local art and farming collective Kultivator Öland provided a much-needed satellite: in collaboration with the Rural Alchemy Workshop (R.A.W.), Kultivator Öland organized a roundtable discussion that was situated in a large barn with humans, horses, dogs, and their microbial companions, along with those of cows and sheep, who joined the conversation while engaging in a shared meal. The roundtable became a dining table, reminding us of the root of the word "companion," *cum panis,* "with bread." As Haraway reminds us, multispecies encounters are all about digestion, about eating and being eaten in the best possible, most nourishing, and least harmful ways. As it were, this multispecies roundtable was centered around questions of bacteria and regimes of hygiene — how some of our tiniest but nonetheless crucial companions often go unnoticed in our stories about what constitute health, selves, communities, and worlds.

This more-than-human panel was invested in efforts of getting to know some of the microbial critters that inhabit our bodies and our homes. Bacteria cultured by Karin Bolender and companions at R.A.W. in Oregon were traced onto a large tablecloth, which was first used on the roundtable for the communal meal at Kultivator and then installed in the hallway of the conference at the university. Upon arrival, each conference participant was given thread and a needle and was encouraged to spend some time embroidering the traces of the microbial companions who shared the roundtable. This was our way of inviting the more-than-human into the academic conference setting in a playful yet contemplative way.

Of course, the question of hygiene, of sharing tables with many companions, has now entirely changed in the face of the global pandemic that has ravaged our world. The conference took place in January 2019, one year before the global health and economic Corona crisis. The crisis was a result, as far as we know, of an unhealthy multispecies relation, and it was unfortunately a sign that many of the dire and slightly pessimistic ideas weathered at the conference came true shockingly quickly. COVID-19 offers, among many other things, a lecture on the vulnerability that we share. It is a testament to the porosity of our bodies and communities. It

has also been a lesson of the consequences of our particular way of administrating and producing multispecies relations.

The crisis also made some of the editing and collecting processes somewhat slower than planned, but after a while we found the perfect seedbox for the book at punctum books, with the aid of publisher Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei.

Nothing of this would have happened had it not been for the generous economic funding from, primarily, the Seedbox funding agency based at the time at Linköping University. Secondly, the faculty of arts and humanities of Linnæus University added necessary funding, in particular when the size of the conference grew unexpectedly. The Linnæus University Centre for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies supported some of the hours spent in the project, and the department of Design at Linnæus was particularly important in providing spaces, ideas, and essential collaborators; among them Zeenath Hasan, Eric Snodgrass and not least Leah Ireland, who worked tirelessly to facilitate a smooth and caring infrastructure of such a large and complex event. A huge thanks to the amazing students from the Design+Change program who provided extraordinarily delicious, playful., and conceptual food experiences throughout the conference.

Gratitude goes to the team at Växjö Konsthall, Filippa de Vos and Ragnhild Lekberg, for an excellent collaboration on the *Multispecies Storytelling* exhibition, and to Kultivator Öland for arranging a truly multispecies roundtable in their barn. Finally, we would like to acknowledge and thank the administrative assistance of Martina Wilmén and Martina Slättman Hansson from the university conference assistance office.