Pigs, Fish, and Birds
Toward Multispecies Ethnography in Melanesia

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**ABSTRACT:** This article reviews two strengths of Melanesian anthropology that could make a significant contribution to anthropological research on human-animal relations, specifically to multispecies ethnography. The first strength is an analytical approach to comparative research on gender developed in response to challenges from feminist theory in the 1980s; the second is a wealth of ethnographic detail on human-animal relations, much of it contained in texts not explicitly concerned with them and thus largely inaccessible to nonspecialist readers. The article sets up an analogy between the challenges faced by feminist anthropologists and those currently faced by multispecies ethnographers. It demonstrates how pursuing the analogy allows multispecies ethnographers to draw together analytically, and to reinvestigate a broad range of ethnographic resources containing details on human-animal relations, whose convergence so far remains hidden by divergent theoretical interests.

**KEYWORDS:** gender, human-animal relations, Melanesia, multispecies ethnography

**Multispecies Ethnography and Melanesian Anthropology**

This article outlines an important contribution that already published anthropological research in Melanesia could make to the development of research on human-animal relations in anthropology, and specifically, to multispecies ethnography. In the first part, an analogy is set up between challenges facing feminist anthropologists in the 1970s and 1980s, and challenges of multispecies ethnography at present. It is suggested that an analytical strategy developed to address problems of gender may also be useful for the latter. In the second part, the analytical possibility outlined in the first is demonstrated with reference to some of the rich ethnographic material on human-animal relations in Melanesia. Much of this detail is found in texts that do not explicitly focus on animals. It may thus be missed by researchers without expertise in this ethnographic region. Bringing some of it at least to the attention of a broader readership, and indicating that there is more by way of brief references, therefore appears important.

What is at stake in anthropological research on human-animal relations has aptly been summed up in a review article and call for “multispecies ethnography” by Kirksey and Helmreich (2010). Writing from the perspective of cultural anthropology, they argue that this research plays a crucial role in wider disciplinary efforts of recharting the limits of the human—anthropology’s traditional subject matter. As Kirksey and Helmreich point out, the limits of the human have become uncertain from various disciplinary perspectives and at various scales at once.
One set of challenges arises from recent developments in the life sciences and has been debated primarily by anthropologists interested in kinship, gender, and genetics (e.g., Franklin 2007; Hayden 1995; Martin 1987). Second, environmental concerns in public debates and new developments in ecological research have prompted increasing numbers of anthropologists to study the dynamic relations of humans and other organisms at the scale of ecosystems and landscapes since the 1990s. The field of environmental anthropology is varied and developing fast, comprising research in historical and political ecology and on social-ecological systems, among others. Third, the limits of the human have all but disappeared in research in the physical and geo-sciences. The term “anthropocene” was coined by Crutzen and Stoermer (2000, cited in Kirksey and Helmreich 2010) for the current geological epoch, on the grounds that the entire planet is undergoing lasting change whose primary driving force is the agency of humans. These challenges to the boundaries of the human at several scales resonate strongly with research within anthropology itself. There is growing evidence from ethnographic research and anthropological theorizing that not only differences among humans, such as differences in gender or culture, but also species boundaries cannot be taken for granted. They must be studied as emergent properties of “interspecies” relations (Tsing n.d.). This, then, is the disciplinary situation in which human-animal relations are becoming a prominent subject matter in anthropological research. Several related projects are under way that address relations between humans and animals in order to help us rethink what it means to be human. Kirksey and Helmreich use the label “multispecies ethnography,” Kohn (2007) proposes an “anthropology of life.”

Anthropologists working on Melanesia have already contributed to research exploring challenges to the boundaries of the human in kinship (e.g., Bamford 2007; Konrad 2005; Strathern 1992a, 1992b) and have made important and diverse contributions to environmental anthropology (see Bulmer 1967, 1968; Bulmer and Majnep 1978; Hide 1984, 2003; Kirsch 2006b; Rapaport 1968; Majnep and Bulmer 1977; Sillitoe 2003; West 2006). There is a growing interest among them in making their own ethnography and theoretical resources speak to the more comprehensive projects of multispecies ethnography. This article focuses on one possibility for bringing ethnographic and conceptual resources from Melanesian anthropology into multispecies ethnography, and vice versa. This is the possibility of setting up an analogy between an argument about gender in Melanesia made by Marilyn Strathern (1988), and of exploiting the analogy for drawing together analytically a broad range of ethnographic detail on human-animal relations in the region that are so far scattered in texts ostensibly concerned with other topics.

The potential for analogies between problems of feminist research and research on human-animal relations has already been noted (e.g., Hastedt 2011). I suggest that a very specific analogy can be set up between the challenges of feminist anthropology in the 1970s and 1980s and the challenges of multispecies ethnography now. Anthropologist Marilyn Strathern in her *The Gender of the Gift* (1988) articulates and addresses the challenge for feminist anthropologists as one of “facing both ways.” Facing in the direction of a “radical politics,” they must seek to uncover gender inequality (Richards 1982, cited in Strathern 1988), including in their own analyses (e.g., Atkinson 1982; Strathern 1988: 37). Facing in the direction of a “radical scholarship,” they will want to reveal these aspirations themselves to be grounded in historically specific conditions (e.g., Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Rosaldo 1980b). multispecies ethnographers similarly find themselves facing both ways. On the one hand, there is a need for writing critically against the “anthropocene,” the inflation of the human to planetary scales; on the other, we must avoid becoming engrossed with ourselves and give due attention to our connections with other species. As Kirksey and Helmreich write: “Multispecies ethnography involves … attending to the remaking of anthropos as well as its companion and stranger species on planet Earth” (2010: 549).
Strathern approaches the challenge of feminist anthropology by assuming a third position, between the political and the scholarly, as an ethnographer of Mount Hagen, in Papua New Guinea. She uses her Hagen ethnography as a starting point for a comparative analysis of gender in Melanesia and in the modern West, in which she moves back and forth between feminist and anthropological scholarly debates and ethnography. How exactly she does this, must be a question of some interest to multispecies ethnographers. Below, I try to outline one of her analytical strategies, step by step, and suggest how it may be re-employed in the development of multispecies ethnography in Melanesia and perhaps beyond.

The strategy I am interested in combines three analytical moves that can usefully be replicated in multispecies ethnography. The first is training attention on an ethnographic instance that appears especially troubling, from the perspective of the double challenge. The second is Strathern’s replacement of men and women with “same-sex” and “cross-sex” relations as key analytical categories, a move by which she guards against taking for granted the difference she sets out to investigate. The third is her integration of the term agency, which is central to feminist debates, into her analytical toolkit. In this way, Strathern anchors her argument closely in the feminist debates that provoked it, as well as in ethnographic observations of Melanesian concerns with action and its effects. I suggest that the term is equally useful for anchoring multispecies ethnography in Melanesian as well as various anthropological concerns. Eduardo Kohn, alluding to a different but related analogy to the one that I perceive between multispecies ethnography and feminist anthropology, has made a comment on agency, among others, that expresses an intent similar to mine here: “the goal in multispecies ethnography should not be just to give voice, agency or subjectivity to the non-human … but to force us to radically rethink these categories of our analysis as they pertain to all beings” (cited in Kirksey and Helmreich 2010: 562–3). For rethinking our analytical categories as they pertain to all beings, and with special reference to Melanesia, I propose building on Strathern’s analysis of gender.

The appropriateness of doing so for developing a comparative approach to human-animal relations in Melanesia may be doubted on several grounds. First, the suggestion to use Strathern’s writings as a conceptual resource for research on human-animal relations will likely be contentious, including among anthropologists working in Melanesia. Her writings have often been criticized as opaque, and they do not readily lend themselves to simplification. The challenges of making them useful for a broader and multidisciplinary research community are thus considerable. A second, equally serious point of criticism from within Melanesian anthropology has been that the elegance and power of the arguments—not of the style of writing—have led researchers to replicate them uncritically, including in cases where ethnographic observations would have permitted different theoretical conclusions (Scott 2007a). As a result, there have been calls to break the dominance of those writings rather than extend their influence (see Scott 2007b).

This article is structured, and my argument is developed with these reservations in mind. First, and especially for the benefit of nonspecialist readers, one particular argument about gender contained in The Gender of the Gift is singled out for my purpose here, and a step-by-step exposition is provided in the following section. For the sake of simplicity, much of the history and context of this argument that specialist readers would be interested in is removed. Among other things, I can only acknowledge but not review here its development in the context of debates about sexual antagonism and women’s roles in the Papua New Guinea highlands (see Bonnemère 1990; Buchbinder and Rappaport 1976; Godelier 2004; Herdt 1981; Herdt and Poole 1982; Langness 1967; Lindenbaum 1972, 1987; Meggitt 1964; Meigs 1976, 1984; Read 1952, 1954; Strathern 1972, 1980, 1984, 1988). The same holds for disciplinary debates about personhood in the 1980s (e.g., Carrithers 1985; Geertz 1983; Rosaldo 1980a) that Strathern
addresses with reference to ethnographic findings from Melanesia (see Leenhardt [1947] 1984; see also Battaglia 1983, 1990; Clay 1986; Clifford 1982; Goodale 1985; Munn 1986). Furthermore, I omit any reference to Strathern’s writings on property, which are a continuation of her argument on gender utilized here and in which its critical potential becomes apparent (e.g., Hirsch and Strathern 2004; Strathern 1984, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2005). With regard to the criticism of replicating theoretical findings uncritically, this paper aims exactly in the opposite direction. Animals are not women. It cannot be sufficient to import, in the form of basic analytical assumptions, theoretical conclusions pertaining to gender into research on human-animal relations. What can be adapted and developed further for this purpose is an analytical strategy that has proven productive for understanding relations among humans and relations between persons and things. It may also lead to novel insights into human-animal relations.

Furthermore, objections may be raised against my suggestion to retain agency as a key analytical term for comparative research into human-animal relations. The term poses dangers of reification (Dwyer and Minnegal 2007). It is also true that some anthropologists are currently exploring human-animal relations without relying on an explicit theory of agency, and that their research has been productive. A prominent example is Viveiros de Castro’s “perspectivist” approach that has been taken up in debates about hunting in the circumpolar north (Viveiros de Castro 1998; see also Ingold 2000; Pedersen 2001; Willerslev 2007). However, making agency central to human-animal debates offers advantages that, in my view, outweigh the disadvantages, at least for the moment. In Melanesian anthropology, agency has long been and remains crucial to theoretical debates (e.g., Clay 1992; Dwyer and Minnegal 2007; Mosko 2001; Rio 2007). Second, agency remains an important analytical term in anthropological research beyond Melanesia, notably in economic anthropology (see Maurer, Nelms, and Rea 2013). By retaining and developing the term further for research on human-animal relations, the possibility for cross-fertilization between this research and equally timely debates will be enhanced (see also Rio 2005).

Problems with Women: Laying out the Argument

For the purposes of this article, it is sufficient to summarize, and to discuss the analytical strategy developed in Strathern’s response to a particular challenge directed at her research (Josephides 1982, 1985; Strathern 1988: 145). Josephides argued that research in Mount Hagen, in focusing on ceremonial exchange at the cost of household productive activities, bought into male informants’ ideology of reciprocity. Josephides was most critical of the way in which the research concealed the source of the pigs that men exchanged among each other in the labor of women, and thus the alienation of women’s labor. At one level, Strathern rejected the criticism. She has argued that the concept of alienation central to Josephides’ argument presumed an “intrinsic relation between the self as subject and its realization in the objects of its activities,” and “entails a view of agents as single entities, as singular authors of what they make and do” (Strathern 1988: 162). However, Hageners assume no such identity between women as subjects and pigs as their products. Pigs are coproduced by people in the household. Thus, when a man takes a pig out of the household for purposes of exchange, this is not a matter of one individual appropriating the product of another’s labor. The analytical language is misplaced. At another level and more important, however, Strathern affirms the relevance of the critical questions raised by Josephides. She places these questions in the context of feminist debates about women’s agency, and asks what the concealment of one set of relations by another meant for this agency: did it become concealed, as well, and what conclusions could be drawn about the equality of men and women in Melanesia?
In order to demonstrate how Melanesian ethnography drove a wedge into assumptions about gender and agency (among others) deeply engrained in academic debates of the time, it is necessary to review Strathern's argument in the ethnographically specific terms in which it was made. The example of a man taking a pig out of the household for purposes of ceremonial exchange may serve as a starting point. As mentioned above, he does not alienate the product of his wife's labor, but he renders irrelevant, temporarily, the relations he has with her and others in the household. Strathern labels these relations “cross-sex.” They are the (always particular) relations of mutual care among kin who collaborate and feed one another in the household. A woman grows tubers with her husband and children's well-being in mind. Their health is evidence of her care and “good thinking.” Her husband, in his turn, clears gardens for her. The tubers grown in these gardens thus evidence his work, as well as his wife's. The same holds for their children and pigs that eat the tubers. They are the products of cross-sex relations.

Once in the domain of ceremonial exchange, a pig turns into evidence of relations of a different kind: the same-sex relations between men in ceremonial exchange. When looking at the pig about to change hands, the donor perceives his (generalized) capacity to give. The recipient, in turn, perceives—through the pig he obtains—his particular relation with the donor. He also anticipates giving it away again, thus anticipating—with the act of giving—his (generalized) capacity to give. This specifically male capacity is made visible again and again, and the same-sex relations between men are thus replicated every time a pig is given and received. Men are not the only ones engaged in same-sex relations, in which one gender's capacities are replicated at each turn. Women do the same, according to Strathern, when they grow (female) tubers in the ground, or when they grow children inside themselves that reciprocally grow the mother's body (see also Gillison 1993). They replicate same-sex relations, and the capacity to grow that is specifically female.

For becoming evident, same-sex relations must yield a product: a woman's children must be born, and her tubers must be consumed. Likewise, the pigs that a man passes around in exchange only turn into evidence of his productive capacity once eaten. Men and women thus rely on one another to recognize the products of their respective capacities. However, those who recognize the products redefine their source in the process. They perceive of themselves as the cause for whom the respective other produced a tuber, child, or pig. Thus, the circle closes.

Strathern acknowledges the inspiration, for this analysis, of the Hagen donor, who gives both ways. On the one hand, she presents an analysis of Melanesian gender relations that is anything but reductionist. Instead of assuming men and women as fixed points, her analysis moves between same-sex and cross-sex relations, with each providing a vantage point from which to review the other. On the other hand, Strathern answers questions about equality in definite terms: men and women are valued equally as parties to cross-sex relations, in which each is the cause of the other's actions; they engage separately in same-sex relations in which the respective other's contributions are eclipsed; however, in the end, their particular gendered capacities, as men and women, can only become visible in the effects they have in the cross-sex domain. In the course of her analysis, she also exposes the points at which modern Western readers would inevitably assume inequality, while Hageners do not.

Going beyond the single case, Strathern makes her Hagen ethnography the centrepiece of a comparative argument on gender in Melanesia. In the process of working through a large amount of ethnographic detail, she develops a highly refined analytical vocabulary. The contrast between cross-sex and same-sex relations introduced above is crucial; beyond that, she uses the term agency to contrast feminist concerns with those of Melanesians. In the modern West, agency is located in individual subjects that act upon objects, and this assumption underpins feminist critiques of the objectification of women (e.g., Nussbaum 1995). In Melanesia, how-
ever, agency is an attribute of cross-sex and same-sex relations. In cross-sex relations, men and women alternately stand to each other as “agent” and “cause” of an action; each acts with the respective other in mind. In same-sex relations, agency remains a generalized capacity that is elicited by (similar) others: male exchange partners elicit a man’s capacity to give; children and tubers conceived of as female elicit a mother’s nurture. The effect can only be made visible—and is turned into something else in the process—as a particular outcome of cross-sex relations.

**From Gender to Species: Setting up an Analogy**

If cross-sex relations are not simply relations between men and women whose gender can be taken for granted, but are differentiated from same-sex relations on the grounds of particular ethnographic observations, then human-animal relations are not simply relations between humans and animals. They need to be established ethnographically. An example we can use for this purpose is ready at hand: Strathern’s description of relations between humans and pigs that is contained in the argument summarized above. This description also provide a convenient entry point into an exploration of multispecies relations in Melanesia because of its obvious shortcomings, from this perspective. It does not address either side of the challenge of multispecies ethnography: it neither pays careful attention to the boundaries of the human in Hagen, nor does it give due attention to the pig.

Pigs, unlike men and women, are neither causes nor agents in Strathern’s descriptions, or in their relations with the humans who grow and exchange them. Much the same may be said about other ethnographies that describe pig exchange in the Papua New Guinea highlands, regardless of other differences and disagreements (e.g., Brown 1978; Feil 1984; Lederman 1986; Meggitt 1965, 1977; A. Strathern 1971; Sillitoe 1979). They are all written with a human bias, and, to paraphrase Josephides’ criticism, buy into the human ideology of pig exchange. They confine themselves to asking what humans want to know when pigs change hands: Who did this? Who was the cause of the man’s original removal of the pig from the household? Who caused him to act as a donor in a particular exchange? Note that it is always another human, and not a pig that is seen to cause a person to act. Pigs merely facilitate the reproduction of relations among humans, by human agents and causes. The same human bias can be detected in analyses that shift attention from exchange to pig-rearing and to the husbandry and hunting of the animals (see Sillitoe 2003). In the end, it is humans who manage animals, and human purposes (relations among humans) for which the animals are used. Pigs, in these relations, are neither agents nor causes. The harder we try to specify pigs’ role in human relations, for instance by suggesting that they are “secondary agents” (Gell 1998) through which human primary agents work, the deeper we seem to become entangled in arguments in which the agency of animals appears as a deficient version of human agency. This, of course, is exactly what multispecies ethnographers would want to avoid.

As an alternative, I suggest that we take as a positive observation what I have so far rendered in negative terms. If pigs, in the relations that Strathern analyses, merely appear to be used for human purposes, then perhaps these are human same-species relations. Pigs are neither agents nor causes, just as women are neither agents nor causes in (male same-sex relations of) ceremonial exchange. What, then, would a species analogy to cross-sex relations look like? Because it is difficult to read between the lines of others’ ethnographies, especially if they are written with a different purpose in mind, I use my own ethnographic observations for providing a preliminary answer to this question, from which other ethnographic instances then come into view. These observations concern fishing, the most important subsistence activity and a favorite pastime on
Pororan Island in northern Bougainville, in the far east of Papua New Guinea. Once they are on land, the Pororans put fish to use for human ends, just as Hageners do with pigs. However, while at sea, relations of different qualities emerge. I draw on Pororan accounts of hook-and-line fishing from a canoe in the lagoon and in the reef passages, in which both men and women engage, during the day or at night. The accounts were collected and are supported by observations on Pororan Island in 2004 and 2005.

According to their own accounts, the Pororans take a deliberately random approach to fishing, in response to their perceptions of uncertainty inherent in this activity. They find it difficult to predict the movements of fish, or the conditions at particular fishing spots that change with the currents, the weather, the tides and by season. One woman highly regarded for her success in fishing once explained that, instead of trying to plan a trip, she enjoyed “going around at sea,” often zigzagging, checking this spot and that and discovering new ones as she went along. By “just trying,” she would often “bump into” fish. She explained that this approach worked because fish, too, “go around at sea” looking for food, much like the islanders. There are many fish around the reef and in the lagoon, yet Pororan fishers narrate each particular encounter with a fish as an unexpected event. They dwell on their surprise when feeling a tug on the line, followed by a moment of anticipation in which they try to guess from its movements what kind of fish it might be. This moment of anticipation gives way to some moments of “proper thinking” once the fish is in the canoe: the fisher thinks of the people back on the island who will want to eat the fish and decides to whom to give it. However, these thoughts disappear when the fisher prepares the next string, or picks up the paddle to “just try” another fishing spot.

Two elements of these descriptions are striking. The first are the random movements that people and fish perform at sea, that the Pororans contrast with ordinary movements at the village, and that momentarily create symmetry, and indeed similarity between fish and people. These movements also create a strong sense of uncertainty, certainly for the humans involved. Fishers describe this uncertainty in terms of excitement about the possibilities ahead when fishing on the reef; when they use methods targeting larger species, excitement may be mixed with anxiety. The Pororans also replicate these movements, and deliberately evoke the uncertainty associated with them, in certain moments in their interactions with other humans, most importantly, in a ritual performed after the death of a person of rank. Furthermore, random movements and collisions with marine species evoke a Pororan origin story, and vice versa (Schneider 2012).

The second noteworthy element in Pororan accounts of fishing are their descriptions of the moments in which fishers and fish “bump into” one another, at which the random movements come to a halt and the symmetry and similarity between people and fish disappear. Fishers like to exaggerate, in retelling these moments, the radical change that occurs when the fish makes its presence known by tugging on the hook and when it emerges from the water as a particular (animal) Other. Once in the canoe, it brings to mind more remote particular others, the humans who will want to eat it. The words that the Pororans use when narrating human-fish encounters evoke sequences of ritual events that are described in the same terms, and vice versa.

Let me make the analogy to Hagen gender relations explicit. While Strathern distinguishes between male and female same-sex and cross-sex relations in the analysis of gender summarized above, species relations in Pororan fishing could, provisionally, be labeled cospecies (co-existence while “going around” on the reef); cross-species (direct interaction between agent and cause, separated by the fishing line), and human same-species (fish in the boat extending a human agent’s capacity for action). While the terms are cumbersome, the imbalance is revealing. On the one hand, I am in no position to specify, based on my ethnographic data, what fish same-species relations would be on the reef around Pororan. This question will require future attention. On the other hand, androgynous gender, the analytical equivalence of cospecies rela-
tions, appear as preconditions to human action in Strathern and others' accounts, in the form of undifferentiated bodies of children and pigs and in origin stories (see Leach 2003; McKinnon 1991; Mimica 1988; see also Wagner 2001). Unlike the transformation of children into persons capable of engaging in (human) relations, and unlike the transformation of origin states, the transformation of pigs into objects in human exchange occurs so rapidly that we miss what the Pororans dwell on when talking about fishing: the importance of cospecies relations, and their transformation in cross-species relations. Co-species relations, too, must be investigated as an outcome and precondition of (not necessarily human) action, along with the (human) actions that sustain and transform human same-species (cross-sex and same-sex) relations. This takes me to Strathern's second analytical move that is worth replicating in research on species relations.

**Asking about Agency: Multispecies Ethnography in Melanesia**

In this section, the characteristics of species relations and their transformation that one can detect in Pororan accounts of fishing are used as an ethnographic starting point from which to identify comparable cases that would lend themselves to (re)analysis by multispecies ethnography. Strathern's turn to agency is used to suggest how these cases may be explored, and how comparative analysis may proceed. This, of course, is making only minimal use of the term's potential. It could be used, as well, in order to anchor these cases in broader debates, academic and public. I can only note this possibility, and the challenge that lies in it. An attempt to explore it further would exceed the scope of this article.

The ethnographic sources introduced here may give nonspecialist readers an indication of the rich ethnographic material available on human-animal relations in Melanesia. The examples selected demonstrate, first, how much detail on these relations can be culled from texts not explicitly concerned with such analysis. Second, I show how a focus on questions of the agency in cospecies, cross-species and same-species relations may draw together material contained in texts whose divergent theoretical orientations pull the data apart.

Staying as close to Pororan fishing accounts as possible, we may consider fishing activities in other ethnographic settings as an obvious place to look for other instances of cospecies and cross-species relations, and for their transformation into same-species ones. Unfortunately, Hviding's (1996: 4) comment about the lack of research on fishing, compared to land-based activities, remains valid. The evidence from ethnographies that do describe fishing in some detail suggests significant contrasts in this respect between ethnographic settings. Rutherford's (2003) accounts from Biak, West Papua indicate close parallels to fishing on Pororan, especially with regard to the element of surprise in fishing activities. Hviding’s own, in-depth accounts of fishing in Marovo Lagoon in the Western Solomons seem to suggest that the Marovo seascape is pervaded by the concerns of the lagoon's traditional guardians, who “manage fish,” so to speak, rather than exposing themselves to surprise encounters with nonhuman others at sea, as the Pororans do. Although Hviding's ethnographic material on diving in Marovo may perhaps be interpreted differently, the overall contrast appears stark (Hviding 1996: 202–4).

The contrast might be accounted for narrowly, in terms of divergent population histories between Marovo and Pororan and the transmission of oral, partly restricted fishing knowledge. More productive is a broader approach that asks how ethnographically observable differences in species relations can be linked with contrasts in the same-species human domain. Questions about agency, that is, about the reproduction and transformation of the three kinds of species relations by the actions of those who participate in them, provide a means of establishing
such a link. It should be possible to connect through it, and to analyze systematically contrasts (between Pororan, Marovo, Biak, and potentially other settings) that can be gleaned in available ethnographic descriptions and analyses of myth, ritual activities, history, subsistence, and environmental change. In the process, assumption about agency, humans, and animals should become apparent, and could then be critically reviewed. To this end, the comparison between species relations internal to the material could also be complemented with a comparison of another set of relations, involving yet other agents: conservationists, who establish relations with both humans and fish in Melanesia.

Besides the sea, another obvious setting for studying human-animal relations in Melanesia is forests. Since the 1970s, a rich and diverse set of ethnographies with different ethnographic and theoretical foci has emerged on the people in the Mount Bosavi and Southern Highlands area in Papua New Guinea (see Dwyer 1990; Feld [1982] 2012; Kelly 1993; Knauf 1985; Schieffelin 1976; Weiner 1988, 1991, 2001). Many of these texts have become highly influential in their respective subfields. I demonstrate how the wealth of detail on human-animal relations contained in them may be drawn together, through an analytical focus on questions of agency, and how it could stimulate an analysis that attends to other species, as well as critically reviewing the boundaries of the human.

Perhaps the most highly acclaimed text from this ethnographic area is Steven Feld’s *Sound and Sentiment* ([1982] 2012), a study of the acoustic relations between humans (Kaluli) and birds. In the introduction to the third edition, the author describes the further development of his Bosavi research project: “I wanted to have a new all-species way to talk about the emplaced copresence and corelations of multiple sounds and sources” ([1982] 2012: xvii). Beyond noting the general relevance of this research in the broader context of research on human-animal relations, I am interested in Feld’s choice of the terms copresence and corelations, which offer leads for a multispecies perspective. They indicate a concern with ethnographic moments and relations very different from those characterized by intense attention to (human) others as the causes for one’s action.

This intense attention to human others is the subject matter of Edward Schieffelin’s research with the Kaluli, which complements Feld’s. Schieffelin’s (1976) ethnography focuses on the *gisaro*, the ritual in which the songs analyzed by Feld play a crucial role. The *gisaro* is a ritual held at night in the longhouse, often on important occasions such as a major ceremonial exchanges. In the ritual, four dancers among a larger group of visitors, decorated as birds, dance to and sing songs that evoke memories of the host group’s recently deceased. They move the audience to such extreme emotions that spectators jump up and burn the shoulders of the dancers with torches. After the ritual, the dancers pay compensation to those whom they caused to weep. In selecting a single ceremony as a focus for understanding how meaning is generated in particular sequences of ritual events, Schieffelin follows Bateson’s (1958) thrust and strategy. He is primarily interested in understanding reciprocity as an emergent outcome of the “opposition scenario” (Schieffelin 1976: 107–16) of the *gisaro*, which transforms an original difference, established by the loss of one group, and which culminates in the dancers paying their hosts compensation for causing them to weep.

Feld’s and Schieffelin’s writings demonstrate the potential that research from the Mount Bosavi area holds for studying the ethnographically specific boundaries of the human, while giving due attention to animals. One focuses on the corelations of humans and birds in the forest; the other, on the emergence of what might be called same-species human relations. The ethnographic link lies in the acoustic relations between humans and birds. However, for a project in multispecies ethnography that would go beyond sound, a theoretical link is missing between Feld’s research, inspired by phenomenology (among others), and Schieffelin’s, which builds on
the processual impulse of Bateson's work but turns it into a narrowly social direction. Establishing this link would be important from the perspective of Schieffelin's research, as well as of Feld's, and may allow researchers interested in human-animal relations to draw the wealth of their data together and into a novel field of research.

Schieffelin's emphasis on the opposition scenario and the establishment of reciprocity in the *gisaro*—the dancer moving the audience, the audience torching the dancer, and the payment of compensation—fails to account for some details of the performance that he describes with great intensity. Among them is the significance of the movement of the dancer “reflecting the motions of man, of waterfalls, and of the forest” (Schieffelin 1976: 178). Furthermore, there are various indications of a nonoppositional relation between audience and dancers, or hosts and guests, which is more prominent in other ethnographic accounts of related rituals (see Knauf 1985; see also Dwyer 1990; Kelly 1993). I suggest that we may take the dancers' movements as an indication of cospecies relations at work that cannot be explained in terms of the same-species human concerns. Instead, we could specify how these cospecies relations are created, reproduced, and transformed into cross-species, and eventually into same-sex human relations of opposition, and vice versa. The *gisaro* is a multispecies event.

If the *gisaro* can be understood better when examined through the multiplicity of species relations at work, then the same may hold for human-bird relations in the forest. We may ask, for instance, how Kaluli acoustic knowledge of the forest helps them catch birds, whose feathers then enhance the appearance of the human dancers in the *gisaro*. Detailed ethnographic material on hunting is available for a neighboring people, the Etoro or Etolo (Dwyer 1990; Kelly 1993), and raises further questions for multispecies ethnography. For example, Dwyer (1990: 195–96) suggests that the opposition scenario, which Schieffelin had detected in the Kaluli *gisaro*, underpins the new, Christian celebrations that have replaced the Etolo version of this ritual, as well. However, although Dwyer can still report Etolo reminiscences of waiting in ambush for the feather of the bird-of-paradise to decorate dancers for their equivalent of the Kaluli *gisaro*, he could not observe the hunting of the birds itself, as the Christian rituals required no feathers. This raises interesting questions about connections between subsistence, religious change and multispecies relations.

Spinning the thread further (and leaving the Mount Bosavi area for the sake of making a more general point): bird feathers travel along far-flung trading networks, and they are used in decorations for dances not only by the Kaluli, but also by other highlands peoples. For Hagens, detailed ethnographic information is available on their evaluation of the effects of the secondary agency of these feathers, in strictly human terms (Strathern and Strathern 1971). Furthermore, feather of the bird-of-paradise enhanced the appearance of non-Melanesian agents in the early twentieth century, when they were fashionable on hats in Europe and North America (Kirsch 2006a). These feathers were outcomes of, as well as conditioning actions of humans and birds across vast geographical distances and across analytical scales. Finally, the same birds have also figured prominently in conservation projects, in which Melanesian and Western stakeholders are negotiating their significance (West 2006). The wealth of ethnographic material on human-bird relations is available but widely dispersed, and requires a powerful analytical strategy to draw it together, and to link the various debates to which its analysis could contribute. I suggest gathering, by ethnographic “partial connections” (Strathern 2004), descriptions of co-species, cross-species and same-species, and examining their reproduction and their transformation into and out of each other.

The suggestion of incorporating into a single analysis, and specifically one of agency, ethnographic detail across the full length of multispecies relations, from moments of copresence in the forest to the generation of reciprocity, will likely be contentious. Specifically, it appears to
oppose arguments put forward by James Weiner (1991, 2003) with reference to ethnographic observations among the Foi, north of the Kaluli. In an early analysis of Foi sociality, Weiner (1988) had relied heavily on an analytical approach developed by Roy Wagner ([1967] 1981, 1986), which is closely related in spirit and strategy to that of Marilyn Strathern. In more recent writings, Weiner complemented this approach by drawing on an eclectic range of inspirations, but most important phenomenology, in order to uncover what, as he argued, the analytical language he had used before could only cover up. Rather than suggesting a return to an analytical language that has proven insufficient, I suggest its critical reworking through the ethnography that seems least amenable to its terms. With Kohn, I suggest rethinking agency in response to the challenge that multispecies relations pose. Weiner’s ethnographic descriptions and analyses provide rich material for beginning such rethinking. They draw attention to two dimensions of multispecies relations in the Southern Highlands, in addition to ritual and sound: metaphor and myth. For instance, Weiner’s analysis of a myth about the origin of pearl shells, important wealth items for the Foi, in which birds play a prominent role seems to suggest possibilities of exploring, through myth, exchange as a multispecies relation (Weiner 1988: 276–78). Tracing highlands exchange networks with an eye to such relations, all the way back to Hagen pigs, would be an intriguing task.

It should be noted that other areas besides Mount Bosavi have been studied extensively by anthropologists, whose rich descriptions and analyses could be reviewed with an eye to human-animal relations contained in them, but partly hidden behind other research interests. One area worth mentioning briefly is the Mount Ok area, in the far west of Papua New Guinea (see Barth 1975; Craig and Hyndman 1990; Crook 2007; Kirsch 2006b; Robbins 2004). Another is the area around Mount Kare (e.g., Biersack 1999; Clark 1993; Haley 1996; Stewart and Strathern 2002). In both locations, dynamics of myth, subsistence, resource extraction, and religious change have been explored, and the sources would lend themselves to exploration from the perspective of multispecies ethnography.

Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to draw attention to the potential that ethnographic and analytical resources from Melanesian anthropology hold for the further development of research on human-animal relations in Melanesia, and in anthropology. The context in which a review of this potential appears most immediately relevant is recent developments in multispecies ethnography, a relatively new and open-ended undertaking that anthropologists working in Melanesia, among others, are becoming increasingly interested in.

With respect to analytical potentials, I have seized on an analogy that may be perceived between a fundamental challenge that inspired feminist anthropology in the 1970s and 1980s, and one that multispecies ethnographers face today: to take a critical stance against something (male domination, the inflation of the human) without losing one’s intellectual curiosity about the phenomenon at issue (gender, species relations). Marilyn Strathern has both contributed to clarifying the challenge of developing a feminist anthropology and addressed it convincingly, in a comprehensive comparative study on gender in Melanesia. Multispecies ethnographers might learn from her approach, and from its limitations as well as its strengths, which have been discussed controversially in Melanesian anthropology and beyond.

One advantage of trying to think about what multispecies ethnography might look like through the lens of Strathern’s work on gender is that the analytical language is precise. This allows multispecies ethnographers to perform parallel analytical moves to hers, register the
differences in outcome, and detect in these differences important contrasts between gender relations and species relations as analytical fields. There are limitations to the analogy, including practical ones. Some of the terminology that I have borrowed, including “cross-species” and “cospecies,” will need adjustment, with reference to a proliferation of terms for analyzing human-animal relations that are still in the process of consolidation. The more difficult, long-term but potentially rewarding task will be to refine agency by using it as a tool in multispecies ethnography.

The second aim of this article—to draw attention to rich available data on human-animal relations in Melanesian ethnographies—has been complicated by the pursuit of the first. Strathern’s second analytical move displaces the target. While the appearance of animals in ethnography may be a good first indication that human-animal relations are at issue, focusing on these alone may conceal more than it reveals about the extent of these relations, about their significance in a variety of situations and settings, and about the novel connections between the latter that become apparent from a multispecies perspective. I have chosen to make this point with reference to ethnographic sources from a small area only. This has come at the cost of omitting reference to a wealth of other material. The benefit, I hope, is that readers may have acquired a position from which to perceive multispecies relations in material they are familiar with from other contexts, and from which they may appreciate both the scope and the potential of this exciting research field.

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REFERENCES


