

ANTHROPOLOGY AS COSMIC DIPLOMACY: TOWARD AN ECOLOGICAL ETHICS FOR THE ANTHROPOCENE



EDUARDO KOHN
McGill University

Forests think. This is neither a metaphor nor a cultural belief. There exists a kind of thinking, which I call “sylvan,” that is made exquisitely manifest by tropical forests and those that live with them. This kind of thought extends well beyond us humans and, in fact, holds our human forms of thinking. Thinking with the sylvan logics that thinking forests amplify can provide an ethical orientation for these times of planetary ecological cataclysm that some call the “Anthropocene.” I here discuss three projects in and around the tropical forests of Ecuador whose goal is to capacitate sylvan thought. This research, which has brought me into collaboration with indigenous leaders and shamans, lawyers and conceptual artists, forest spirits and even archaic prehispanic ceramic figures, has encouraged me to see anthropology as a kind of “cosmic diplomacy.” This form of diplomacy is “psychedelic” in so far as its goal is to make manifest the mind manifesting nature of the sylvan thinking on whose behalf it advocates. Another word for this kind of emergent mind is “spirit.” This implies that a politics for the Anthropocene must not only be ecological but spiritual as well. I here explore alternative “sylvan” means to actualize for our times the spirits among us, and I trace the challenge this poses for anthropological thought.

*Eduardo Kohn is the author of the book *How Forests Think*, which won the 2014 Gregory Bateson Prize and has been translated into several languages. His research continues to be concerned with capacitating sylvan thinking in all its valences. He teaches Anthropology at McGill University.*

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