# Intimacy without Proximity: Encountering Grizzlies as a Companion Species

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*Using grizzly-human encounters as a case study, this paper argues for a rethinking of the differences between humans and animals within environmental ethics. A diffractive approach that understands such differences as an effect of specifc material and discursive arrangements (rather than as pre-settled and oppositional) would see ethics as an interrogation of which arrangements enable fourishing, or living and dying well. The paper draws on a wide variety of human-grizzly encounters in order to describe the species as co-constitutive and challenges perspectives that treat bears and other animals as oppositional and non-agential outsides to humans.*

> My position on grizzly bears has been clear for years. I do not want to see an anti-social, flesh-eating animal brought into Idaho.
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> —Dirk Kempthorne, current U.S. Secretary of the Interior, quote given while Governor of Idaho

> The granting of quarter itself was a transcendence.
>
> —Doug Peacock

A human-grizzly encounter is never *easy*. *Ursus arctos horribilis* and *Homo sapiens sapiens americanus* encounter each other in contestable border regions that are the result of rich historical and material apparatuses.[1] When bears and humans come into close contact, when they sight and scent each other, they do not encounter each other as *others as such*. Their otherness is not general, rigid, or absolute, but it is real, and it is consequential. When the human has a non-negligible chance of becoming bear scat and the bear has a non-negligible chance of being hunted down by park rangers if it encounters a human gustatorily, there is no room for *as such* about anything, especially *others*. Rather,

1. I owe this title to two of my teachers. Karen Barad suggested the phrase "intimacy without proximity" to describe this work, and I borrow the term "companion species" from Donna Haraway.

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bears and humans encounter each other in material specificities. Without exaggerating the danger involved in being with a grizzly bear in the wild, life and death are at stake, even if death is not a common outcome. And where life and death are at stake in the age of biopolitics, much else is also at stake. How then might bears be treated not as absolute or oppositional outsides to humans but as co-constitutive with them?

To answer this question, bear-human relatings on three different but overlapping planes are in turn to be interrogated. First, how can we as philosophers be open to the material and semiotic gestures of actual bears? The practice of philosophy traditionally encourages humans to treat actual animals as mere metaphor or re-presentation for animality, *a priori* revoking the animal's agency in any philosophically interesting practices. As an intervention into this impulse, the discussion below is to be directed toward the materiality of bear-human relatings. Second, how can those interested in ethical wilderness practices *be* in grizzly country? Given the intimate entanglements of humans and bears that are enfolded across millennia and that sometimes invite proximal and productive encounters, how can the kind of physical separation be maintained that usually allows humans and bears to best flourish? This interrogation operates in the space opened up by the intersection of conservation policy and research, environmental ethics, and wilderness practices. Third, how can the telling and retelling of narratives about bears retain their roles as fully social, materially-semiotic agents? Much contemporary North-American environmentalist and anti-environmentalist discourse relies on bears as a trope for human-wilderness relations, both to the betterment and detriment of actual bear populations. The stories we tell of bears can be both data and normatively compelling. But this use of bears as a model or trope for human experience is nothing new; it has unexpected echoes throughout the mythologies and materialities that inform our storytelling practices. The term "storytelling" is used very broadly here; stories serve important epistemological and political functions by making the world intelligible. In order to adequately interrogate our ethical practices, we humans must interrogate our stories for which worlds they make possible. This paper thus operates in a self-reflexive mode that both argues for telling stories about human-bear encounters differently *and* does such storytelling along the way.

Treating bears and humans as co-constitutive is an ethical, epistemological, and ontological commitment: the proper entity for analysis is not bears and humans as fully individuated relata that precede their possible relationships, but rather the material and discursive apparatuses that temporarily resolve bears and humans out of ontological indeterminacy. As an absolute and determinate outside, *the* grizzly becomes either the enemy to human flourishing or a reified metaphor for denunciating *the* human as overly intrusive upon

wild spaces.[2] As co-constitutive with bears, humans cannot ignore the ways in which the specificities of our flourishing are entangled. Treating humans and bears as co-constitutive requires opening apparent binaries to being unsettled, especially binaries like nature and culture, wild and domestic, and animal and human.

These categorical binaries fit neatly within a central problem of environmental ethics: describing the appropriate balance of two seemingly opposed philosophical impulses regarding the ethical treatment of difference. On the one hand, both the science of ecology and the global nature of environmental problems demand an ethics founded on the unity of all life. On the other hand, the very entities to which our moral obligations refer are often best cared for through a separation from most human activities. We are left with competing claims that wild places and animals are best kept separate from us and that we are bound by a global biome. Inevitably, such conceptual oppositions multiply and concretize, circumscribing and distorting our ethical possibilities. Such oppositions are often (explicitly or implicitly) part of the intellectual artillery of those who profess a deep care for bears and the spaces in which they live. These binaries have real material consequences, and those people who want grizzly bears (and humans) to flourish should be committed to a continual re-evaluation of which abstractions do what work for whom. To treat bears as determinate entities, as reified organisms bounded by their fur, that are oppositional to humans puts grizzlies at greater risk of extinction.

Although environmental ethics has always been about who lives and dies, the question of living and dying *well* is often taken off the table by the discursive and/or metaphysical division between nature and culture. Philosopher H. Peter Steeves puts it well here:

> The environmentalist who calls for a return to a state untouched by human hands is separating human beings from nature, and this is the same mentality that motivates those who destroy the environment. Surely there is room left to discriminate between living well on the earth and living poorly on it; yet while the whaler causes more damage initially, environmentalism which separates human beings from nature ultimately perpetuates the misguided thinking of development and abuse.[3]

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2. I italicize the article here in order to emphasize the extent to which one must efface the many differences between animals in order to create such a broad category. Such effacement inevitably undermines ethical relatings—one cannot relate to the animal, but one can relate to an animal. Here I quote Derrida from a 2001 interview: "Wherever something like 'the animal' is named, the gravest, most resistant, also the most naïve and the most self-interested presuppositions dominate what is called human culture (and not only Western culture); in any case they dominate the philosophical discourse that has been prevalent for centuries." See Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow—: A Dialogue* (Stanford,: Stanford University Press, 2004), 64.

3. H. Peter Steeves ed., *Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology, and Animal Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 151.

The separation between humans and nature of which Steeves speaks is a separation that is often assumed as the pretext of ethical analysis. Many of the philosophical resources typically at play in applied ethics for handling difference and identity are taken for granted, as if ethics is what happens after the world is settled. The challenge for a non-centric ethic is thus substantial: how can we resist the discourses of mainstream environmentalism that separate humans from nature without also ignoring the specificities of differences between humans and other creatures?[4] Doing this requires paying attention to differences as specific and material, not as metaphysically determinate, oppositional, or absolute. In this project, to get at a differential analysis of who lives and who dies requires a careful accounting of how bears and humans make and remake each other in their unsettled and unsettling intimacies. A non-centric environmental ethic requires that the categories of who or what is morally considerable are not pre-determined but arise from a diffractive mapping of intra-active relationships.[5]

**Diffractive Mappings and Ethical Encounters**

Feminist science studies scholar Donna Harraway describes diffractive mapping as a map of the *effects* of difference, not an accounting of differences themselves. Haraway describes diffraction as a visual metaphor that displaces reflection, or repetition of the same, as the primary metaphor for epistemological and ontological practices: "Diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference. . . . Unlike reflections, diffractions do not displace the same elsewhere, in more or less distorted form. . . . Diffraction is a narrative, graphic, psychological, spiritual, and political technology for making consequential meanings."[6] When epistemological practices concretize around a reflective metaphor, the purpose of knowledge production is to produce a re-presentation of the world that is certifiable as a legitimate production of identity between mind and world, as if our cognitive apparatuses were properly a mirror. A move toward diffraction instead

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4. Examination of difference, identity, and power is certainly not new to environmental ethics and is most explicitly handled in the critiques of deep ecology offered by ecofeminists. For instance, Karen Warren describes a "Logic of Domination" that warrants oppression on the basis of difference, which she identifies as the common source of racial, gender, and environmental abuses. Insofar as deep ecologists sought to fulfill Arne Naess's call for a self-in-Self that made human interests, identical to ecological interests they failed to challenge this logic and in some ways relied on it.

5. Intra-activity, in Karen Barad's terminology, refers to agential relationships that precede their relata. For a fuller explanation of intra-activity, see Barad, *Meeting the Universe Half Way: Quantum Physics and the Entanglements and of Matter and Meaning*L8GB

understands our cognitive apparatuses as prisms, and thus takes an apparently unitary source of light and produces a diffracted pattern.

That pattern is not a map of pre-existing difference; it is rather a map of the *effects* of producing difference. Haraway writes, "A diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the effects of differences appear."[7] A diffractive epistemological apparatus matters to the central tensions of difference and identity in environmental ethics because it will not allow us to take our experiences of difference and identity for granted. Instead, it requires that we recognize those differences and identities as *effects* of a specific difference-producing apparatus. Environmental ethics (and applied ethics in general) must learn to recognize and interrogate our philosophical prisms in order to advocate for those that enable the co-flourishing of humans and other critters. Thus, when bears and humans encounter each other, *how* they encounter each other should not be taken for granted. When bears are encountered as wild on the trail, in legislatures,[8] in environmentalist literature, or ancient mythology, all the tropes of wildness—nuisance, threat, free, untamable, mystical—must be interrogated as the effect of a specific material and conceptual apparatus, not as difference that pre-exists the encounter and with which we can determinately justify a response.

The goal in this discussion of human-bear relatings is to offer a diffractive reading of the ways in which humans and bears have made and remade each other through ecological, cultural, social, historical, and even philosophical encounters. This requires a diffractive ontology: each species is an entity that is produced through entangled differences, not by categorical and oppositional boundaries. The bears with whom we relate are not settled entities whose nature is the *cause* of difference—they are unsettled and unsettling *effects* of difference. Environmental ethics would be well-served to see boundaries between humans and animals as negotiated and in process; through such negotiation, the ontological status of humans and bears may be temporarily resolved. That resolution matters to who lives and who dies, and, most importantly, who lives and dies *well*.

Consider the quotes offered as an epigraph. The first is from former Idaho Governor Dirk Kempthorne: "My position on grizzly bears has been clear for years. I do not want to see an anti-social, flesh-eating animal brought into Idaho."[9] The comment, from an official press release, was made in the context of the Bush Administration's Interior Department reversal of the Clinton

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7. Donna Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 70.
8. This preposition is intended to be provocative. Of course, I do not mean that bears are physically present in legislatures in any literal sense. Rather, because my analysis pushes towards a rethinking of the boundaries between humans and bears, I draw a large circle around the kinds of encounters that are possible, whether spatially proximal or not.
9. State of Idaho, News Release 01:056, 2001.

Administration's decision to re-introduce grizzly bears into Idaho. Such positions resulted in Kempthorne receiving President Bush's successful nomination to be the new Interior Department Secretary in March 2006, despite his rock-bottom rating from the League of Conservation Voters.[10] Leaving aside the pronounced irony of a devoutly pro-gun, pro-ranching Republican wanting to keep anti-social flesh-eaters out of his state, what is Kempthorne saying that seems threatening to someone like myself with strong environmentalist political commitments? Kempthorne is not factually wrong—a grizzly bear is a flesh-eater, and while not anti-social, they do tend to prefer their own company. Grizzlies do not commonly congregate in substantial numbers, and when they do they often demonstrate unease with each other. And while they subsist largely by foraging from plant matter and carcasses, they are formidable hunters and do sometimes take a human being as their prey. Rather, there seems to be something remarkably ungenerous about ascribing a moral equivalency to a grizzly bear and a serial murderer.[11] Kempthorne's environmental ethic is undoubtedly anthropocentric. Yet the logic behind his willingness to treat bears like murderers relies on a move that many ecological philosophers have used to argue for the widespread acceptance of a biocentric ethic: the description of a singular moral order ostensibly entailed by a singular natural order.

In Kempthorne's world, the bear is to be held accountable for its lack of respect for the superior moral self that resides within all humans—its anti-sociality with humans is fundamentally irrational and therefore wild and dangerous. In the deep ecologist's world, the human is to be held accountable on the basis of the same singular moral order for its lack of respect for the bear's need to carry out its very bearness. Without a doubt, Kempthorne's take on predatory behavior will have consequences for large mammalian omnivores, including bears and humans, who co-exist in shared border regions; those consequences will clearly be quite different from the consequences hoped for by biocentrists. Furthermore, objecting to Kempthorne's position does not require that I be anti-ranching or anti-hunting or anti-Republican. Even if Kempthorne does not have a voice in my politics, the citizens he represents in a cartoonish manner certainly deserve a place. Indeed, I object both to biocentric positions

10. M. Janofsky, "Idaho Governor Selected to Lead Interior Dept," *New York Times* (2006). In their press release of March 16, 2006, League of Conservation Voters official Tony Massaro stated: "During his career in Congress, Governor Kempthorne earned a paltry 1% lifetime LCV score. Enough said."

11. James Hatley explains what lies behind an attitude like Kempthorne's quite well: "What might make a bear's eating others less than commendable, at least to our mind, is when the bear steps over that boundary which we would set up, dividing the human from the natural, and eats us as well. And yet we will return bears to the woods where the threat of their eating us is implicit, even if rare." See James Hatley, "The Uncanny Goodness of Being Edible to Bears," in *Rethinking Nature: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Bruce Foltz and Robert Frodeman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 17.

and Kempthorne's position precisely because they do not provide the attachment sites for political alliances and thinking together about better ways of living and dying.

Now consider the words of Doug Peacock, one of the world's most respected lay experts on grizzlies: "The granting of quarter was itself a transcendence." [12] As detailed in his memoir *Grizzly Years*, after his service as a medic in the Vietnam War Peacock found solace in wilderness areas in the Western United States, especially in Montana and Wyoming grizzly territory. This quote occurs in the context of one of his first run-ins with a large alpha male bear on the trail, a grizzly that Peacock had observed was particularly aggressive with other bears. Raising his pistol, he realizes that he could not shoot and further his participation in the violence that had marked his life to that point. Instead, he bows his head while looking off to the side, a gesture in ursine body language that indicates a desire to avoid confrontation. The bear returns the

thorough re-ordering of the world and the ethics that the world demands of us. Some of us have had similar experiences with wild animals, and some of us have not; but such experiences clearly play a role as data points in environmental philosophy, and his encounter is transformative in a way that is important for those of us concerned with the well-being of grizzlies. Not only has Peacock found a new and productive way to be with grizzlies, his newfound openness to the "evanescence" allows the world to be remade in some important way. *How* the world is remade is the crux of my diffractive analysis, and the role that boundaries and unities play in philosophical notions of transcendence runs counter to attempts to track that remaking.

As much as I take Peacock at his word and strongly favor the generation of new ways of being with grizzlies, I am skeptical of the role that discourses of transcendence ought to play in this transformation. Although I am friendly toward Cavell's reading, which contends that the world finds unexpected ways to press in upon our experiences, I think we would be well served to find ways of thinking about transformation that do not evoke transcendence. Where I part ways with Cavell's sense of transcendence is the suggestion that the transcending experience finds the *truer* limit, even if that truth is also perpetually revisable. In my reading, it was at this moment that Peacock realized that there are not transcendent differences or unities between himself and that bear that can be used to justify an action; I understand the encounter as Peacock and the bear engaging each other without pre-existing and settled differences or unities.[14]

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*Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/transcendentalism/; S. Cavell, "Thinking of Emerson," *New Literary History* 11, no. 1 (1979): 167–76.

14. I want to be very clear here: I am not asserting a privileged position from which I know the true meaning of Peacock's experience. I do not doubt the reality of his experience as he describes it—I doubt the usefulness of the cultural and philosophical traditions that enabled that specific experience and label it is as transcendence. This deconstructive stance toward wilderness experience aligns me in some ways with William Cronon's approach in the essay "The Trouble With Wilderness": "The more one knows of its peculiar history, the more one realizes that wilderness is not quite what it seems. Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation—indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history." I part ways with Cronon with regard to the reality of wilderness. Cronon implies that because wilderness is socially constructed it is illusory or even delusory—because it has a "cultural" history it is "unnatural." I argue that wilderness is "real" insofar as it is agential in the world's material becomings. In many ways, I prefer Jack Turner's conception of wilderness, even though I largely agree with Cronon's effort to historicize it. For Turner, wilderness is a particular kind of relationship between humans and the land that emphasizes relinquishing human control, but does not conflate every human presence with a degradation. As such, wilderness (or better yet: wildness) is a practice. I hope that this paper points to such a wilderness practice that also recognizes the co-constitution of humans and non-humans. See: William Cronon, "The Trouble With Wilderness; Or, Getting Back to the Wrong

Rather, Peacock *and* the bear *produce* an unexpected difference that is altogether better. And although he might disagree with the following claim, this means that he was no longer encountering *wild* grizzlies as a *domestic* human, but was seeing clearly for the first time his entanglement with the grizzly without needing any categorical "beyond" to explain why he ought to offer the bear quarter and respond to the bear's gesture. Concepts like wild and domestic will not get us sufficiently far in understanding bear-human interactions insofar as they preemptively establish where bears end and humans begin, thus describing boundaries that must be overcome in a transcending experience. Rather, we need tools to describe how boundaries are made rather than found, so that we can ask whether they are made *well* and whether they ultimately support the co-flourishing of humans and bears. These tools are especially important because of the role that discourses of transcendence have played in establishing wilderness experiences as data points for philosophy and policy.

Placing the transformative action in specific and historicized materialities allows us to understand those boundaries as *constituted through* the experience. Understanding boundaries as transcendent operates as a flight from the specificities of this constitution and does not capture the being-at-stake that is present in any transformative being-with. Establishing a discourse of transformation without transcendence would help move environmental philosophy past the restrictive conceptual tropes of "strict boundaries or no boundaries," "global biocentric unities or anthropocentric exclusions." Moving past these tropes would allow us to interrogate with much more specificity the shared stakes in the categories of humans and bears. A diffractive analysis would move us towards describing the world-remaking made possible by encounters such as Peacock's without relying on pre-established boundaries that must be found, revised, and reinstated.

**Diffractive Communications**

A diffractive mapping of such negotiations necessarily starts with recognition of difference; it is only through mutual recognition of each other that communication becomes possible. But such recognition is not of some pre-settled nature of the other. If communication relied on the recognition of absolute difference, we would expect communicative encounters to consist of simple mimicry of the other's behavior. However, closer investigation reveals that successful encounters with bears require a communicative openness that provides space for the bear's agency. In their book on human-bear relationships, *The Sacred Paw*, Paul Shepard and Barry Sanders cite Peacock as an example of someone who is capable of behaving sufficiently "bearishly" to defuse confrontation with grizzlies precisely because he is capable of this kind of sensitivity to them as

Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 69; Jack Turner, *The Abstract Wild* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1996).

subjects.[15] To behave bearishly is not to mimic ursine body language, insofar as mimicry is a reflexive copying to induce a reaction in the grizzly. Rather, a gesture of amity requires two subjects that recognize each other as capable of such a gesture—in their gesturing to one another they both become subjects respectively worthy of a bearish/human respect from the other and create a shared stake in response-ability to each other.

In his account of the Amazonian Runa people's complex ontology of human-animal communication, anthropologist Eduardo Kohn offers a way to think through these shared stakes. For the Runa, other animals are explicitly encountered as subjects who have their own *Umwelt* or interpretive world. Kohn identifies this perspective as multinaturalist: "The upshot of perspectival multinaturalism is that it permits commensurability among disparate beings. Because all creatures possess a human subjectivity, trans-specific communication is possible despite the manifest existence of physical discontinuities that separate kinds of beings."[16] The commensurability of the Runa with the jaguars that share their hunting grounds, and that sometimes make a meal of the Runa or their dogs, allows for Runa and jaguar to encounter each other as predators. It is actually the jaguar's gaze, its re-cognition of the human, that permits the human to *be*, to co-achieve ontological status *as*, a predator:

> In some encounters with nonhumans, how animals represent us makes all the difference. This is evident from the way status is conveyed across species lines through the use of either direct or oblique forms of non-linguistic communication. . . . By returning the gaze of jaguars, the Runa deny felines the possibility of treating them as prey and they, thus, maintain ontological parity with them as predators. (Kohn, 15)

Despite the otherness of the animal and the human interpretive perspectives, what is occurring here is not recognition of a radical otherness or an otherness as such. Although Kohn states that trans-specific communication occurs "despite" their differences, this claim can also be read as communication that occurs *by virtue of* their differences. The Runa and the jaguar know that they are different from each other: they fully understand that "entertaining the viewpoints of other beings is dangerous business" (Kohn, 7). But the nature of this difference is constituted in the act of knowing, not before it—the differences between humans and other animals that come to be known are not pre-settled. All that humans come to know are the effects of difference.

And these are differences that matter, in both senses of the word: they are not only critically important to the modality of the encounter but also are materially generative. To survive an encounter with a jaguar, the Runa need to pay attention to the concrete specificities of the jaguar, if they are to find a

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15. Paul Shepard and Barry Sanders, *The Sacred Paw: The Bear in Nature, Myth, and Literature* (New York: Viking, 1985), 34.

16. E. Kohn, "How Dogs Dream: Amazonian Natures and the Politics of Transspecies Engagement," *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 1 (2007), 5.

suitable ontological boundary. A jaguar returns your gaze in one way, a bear in another, a deer in another and a human in another; you (this 'you' includes non-human subjects) had better know the difference, not as simply categorical, but as material and embodied. The relations of continuity and difference here are not derived from a unitary nature, but are founded on an ongoing semiotic encounter. A single natural order (and its implied correlative moral order) would determine the relationship too strictly. If the Runa return the gaze of the jaguar, jaguar and human will remake each other's nature or ontological status in one way; if they fail to respond to each other, their ontological statuses will be remade in another that is perhaps less opportune for the human or jaguar. If the Runa were to enter such an encounter having already settled the difference between themselves and the jaguar—certain of their solitude as top predator—the human may become jaguar scat. Likewise, if Peacock encountered the grizzly *only* as a threat and was incapable or unwilling to encounter it as a subject—or if the grizzly did the same—the possibilities for relatings would be foreshortened.

In other accounts of communication with grizzlies, Peacock's narrative confirms the production of ongoing semiotic encounters. When meeting bears on the trail, Peacock's advice is to speak calmly to them and tell them that you mean no harm; his autobiography is replete with anecdotes about speaking to (or perhaps with?) bears. At other times, in different circumstances, Peacock prefers silence: "Although I usually talked to grizzlies when I accidentally stumbled on them, I was silent with this bear. We had just shared a lightening storm. Quiet was better" (Peakcock, 199). The bear's status as a threat, as a non-threat, or as a companion in contemplation of the ozone-spiked atmosphere, is only established through the encounter, not before. To encounter the other as an other as such—a predetermined otherness—is to mistake the effect for the cause: the nature of the other arises only in the encounter. This communication is diffractive in the sense articulated by Haraway: *Humans are not the makers of difference; humans are made by the difference, and that difference is always negotiable and negotiated.*

It is crucial to recognize within a diffractive ontology that semiotic and conceptual markings have very material consequences. An example of this occurs in a film about bears and humans that cannot be ignored: *Grizzly Man,* Werner Herzog's 2005 biopic of Timothy Treadwell.[17] Treadwell, a former alcoholic and drug addict and perhaps bipolar,[18] spent thirteen summers in Katmai National Park in coastal Alaska living in close proximity to grizzlies. He filmed his experiences to further his educational ventures with school children. After Treadwell and his girlfriend Amie Huguenard were eaten by a bear late

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17. Fittingly enough, the tagline for the movie is: "In nature, there are boundaries. One man has spent the last thirteen years of his life crossing them."

18. Mike Lapinski, *Death in the Grizzly Maze: The Timothy Treadwell Story* (Guilford: Falcon, 2005), 198.

in the fall of 2003, Herzog compiled a documentary about his life composed largely of Treadwell's own footage. Treadwell most certainly engaged in surprisingly unethical wilderness behavior: he altered streams, habituated bears to human presence, violated rules about long-term camps, etc. Yet in the movie he exhibits a remarkable grasp of bear semiotics.

In one of the early scenes, he deftly deflects a bear's unwanted and aggressive attention with bearish body language. In this scene along a stream, he begins with his back turned to a bear he named Grinch, whom he is describing as a somewhat grumpy female. Unbeknownst to Treadwell, she begins approaching at the very moment that Treadwell claims she will bite him if he stays with his back to her for too long. As he turns around, he quickly alters his stance and makes a move as if he were about to strike, telling her firmly, "You back off!" She does as asked in voice and body and leaves the camera shot. Surprisingly for the audience, he then proceeds to tell her in a childish tone "I love you! It's okay."[19] It is precisely this kind of infantilized speech that his critics (including Herzog) have latched onto to claim that Treadwell thinks: 1) he is a bear, and/or 2) grizzlies are really just harmless teddy bears.

But what exactly is so different between Treadwell's approach and Peacock's example?[20] While I do not want to romanticize Treadwell, I appreciate his willingness to engage in gestures of openness with a dangerous, cunning, and beautiful animal. In many ways, Treadwell demonstrates a remarkable ability to enter into ontological negotiations in which both species prove themselves to be agents but only through mutually encountering the other's agency. Fundamentally, Treadwell communicates with this bear because he is aware of the bear as a subject worthy of respect and capable of responding to his gestures. And he knows how to communicate to the bear that he is worthy of the same—the meaning-making here is mutual. He is not simply mimicking the bear's behavior.

To simply say that Treadwell makes the mistake of thinking he is a bear or that bears are harmless, as some of Herzog's interviewees suggest, is not accurate. To get at the uncanny tension between his body language and vocal patterns, we must consider the many semiotic layers at play even in this short clip. The meaning of this encounter is not transparent: it traces from Treadwell's body language with the bear, to his childish verbal tone, at least partially directed toward his usual audience of school children, through the mediating camera, and includes Herzog's interpretation and his audience. Her-

19. W. Herzog et al., *Grizzly Man*, (2005). In multiple experiences of showing this film to undergraduate classes, about half of the audience laughs somewhat uncomfortably at the scene with The Grinch.
20. There are many other differences between Peacock and Treadwell, including the fact that Peacock does not seek out close contact with grizzlies and has proven to be a much more effective advocate for grizzly preservation.

zog is abundantly clear that he believes Treadwell's behavior borders on absurdity and chooses his footage and interviews to support this.

When considering Peacock's and other experts' advice to speak to bears calmly, it is not *prima facie* silly to tell a bear you love it. The use of infantile language in itself is not reason to discount the possibility that Treadwell knew what he was doing.[21] He accurately predicted the kind of dangerous behavior this particular bear was likely to engage in and cut it off deftly. To claim he underestimated the danger of the bears does not even seem accurate, considering how often he specifically mentions his possible (even likely) death. The risks he takes appear to be calculated and not casual, even if they are arguably foolish or ultimately harmful to the bears. Indeed, the best evidence that he had a tremendous grasp of bear etiquette was the fact that he made it through thirteen summers in conditions that few people from his cultural background would survive, let alone voluntarily adopt.

To recognize that Herzog's humanist metaphysics infuse his film is essential. During footage of one bear that may have been Treadwell's killer, Herzog narrates:

> And what haunts me, is that in all the faces of all the bears that Treadwell ever filmed, I discover no kinship, no understanding, no mercy. I see only the overwhelming indifference of nature. To me, there is no such thing as a secret world of the bears. And this blank stare speaks only of a half-bored interest in food. But for Timothy Treadwell, this bear was a friend, a savior.

The haunting that Herzog experiences is a matter of looking for and not finding a *human* understanding in a *bear*. He identifies and respects a type of care that Treadwell has towards the bears, but believes this care is futile and misplaced because grizzlies cannot reciprocate human caring, they can only return half-bored gazes. Although Herzog is right to claim that Treadwell's treatises on the peaceful unity of all life are rife with a stylized naiveté, Herzog is too willing to take Treadwell at his own word. Rather than looking for a human-like caring in the bear, Herzog would have been much better served to look at the production of a relationship between Treadwell and the bears in which the bears were not passive. For Herzog, either the bears are like humans or they are not participants. This humanism is even more apparent in Herzog's closing statement for the film:

> The argument how wrong or how right he was disappears into a distance, into a fog. What remains is his footage. And while we watch the animals in their joys of being, in their grace and ferociousness, a thought becomes more and more clear. That it is not so much a look at wild nature as it is an insight into ourselves, our nature. And that, for me, beyond his mission, gives meaning to his life and to his death.

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21. Indeed, the use of infantile language is not *prima facie* evidence of ignorance in any situation—this devalues nurturing as a skill and ignores Treadwell's strengths.

Whatever one might say about the bears' grace and ferociousness, for Herzog the story is finally about *us*. However, there is no need to live within this agential monism, this metaphysics of excluding non-humans from agency on the assumption that all agencies must be like humans' agencies. As will be elaborated in the next section, this monism can be disrupted by understanding agency as performed and achieved, rather than possessed.

Arguably, the deaths were not due to Treadwell's psychological state, or a denial of the danger in which he placed himself (and Huguenard), or an unreciprocable love of bears. Rather, he, Huguenard, and the bears were killed by his metaphysics. The film abounds with evidence that Treadwell believed in nature as a state of wild and autopoetic harmony, cleanly separated from the depraved world of human civilization. This belief has multiple material consequences in the film: he believes he ought to intervene in their environment in order to restore this harmony, as counterposed to his struggles in the human world. In a drought-stricken season, Treadwell is so distraught over the cannibalism of a young bear by starving adults that he alters a stream to encourage the salmon run. He also rants about the failure of the U.S. Park Service to keep poachers out of Katmai, taking on the role of a savior to the bears, despite the scant evidence of poaching in the park.[22] His animosity extends to legitimate photography tour guides and filmmakers, whose presence he responds to as if he were an angry bear, by huffing and grunting.[23] This elevation of himself as savior of the bears is a major step away from the specificities of his relationships with the bears: by constructing most other humans as threats that only he can engage, he begins to strip the bears of their agency. What concerns me about his interventions is not that he leaves a mark of human agency in the wilderness (although his practices demand specific criticisms), but that, in doing so, he ignores the bears' agency.

This is exacerbated by his apparent belief in the absolute separation of human civilization and wilderness. As he flies over the glacier that separates Treadwell's "Grizzly Sanctuary" from the rest of the park, Herzog provides this narration: "In his diaries, Treadwell speaks often of the human world as something foreign. He made a clear distinction between the bear's and the human's world, which moved further and further into the distance. Wild primordial nature is where he felt truly at home." This metaphysics has material

22. The foundation Treadwell started, Grizzly People, argues that he was successful in this mission because there were no poaching incidents in the area in the years Treadwell was present, but there were five in the year after his death. However, those new poaching incidents may have been facilitated by his habituating the local bears to human presence. Jewel Pavlovak, "To All Friends of Grizzly People," http://www.grizzlypeople.com/all.php (accessed 6/29, 2008).

23. This is certainly fuel for the fires of those who claim Treadwell was insane because he believed he was a bear. However, anecdotes from mentally balanced (and tenured) ethologists indicate that its quite reasonable (perhaps unavoidable) to take on mannerisms of the creatures you study and interact with on a daily basis.

consequences: Treadwell and Huguenard were eaten and two bears killed precisely because of it. Their beliefs drove their return to the campsite irrationally late in the season. At the end of the summer season in 2003, Treadwell followed his normal schedule and tried to depart Alaska in late September. Yet he and his companion returned to the backcountry in early October because he could not stand to be around humans any longer. His diaries note that he had a run-in with airline customer service, precipitating in Treadwell an intense desire to flee to his campsite at the Grizzly Maze, a densely wooded lowlands area. However, this occurred around the time that bears begin the final preparations for hibernation. As anyone who knows bears (including Treadwell) would tell you, this is a terrible time to be in isolated grizzly country. Only the weakest, most desperate bears are still foraging for the final scraps of salmon before the first snow. Bears that typically exclude humans from their dietary repertoire may predate humans as a last resort for a big meal.

The diffractive mapping of this encounter must include the disjunction between humans and nature that Treadwell could not or would not shed. On the one hand, Treadwell's material semiotic encounters could articulate humans' and bears' co-evolution and shared communicative edifices. On the other hand, his metaphysics were amnesiac of the ugly side of such entangled histories and materialities, at much cost to himself and the bears. Precisely at the point where Treadwell returned to his campsite the ontological negotiations were unilaterally closed: he would no longer engage the bears in semiosis, and their natures were settled. The humans would become scat, and two bears would be killed by rifles.

**Grizzlies as Companion Species**

From the situated perspective of someone committed to environmentalism in general and the flourishing of bears particularly, the kind of ethical narratives available to me and my fellow humans begin to look radically different from those that pose the bear as pristine and wild contrast to human depravement. Unfortunately, the Kempthornes of the world consistently drive me toward a discourse that is their mirror opposite, as if construing bears as oppositional to humans and thus requiring "our" protection is necessarily a productive discourse. Likewise, the Treadwells of the world remind me not to ignore the consequences of such metaphysics. Ethical accounts that receive warrant from the nature/culture divide strip non-human animals of agency regardless of our motivations. This traps us within the representationalist dilemmas in which ethical warrant so often appears at best implausible. What becomes evident through a diffractive mapping is that our narratives and conceptual categories have material effects for which we are responsible. As Barad so elegantly argues, we are responsible for the conceptual schemata that we adopt precisely because they are agential in the intra-active practices that allow one part of the world to make sense of itself to the others.

Thus, perhaps counter-intuitively, I approach human-grizzly relatings through a companion species analysis. Haraway has recently drawn attention to the notion of companion species as a vital framework for examining human-animal relatings.[24] Companion species are creatures with which humans have shared a close naturalcultural history—which is to say animals that are co-constitutive with humans at a variety of levels of analysis—drawing our attention to the agential role that other critters play in our becoming human.[25] Haraway's exemplary case of companion species is working dogs, with which humans share biochemical and cultural co-evolutions, economic and political histories, and at times common requirements for a flourishing life. A companion species analysis about dogs is "about the implosion of nature and culture in the relentlessly historically specific, joint lives of dogs [or bears] and people, who are bonded in significant otherness."[26] The bond of significant otherness is one of intra-active entanglement—it is through the relating that the companion species are produced. A companion species story is "about relating in significant otherness, through which the partners come to be who we are in flesh and sign."[27]

As an example, Haraway tells of her human-canine entanglement: agility training, a sport in which humans guide their companion canines over, under, and through a series of obstacles. The sport of agility requires a relentless attention of both dog and human to signals from each other in order to accomplish an arbitrary set of performative markers. She appropriates the term "contact zone" from agility in order to describe the space in which this occurs. In agility, the contact zone is the area that the dog's paws must touch in order to receive credit from the judge for completing the obstacle. In Haraway's appropriation, the contact zone is also the space for subject-shaping encounters, "a zone fraught with power, knowledge and technique, moral questions," that enables a "chance for joint, cross-species invention."[28] It was her experiences with persistent problems in the yellow painted contact zone in agility that brought home for Haraway the necessary specificity of the contact zone of inter-species encounters: it is *this* dog and *this* human that must get along, *here*, *now*.

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24. Companion species are not to be confused with companion animals, a euphemism for pet. Although pets are companion species, not all companion species are domesticated.
25. "Natureculture" is a term coined by Haraway to indicate the analytic inseparability of nature and culture as categories.
26. Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Signifcant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2003), 15.
27. Ibid., 25.
28. Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 205.

> But there is a hitch: the human must respond to the authority of the dog's actual performance. The dog has already responded to the human's incoherence. The real dog—not the fantasy projection of self—is mundanely present; the invitation to response has been tendered. Fixed by the specter of yellow paint, the human must finally learn to ask a fundamental ontological question, one that puts human and dog together into what philosophers in the Heideggerian tradition call "the open": who are you, and so who are we? Here we are, and so what are we to become?[29]

The contact zone, the open, forces the question of *who*, the question of ethics; the contact zone is the zone of recognition and response. And as that question proliferates, the historical and material entanglements and intra-actions proliferate; this proliferation is the ethical call of the open.

Through entanglement with her Australian Shepherd bitch Cayenne, Haraway also becomes intertwined with histories that are sometimes ugly and violent, but cannot be denied. The conditions that allow her and Cayenne to participate in this sport include colonialism, international commodity economies, class, age, racialized discourse about "purebred" dogs, etc. Her love for (entanglement with) Cayenne demands that she be a non-innocent participant in these histories. Here in the contact zone—where the agential cuts are made—ethics begin, not in some abstract application of principles to the settled categories of "the human" and "the dog."[30]

At first glance, grizzly bears would make a poor example of companion species because Haraway's paradigmatic dogs thrive on proximity with humans. Yet, bears and humans have long maintained an *intimacy without proximity*. Humans share a close naturalcultural history with bears, which means that we always already share an odd kind of intimacy. This intimacy takes the entangled morphologies of political boundaries, co-evolution, shared ecological niches, common non-linguistic semiotic capacities, etc. Yet such an intimacy can be misleading because in most instances both bears and humans flourish better without physical proximity. The lack of proximity, in both a spatial and temporal sense, contributes to the perspective that bears and humans can be treated as entities with given, discrete boundaries.[31] However, the

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29. Ibid., 221. Haraway is quite explicit that she is radically reconfiguring Heidegger's open here. She and I are in conversation about how to understand the possibilities for this reconfiguration. In particular, Heidegger's clearing is opened by the ultimate emptiness or purposelessness of human existence. However, the open that both she and I require to articulate human-critter entanglements is created by a rich material-discursive apparatus that demands the fullest attention and a double-edged curiosity, not boredom.
30. I borrow the notion of "agential cuts" from Karen Barad's agential realist ontology. See Barad 2007, especially p. 381.
31. This sort of entanglement shares much with the quantum entanglements described by Barad. Sometimes called "spooky action at a distance," quantum entanglements are one of the most perplexing phenomena in contemporary physics. Basically, particles

entities in question here are only constituted in their relatings, which prove to be surprisingly intimate.

In my analytic bears are fully social partners in our shared naturecultures: our obligations are emergent from the historical materiality of our relatings, not an always pre-existing phenomenological criteria such as a Levinasian face. Because we are in the agential cut, in the apparatus of bear-human being, we have an obligation to and for the material becoming of this relationship. This contrasts to the usual possibilities for both pro-environmental/pro-wildlife/anti-development or anti-environmental/pro-eradication/anti-predator narratives in which the bear is a beast unto itself, outside of the human. The usual narratives available for thinking about wild animals deny them agency by turning them into either symbols of all that is good about wilderness or enemies of human safety and progress. Neither trope gets us very far because both neglect the specificity of bear-human intra-actions. As Haraway writes, "Companion species cannot afford evolutionary, personal, or historical amnesia. Amnesia will corrupt sign and flesh and make love petty" (2003, 82). Despite our best impulses to prevent human intrusion into bear habitat, we take great risks in treating bears as oppositional limits in ethics, ontology, or politics. Ethics demands that we allow our entanglements to open up possibilities for relatings, and hopefully for relatings that create more flourishing for bears and humans. Although we still need tools to judge which ways of living and dying are desirable and which are not, such judging is inescapable.

**Eating (Each Other) Well**

In human-bear mythology is found a diffractive mapping that further troubles nature/culture boundaries. This mapping, traced out tentatively below, opens several areas of inquiry that are intertwined spatially and enfolded temporally: the commonality of themes in bear mythology in circumpolar regions, the use of bears as an appropriate marker of political boundaries, and notions of shared ecological niches and co-evolution. Crucially, the goal is not to chastise modern humans for failing to observe bears correctly, as if I had found the proper re-presentation of our object "the bear." Such complaints warrant calls to "save the bears" from human intrusion: "If only we had more knowledge and taught more people about how neat bears are, we could secure the future of the bear and make their territory more like it was in the past." That is not the only—or best—way to oppose the extinction of grizzly bears (or any species, for that matter). Despite not being anthropocentric, that approach is most certainly humanist. It problematically roots our moral obligations in a deferral of the future

that are entangled can alter each other's ontological state without any spatial or temporal proximity of the sort that is necessary in Newtonian causality. Thus, a description of one particle demands the description of its counterpart despite their apparent separability. It is not my contention that "quantum physics explains bears," but that the tools Barad requires to make sense of quantum physics's philosophical conundrums are useful for rethinking the tropes of separability and difference at play in environmental ethics.

so we can keep our eyes on a past without human intrusion, which is a past that never really existed and assumes we only intrude. Instead, this analysis should lead to a recognition of our obligation in the present for mutual flourishing, an obligation whose contours arise out of our entanglements, not despite them.

In writing about the role bears play in origin mythology, the most substantial mistake would be to understand these mythologies as only cultural histories of humans. Thus, I am called to offer an accounting for the long history of stories in which humans, bears, origins, gods, and sexuality are entangled. This is anthropology of humans, not the Human.[32] The challenge here is that mythology, especially origin myths, is always in some sense about the Humans, and in this case also about the Bears. My hope is to show the ways in which that mythology reflects the concrete specificities of human-bear entanglements, rather than allow mythology to be just about Human-centered generalities. Human-centered generalities too strictly determine what we can find by looking at these myths, but paying attention to naturalcultural entanglements will allow us to rethink both humans and bears. In particular, there are a wide variety of stories in which bears play an integral role in the creation of humans. The roles that bears take in these stories cannot be understood as strictly metaphorical, but rather indicate an ancient intimacy with bears that is key to our naturalcultural history. As Haraway writes, a companion species story is "about relating in significant otherness, through which the partners come to be who we are in flesh and sign" (2003, 25). The choice of bears as the animal to either mother, mate with, or teach humans how to live well cannot be understood as arbitrary—the shared ecological niches and historical relationships exist in reciprocity with the cultural lessons that make survival practicable. Human-bear naturecultures are a constructed niche: these naturecultures indicate the appropriate place for both bears and humans within a community. Their placement is not a matter of pre-settled ontological differences, but of becoming in flesh and sign in which both species have agency.

The breadth of roles that bears play in mythology is astonishing. Bears are described as (at the very least) sky spirits, earth spirits, spirits of the underworld, wise elders, in control of the seasons, in control of the movement of the stars, and in control of hunting results. This breadth contrasts with other common mythic animals that were often honored for a specific skill. As excellent generalists, bears are more similar to humans than any other large mammal in northern regions of both the Eastern and Western Hemisphere, which could well be the reason that bears play such a broad and central role within Northern mythologies.[33] Furthermore, in especially cold areas where bears

32. This distinction comes from my colleague Heather Swanson's work that develops anthropological perspectives of human-salmon naturecultures.

33. Shepard and Sanders, *The Sacred Paw*, 72. To this I would add that brown bears are perhaps more similar to humans than chimps, if you bracket genetic origins as the primary marker of identity. There may be no other creatures that have an ecological niche as similar to hunting-gathering humans.

hibernate, they come to play a central role in birth and death. Bears do not truly hibernate, but rather enter into a winter-long state of reduced metabolism with only occasional awakenings. Pregnant sows give birth in their winter den, nursing cubs on stored fat. Arising from an annual, season-long "death" with new life in tow is impressive and would certainly contribute to the symbolism of the bear as both nurturer and undertaker. As a symbol of both birth and death, bears become guides to immortality, the continual cycle of death and renewal (Shepard and Sanders, 114). Sanders and Shepard write, "Clearly the bear was master of renewal and the wheel of the seasons, of the knowledge of when to die and when to be reborn" (57). They also suggest the etymology of childbearing, bereavement, bearing one's dead, and burial are all connected to the Old English roots for bear, *beran,* and the Tuetonic *ber* (xvi–xvii). While these symbolic relations are common among closely related Northern European cultures, similar linguistic and ritual connections between bears and birth and death are even found among Hindus (61). Bears are also highly ritualized in other fashions, with an annual killing of a bear a common practice among those who revere bears.[34]

Three types of stories can be offered for consideration as a variation on a theme. First are stories in which bears and humans either share a common ancestor or in which bears gave birth to the first peoples. Second are stories in which bears mate with humans, a surprisingly common element in mythology. Third, stories about bears as teachers of how to survive in a new landscape are considered. In all of these stories, bears play an agential role in stabilizing the ontological status of humans.

First is the Modoc version of an origin story that describes bears and spirit people as the source of the original humans. The Modoc, a Native American group from the Klamath River Basin, tell the version of this story in which bears are connected to the sky spirit. Others, such as the Wisconsin Menominee, tell a version in which the bears are connected to an earth spirit.

> One day, the chief of the sky spirits was walking in the above world and grew annoyed by the cold there. Making a hole in the above world, he pushed all the snow and ice through it until it formed a mountain from the earth below almost to the sky. The chief then stepped through the hole and walked down the mountain. The scene was bleak and devoid of life. Wherever he touched his finger to the mountain a tree sprung up. At one point the chief of the sky spirits picked up a branch and, breaking it into pieces, threw the large pieces into a river at the base of the mountain. There, these large pieces of wood became beavers and the little pieces became fish. From some of the large pieces of the branch, he made grizzly bears. They were large, covered with thick hair, had long, sharp claws and walked around on their hind legs. The chief of the sky spirits thought they were incredibly ugly and ordered them to live at the bottom of the mountain.

34. However, some peoples refuse to eat bear meat because of the cannibalistic element of eating one's mythic ancestors.

> The chief of the sky spirits then looked around and decided he was pleased by the mountain and the world he had created and decided to bring his family down to live in a lodge that he built inside the mountain. The entrance to the lodge was through a hole in the top of the mountain that also served as a smoke hole. One day, when the chief of the sky spirits sat with his family around a roaring fire inside the mountain, the wind spirit blew up a storm. The wind grew so strong that it blew the rising smoke from the fire back into the mountain. This annoyed the chief of the sky spirits, and he asked his little daughter to go to the smoke hole and tell the wind spirit to blow more gently. But the chief also warned his daughter not to put her head out the smoke hole because the wind might catch her hair and blow her away. She did as instructed but was unable to resist putting her head out of the smoke hole a little way in order to take a look around. That was enough for the wind spirit who, as her father had warned her, grabbed her hair, lifted her out of the smoke hole and tumbled her down over the snow and ice to the bottom of the mountain.
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> A grizzly bear out hunting found her and carried her home to his wife. The wife, feeling sorry for the little girl, took her in and raised her along with her own cubs. When the little girl grew to womanhood, she married the eldest son of the grizzly bears and in time had many children. When the mother grizzly grew old, she began to feel guilty about keeping the daughter of the chief of the sky spirits away from her home in the mountain. She told one of her sons to climb the mountain and tell the chief of the sky spirits that his daughter was alive and where she could be found. The chief of the sky spirits was delighted with the news that his daughter was still living and he hurried down the mountain to see her. He found his daughter living with the grizzly bears and taking care of a brood of strange-looking creatures who he learned were his grandchildren. What he saw greatly angered him. A new race of creatures had been created. In revenge, the chief of the sky spirits cursed all grizzly bears, telling them that from that time forth, they would all walk on four legs and would never be able to talk or use language again. He then took his daughter and carried her back up the mountain and perhaps up into the sky. The strange creatures, half grizzly and half spirit people, traveled far and wide and, according to the Modoc, were the first Native Americans and the ancestors of all the tribes.[35]

Environmental historian Robert E. Bieder states that this story, and other variations, shows bears as progenitors, protectors, and nurturers of humans (Bieder, 52). Particularly interesting here are the convoluted kinship relationships. Bears, created by the sky spirit who found them particularly ugly, function as a mediator between humans and gods. Their kinship is simultaneously a moment of shame and pride: the humans are created by the mating of a particularly ugly creature and a beautiful spirit, but the ugly creature proves to be fundamentally ethical and generous, even at great cost to itself. The sky spirit is angered over the creation of a new race of creatures and in taking back his daughter

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35. Quoted from Robert E. Bieder, *Bear* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 52.

renounces his grandchildren, but one is left to wonder about how the bears and humans will get along. Presumably, it would be a tentative relationship at times, but these beginnings do offer some potential for generosity.

European mythology, particularly with Nordic peoples, has similar themes. In the *Kalevala,* a 19th Century epic poem compiled from Finnish mythology and written by Elias Lönnrot, bears and the Finnish hero Väinämöinen share the same origin. Both are given form by a female spirit that blows them across the water, suggesting that they are in fact brothers (Bieder, 55). In a more explicit manner, the Danish kings draw their ancestry from a mating between a male bear and a female human. This story was recorded by the Archbishop of Uppsala in his 1555 *Description of the Northern Peoples,* and tells of a beautiful young girl abducted by a bear. Here I quote Bieder's summary of the Archbishop's story:

> Although he stole her to "tear her to pieces", he soon fell in love with her and "he now altered his designs on her to purposes of wicked lust. He immediately turned from robber to lover, and dispelled his hunger in intercourse, compensating for a raging appetite with the satisfaction of his desires." To encourage the girl's affections he robbed local farms and brought her fruits and other food "spattered with blood." Eventually, the farmers of the region tired of the bear's stealing, found his cave, and killed him with dogs and spears. The pregnant woman was now free but, "Nature working with two different materials palliated the unseemliness of the union by making the bear's seed suitable. The girl gave birth normally but to a marvel among offspring, lending human features to this wild stock." The child, a boy, while looking human, had the wildness and strength of the bear and slew those who had killed his father. From this boy descended King Sven of Denmark and a long line of Danish kings. (Beider, 60)

While this story as told is dripping with proto-Victorian sexual morality, and most certainly carries a strong element of Christian disdain for pagan mythology, there appear to be elements of moral ambiguity similar to the Modoc tale. Like the Modoc story, there is substantial anxiety about boundary crossing, a shameful event. Yet, here "nature" rejects the strictures of "culture" and overcomes the unseemly event to produce a powerful hybrid, giving lie to the "naturalness" of the boundary in the first place. The cut that excludes is always also a cut that includes.

The Danish tale provides a segue to one of the more interesting styles of bear mythology in which a female human mates with a male bear. Different from the origin stories, these stories are more pedagogical about actual encounters between humans and bears. Both Bieder and Sanders and Shepard note that this story is particularly widespread and may be millennia old. Bieder and Sanders and Shepard offer analysis of this story from the Haida, a tribe that lives on islands off the coast of British Columbia and southern Alaska. The version quoted here comes from Bieder:

> The story relates how a group of women encountered bear droppings at a place where they went to pick berries. Ignoring the warnings that it was taboo for women to step over such droppings, one young woman not only stepped over them but on them and kicked them. At the same time she hurled insults at bears and mocked them in derisive language. In the afternoon, when her friends returned home, the young woman decided to remain a while longer, having discovered a bush laden with berries (other versions have her spilling her basket of berries and having to pick them up, thus preventing her from returning to the village with her friends). As she picked, she noticed a handsome young man approaching wearing a bear skin cloak. He offered to help her pick berries and told her of other bushes with even more berries further up the mountain. He suggested that they pick them and he would walk her back to her village. It soon grew dark and the young man said it was too late to return to her village and suggested that they should make a camp and return to the village the next day.
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> On the following day, as they continued to pick berries, the young man used his shamanistic power to make the woman forget about going home. Days turned to weeks as the man led the woman further and further from her village to pick more berries. Finally, when summer passed into fall and it began to grow cold, the man decided he would dig a den, and the woman's suspicions that he was actually a bear were confirmed.
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> That winter the woman gave birth to two children, half human and half bear. In the early spring her husband awoke suddenly from his sleep of hibernation and announced that someone was coming. The woman knew her brothers were searching for her. Several times her husband awoke and each time he said, "They are getting closer." Then her husband said, "They are almost here; I will put in my teeth and kill them." The woman pleaded with him, telling him that what he heard were her brothers coming to find her and she begged her husband not to kill them but to let her brothers kill him for the sake of their children. He finally agreed but told the woman that upon his death certain rites were to be performed and songs sung.
>
> After her husband, the bear, was killed and the rites performed and the songs sung, the woman, with her two half-bear, half-human children, returned with her brothers to the village. Fearful of turning into a bear herself, she refused to enter into games with them that involved wearing a bear's skin and pretending to be a bear. But in defiance of her wishes, one brother threw a bear skin over her and her two children. As she had feared, she and their children immediately turned into bears. She then killed her brothers and returned to the woods with her cubs. (Bieder, 60)

This story continues as it tracks the exploits of the bear sons, who are understood to be symbols of the simultaneously supernatural and earthly origins of humans. Shepard and Sanders claim that this story shows "why both bears and people are part animal, part human" (59). It establishes a bear as a clan matriarch and her sons as a source of the appropriate rituals for successful hunting. Since this story is often told in conjunction with ritual bear hunting, it is an acknowledgement of the gifts given to humans through the very body of the bear: the bear sons demonstrate that hunting successfully and appropriately

demands reconciliation between hunter and hunted. Bieder also writes that this story struck fear into the hearts of women across the Northern Hemisphere, but it is not clear whether this is speculation or an accurate portrayal of the purpose of the story (Bieder, 56). This is arguably not about condemning bears as rapists, at least in part because other similar stories have bears and humans as consensual partners. So, this story is clearly about boundary maintenance of some sort, but of what sort?

Interestingly, the boundaries here do not derive from a supernatural origin event, but rather through an actual material encounter between already extant humans and bears, even if the bears are construed as supernatural. While the humans already had pedagogical notions of how not to offend bears, here we see the appropriate boundaries remade through an encounter. On the one hand, the extant people already had stories that taught them their appropriate role within the natural-supernatural ecosystem. Those stories were binding upon human behavior, but the stories also had agency within the material semiotics of the encounter that lead to the renegotiation of appropriate bear-human boundaries.

These sex-infused tales also demonstrate the entangled nature of sexual boundaries interior and exterior to a species. The reasoning that would support the irreducibility of intra-human sexual difference is an origin story about species difference—by maintaining correct sexual species boundaries, animals and humans are created and males and females are created. Evolution is both facilitated by and constitutes such categorical differences. Yet, as Barad shows, such an apparently exclusive cutting is always also inclusive: the categorical practices that would mark off sexual and special boundaries also highlight the similarities that would make bestiality a concern. Steeves captures this dynamic well:

> Being a human being, then, was made possible by tens of thousands of years of appropriate sex. Sex created humanity and continues to separate it from animality. As a result, refraining from bestiality is what makes bestiality possible, and is this wonderfully circular bit of metaphysics lies the absurdity of the notion of a boundary. . . . Fear resides not only in the disappearing barrier, but in the realization that we have not known the truth, that we have been hiding foolishly, that we are not alone. (Steeves, 58)

From the very beginning the human and the bear have not been a settled boundary, but humans and bears have co-constituted an always temporarily settled boundary through continual cultural and sexual exchanges. Perhaps unexpectedly, human society both begins and ends with bestiality, a radical crossing of never-quite-there boundaries. This revelation about the agential cut of bestiality shocks us only if we take for granted the necessity of a temporally fixed beginning (and end) to our species.

Reading the historical roots of our shared ecological niche through myths produces similar disturbances. Humans and grizzlies find themselves in more or less the same ecological niche, as large mammalian omnivores. Although

I have been inconsistent about using the term "grizzly" as an antecedent to "bear," here the specificity is especially important. Humans have co-evolved with many different species of bears, which have co-evolved with each other. But in terms of behavior and ecology, brown bears or *Ursus arctos*, of which the grizzly is the North American variety *horribilis*, are particularly important in human naturecultures.[36] One reason for this is that grizzlies and humans have a similar attitude about their place in the ecosystem: both co-evolved with other apex predators capable of killing them. In the case of grizzlies, there was a much larger bear extant in North America up to 12,000 years ago, the short-faced bear, *Arctodus simus*. Although resource competition from the grizzly may have been part of the reason for the short-faced bear's extinction, the grizzly acquired a repertoire of submissive conflict-avoidance behaviors with other creatures at least in part because of the presence of much larger bears. This semiotic edifice is one of the reasons that humans and grizzlies are able to (for the most part) successfully avoid conflicts with each other, even though their present roles as apex predators would not necessarily lead to the adaptiveness of such behaviors. The American black bear was submissive to all the other species of bears in North America, and so predictably rarely engages human's aggressively.[37] That humans and grizzlies are creatures sharing an ecological

36. The grizzly is *Ursus arctos horribilis*, which once ranged over most of North America west of the Mississippi, from Alaska to central Mexico. Grizzlies are currently extant in most of their historic ranges in Alaska and Canada, but are restricted to vanishingly small portions of their historic range in the United States. There are stable populations in Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks and surrounding ecosystems. There is considerable controversy whether grizzlies may still exist in Colorado's San Juan mountains and there are occasional sightings in the northern Cascades of Washington state. The brown bears on Alaska's Kodiak archipelago, *Ursus arctos middendoriff*, are a distinct subspecies and are the largest of the brown bears. Other *Ursus arctos* subspecies range throughout Russia, Central Asia, and isolated parts of Europe. The polar bear, *Ursus maritimus*, is not a brown bear. The polar bear roughly ties with the Kodiak bear for the world's largest extant land predator. Far more common in North America is the black bear, *Ursus americanus*, a smaller, mostly herbivorous species unique to North America. "Black bear" and "brown bear" are both somewhat of a misnomer: both species have a variety of colorings, ranging from blond to black. The best shorthand for differentiating grizzlies and black bears are 1) their size, and 2) black bears have a canine-like snout, whereas grizzlies have a concave "moon like" and more humanoid face. I personally have seen a tri-color black, brown, and blonde "black bear" in California's Sierras.

37. Nonetheless, human deaths by black bears are substantially more common. This is partly due to their much larger range and proximity to human populations. However, when humans are killed by black bears, it is more likely a case of predation than threat response (threat responses are sometimes called "defense-aggression"). The black bear response to threats is nearly always flight. Grizzly attacks are most likely to be a response to a threat and not predation. Thus, when attacked by a black bear one ought to respond aggressively, but when attacked by a brown bear one ought to respond passively.

niche and a complex dominance-submission behavioral repertoire guarantees semiotically productive encounters in a way that may not occur between humans and other creatures. It is in this sense that semiotics are always material: the beings become what they are in flesh and in sign.

This claim about the natural history of bears and humans establishing a shared semiotic edifice may run counter to the goals of troubling the division of nature and culture—one could easily read this as a naturalization of culture. Yet, the troubling can be maintained. Here is offered one last mythological theme: the bear as a wise teacher that instructs humans on how to live well in their world. Sanders and Shepard share an unsourced story—it is unclear whether it is mythological, and if so, which people narrated it, or if it is written entirely by one of them.[38] However, they and other sources indicate that this is a common symbolic role for bears in myth. Their story starts:

> There once was a man who lived deep in the forest where he was perfectly content. Everything he wanted was at hand, and he had only to reach out for all the fruits the forest had to offer. He was safe and comfortable. He noticed the other animals hardly at all, but they too seemed to lack nothing.

does the intra-action[39] construct the niche?[40] The latter offers the possibility that "culture" has agency within "nature"; perhaps reverence for the wise bear generated ecological possibilities that were not previously present. That is, the place that humans may take in the ecosystem is not yet, and never really is, settled. The possibilities that have yet to take shape are due in no small part to grizzlies' marks upon our bodies. As Shepard writes elsewhere, the presence of bears "persists in our dreams and imagination as though some tracks were pressed into the human nervous system during the ice ages" as a testament to the materialization of this ever-evolving ecology of bodies, dreams, naturing, and nurturing.[41] A diffractive reading of the phenomena of human-bear relatings queers the typical modes of causality available to us. Our natures only emerge through our relatings, and not prior to them, and our relatings include the categorical practices that we use to think about each other. Drawing on the anthropologist Anna Tsing, Haraway often argues that human nature is a multispecies interdependence (2007, 218). Shepard's and Sander's story fleshes out one way that this interdependence could be historically embodied.

One final suggestion for the ways in which human and bear interdependence is embodied is the way in which bears come to be appropriate markers of political difference. One clear example is Kempthorne's position on grizzly bear habitat in the U.S. West. His environmental ethic shows the ways in which the grizzly's future as an extant or extinct species will be in part determined by governmental policies and state boundaries. For Kempthorne, the presence of grizzly bears in his state is a matter of territorial sovereignty, not simply ecological range—the grizzly is both flesh and sign in Idaho's rights as a state. In this sense, bears are participants within human legislatures as creators of such boundaries, an inversion of the environmentalist fear that legislatures will inappropriately direct bear evolution through establishing artificially restricted ranges. Without a doubt, legislatures often have unwarranted power to exterminate species, but it would be wrong to thus adopt a model in which we must

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39. Intra-action is Barad's term to describe encounters between entities that do not have pre-determined boundaries prior to that encounter—the boundaries are only achieved through the encounter and are never final or determinate. This contrasts with interaction, which supposes that an entities have determinate boundaries prior to an encounter, as if the entities that interest us were all Newtonian billiards. With intra-action, the philosophically interesting aspect of an encounter is how the entities co-constitute each other.

40. For more on niche construction's role in evolution, see: Richard C. Lewontin, *The Triple Helix : Gene, Organism, and Environment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

41. Paul Shepard, *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1996), 168. My use of this quote does not precisely portray the context in which Shepard presents it. However, I am critical of Shepard's reading of human nature and so seek to queer the (tremendously thoughtful) steps he takes toward giving animals much more agency within our experience of the world and ourselves.

therefore "speak for" the bears. Their agency is not so limited—we need to (re) learn to be attentive to it.

Bears also mark boundaries between political stake-holders, such as environmentalists and ranchers. Although the grizzly may be a potent symbol for either party—ostensibly indicating whether you value wilderness or you value rural economies—the status of bears as signs cannot be disentangled from the materiality of bears as flesh. The claim that bears are present in legislatures draws from the essay and exhibit by Isabelle Mauz and Julien Gravelle in *Making Things Public*, the collective project curated by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel. Mauz and Gravelle demonstrate the ways in which the presence of wolves in the Alps is confirmed. Confirming the presence of wolves is a matter of much grander scale than simply spotting them in a particular valley. Rather, the wolves announce their presence in many different places and times: in the genome of guard dogs who are brought back to guard flocks; in the revival of old rivalries over fence lines; in the reconstruction of shepherd huts; in the forms in the drawer of a bureaucrat thousands of miles away; in the distribution and behavior of their prey, etc. In other words, "the predators exert their influence well beyond this zone, and, reciprocally, they are also subjected to the influence of far-off decisions and events."[42] The very nature of wild critters is political—the what, where, and who that wolves or bears might be is for neither they nor humans alone to decide. The wildness of bears is a matter of tremendous material-discursive entanglements.[43]

Which brings the discussion back to the claim that environmental ethics cannot have as its referent a nature disentangled from human culture. When that is the case, the result is either extinct grizzlies or dead Treadwells or both. The proper practices of proximity cannot be negotiated without also taking intimacy into account. Much like Treadwell's failure to understand the dark side of our intimacy because of his cheery cosmology, bear conservation policy cannot be successful if we cannot recognize the co-constitutive work done by bears and humans. The focus of both environmental ethics and policy should

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42. Isabelle Mauz, and Julien Gravelle, "Wolves in the Valley: On Making a Controversy Public," in *Making Things Public : Atmospheres of ?* *Q*

be on living well, not on living separately, and this requires that our ethical referent be diffractive rather than settled. In human-bear relatings we see only the effects of difference and never difference itself; if we attempt to derive an ethic from an ontology of settled difference, it will usually be the bears who lose their agency.

It is in this spirit that I conclude with one of the more interesting elements of human-bear relatings: the possibility that predation can be what draws humans closer to bears. Treadwell's preference (and perhaps desire) to die at the jaws of a bear, and that he would be horrified by the killing of a bear in revenge, is mentioned so many times in *Grizzly Man* that it becomes hackneyed. But this is a common theme among people intimate with bears—the realization that we are always already part of the food web is a realization that our bodies exist only by virtue of being intertwined with other bodies through our edibility. Hatley explores this dynamic in his essay "The Uncanny Goodness of Being Edible to Bears":

> The stalking bear's gaze reminds me that my flesh is not only my own but also a mode of becoming bear. . . . In the uncanny I am placed utterly outside of myself, to the point that *I am an other* and/or the other is so utterly inside me that *no space remains where I can be merely myself*. . . . To be caught up in this condition is not something that happens *after* one already exists, but is the very structure by which one can even come to exist as a particular, living being. In the plethoric, the very condition of lived particularity is revealed to be gestation and nutrition.[44]

To be is always to be-with, even if sometimes spatially located in a digestive system. Reportedly, Peacock captures this insight on a laminated card he carries in his wallet:

> I, ________, being of sound mind but dead body, do hereby bequeath my mortal remains to feed the Grizzly Bears of North America. Respect my body. Do not embalm! (A little mustard would be appreciated.) Please put me in a deep freezer if I must be held for a few days. My family and friends have been instructed in how to deal with my corpse. … Should my family refuse to claim me, or should I be indigent at the time of my demise, please explain to the County that I can be mailed to a wilderness (as evidenced by the presence of grizzlies and/or wolves) for a lot cheaper than I can be buried in a pauper's grave. Please remove my eyes, kidneys and heart for the living, but retain my liver because I think Griz would like that most. See you in the Spring![45]

When life and death are literally and figuratively on the table, perhaps with

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44. Hatley, "The Uncanny Goodness of Being Edible to Bears," 21–22. I owe many thanks to Jim for first inspiring me from a distance that philosophy about grizzlies was a viable topic and then for conversations with proximity about the actual content of this work.
45. Rick Bass, *The Lost Grizzlies: A Search for Survivors in the Wilderness of Colorado* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1995), 123.

mustard, there is no room to be merely yourself, to be merely other, to be merely anything. To be in the gaze of an animal that would kill and eat you is to be aware of the indeterminacy of where one's self ends and where another self begins. The gaze, the fight or the flight, the transcendent granting of quarter, the Mafioso-style vengeance execution of the "problem animal" at the hands of the state, are all negotiations of where one body begins and another ends, and that negotiation is not settled beforehand. To negotiate ethically, we cannot fall back on stories that allow a wild nature to be posed against a tamed culture because then the outcome is already settled: wild nature will lose.

All this is to say that neither the bear nor the human is an animal to itself. Both are deeply historical and political by virtue of their entanglement. The species in question here are not domains given in advance, and how the domains get temporarily settled has everything to do with who lives and who dies. The descriptions and stories that are told about bear-humans matter deeply to how these domains are constructed, but the stories are not just up to humans to tell.