

How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human

Can forests think? Do dogs dream? In this astonishing book, Eduardo Kohn challenges the very foundations of anthropology, calling into question our central assumptions about what it means to be human - and thus distinct from all other life forms. Based on four years of fieldwork among the Runa of Ecuador's Upper Amazon, Eduardo Kohn draws on his rich ethnography to explore how Amazonians interact with the many creatures that inhabit one of the world's most complex ecosystems. Whether or not we recognize it, our anthropological tools hinge on those capacities that make us distinctly human. However, when we turn our ethnographic attention to how we relate to other kinds of beings, these tools (which have the effect of divorcing us from the rest of the world) break down. *How Forests Think* seizes on this breakdown as an opportunity. Avoiding reductionistic solutions, and without losing sight of how our lives and those of others are caught up in the moral webs we humans spin, this book skillfully fashions new kinds of conceptual tools from the strange and unexpected properties of the living world itself. In this groundbreaking work, Kohn takes anthropology in a new and exciting direction—one that offers a more capacious way to think about the world we share with other kinds of beings.

Review

"What's so welcome about Kohn's approach is that he walks a tightrope with perfect balance: never losing sight of the unique aspects of being human, while refusing to force those aspects into separating us from the rest of the abundantly thinking world." *The Times Literary Supplement* "*How Forests Think*" is an important book that provides a viable way for people educated in Western philosophy to approach indigenous animism without being credulous or inauthentic. It is refreshing to read a book of this intellectual caliber that takes Runa stories seriously and enters into dialogue with their claims using the tools of Western philosophy." *Anthropos*

From the Inside Flap

"A thinking forest is not a metaphor. Rooted in richly composted, other-than-symbolic semiotic worldings, this book teaches the reader how other-than-human encounters open possibilities for the emergent realization of worlds, not just worldviews. The semiotics in this well-wrought book are technical, worked, demanding, tuned to form and modality, alert to emergent properties, multinaturally and ethnographically precise. Thinking with the other-than-human world shows that what humans share with all living beings is the fact that we all live with and through signs. Life is constitutively semiotic. Besides all that, this book is a powerfully good read, one that changed my dreams and reworked my settled habits of interpretation, even the multispecies ones." -- Donna Haraway, UC Santa Cruz

"I can only call this thought-leaping in the most creative sense. A supreme artifact of the human skill in symbolic thinking, this work takes us to the other side of signification--itself doubly manifest in what gets noticed and not noticed--where it is possible to imagine all life as thoughtful life. It has been done hand in hand with the Runa. It could not have been done without the delicacy of Kohn's ethnographic attentiveness. However far along the track you want to travel with Kohn, you will see that the anthropological landscape has already changed." -- Marilyn Strathern, University of

Cambridge

..".A work of art... [and] an immensely refreshing alternative [for] philosophical anthropology." -- Bruno Latour, Sciences Po

"Radically innovative and original [and] beautifully written." -- Anna Tsing, UC Santa Cruz

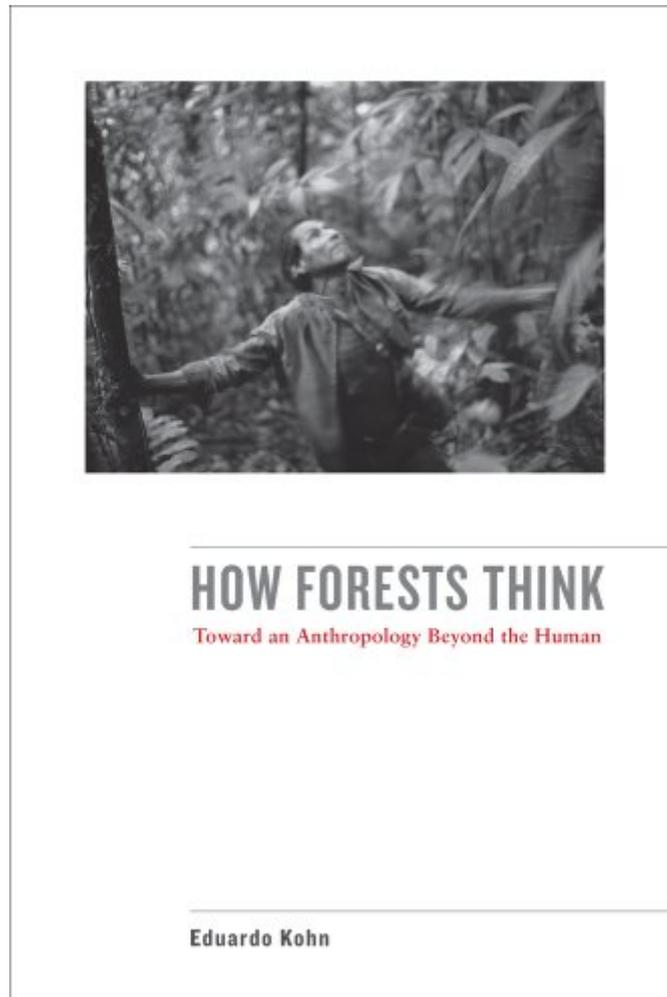
"A remarkable aspect of [this book] is the complex - and often beautifully written - intermingling of subtle theoretical propositions with an even subtler ethnography." -- Philippe Descola, College de France

"[Kohn] means to attach us again to the world we thought our thinking removed us from by showing us that the world too thinks. ... I know dancers and painters who would groove to Kohn's expansion of self and thought and living, and I want to see the dances, paintings, films, buildings that come out of dreaming over this book." -- *Bookslut*

Eduardo Kohn is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at McGill University.

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