

**Faier, Lieba and Michael J. Hathaway (eds.). 2021. *Matsutake Worlds*. London, New York: Berghahn Books. 150 pp. Hb.: \$27.95/£22.95. ISBN: 9781800730977.**

Book review by

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This book is the result of the collaborative work of the Matsutake Worlds Research Group, which includes Lieba Faier, Michael J. Hathaway, Timothy Choy, Miyaoko Inoue, Shiho Satsuka, Eaile Gan, and Anna Tsing. They aimed to follow the fungal turn, emulate fungi in their work and writing, and, like them, do everything all at once.

A collection of six individually authored chapters with a forward, an introduction, and an afterword, this book is not a sustained argument or even a collection of arguments; it challenges the idea of argument because an argument is based on clearly conceptualized categories in some relationship to one another.

This book eschews epistemology in favor of a mode of thought Eduardo Kohn styles ontological, that is, “directly manifesting concepts” that the worlds we engage exhibit. This requires a more capacious ethnographic approach. We cannot interview mushrooms, so Lieba Faier suggests the authors needed to:

[...] be able to translate across multiple forms of beings and means of expression—across modes not only of verbal or symbolic communication but also of chemical processing and attraction (p. 5).

Matsutake are highly valued especially in Japan, where most of this work is situated. But they are elusive, difficult to find, and impossible to cultivate. They tend to appear in the devastated landscapes characteristic of the Anthropocene geological epoch of our times, for instance, after forest fires or nuclear accidents, such as what happened at Fukushima. However, Elaine Gan and Anna Tsing caution us, Matsutake take up and concentrate radiation. Typically, however, they are found in village woodlots, kept as stands of mixed pine forest to supply firewood to villagers.

The book may be seen as a series of Zen Koans, short statements of contradictions designed to break through patterns of thought to apprehend stark reality. As such, there is little to assess as the structure of argument and critique can find no purchase in this terrain of elusive discourse that self-consciously attempts to emulate its elusive fungal subject. The book is densely written with some interspersed notes on Japanese ethnography and the place of this mushroom in Japanese life.

So, the book may be appropriate for the intellectual wastelands of Anthropocene anthropology.