

Multispecies Gastronomy: Entangled Worlds of Food and Farming in the Capitalocene

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For millennia, gastronomy as a cultural discourse and practice has concerned itself with the deceptively simple question of how to eat well and live the good life. Drawing on cultural geography, multispecies ethnography and the environmental humanities, my project develops what I term ‘multispecies gastronomy’ through which the good life might be alternatively conceptualised, engaging critically and materially with the messy social and metabolic entanglements by which humans are fundamentally indebted to other species through food. These entanglements are not frivolous concerns of elite connoisseurs. The profound ecological crises of the 21st century provoke critical questions about how to eat and live better across species difference, particularly as scientists signal a ‘biological annihilation’ unfolding at a rate that both threatens the ‘foundations of human civilization’ and Earth’s capacity to sustain life as we know it (Ceballos et al, 2017). Given the centrality of capitalist food systems as major factors driving this extinction event, finding new principles for the good life is an urgent political and ecological project in the Anthropocene—or, rather, the Capitalocene, acknowledging the centrality of capitalist subjects in given rise to the worst of the Anthropocene’s effects (Haraway 2015).

What, then, does living a “good life” at the dawn of the Capitalocene mean for gastronomy? With its commitment to conviviality and commensality, gastronomy is a fertile site from which to respond to this question. At its etymological roots, conviviality attends fundamentally to the question of how to live well together. Yet, in pursuing the good life, gastronomy must work towards, as Haraway suggests, making the Capitalocene ‘as short/thin as possible’ (2015, 160) by looking beyond human interests and attending more carefully to who lives and dies along the way, and in what manner. My proposed book project, *Multispecies Gastronomy: Entangled Worlds of Food and Farming in the Capitalocene*, engages directly with these concerns through case studies of orchardists, livestock producers, cheesemakers, brewers and others experimenting with more respectful, pleasurable, and convivial conditions for living and eating (with) others in the world. Their stories explore farming, fermenting, and slaughtering as practices of gastronomic co-production, drawing humans into messy, intimate entanglements with other earthly creatures: animals, plants, fungi, and even microbes. As a practice that feeds humans but also determines the conditions by which many species live, eat, and die, agriculture is one of the most fundamental of such worlding projects and so takes a privileged position within this book’s case studies.

The project’s reframing of the good life as a multispecies endeavour seeks to offer alternative epistemological foundations for taking seriously the more-than-human worlds of gastronomic co-existence. Empirical narratives present accounts of gastronomic ‘worlding’ with the potential for ‘richer and more responsive invention, speculation, and proposing’ by which humans might engage with the creaturely relations of food and farming (Haraway, 2008, 92-93). Several themes are explored as central to a multispecies gastronomy: care, conviviality,

collaboration, nourishment, and microbial agency along with processes of decomposition, decay and slaughter.

In the age of the Capitalocene, stories of eating and living well amongst species difference enact a prefigurative politics of hope. Composing counternarratives to capitalist discourses—and narratives that decompose gastronomy's humanist roots—contribute to redrawing the normative boundaries of what constitutes good ways of eating and living: socially, politically, and metabolically.