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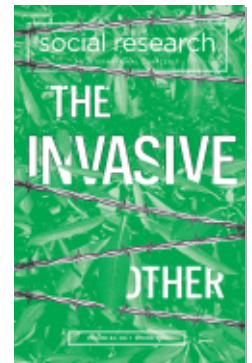
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Invasive Others and Significant Others: Strange Kinship and Interspecies Ethics near the Korean Demilitarized Zone

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# **Invasive Others and Significant Others: Strange Kinship and Interspecies Ethics near the Korean Demilitarized Zone**

History hides the fact that man is the universal parasite, that everything and everyone around him is a hospitable space. Plants and animals are always his hosts; man is always necessarily their guest. Always taking, never giving. He bends the logic of exchange and of giving in his favor when he is dealing with nature as a whole.

—Michel Serres, *The Parasite* ([1982] 2007, 24)

IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE AND MASS EXTINCTION, especially with the identification of the Anthropocene as a new geological era in which humans have become the major planetary force, Michel Serres' statement that "man is the universal parasite" of nature might seem especially prescient. If one were to name an "invasive other" in the age of the Anthropocene, it would have to be the *Homo sapiens*, who wreaks havoc on Mother Earth. Yet, as Rob Nixon cautions, the "epic vantage point," in which discourses of the Anthropocene have a tendency to indulge, invites universalisms that threaten to obscure

the differences that make a difference, in relation to stratifications of power and inequality, and the “imperfectly understood, infinitely elaborate webs of nonhuman agency... that continue to shape the Earth’s life systems” (2014). Moreover, accepting the Anthropocene means that we can’t cling to a modernist vision of “nature as a whole,” as if human culture and nonhuman nature could ever be disentangled. Scaling down from the universal and from “nature as a whole,” questions of who is invasive and what is other, or what is parasitizing whom and toward what ends, become more politically consequential and potentially transformative. If we accept that “we have never been modern” (Latour 1993), then it follows that, even at a planetary scale, an ontological distinction between (human) “guest” and (natural) “host” is impossible to fully draw. Serres himself underscores this point, describing the field of the host as a “dark puddle,” in which the host and the guest are “two things with opposite signs but the same value” ([1982] 2007, 16).

For Serres, “parasite” can be biological, social, or the noise (vs. signal) in a system. Each of these parasites is generative in that it interrupts the typical course of things and creates possibilities for new relations of exchange and communication. As Steven D. Brown writes, “This parasite, through its interruption, is a catalyst for complexity” (2002, 16). I use this parasitical insight to analyze the play of invasiveness and hospitality that characterizes the work of conservation biologists in South Korea. Rather than being merely “invasive” by entering into the habitat of endangered species, or dominating them through biopolitical population management, the conservationists that I describe are more aptly described as parasitical, “bending the logics of exchange” to gain proximity and a measure of relationality with the birds they care for and seek to protect.

## **AN UNNATURAL SANCTUARY**

The ambiguity of invasiveness and host-guest relations is perhaps nowhere more heightened than in the Korean Demilitarized Zone, one of the most heavily fortified spaces on earth, which has become identified as an unexpected ecological sanctuary. As environmental

historian Peter Coates writes, the DMZ “illustrates how a distressing No-Man’s Land can also be an enigmatic Many Creatures’ Land” (2014, 503). The enigmatic return to nature of the DMZ, a place that former President Bill Clinton famously called the “scariest place on earth,” has made it a magnet for international news media, conservationists, scientists, and tourists. The South Korean state has also heavily promoted its ecological value as part of a broader capitalization of areas along the southern border of the DMZ, now packaged as a tourist zone of “peace and life” (Black 2015, Cossette 2016).

Many cultural studies of the DMZ’s ecology tend to reproduce what has become a commonplace narrative in South Korea of the DMZ’s “return to nature,” a nostalgic vision that neglects the politics entailed in resignifying a space of rampant militarization and emergent capitalism as an ecologically exceptional space and symbol of hope. These studies take its exceptionalism at face value and highlight as “paradoxical” or “ironic” the fact that “nature” can coexist with or symbolically overcome the human propensity for war in ways that closely align with the state’s neoliberal agenda (Brady 2008; Kim 2011). An ethnographic attention to the actually existing biodiversity in the DMZ, in contrast, can bring into view how these highly contaminated spaces of militarized natures are also productive of new relations, not through a restoration of pure nature, but of parasitical relations that are also ones of care and interdependence.

In May 2012, I accompanied South Korean ornithologist and conservation biologist Dr. Kisup Lee, along with two graduate students and an environmentalist, on a research expedition to an island breeding habitat for the endangered Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*; hereafter BFS). In the early hours of a mild spring morning, we left the port of Incheon for a two-and-a-half-hour ferry ride to YeonPyeong Island, which is in the highly contested maritime waters between North and South Korea. Just seven and a half miles from the coast of North Korea, the island is within spitting distance of the controversial Northern Limit Line. It made international news in 2010, when it was battered by North Korean artillery in a “training

exercise,” which led to one of the most serious skirmishes between the two Koreas since the 1953 armistice. The breeding grounds were on an uninhabited islet near YeonPyeong Island called Guji-do. The islet’s original name, Guōji-do, means “place to seek out fish,” reflecting its importance to the fishing economy in premodern times. After the Korean War, because of its strategic location, it was converted to a target range for the South Korean military’s air bombing drills. Some time in the 1990s, however, it became a de facto preserve after a resident of neighboring YeonPyeong island transported eight black goats there in an act of defiance. From what Lee told me, this person owned an inn on YeonPyeong Island and felt that the disturbances from the military exercises were negatively affecting the tourism business. The island’s colonization by a resident population of goats made it impossible for the military to continue using the island for training purposes. (The details and authenticity of this account I have not been able to verify.) In any case, the goat stratagem worked, but it created its own unexpected ecological outcomes, one of which was the establishment of BFS breeding colonies.

### **A CONSERVATION SUCCESS STORY**

In contemporary South Korea, migratory birds mediate numerous cosmopolitan and postnational visions, which project human desires for reunification and belonging onto avian “others” who are imagined to exist free from the politics that divide humans. The highly endangered Red-crowned Crane (hereafter RCC), in particular, is a ubiquitous harbinger of political reunification and a mascot for state-promoted ventures that resignify the DMZ as a zone of peace and life rather than as a scar of national division and fratricidal war. There are less than 2,800 of these cranes in the world, and they are declining as their habitats in North and South Korea become increasingly inhospitable, which serves to enhance the species’ symbolic value. In the context of the national division, the RCC is celebrated as “unifying” the two Koreas as it annually migrates from its breeding areas in Northeastern Russia, across North Korea, to its wintering sites in the DMZ and the border areas of South Korea. In actuality, as conser-

vationists and bird lovers well understand, migratory birds depend upon multiple habitats, including breeding, feeding, resting, and wintering sites. In East Asia, and in South Korea in particular, habitat destruction in the form of land reclamation and development are major threats to their survival. Thus, rather than evading earth-bound troubles, migratory birds such as the RCC are, more accurately, made vulnerable in multiple localities, subject to a myriad of hazards and disturbances that affect their flight patterns, habitats, and survivability. Avian creatures and their flyways demonstrate that sky and earth are not “mutually exclusive domains of habitation” (Ingold 2011, 74).

In contrast to the readily iconicized and magnificent RCC, the BFS is a funny-looking, egret-like bird that is more peculiar than exotic. It breeds in the islands off the west coast of the Korean DMZ, in the contested waters around the Northern Limit Line, and travels to and from these islands to wintering sites in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, and southeastern China. Spoonbills prefer shallow waters of tidal flats and wetlands, where they stir the water and wait for fish to pass near their rounded beaks, but these habitats have been under consistent threat from land reclamation projects in South Korea and across the Asian countries where the BFS winters and breeds.

The BFS was first observed in the Korean peninsula in the 1960s by ornithologists on both sides of the border. It was designated a natural monument by the South Korean government in 1968. The most widely cited narrative of the BFS estimates that it once numbered around 10,000 at the turn of the last century, but by the 1980s, the first global census recorded less than 300. Through a transnational network of conservationists working in coordination, the BFS was saved from extinction, with the winter census of 2015 recording, for the first time, a population greater than 3,000. The goal of BFS conservationists since the mid-1990s has been to bring the total number back to the 1900 level of 10,000, yet the limited carrying capacity of existing breeding and wintering habitats makes this goal unlikely, especially in light of the increasing destruction of habitats, climate change, and pollution. Thus, although the BFS represents one of the great conservation success stories of the recent past, this success is

under continuous threat of being short-lived. The cranes and the BFS have found safe haven in the militarized spaces of the DMZ area, but as developments in the border areas of South Korea have intensified over the past two decades, the BFS has become difficult to find in the wetlands of the western coast, and wintering crane counts are likewise declining. The national division is thereby not overcome by birds' migrations, but, rather, their ability to make their annual journeys depends upon the militarized spaces that secure their remaining habitats.

There was little to no scientific knowledge about the BFS prior to the 1990s, when conservationists first began to research its habitats and behaviors and to monitor its migrations through radio transmission and banding methodologies. BFS were known to winter in Taiwan and in Hong Kong, and were also seen on the western coasts of the two Koreas. Over the course of the 1990s, land reclamation on the western coast of South Korea led to the destruction of wetlands and tidal flats, most recently in the name of renewable energy and "green urbanization," the most prominent example of which is futuristic Songdo International City and Business Hub. The effects of these developments on maritime ecologies and local fishing economies have been profound. Also in the late 1990s, BFS stopped showing up in their regular breeding areas along the coasts in North Korea. The reason for this sudden disappearance, according to Lee, must have been a "major disturbance." He speculates that this large-scale change occurred during the famine in North Korea, when starving people stole eggs from BFS and other birds' nests to sell on the black market or to consume themselves. Famine and habitat destruction thus contributed to the shift of BFS breeding grounds to the islands of the West Sea.

## **BECOMING GOAT**

When we arrived on Guji Islet, the detritus of artillery shells and other evidence of military presence, including an umbrella commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Korean War, littered the shore. We

saw the remains of bombing targets in the ground, marked by stones in a circular formation. The goats, who are notorious for consuming any and all vegetation, with a particular preference for tree bark, had multiplied to 20, and had reduced the island's trees to scrawny stick figures poking out of the ground. Lee was not sanguine about the future sustainability of the island for the BFS, calling it a "complete mess," ecologically speaking. The goats present no immediate threat to the BFS, but are consuming and killing off the organic materials the birds need for nesting. White herons, who used to build nests in the trees of Guji Islet, had already disappeared.

Before departing from Seoul, Lee had sent me precise instructions about what to wear and bring with me. The non-negotiable sartorial requirements were a camouflage or dark-colored waterproof jacket, and a black umbrella. The reasons for the umbrella became immediately obvious once we landed—the seagulls were Hitchcockian in their vicious disdain for us—shit-bombing and nose-diving into our umbrellas, and violently pecking at our heads during our moments of weakened vigilance. But protection from the gulls didn't explain why the umbrellas had to be black. The reason, I soon found out, had to do with the fact that the goats had black coats, and we were, to borrow (opportunistically) from Deleuze and Guattari, "becoming-goat" in our quest to get close to the BFS nests. Lee theorized that the BFS were accustomed to the goats, who are not their predators, so that if they mistook us for goats, they would be less likely to be startled by our presence. Becoming-goat required us to hold the black umbrellas close to our crouched bodies, less like umbrellas than military shields, while making our way in a single line, incrementally, indeed, very, very slowly, in a squatting position, up the hill to where the BFS nests were. Once there, we took pictures, counted the number of nests, pairs, and chicks. The banding that had been done in coordination with the network of BFS conservationists helped to identify two birds, and we also saw a one-legged female who had been previously identified by researchers in Taiwan.



Guji Islet, a militarized training ground and ecological dystopia, is a natural cultural borderland where BFSs have found temporary safe haven in the narrow interstices of capital and militarization. Yet it is not only the BFSs, but also Chinese fishermen who have located a space of illicit freedom in these contested waters. North and South Korean fishermen are prohibited from entering the waters between these islands and the North Korean coast, yet Chinese fishing vessels now regularly appear, as overfishing has decimated fish and crab populations in Chinese (and other Korean) waters. Lee feared not only that this activity would negatively affect the birds' food supply, but also that the fishermen might use the remote islands as resting areas and introduce new disturbances in these sanctuaries.

Lee described to me the difference between monitoring and studying the RCC and BFS as one of interspecies intimacy. With the BFS, the ability to get close to them, and to observe at close hand their nurturing and feeding practices, especially with their chicks, helped to create anthropomorphic identification as well as networks of shared knowledge and friendship. Yet what does anthropomorphic connection mean for someone like Lee, who described himself as someone who “knew a lot about birds but nothing about people”? For him, the BFS mediates a transnational network of BFS lovers that is an extension of the relations of friendship created with and through the birds.

This network, which has had to overcome steep financial and political hurdles to meet in various parts of the region on a regular basis, has compiled an internet database with a detailed directory of banded birds and where they were seen in other parts of the region. Naming the birds and being able to identify them in their migrations was another way to develop a sense of closeness to the birds and of friendship among the humans that they connect. In contrast, the RCCs, with breeding grounds in the Amur region of Russia, were too remote and expensive to access, and the wintering cranes in the DMZ were too skittish to get close to. Without the ability to share the same space and create an affective intimacy, RCCs could be icons, but not “friends.”

Following Lee's lead, we endeavored to be polite guests (Haraway 2008, 92) of our avian hosts, and Lee would admonish us in a harsh stage whisper if we broke from our goat mimicry by moving too quickly or standing up to stretch our legs. Perhaps the BFSs saw right through us, but performing goat-ness allowed us to imagine the birds seeing us, granting us a bird's-eye view, or a "double perspective," to quote Rane Willerslev, in which "an inter-species boundary is affected and some degree of 'union' is experienced" (Willerslev 2004, 641). This interspecies union, however, was triangulated—we needed the goats in order to get to a polite distance from the spoonbills, and, in fact, we never encountered the goats themselves, only glimpsed them from a distance. In our goat-personae, we were able to observe the mothers feeding their young for almost a half-hour, at a distance of several yards. Using the goats to gain a literal bird's-eye view was how we entered the environment of the island, through parasitism and corporeal dehumanization. In performing goat-ness, we were also hoping to communicate with the BFSs and in that way were semiotically invested in their ability to understand us as nonpredatory ruminants. And the fact that they did not fly away and they engaged in their breeding and feeding practices despite our presence verified that we were to them, at most, tolerable parasites.

Well before we were within viewing distance of the BFS nests, we had begun the process of becoming goat, and after moving on to other parts of the island, we continued in our painful and tedious goat-like movements, until, nearly three hours later, we took a break from the heat and dust to sit in a human space, delimited by a large multi-colored beach umbrella that Lee planted in the ground. Under the relative security of the beach umbrella, having shed our goat form (the black umbrellas) to sit, human-style, I experienced a Sloterdijkian moment (Sloterdijk 2011) of realization: the umbrella was a sphere that made explicit the *Umwelt* or extensive environment of guano, blood, dust, dead trees, and the incessant, deafening cries of thousands of seagulls around us. If, in the small-scale context of Guji Islet, we were temporary guests, in the near future we may be

the explicit hosts of an actively managed ecosystem. As he has done on the artificial “eco-islands” of Songdo International City, Lee and his assistants may bring in nesting materials for the birds, and may have to figure out ways to prevent the goats from consuming the materials before the birds can learn how to use them. And, as he and his colleagues have done on other uninhabited islets, they may experiment with helping to build the nests themselves, configuring the birds’ spaces “like rooms in an apartment” and co-constructing habitats, while communicating with partners in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Vietnam to figure out where these birds will go as climate change alters their wintering sites and diverts their flight patterns. For Lee and other bird lovers, celebratory narratives of the DMZ’s birds as symbols of freedom, transcendence, and reunification abandon them to a fantasy world of pure nature, in which none of them will survive for very long. The birds and other nonhumans do not escape the folly of human politics, but are, truly, enmeshed within them.

### **STRANGE KINSHIP AND POLITE DISTANCE**

Some time after our trip to Guji Islet, Lee posted time-release images, which had been recorded by motion-detection camera, to the Korea Waterbird Network online café. The camera had been set up next to a BFS nest, and was intended to provide visual documentation of the birds’ breeding and nurturing practices. Like our goat-performances, the camera was a form of stealth surveillance, but more high-tech and remote. The images that Lee posted, however, were not just of our avian friends, but also revealed the presence of human invaders. In the edited images, at least three different men are seen taking photos of the birds. Whenever a man appears in the frame, the birds depart from the nests and leave their eggs unattended. Lee was emphatic in condemning the invasive lack of politesse, titling his post, “This is not photography etiquette. Going too far” (in Korean, *neomu hamnida*).

The men were on the island for at least four and a half hours, alarming the BFS mothers and “carelessly striding around” taking photos here and there while the exposed chicks might have been at-

tacked by seagulls and even killed. Lee's concern was unvarnished: "It's so sad to see the mothers look so worried about whether their newly hatched babies will die from being exposed to the sun's rays." Lee suggested that if chicks were to die, the birds might not return next year. This remote breeding site was not a true sanctuary, and without protected status from the state, strangers could come at will.

With a strong memory of the sensory and bodily experience of becoming goat, I viewed the image of men's fully human forms as a stark reminder of our earnest attempts to alter our bodies to assimilate to the island ecology. That day we counted 150 pairs and measured a dozen eggs, moving excruciatingly slowly, taking great care not to disturb the nests, crouching, covering, and squat-walking while trying to hear each other over the din of the seagulls' calls and shrieks. Members of the network, with handles borrowed from nonhuman species (e.g., Birch, Warbler), responded to Lee's post with messages indexing their shock and distress: "How can we stop this?"; "To be doing this while they're incubating their eggs—that's going too far"; Extremely selfish! Ignorant ... bastards ... My heart is aching."

Traci Warkentin, drawing upon Val Plumwood's feminist "interspecies ethics," describes an "ethical praxis of paying attention" that resonates with the decorporeal methodology Lee required of us. She writes, "the kind of attentiveness we are concerned with here involves one's whole bodily comportment and a recognition that embodiment is always in relation to social others, both animal and human" (2011, 100). This interspecies ethics and attentiveness reflects a more general philosophy of what Merleau-Ponty, in his *Nature* lectures (2003) called "strange kinship" (*étrange parenté*: strange relatedness), an acknowledgement of the similarity and alterity of humans and nonhuman animals.<sup>1</sup> The notion of strange kinship, or strange relation, suggests the indeterminate ways in which humans and nonhumans exist in a play of similarity and difference and resonates with Haraway's approach to nonhuman animals as "significant others with whom we are in consequential relationship in an irreducible world of embodied and lived partial differences" (2008, 72).

The images of the “real” human invasives, however, made clear to me the genuine ambiguity of our effects on the birds. If our parasitism in the name of science was unavoidable, our dedication to be polite guests required us to attenuate our human form and reduce our semiotic effect on the island biosphere. The rationale was to ensure that the birds were not frightened away from the urgent task of procreation, and to also make sure that they did not become habituated to humans and thereby become vulnerable to the predatory members of our kind (a motion detection camera in another breeding site documented a fisherman stealing BFS eggs). But are we really that different from the careless photographers? Perhaps all that separates us is our more expansive imaginaries, such as the possibility that the birds could “see” us as other than human and as categorically different from ruder human parasites.

Lee’s conservation work is more empirical than experimental, organized around solving migration and reproductive challenges. But it is also underwritten by a theory of avian personhood in which connections to habitat and kin are affective and real. Strange kinship helps me to describe interspecies relationality that doesn’t seek to valorize nonhuman species as allegories against which to measure human morality or to find a new ground of “nature” against which to construct alternative myths or models for the social (Watson 2016). Rather, it brings into focus ambiguous and ambivalent relations of hospitality involved in the pragmatics of living and surviving together. Humans may be the most invasive species of the Anthropocene, yet the strange human-goat-spoonbill relations made possible on Guji Islet suggest the necessity of attending to the various scales of parasitism, in which our relations as host and guest are less about drawing categorical distinctions between self and other than about refining etiquette and practicing an ethics of attentiveness.

## **CONCLUSION**

Conservation biologists attempting to prevent extinction events have been critiqued by animal studies scholars for subscribing to “species

thinking” (Chrulew 2011)—which problematically essentializes and simplifies what are highly multiple, interspecies, and transhistorical formations—and for their ethically suspect practices that would sacrifice individual lives of various creatures or cause them suffering in the name of species survival. Chrulew, for instance, describes the captive breeding in zoos as a form of “loving to death” (n.p.), and Thom van Dooren, in his analysis of captive breeding of whooping cranes in North America, frames these practices as ones of “violent-care” (2014, 116). These frameworks foreground the ethical ambivalence that lies at the heart of conservation biology, in which certain species are valued more than others, and individuals can be sacrificed in the name of the group.<sup>2</sup>

Loving to death and violent-care both presuppose a relationship of domination and even sovereignty of humans over the nonhumans they “care” for, in which, it would seem, humans are not the guests of nature, but the hosts, forcing their hospitality on nonhuman animals in an anthropocentric fashion.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, I suggest that both politeness and parasitism may be the means toward the end of scientific knowledge production, but they are also modes of decentering human perception that can offer alternative visions of planetary connection and models for interspecies relations. One alternative vision is that of migratory bird flyways, human-avian co-productions that foreground what we might refer to as “birds’-eye views,” multiple and heterotopic visions mediated by technologies, which are integral to producing knowledge about the birds and human networks of bird lovers.<sup>4</sup> The flyway describes a biosocial formation and also constitutes a social network and shared imaginary.<sup>5</sup>

Guji Islet is one stopover on the BFS flyway, itself a small portion of the East Asian Australasian Flyway, which encompasses 22 countries and includes 50 million birds. Birds representing 200 species visit tidal flats and wetlands across the East China and Yellow seas, crisscrossing Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, and Cambodia. For Lee, who began researching cranes in 1983, as more knowledge of the birds’ flyways was being generated through banding, bird

watching, and especially satellite tracking, the movements of the birds created what he called “organic” linkages with other bird lovers along the flyway. If one part of the flyway is ruined, he told me, it will all be ruined, so local conservationists in the related countries must coordinate with their counterparts in the other locations. Although migratory birds adapt to changes in their flyways, the stresses of their annual migrations can be fatal if they are unable to reach their destinations or are unable to access adequate food sources to fuel them along their way. For vulnerable and highly endangered species, the loss of an individual can constitute a severe setback that threatens its survival. As stated in “Bird’s Eye View on Flyways,” a 2012 brochure by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species, “For each species, the migration chain is only as strong as its weakest link” (8).

Lee described how the birds have taught him to view the flyway as a human-avian network. His understanding of this network, moreover, affects his larger view of the physical world, which he perceives as a Gaia-like entity: “I believe that the earth is like an organism connected by a network. Through the birds, I’ve come to feel this very strongly.” Like Stefan Helmreich’s notion of Gaia sociality, for Lee, “knowledge of the globe, understood as a cybernetic whole ... is enlisted as an important node in and context for relations among humans and nonhumans” (2003, 348). I theorize flyways as improvisational, networked choreographies of humans and birds, which are also, following Stengers (2005), “cosmopolitical propositions.”<sup>6</sup> They are propositional and pragmatic modes along which relations of interdependency emerge between birds and humans. As such, they can offer alternative visions and models of planetary connection and interspecies relations, based on a more complex relationship of parasitism, not merely domination.

This may be one possible map for an alternative peace, not nation-bound or state-centric, but privileging the agency of nonhuman others. Never fully knowing or understanding what motivates our avian friends, conservationists like Lee are passionately invested in a critical anthropomorphism and a “human commitment to value

biological otherness” (Heise 2010, 72) in a world increasingly inhospitable to both human and nonhuman survival.

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## NOTES

1. Animal-studies philosopher Kelly Oliver writes that “strange kinship allows for an intimate relation based on shared embodiment without denying differences between lifestyles and ways of being. . . . This strange kinship is not based on descendants or on generation but on shared embodiment in a shared world, even if the style of body and the style of inhabiting that world are radically different” (222).
2. As fieldworkers with a particular agenda, we also employed a hierarchy of value that privileged the BFS over other more common cohabiting species—seagulls, cormorants, fish, and, of course, the goats. In fact, we observed with horror, yet passively, the viciousness of the gulls who pecked rivals’ chicks to death in their competition over the limited space and nesting materials on the island.
3. See Youatt (2015), who offers a useful Foucauldian analysis of conservation biology as a form of biopower, which is far from totalizing. As he writes, “while the lack of subjectivity and reflexivity in nonhuman populations is usually read as a source of acquiescence to human interrogation, it seems to also have the opposite effect by enabling resistance and disruption to the desires of biopower to establish governable populations . . . Life itself escapes biopower.” (56).



4. I offer the flyways as a metaphor and model for thinking about human-avian relationships in ways that go beyond what Thom van Dooren calls “flight ways” (2014). For van Dooren, flight ways capture the emergent becoming of birds as individuals whose collective lives constitute a species, as a transhistorical unfolding. Yet his work, even when it includes an analysis of conservationists’ work, does not consider how human–avian interspecies relationships are also part of the coevolutionary process that he considers to be vital to understanding birds or other nonhuman species as forms of life (i.e., individual beings as opposed to specimens that represent a species).
5. The “flyway concept,” according to ecologists Gerard Boere and David Stroud (2006) is “defined broadly as the biological systems of migration paths that directly link sites and ecosystems in different countries and continents” (40). As a concept, it has been crucial to “simplify the real-world complexities of migration so as to assist consistent international cooperation between governments and non-governmental organisations” (40). First coined by American ornithologist Frederick Lincoln in the 1930s, the flyway concept was, from the beginning, a scientific and administrative category, literally mapping biological processes of migration onto social relations of political boundaries and governance (Wilson 2010, 73–74).
6. Against the classic Enlightenment framework of a Kantian “perpetual peace,” Stengers calls into question the metaphysical presumptions of western modernity and secular liberalism that underwrite the notion of a single, scientifically knowable world, to which all humans might belong equally. Once the notion of a single world has been refuted, the liberal vision of world peace and cosmopolitanism takes on a more ethnocentric, imperial, and sinister cast. As an urgent alternative, Stengers offers the “cosmopolitical,” in which the “cosmos refers to the unknown constituted by ... multiple, divergent worlds, and to the articulation of which they could eventually be capable, as opposed to the temptation of peace intended to be final, ecumenical” (Stengers 2005, 995). If there is not one world, but many, including not just humans but many other forms of nonhuman life,

then how should we take these into account without merely assimilating them into a preconceived, pre-given totality?

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