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Intimate Knowledge

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Intimate knowledge*

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We were on a small boat near the mouth of the Amazon. It was a routine trip, just three or four hours back to the village of Igarapé Guariba from the city of Macapá.¹ On the way out we had carried sacks heavy with the palm fruit *açaí*. These had been sold to dockside buyers and now we were returning almost empty: a couple of propane canisters, a recharged battery, a few plastic bags filled with shopping for people who had stayed home.

It was a small incident. There were six of us on board. It was early morning but hot already and we were relaxed, too relaxed, stretched out in the sun on the roof or snoozing down below, the engine chugging steadily as the boat carried us along the broad, main channel of the estuary. Beto was piloting, staring into the middle distance, meditative, working the current as always to save fuel. Somebody shouted sharply – alarmed. I started from my daze in the midst of panic on all sides. Someone snatched the wheel from Beto's hand; somebody else was leaning hard over the bow; another person had grabbed the *vara*, the long, sturdy pole for punting into harbour, and was heaving at the river. We were running aground on a sandbar, 200 yards offshore, suddenly tiny in the midst of that ocean of coffee-coloured river.

It was only a small incident, though it could have been much larger. Within five

minutes we were on our way again, the current wrenching us out and twisting us off. We were laughing, relieved, joking about liquor and how much – too much – Beto had drunk already that morning.

The Amazonian *ribeirinhos* with whom I was travelling that day know these rivers as well as anyone. They have been around them their whole lives, piloting sail and motorboats, paddling canoes, fishing, hunting, swimming, wading, and bathing in these waters. Yet even so, terrible things lurk nearby, on and just below the surface. Boats fill and capsize, passengers get swept from the stern, children taking their bath are seized by the current and dragged away, hunters step blindly on stingrays and submerged thorns, teenagers are scarred by the *candirú* orifice fish. Dead trees, sandbars, and floating islands of grass rear up unexpectedly to imperil

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travel. The river has lives of its own that no amount of familiarity can thoroughly contain.² For many people who live in Amazonia, this nature is as much something lived and of which one is unmistakably a part as something of which one has abstract knowledge.³ Indeed, this type of separation, so familiar in the academic literature that attempts to locate the distinction between local (or indigenous) knowledge and scientific knowledge, is rarely evident in rural Amazonian life.

Knowledge of nature is a set of practices (as Paul Richards has shown) and it is also a lexicon (as the ethnoscientists have long argued) – though one that is profoundly contextualised, social, and dynamic.⁴ Such knowledge is unevenly distributed in that some people know more about certain things than others (some people are more knowledgeable farmers, some better boat pilots).⁵ And, as practice, it is fundamentally tied to contingency and habitus: to the pleasures of drinking and meditation on a routine morning voyage, for example.

Small as it is, I often recall this incident. Indeed, it has been through worrying away at its possibilities – dwelling on the contingencies through which it becomes a minor story rather than tragedy and trauma – that I have come to think more seriously about what is called “local knowledge”. And there is more than the truth of its ad hoc-ness drawing me back to that morning. The story also instantly recalls the intimate, lived experience of everyday life: the textured intimacies among men and women, and those between people and these mercurial fluvial landscapes. This incident reminds me how on these rivers people enter into relationships among themselves and with nature through embodied practice; how it is through these relationships that they come to know nature and each other; and how the relationships, the knowledge, and the practice are always mediated not only by power and discourse, but by affect. And it also brings to mind how affect, though inconstant, is also ubiquitous, the perpetual mediator of rationality.

This broad and encompassing field of affective sociality is what I am calling intimacy.⁶ It is a site for the social production of knowledge and the reworking of human–nature boundaries. It is always within a field of power. It is always in place. It is always embodied. And it is always, above all else, relational. As an analytical tool, local knowledge fails to capture this situated intimacy.⁷ Though it explicitly indexes an embeddedness in locality, there is a problem with the particular type of “local” with which it is currently burdened. In this paper, I suggest ways of rethinking the local in local knowledge and in so doing find that the work I want this local to perform is better done under the sign of intimacy. Understanding local knowledge as an intimacy can be a basis for

collaboration between field researchers and their associates in circumstances of confounding asymmetry, circumstances in which the success of a project depends on recognition, sensitivity, and the willingness to face the often painful complications of relationality. Let me explain more concretely what I mean.

Radical knowledge

Two years ago I visited an abandoned research site on a ranch near the town of Paragominas in eastern Amazonia. Important studies had been carried out here in the early 1990s, demonstrating that Amazonian trees and pasture grasses could have deep tap-roots reaching down to the water table. My host, Moacyr, had worked as chief research assistant on the investigating team of North American and Brazilian ecologists, playing a key role in setting up the critical experiments. The camp was abandoned and the researchers had moved on. But the shafts that made this place famous were still studded with electronic monitoring equipment and Moacyr was showing me the exposed roots visible in their depths.

“Did you know these plants had deep roots?” I asked as the two of us peered down the smooth sides of a rectangular pit cut into open pasture.

“You mean before we set up these treatments?” I nodded. “Well, yes, I knew some of these trees did. I’ve always known from looking in animal burrows that there were big trees and some vines with a long *pião* root that brought up water from way below the surface.”

So what, I wondered, did the researchers discover that Moacyr didn’t already know? “I didn’t know about all the trees that did this. They found more.”⁸

This exchange at once reminded me of my own research on anthropogenic streams and rivers in Amazonia. It had turned out that the artificial channels I was studying were so familiar to most river-dwelling people in the region that they rarely thought twice about them. The canals were commonplace and they were widespread. Nevertheless, it had been only recently that academic researchers had begun to accept these channels’ widespread existence.⁹ This odd disjuncture was at least partly due to the over-

determinations of ideology – to the persistent popular and scholarly belief in the inability of rural Amazonians to exercise control over a potent tropical nature. But didn't it also have something to do with differently situated intimacies?

Moacyr had grown up knowing about the existence of deep root systems at a time when the confident ecological story about tropical rain forest nutrient cycling was of shallow roots and a tightly closed system.¹⁰ My experience researching the canals told me that such anti-hegemonic knowledge remained broadly invisible in scientific circuits because few researchers thought to ask the questions by which it might be elicited. Immersed in their own discursive communities, researchers already knew the forest – or some particular version of it – before they ever met it in person. Scientific projects tended to be framed by existing theoretical paradigms and from the limited conceptual repertoire readily available at any historical and institutional moment.

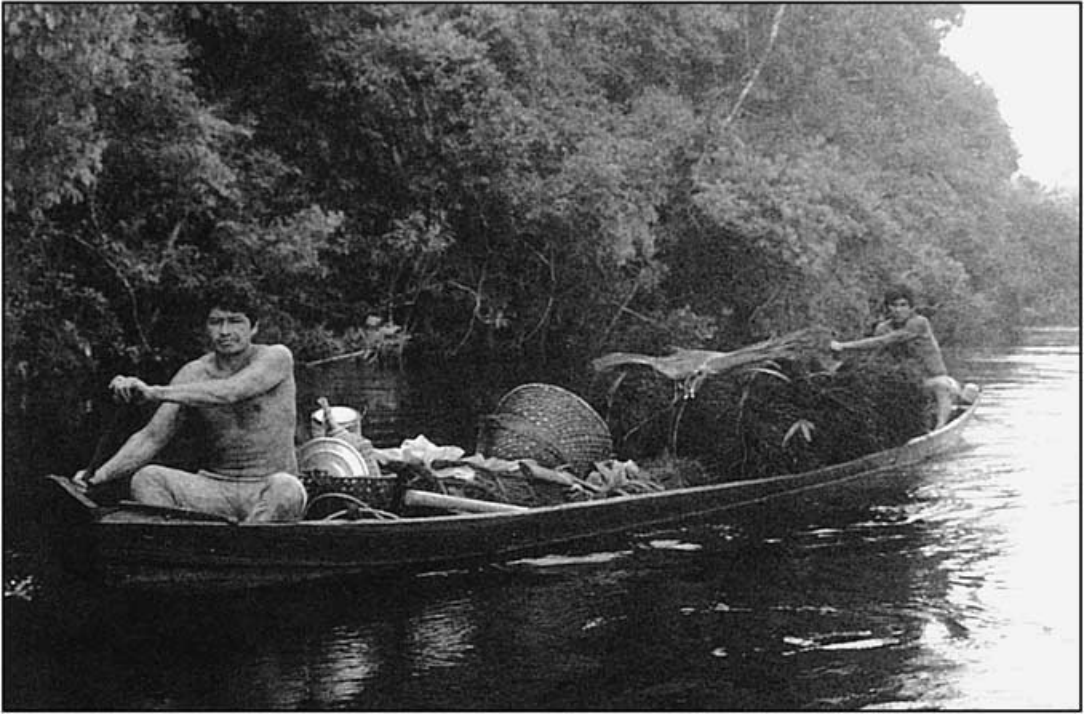
Yet Moacyr, whose role on the Paragominas project had been putatively technical – organising the digging of the shafts and the insertion of the measuring devices, putting in place and managing the biomass experiments – apparently knew the broad outcome of this research long before its radical conclusions had even been hypothesised. Among rural Amazonians, it seemed, these deep root systems were quite familiar – though they excited little interest.

Despite the widespread distribution of Moacyr's understanding of tree structure and function, its place-based experiential character made it look like paradigmatic local knowledge to me. And presumably it did also to the researchers who, he tells me, drew upon it in designing their investigations. In recent years, such knowledge has become an object of desire for natural scientists: somewhere to turn in the hunt for rare species, a shortcut in the scramble for ethnobiological value. For some fieldworkers, the taking seriously of the knowledge of informants has reflected a newly liberal practice of collaboration across previously unacknowledged cultural boundaries and an entry into the types of ethical, ontological, and logistical conundrums that have provoked the field-based social sciences more or less explicitly

since their inception. For others, however, it has been primarily a question of cost-benefit efficiency. In the latter case, the key question is that of locating the right informants.¹¹

Unless it is itself the object of inquiry – a rarity in the biological sciences – the epistemological difference to which description may be tied is at most a curiosity. No matter the political basis of collaboration, what is important to natural science fieldworkers is descriptive data: the fact that some trees and grasses have a *pião*. The intellectual and affective relationship between researcher and informant through which this local knowledge is accessed is often (though not necessarily) instrumental and asymmetrical, and it is always tied to specific socio-cultural apparatuses. Though the particular desired local knowledge may hold the secret to scientific progress (it may guide us to those deep roots, for example), in the same scientific terms it nevertheless lacks universalism. To become meaningful on a planetary scale, Moacyr's knowledge of the root system must be translated into a language of expertise, incorporated into and subsumed by the mobile narratives of natural science. It is all very well to develop an hypothesis. Value accrues only at the moment of proof.

Bruno Latour has explored this familiar process in detail, arguing that it is by virtue of the length and strength of the networks they are able to assemble that some knowledge systems are consigned to parochialism and others become universals.¹² Explanatory power results less from intrinsic truthfulness than from the successful collaboration of political, cultural, and biophysical actors ("actants" in his terminology). In this account, scientific knowledge is as much a local knowledge as is Moacyr's.¹³ Or, at a moment of origin: there is an immanence, a potential for universality that is realised through specific forms of translation. Resisting a priori hierarchisation, Latour argues that knowledge becomes differentiated through the ability of what becomes scientific knowledge to travel through circuits of power and prestige – an ability realised through the resources enrolled by scientists and their allies in its service and in their translation of it into suitably mobile and commensurable form (e.g., numerical data). Or, to use a differently spatialised metaphor: science is a knowledge that



Collecting *piçaba* (a variety of palm) on the rio Xié, Brazil. DR

(Note: the activity and area pictured are not those referred to in this article.)

succeeds more effectively in its translocal articulations.¹⁵ By travelling, it refuses to be localised. In the expansiveness of its movement, it achieves abstraction from the confines of particularity.

Local knowledge

But Latour's relativising of scientific knowledge is not widely shared outside the social sciences. More commonly, only certain knowledge is considered local. And one useful observation to which we will return is that these local knowledge systems also travel and make articulations of their own. However, they do so as science's negation: unlike the transcendently neutral scientific-knowledge stories, what makes local knowledge mobile is precisely its naming as local, a naming that promises a definitive particularity, a resistant, non-reductive, anti-

colonial holism, a naming that seeks out the marks of ethnographic alterity.

Such non-scientific local knowledge is marked above all by a perceived placefulness, an apparent conformity to a quite specific idea of locality. In conventional usage, local knowledge is a particularistic knowledge of place and the things in it; a knowledge born from rooted experience. It is precisely the kind of intimacy normally unavailable to the outsider.¹⁵ But what is the locality for which the term "local" stands and on which it depends for its commonsense resonance? And how else might we think about places and the knowledge apparently attached to and derived from them?

We can begin with the anthropological concept of culture. Until relatively recently, many anthropologists thought of culture as a series of discrete, self-contained units, heritable in key aspects, and passed down among a particular group of people. It was understood to be located geographically, and, somewhat tauto-

logically, culture and place were often mapped isomorphically upon each other.¹⁶ The critique of the culture concept that swept through U.S. anthropology in the 1970s and 80s involved its shearing off from this embeddedness in place. “Culture” was radically reconfigured: it became mobile, processual, unfinished, emergent, and relational. The category moved so far that, for some scholars, the term itself became unacceptable except in its adjectival form.¹⁷

Yet, while the unmooring of culture from place in anthropology has resulted in the thoroughgoing transformation of the idea of culture, notions of place have remained largely intact. Indeed, in the context of the current preoccupation with globalisation, the local – a standard surrogate for a conventional notion of place – has tended to be reconfirmed as the site of ethnographic particularity, in sharp distinction to the non-placed abstraction of the global.

However – and this twist in the argument will come as no surprise – the idea of a place-bound local is readily subject to a critique that parallels that of the culture concept.¹⁸ Among the many things I learned from Amazonian people’s accounts of their anthropogenic streams and rivers was that, in the most fundamental ways, places are *made*. The places I got to know were actively and continuously brought into being through the coming together of many human and non-human phenomena – physical labour, narrative, imagination, memory, political economy, the agentic biophysicality of tides, plants, and animals . . . And I came to understand places best when I saw them as formed by the movement of people and ideas and as constituted by traces of pasts and futures; when I thought in terms of place-making rather than of ready-made places.

The British geographer Doreen Massey has expressed this well. Bringing together space and time, she describes places as “particular moments” in intersecting, spatialised, social relations, some of which are “contained within the place; others [of which] stretch beyond it, tying any particular locality into wider relations and processes in which other places are implicated too”.¹⁹ Such places are relational. They are caught up in complex networks and articulations that tie them to capacious geographies, linking humans and non-humans across time and space. Moreover, places carry multiple

meanings and are the sites of numerous overlapping, contradictory, synergistic activities, brought into being through and productive of difference and inequality. These are the sites people travel as they live their complex, mobile lives. And the people that produce and are produced by places, “local people”, are, like the places themselves, anything but local – at least, so long as we continue to think of the local in that conventional sense of narrowly parochial, self-contained, static, and restrictive.

No matter how distant from the sites marked as cosmopolitan, the places on which the local of local knowledge depends for its authenticity are, invariably, highly active and articulated. Igarapé Guariba, that village of 25 houses with no roads or electricity to which we were sailing when we ran aground that morning is like this. The people who live there are constantly in dialogue with other people and places, constantly reconfirming and reinventing their own locality in relation to the innumerable elsewhere in which they participate physically, imaginatively, culturally, and through the expansive networks of translocal political and cultural economy. Like all of us, they are constantly learning new things about the world they live in – its people, its rivers, its plants, its soils – constantly talking, listening, and exchanging ideas about the things that are important to them, making connections across time and space, through radio, TV, and video, through extensionists, union officials, government specialists, and foreign researchers, and through all kinds of mobile commodities.

Clearly, people in Igarapé Guariba have a knowledge of that place’s particularities that others do not. But I hesitate to call this knowledge local. Let’s consider a moment of relationality, a moment of local knowledge in which the local is a site of engagement and productivity.

Relational knowledge

I had sought out Moacyr because he was once employed on a mahogany conservation project I spent some time studying. I had stayed a few weeks at the site of this project in south-eastern Amazonia, trying to understand the ways in which the logic and preoccupations of conser-

vation biology were put into practice, and considering how academic field science travelled. It was a problem of the articulation of different practices and knowledge systems: those of the North American research scientist who led the project and those of the “local people” he employed as his field assistants.

Of course, there were tremendous complications. I couldn’t understand these questions without knowing something about the intellectual, philosophical, and experiential biographies of the participants. And I also needed to think seriously about the mahogany tree itself and the forest in which it grew. Through some convoluted contingencies, all these beings had been brought together in this particular forest in the service of a project dedicated to social and environmental change (or, rather, dedicated, so far as possible, to the arrest of certain kinds of change associated with deforestation). And, in their own ways, from their own locations, and – for the humans involved – with an acute awareness of each other and of the differential distributions of power that mediated their interaction, all these participants had something to say about the process and the outcomes of the project in which they were temporarily enrolled.

Every morning, the team of researchers and assistants would leave camp and trek into the forest. It was cold and damp at the beginning of the day, but the heat would soon become oppressive, and the work was demanding: repetitive, detailed, exhausting. One by one the hundreds of trees were measured, the tape tightened around the trunk at three heights.

One particular morning, we are all standing under the shimmering crown of a tall mahogany tree, swatting at deer-flies as we waited for the measurements to be completed. Pointing to another tree nearby, a large timber species less valuable than mahogany, Paul, the research scientist and project leader, muses out loud that such trees are often found growing close to mahogany. He doesn’t know why – maybe they like similar growing conditions? After a moment’s quiet, Luiz, one of Paul’s assistants, responds. It’s true, he says. When the spotter on a logging team sees this type of tree, he gets excited. He knows there’ll be mahogany nearby. Similarly, he continues, the spotter will look for mahogany by following a stream, but he knows he won’t find any until the channel narrows and he reaches the top of the watershed.

Luiz has four years’ experience working with logging teams in this area, accompanying the spotters in their hunt for the R\$3 paid for each tree found. Out in the forest at four in the morning, marking trees, bulldozing trails, dragging out the trunks with heavy equipment till ten at night all through the dry season. He learnt a lot about natural history here in those four years. If this project folds, the chances are he will once more put his skills to work for the loggers.

Paul is respectful of the team’s forest knowledge, and, he tells me, his understanding of the landscape and floral ecology in this place has come about through “a joint learning and teaching venture with them”. Yet, he also tells me, these people are relatively new to this landscape. And though in the early days his dependency on them was thoroughgoing, now it is more a case of logistics and labour. These guys are colonists and immigrants in south Pará, fieldworkers whose botanical experience does not compare with that of the Dayaks with whom he worked years before in South-East Asia. These Brazilians’ awareness of ecological relationships, he thinks, is uneven and limited.

Jaime, another crew-member, agrees. Yet, born and raised outside the nearby town of Conceição do Araguaia he is by no means a new arrival. When I ask him if he knows the forest well, he says he knows this part of it pretty well. He is not merely self-effacing. He understands the significance of location and the detail of ecological heterogeneity. And one way to hear his response – though I doubt he intends this – is as a rebuke to a scientific method that arrogates the right to generalise heroically from the particular. But Jaime’s local knowledge resists translation. And anyway, there is none forthcoming. What use *in itself* is partial knowledge of a particular landscape, no matter how fine-grained? This is knowledge that is instantly recognisable as local, in that negative, restricted sense. And, judging from his easy self-effacement, Jaime has no other expectations.

But as for Luiz’s observations on the spotter’s practice, it is not only parochialism that restricts their scientific relevance. His pronouncements are information but not data, and – though what counts as data is always dependent on the community and the moment in which it is being articulated – it is on such distinctions that methodological practice reproduces and jus-

tifies itself. Indeed, it is in these moments that the saturations of power through which knowledge is localised are glimpsed. And it is here that we see how methodology itself arbitrates multiple knowledges. Out in the forest, method emerges as a complicated sorting procedure with a simple, but crucial, goal: the making of what counts as science. It is a process through which the hierarchies of knowledge are established, and in which the descriptive is distinguished from the analytic, the anecdotal from the systematic, the mythic from the factual, the information from the data.

Localising knowledge

Knowing part of a forest pretty well is more than most people can aspire to. It's not an impossible goal though, as that "pretty well" contains considerable latitude. But Paul, Luiz, and Jaime know this forest well by any measure. Spending those hot, humid weeks out there with them was revelatory. The forest took shape in all kinds of unexpected ways. Jaime had a sharp eye for human histories: the trees cut, split, and abandoned, the knife slashes that had once tested a mysterious bark. Luiz would stop to pocket seeds: this one because it will be pretty in the front yard of the house he's building, this because the fruit is so delicious, this – did you see this? – look, it's like a little egg. Paul, both focused and distracted, caught up by the detail of it all, spotting birds, noting anomalies, holding everyone back, pulled by the individuality of the creatures in this creature that is the forest.

And containing all this, justifying it, demanding it, the blunt work of counting feels like factory discipline. It has its own distinct ontology; awkward and artificial to poor tired and impatient me. The effects of its repetition are drug-like, compelling, irresistible; a tacit, machinic logic generating its own perverse desires. And so maybe it was the embodied pain of doing science that convinced me of its seriousness. A child could sense the hierarchy among these different ways of knowing.

At issue here is *localisation*, the active hierarchisation through which something or someone is made local, is tied to a set of place-based meanings that confirm it, her, or him as

not-universal.²⁰ Localisation operates through the logic of specifiable metonymies. A particular place and the people understood as bound to it both index and are reduced to signifying a particular phenomenon (and sometimes vice versa).²¹ Unmistakably, for example, the Amazonian local is a place and space of nature. Conversation on Amazonia is always haunted by its double, the problem of nature.

I have written at length elsewhere about this process as both localisation and regionalisation.²² Here I want only to point to the complexity of local knowledge in its operation. Local knowledge is simultaneously a product of localisation and one of its agents. In the field situations I have described here, localisation is achieved through the purifications of scientific methodology, by the separation of different qualities of knowledge and their assignment to different explanatory domains.²³ Distilled to a question of method, the issue becomes not what is known, but in what language that knowledge is expressed. The realisation of local knowledge or, better perhaps, its historical fulfilment, lies in its adoption and transformation into the specialised narrative language of science. Before this redemptive moment – before Moacyr's pião becomes the critique of the closed nutrient system, before Luiz's clue to the presence of mahogany becomes an upslope–downslope distribution²⁴ – such knowledge and those who generate it are merely local. And, most commonly, this *is* only a moment. With rare exception, there is an afterwards in which the project, its science, and its universals pass on, disarticulated, new datum in hand, their passage serving to further reconfirm the local-ness of what was only momentarily transformed.²⁵

As a product of localisation, then, local knowledge is always in contrastive relation to something supra-local. And this relationality, the status of local knowledge as not-universal-not-science, is also a mark of the ethnographic specificity of the local. In much scholarly as well as popular discourse – despite the frail logic of such ideal-typology²⁶ – travelling science succeeds in being of no place because it appears to be everywhere, everywhere the same, and everywhere transcendent. It touches down, but its methodological feet are rarely soiled. Rather, it is defined by its commensurability, its prodigious ability to translate and be

translated, and it is distinguished only by its normal rationality.²⁷ Local knowledge, in stark contrast, is saturated with the difference of both social and cosmological relations, place-based in the broadest sense that the limitations of the convention allow.

Discursive practices of this type should tell us that local knowledge also has political possibilities. There is an active transnational constituency for the cosmological, and astute political actors such as the Amazonian Kayapó have made the most of their enforced attachment to the local – turning their essentialised tie to nature into an ambivalent but productive site of activism. By working the resource of the local, they create a site of opportunity, but equally – in the expectations it creates – one of potential peril.²⁸

Intimate knowledge

My interest in this short essay has been in local knowledge as an intellectual category: in what it is, how it is produced, and, especially, in the things that it achieves. I have focused on the local, a potent theoretical architecture yet one that, in this formulation, too often remains knowledge's unexamined partner.

Local knowledge, I have argued, is fundamentally relational. Moacyr's and Luiz's forestry are examples. They are local only in relation to the supra-local of science and only as a result of their enforced emplacement. But they are also relational in the broader sense of their articulation with and by a range of interlocutors: the other field assistants, Paul, myself, the loggers, union officials, conservationists, families, friends, trees, soils, and animals. The list is long and what counts as knowledge must be actively worked out through the agonistic and power-saturated encounters of daily life. This situated knowledge is always in process: emergent in talk, labour, sociality, affect, and many other forms of social practice.

We are a long way from "local knowledge" as normally employed. My impulse is towards the re-signification of contaminated language rather than its rejection. However, it is clear that no matter how generous the impulse and no matter the stubborn politics it at times enables, the local of local knowledge requires a radical rethinking if it is to stop reproducing a localisation that categorises people as well as knowledge systems. Local knowledge may appear to valorise non-scientific ways of knowing, yet it is trapped by the not-universal of its local into reproducing and reifying the very taxonomy through which knowledges are hierarchised.

In considering this particular local, I have suggested reimagining it as a site of intimacy. I want this intimacy to be understood broadly, as a realm of the affective. We know that all knowledges can be usefully thought of as local, even if they are not equally localised. Because of the practices through which they are produced, all knowledges are also intimate, though, again, not equally so. Moreover, as I have already insisted, all intimacies are necessarily relational.

Localisation is a genuine problem. Relationality is a social fact. To claim that the local knowledge of conservation and development should be understood as forms of intimacy is to call for attention to the spatialised hierarchies of knowledge production and to the entrenched inequalities in social and natural scientific research. There is no universal against which intimacy is parochialised. It speaks symmetrically of researchers, field assistants, trees, and loggers.²⁹ It insists both on the importance of the time and space of encounter (between people, and between people and non-humans), and on the decisiveness of the embodied, situated practices that take place there. It points to the ubiquity of affect as a mediator of rationality. And it draws attention to the embeddedness of social practice in relations of power.

Notes

* My sincere thanks to Paul, Luiz, Jaime, and Moacyr for welcoming me to their projects and teaching me about ecological fieldwork. Many thanks also to Arun Agrawal, Don Moore, and Anna Tsing.

1. I have disguised the names of most places and of all individuals.
2. There are, of course, several modalities of explanation for destabilising phenomena. For discussion of the variety of beings that populate Amazonian rivers, see Slater (1994); Loureiro (1995).
3. e.g. Descola (1996).
4. Richards (1993); Conklin (1997).
5. Padoch and Pinedo-Vásquez (1999).
6. Recent work on intimacy that I have found helpful includes that of Ann Stoler on intimacy as an ambivalent realm of biopolitics and government (forthcoming); Lauren Berlant, who writes of the ways “attachments make worlds and world-changing fantasies” (1998: 288); Michael Herzfeld on “cultural intimacy” as “rueful self-recognition” (1997: 3–4); and, most provocatively, that of Alphonso Lingis (1994, 2000) who brings to life a world of all-encompassing intimacies charged with politics, power, and desire.
7. On “situated knowledge,” see Haraway (1991).
8. In a recent email exchange, Paul, the forest ecologist I introduce below, argued that Moacyr’s use of the term *pião* signified the tree’s tap-root, a feature quite distinct from the deep roots described in the Paragominas research. He wrote, persuasively: “I am not aware of such a thing as a deep *pião*, one reaching below 2–3 metres. The deep roots described were those 8, 12, and even 15–20 m belowground, actively respiring.” Was Moacyr talking about something of which science had little interest, or might this be a problem of translation arising from an “imprecision” of terminology? Given the familiarity of this research situation, I am tempted to claim that the truth of the particular example is of less significance than the prevalence of the knowledge relationship. Yet, from our *in situ* conversation I take Moacyr’s *pião* to include both tap-roots and deep roots. Translation, as I argue in what follows, is a critical relational practice in the encounter between knowledge systems – and its product is never quite the same as its raw material. Though it always involves the work of stabilisation, translation is often simultaneously the agent of occlusion and erasure. On this latter point, see Chakrabarty (2000).
9. Raffles (2002), Raffles and WinklerPrins n.d.
10. For the definitive statements of the closed rain forest system, see Richards (1952), Jordan (1989).
11. Hayden (2000).
12. Latour (1986).
13. Peter Redfield has expressed this effectively in a sharp aphorism: “All knowledges are local, but some are more local than others.” See Redfield forthcoming.
14. On articulation, see Hall (1980).
15. But one that an especially dedicated outsider might earn through the trope of reverent apprenticeship. See, as iconic, Castañeda (1968), and, more recently, Plotkin (1993).
16. See, as an example, the work of the cultural ecologist, Julian Steward; for instance, Steward and Faron (1959).
17. See, for example, Appadurai (1996).
18. See Gupta and Ferguson (1997).
19. Massey (1994, 120).
20. Cheah (2000) makes this point in relation to academic area studies.
21. See Appadurai (1988).
22. Raffles (2002).
23. Latour (1986).
24. This relationship is far more complex than I am acknowledging here, involving collaboration and negotiation, and mutual – rather than unidirectional – appropriations. See Raffles (2002).
25. And despite disarticulation, what remains behind as the local in this account is never the same as it was before. There is always a waning trace of transformation lingering in people’s lives.
26. Agrawal (1995) examines the porosity of these binaries.
27. See Haraway (1997).
28. For perceptive discussions in an Amazonian context, see Conklin (1997) and Conklin and Graham (1995).
29. On symmetry as a methodological principle, see Callon (1986).

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