Shooting Snowy was the Toughest Job I Ever Had:

The Role of Dogs in First Contact

and Anthropological Theory

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Paper for

"Fashioning Anthropology: Papers in Honor of Gail Kelly"

Portland Oregon, April 15-16

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> "It did not take Man long to discover that all the animals except the dog were impossible around the house. One has but to spend a few days with an aardvark or llama, command a water buffalo to sit up and beg, or try to housebreak a moose, to perceive how wisely Man set about his process of elimination and selection."
> —James Thurber

British Papua and German New Guinea between the World Wars is remembered today as the location of the last great exploratory patrols whose 'first contacts' marked the end game of colonial penetration of the globe. Since the mid-80s accounts of the exploratory patrols of Jim Taylor (Gammage 1998), Mick Leahy (Connolly and Anderson), John Black (Gammage 1998), Jack Hides (Schieffelin and Crittendon 1991), and Ivan Champion (Sinclair 1988) have been documented in a series of books of high quality, culminating in Bill Gammage's superb 1998 volume *The Sky Travellers* (1998). In this paper, I want to chart the history of my own relationship with anthropological theory through the relationship these men had with their dogs. Although their ubiquitous presence is often overlooked, the dogs of Papua New Guinea have always been at the forefront of Australian exploration. Peeking out of the background of photographs and shuffling inconspicuously across frames of silent film footage, dogs like Dash, Snowy, Bluey, Spark, and Lucy follow the patrols they accompany invisibly, surfacing only occasionally in the narratives of their masters.

I first developed an interest in these dogs in 1994. I was a student at Portland State University, where I was taking a biology class over the summer to fulfill my sciences so I could graduate from Reed. I skipped all of these classes and spent my afternoons at the PSU library, where I applied myself to reading the books that my friends had read in other classes and which I had missed out on. These were *Being and Time* and *Like People You See In A Dream*. I would read a chapter of one, and then a chapter of the other. As a result – trust me, it's a long story -- I wrote my undergraduate thesis on how first contact patrols proved Sahlins didn't understand Heidegger. My interest in first contact continued into

graduate school, where I ended up writing about the relationship between a large gold mine in the Porgera valley of Enga province and the local people who lived there. While there, I interviewed the local oldsters about their memories of first contact, and in retrospect I can say that the best part of my first book, a history of my field site, is the fact that it is the first comprehensive account of early European penetration of Enga.

In sum, my interest in The Dogs Of First Contact – it sounds like a strangely-themed calendar, I know – has endured even as the various fads and fashions in anthropological theory have changed. I would like to use this opportunity, therefore, to describe the vagaries of anthropological fashion by illustrating different ways in which they might be used to analyze my data on dogs in Papua New Guinea. I do so to honor my thesis supervisor, Gail Kelly, who is well-known for withstanding – although *not* tolerating -- these trends. Given the choice between reading Foucault on the Care of the Self or Mauss on Techniques of the body, Professor Kelly could always be counted upon to raise one eyebrow and remind one that such theoretical novelties as Mauss were perhaps not the most pressing thing to read given the many copies of William Robertson Smith's “Lectures on the Religion of the Semites” that were freely available at the library. Professor Kelly is also known for a certain frankness – in one class I took with her she attributed the shortcomings of a student of Scots descent to that fact that he came from a race that “subsisted entirely on oats and apples.” Therefore I will use this opportunity to forgo the calm and balanced style that is my presentational trademark and indulge in a bit of caricature. I'll discuss three phases of my education: Reed, Chicago before my fieldwork, and Chicago after my fieldwork.

Reed College

As I mentioned above, at Reed I became interested in what Heidegger had to teach us about first contact. I was struck, basically, by how the cultural reflexivity forced upon highlanders by their contact with outsiders was similar to the shift in comportment that

dasein experienced when things shifted – as we used to say back in the old days of the Macquarrie and Robinson translation – from to-handedness to at-handedness.

Traditionally, anthropological analysis tended to focus on the way in which people blurred the distinction between themselves and the animals they loved in order to make the point that such a distinction really exists. As Dennis McGilvray, the dean of Reed Animal Studies, wrote

> attitudes towards animals represent... one possible area of expression of the conceived distinction between man's cultural world and the non-human environment that is always threatening it... in the terminology of Mead, animals might be said to constitute a crucial conceptual 'other' against which the standards of truly human activity take place (1965:95).

This approach can be seen in other authors. For Sahlins, kinship becomes a cultural system and "dogs… participate in American society in the capacity of subjects. They have proper personal names, and indeed we are in the habit of conversing with them" (Sahlins 1976:174). Or, as a sterner (and much less funny) Donna Harraway puts the point,

> nature is only the raw material of culture, appropriated, preserved, enslaved, exalted, or otherwise made flexible for disposal by culture in the logic of colonial capitalism (Haraway 1989:13) .

In both cases, the point is simply that people have culture and that the animals they love do not, no matter how much they might treat them as "furkids."

For Heidegger, on the other hand, there is no clear distinction between dasein and the totality of its care-full involvements. Dasein's identity is conditioned by its relationship of care such that the totality of things encountered in the world — hammers, trees, mountain huts, work benches, the Hort Wessel song, and so forth. — are determinative of its being. Without the world, there could be no person, but no world would be encountered without a person to encounter it in a particular manner. "'subect' and 'object,' Dasein and world, are ultimately so intertwined that one cannot separate the world from Daseining". My point at Reed was that if Heidegger is right, dogs become constitutive of human identity. They are our pets, our companions, and our confidantes.

Although, to be fair, while Dasein's fundamental being-with is existentially directed towards others, the ontic constitution of that other is not existentially given. Thus Dasein could, for example, keep cats.

The death of one's dog, I reckoned, thus formed a fundamental horizon of dasein, and dasein's being-towards-the-death-of-a-dog (or, as Heidegger called it, *zuhundstotlichkeit*) is an existential source of anxiety for the average explorer stuck in the middle of the jungle in Papua New Guinea. Not surprisingly, then, the trope of the death of a dog is common in accounts of exploration. The earliest recorded dog to accompany a patrol inland was Dash, a setter who accompanied Luigi D'Albertis five hundred and eighty miles up the Fly river in 1857. Lugi D'Albertis's record his death thus:

> September 21st — Poor Dash! His sufferings came to an end to-day, forty-eight hours after he was bitten [by a snake]. I thought he seemed to be regaining strength; he drank twice, and changed his place oftener, moving, although with difficulty, from one part of the "Neva" [D'Albertis's boat] to another.
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> Towards the middle of the day, while I was preparing the skin of a bird, I saw Dash coming to me. I caressed him with my hand; he wagged his tail, looked up at me fixedly with blue, dilated pupils, and fell dead at my feet. I touched and shook him, but in vain. He was dead, and cold as if he had been dead many hours. The river was his grave, for to-day I had not a canoe with which I could go ashore and bury him. The splash made by his body falling into the water echoed painfully in my heart. In loosing poor Dash I have lost a friend. I have always believed the friendship of a dog to be the truest and most lasting. When a dog loves, it is until death. We cannot always say this of human friendship and human love. Poor dash! (D'Albertis 1881:v.1 192)

A similar scene was repeated in 1926 when Ivan Champion was forced to continue his patrol even though the dogs accompanying him had not returned to camp. The usually terse Champion takes a moment to record his feelings on their loss:

> Paru arrived at dusk without having found the dogs. They had evidently got lost or fallen down one of the limestone chasms. I could not delay our journey to look for them; our limited supply of food forbade it. The large dog belonged to Karius and had accompanied him for many years in the interior of Papua, and I knew how grieved he would be at losing him. They had been my constant companions for many months, and it was very painful to have to abandon them; those who know the companionship of a faithful dog in lonely places will realize what I felt. Regrets, too, came from the natives [who were part of the patrol]; they remembered the many times that the dogs had supplied them with pig. (Champion 1978:116-117)

This was not the only patrol where grief over a dog's death affected more than just the white patrol leader. During the Hagen-Sepik patrol of 1939, John Black's dog Lucy was crushed by a falling tree and the entire patrol was halted for the mortuary preparations. As Gammage writes:

> A week earlier a pet cassowary chick, Yumo, drowned crossing a creek... and when it died the cooks smeared their chests with yellow clay in mourning. Lucy's death was much more serious. As John dug her grave the police came one by one with loincloths to wrap her, Orengia [a coastal policeman] weeping, the others tearful. 'There is no need for gifts,' John said. 'There is,' they replied, 'Lucy was more like a man than a dog. She used to go on watch with us and help us. She would find the track. She found water. She was one of us. And now, nearly home, we have lost her." Lucy was wrapped in cloth. Carriers gave shells, knives, and axes but John returned them. His own distress was transparent; he wrote twice that her death was quick and her grave beautiful (191-192).

While Michael Leahy could massacre a dozen 'kanakas' in a day in the name of the white man's burden without batting an eye, but putting down his dog became a moment in which he faced the finality of death:

> We came to a great scar where a hundred acres of mountainside with its burden of brush and trees had pulled loose from the naked rock face and plunged downward toward the river… since there seemed no other way, we started across the path of the avalanche, but had gone only a little way when more earth and stones broke loose up above and came hurtling down upon us. There was a mad scramble for safety, and all of us managed to get out of the way except poor Snowy. Hearing his yelp of pain, [Michael] Dwyer and I both ran back to get him. A heavy stone had rolled on him and broken his back. Shooting him was one of the toughest jobs I ever had to do. (Leahy 1927:99)

On the trail, at a remove from the society of which one was a part, the moral order of the patrol became a vital part of securing one's sense of self, especially when the perilous situations encountered suggested that one was a lousy explorer. Dogs were not mere appendages to this moral order, but a vital part of it.

Chicago

While professor Kelly had warned me that many unacceptably outre authors – I think here of ne'er do wells such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Ralph Linton, and Andrew Apter -- would be taken seriously at Chicago, I was genuinely shocked by what I encountered

when I arrived at Graduate school. I was told that a small group of European theorists had developed a concept that would revolutionize anthropology. The idea revolved around the fact that human beings created arbitrary, conventional, and enduring set of meanings which, although generated intersubjectively, were sufficiently objective that they might be studied. I was told that the name of this concept was 'hegemony.' “Don't you mean 'culture'?” I asked. No, I was told, hegemony. Culture was a bankrupt concept because it didn't pay attention to power. Having read Parsons I remembered that L was intimately connected to G and told them so. Oh no, I was reassured, 'power' did not refer to such outmoded notions as the ability to get someone to do something they wouldn't have done without your intervention. It referred to the way in which individual people or subjects were taught by society to have a certain image of themselves and certain expectations, and to fit in to certain roles that society had laid out of them. “Wasn't this socialization?” I asked. No no, I was assured. It could not be socialization, because socialization was a bankrupt term from a time when people didn't think about power. The older, richer cross-disciplinary 'blurred-genres' work of the 1980s (Geertz) had hardened into a weird hybrid of ethnography and philosophy. As Bill Ray once put it, “gay pirate criticism” was over. “Queer bucaneer theory” had arrived.

One did not write 'about' something, one wrote *against* it. I found I could only get the Comaroffs to read my papers about dogs if I cast them as critiques of pigs. The Papuan pig, I argued, had been the subject of a great deal of anthropological literature while the dog had been unfairly slighted by the suidocentric biases of Western academics immersed in the hegemonic pro-pig tropology of Papua New Guinea’s imperialistic episteme (Canberra Anthropology 1984). This strategy failed, however, because no one at Chicago knew that people in Papua New Guinea raised pigs, since they did not read about Papua New Guinea because doing so would be to participate in a politically unacceptable exoticism. *Real* anthropologists did not read about subsistence farmers in third world

countries. *Real* anthropologists studied things non-exotic things like the international organ trade, global flows of transgendered prostitutes, and mass genocide.

So I tried emphasizing the fact that I was excavating the discourse of the subaltern dog. European judgments of indigenous dogs had historically been quite negative. D'Albertis describes them as "ugly, hungry little dogs" (D'Albertis 1881:v2. pg. 170). Mick Leahy was even more critical: "their [dogs]" he says, "were mere caricatures of ours. Small pigs have more initiative then the native village dog, which has been starved for protein to the point of being helpless and stupid" (Leahy 1991:155). This judgment of indigenous dogs, I argued, was the result of a history of colonial domination, in which narratives of lightly-complected settler dogs – 'Snowy' -- dominated. Could the subaltern dog speak? No, of course not. No dog can speak. So that paper also ended up not taking off.

Finally I had some luck with a Foucaultian angle, emphasizing how dogs were part and parcel of the penetration of distinctly Australian mode of governmentality in Papua New Guinea. Consider, for example, Snowy's entanglement in inter-clan warefare in the Wahgi valley in 1933-1934. Mick Leahy arrived in Hagen during a period of intense armed conflict between two tribes, and during his time in the Wahgi Valley he "had feared… that Snowy would meet his end from a kanaka arrow, as he had formed the habit of rushing into every fight" (Leahy 1937:267-268). Snowy's interventions were sufficiently serious that they were noticed by both the Yamka and Mokei. Leahy tells us that

> The Jamgas warned us that the Mogais were gathering their allies from the whole countryside to wipe out our party, even including the white bulldog Snowy. Their animosity toward Snowy was doubtless due to the fact that he had dashed into the fight and sped their retreat by nipping a few shanks. (Leahy 1937:265)

The next day

> We were awakened before daylight by a watch report that a massed attack was imminent. Apparently there were plans to wipe us out save

> Snowy, the dog, whose prestige was high amongst the people (Leahy 1991:112).

In fact, it is the dogs' capacity for violence over everything else, that was frequently remembered in indigenous accounts of first contact. Leahy himself remembers that his dogs were "intelligent and savage when necessary" and that "Natives were terrified of our dogs". Isoakoa Hepu, a man who traveled with Leahy when a child, remembers the dogs when Leahy first bought him into his camp. "There were two camp dogs," he remembers, "Snowy and Spark. The camp was fenced in with a long rope line and my people stood outside of it, afraid of the dogs. I was inside and could see my mother crying. I was afraid of the dogs too! They were on long chains and could move around and attack the people if the white men wanted them" (in Connolly and Anderson 1987:161-162). Nengka Amp Dau also joined Leahy's party. She remembers her first time inside Leahy's camp in similar terms. "He [Opa, a man of her tribe] left, and they unchained the dogs! Then I began crying. I put my face in my hands and I was sobbing, I was so upset. I was crying, not knowing what to do" (in Connolly and Anderson 1987:139).

Discipline, as Foucault would say, is complete when the dog disciplines itself.

Chicago, Again

On my return from Chicago after fieldwork, I noticed a subtle shift in the air. Gramsci had disappeared from the agenda – not that there had been a critique. People just stopped reading him. It was amazing. Negri and Hardt's book on 'Empire' tried valiantly to keep Italy relevant to theory, but descended into self-parody so quickly that it was difficult for people to take too seriously. Also, it was long. A few seized on Virilio, until they realized he was actually French. Alain Badiou seemed sufficiently radical, but required a knowledge of calculus which most anthropologists lacked. Appadurai was still writing, but his mid-90s vision has missed the Internet during the moments of its greatest growth, and the idea of cab drivers in New York listening to casette tapes of sermons from Dubai seemed hopelessly unhip to professors with shiny new iMacs who were

discovering chat rooms for the first time. Deleuze seemed popular, but the most anyone seemed to be able to extract from his work was the word 'rhizome.'

The answer, it seemed, was Latour. He had been writing for some time, of course. The sociology of science people has read his work, as had those of us who studied with Sahlins and were forced to read such exotic French theory as Jean Pouillon, Gaston Bachelard, and Greg Dening. But suddenly, shortly after 9/11, everyone realized that *We Have Never Been Modern* was only 140 pages long, chock-full of helpful diagrams and – best of all – had no ethnographic facts in which might slow down or distract the reader. As a result, it quickly became the text of choice.

In the 1990s Johannes Fabian had argued that anthropologists had a tendency to 'deny the coevalness' of their research subjects, seeing them as radically disjunct from the anthropologist's culture. This, it was universally agreed, was a bad thing. What we needed was 'dialogue.' Somehow, no one seemed to notice that Latour's strategy of 'irreduction' – a combination of Serres's denial of meta-narratives and Garfinkel's ethnomethodological indifference – involved rigorously avoiding any dialogue with one's research subjects, or passing any judgments at all on their beliefs and hence engaging them. Since Latour's research subjects were scientists with more grant money then us, some anthropologists argued that turn about was fair play. Those us more deeply concerned with the ethics of fieldwork worried, however, that two wrongs didn't make a right.

At any rate, the focus was now on 'the network' and we were finally free to examine the relations between people and animals – now called 'transgenic' relations (Cassidy). In contemporary anthropology, these relationships are embedded in a transactional relationship with Marilyn Strathern, a textual effect of an always in principle reversible relationality which appears, thanks to the size of her network, to be teaching at Cambridge. We can no longer, I was told, assume a modernist distinction between nature and society. Thus Marilyn Strathern, Bluey, and Mt. Hagen became hybrid actors,

unsullied by the work of purification, which were no longer divided into categories such as 'nature,' 'culture,' or 'canine.' Rather they are part of an unbroken line of impure creations who were no longer mediated through in the new, not-yet-modern world in which we leaved. The question then became how dogs fit into the network.

And indeed they did. Suddenly the inclusion of dogs into exchange activity – what we used to call 'reciprocity' – became crucial for understanding the way the potency of the alliance of actors in the network which now appears to us as a black box entitled “The Fly-Sepik Patrol of 1927.” Ivan Champion tells us that

> my two dogs were objects of great interest. At first the natives were frightened of them, and on approaching we would ask that they be removed. I made them understand that there was nothing to fear, and one man, bolder than the rest, then bought some taro and gave it to them, *and soon the dogs were being given as much of it as I was*.” (Champion 1978:74, emphasis added).

Here the rhizome's status as a transacted hetergeneity (since, after all, no two pieces of taro look exactly alike) demonstrates the highlanders appreciation of Champion's dog's elicitation of his identity. Sometimes these elicitations became 'contests of strength' in a more literal way than Latour imagined. In one particular case, Snowy’s involvement in a violent encounter provoked a prestation. The occasion was a raid on a village in which Leahy was reluctant to involve himself. However, anticipating “some good action pictures” Leahy set up his camera on top of a ridge where he assumed that he would be isolated from the fighting. As it happened, a few spears were thrown in his direction and he fired a few warning shots in in return. At the sound of the shots, Snowy went “into frenzied action… With a yelp, away he went, after the now rapidly retreating villagers”. Leahy relates the rest of the story thus:

> He [Snowy] came back a couple of hours later, marching home with the victorious troops, looking very tired but thoroughly satisfied with himself. The local natives were loud in their praise of Snowy, saying that he had won the fight by charging ahead of the line and nipping the shanks of the enemy. Later a solemn delegation came bringing gifts for him, a pig and the most enormous sweet potato I had ever seen, cooked and broken open, with a puddle of pig grease in the center. Snowy…

> was not much impressed by the sweet potato, but did not sniff at it too obviously until the delegation was out of sight. (Leahy 1937:268)

Leahy's description of 'nipping shanks' is euphemistic. In fact, Leahy trained his dogs to viciously attack anyone on command, as well as to attack any 'native' not wearing lap-lap, a piece of clothing that indicated membership in Leahy's party. Thus we can agree with Strathern when she suggests that "the arrival of the Australians became an event, with a past and a future, the moment the strangers revealed the effect of the Hagen presence upon them" (Strathern 1992:251). Snowy 'decomposed' the bodies of highlanders, not by reducing the body to the nurturative substances which are the physical manifestations of the social relationships that constitute it, but by biting them.

Conclusion

In his fine article "Forget Culture" Rob Brightman takes issues with various contemporary critiques of the culture concept while attempting "neither to defend the received culture concept from its critics, nor to articulate a version of the fatigued message that 'it's all been said' earlier and better" (1995:509). My purpose in this paper, on the other hand, is to articulate exactly such a message. It has all been said earlier, and better. It is one of the great hallmarks of a Reed education in anthropology that when one hears the word 'transnational flow' one thinks 'diffusion' and when one hears the word 'self and other' one thinks "George Herbert Mead." Anthropological theories may not progress, but they certainly *accumulate,* and those who do not study them have an infinitely smaller sandbox within which to play than those of us who were forced to read the entirety of *The Andaman Islanders* by Professor Kelly. It has been said that those who do not learn history of anthropological history are destined to repeat it, but I think a certain amount of repetition is inevitable, and perhaps healthy, no matter how deeply you delve. Almost all Reed seniors experience their theses as a tragedy, for example. Not so many, however, have had the chance to pursue the goal of this paper: to relive it for a second time -- as farce.

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