

“Registering Riparian Voices as Environmental Pedagogy  
in Cepo (Amis Nation, Taiwan)”, conference by DJ Hatfield

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On Thursday February 14th, 2019, Professor D.J. Hatfield spoke on “Registering Riparian Voices as Environmental Pedagogy in Cepo (Amis Nation, Taiwan).” He had been invited by André Laliberté, the Research Chair in Taiwan Studies and co-chair professor Scott Simon, in collaboration with the HumAnimaLab, Research Group on the Anthropocene, directed by Professor David Jaclin.

The talk was initiated in relation to the research project “Austronesian Worlds: Human-Animal Entanglements in the Pacific Anthropocene” at the University of Ottawa. Hatfield is a social anthropologist and assistant professor of history and anthropology in the liberal arts department of the Berklee College of Music, in Boston (MA). His research focuses on soundscapes and indigenous response to colonialism. Prominent themes of the presentation included: voice, voicing and registration; environmentalism and sustainability; the possibility of registering voice as an ethnographic practice with functions of artifact; and the human relation and interaction with environmental sounds in the context of an Amis community in Taiwan.

Hatfield’s presentation was a summation of his fieldwork conducted in Amis Nation, Taiwan. He began with clarification of the difference between the sounds of things and voice proper, with emphasis on the latter being generated with intentional meaning – even if without semantic content. The animation of the voice proper thus joins listeners, through affective relations, to the environment. Hatfield then examined the register of such voices in the context of Cepo (Amis Nation). Using audio recordings, Hatfield walked his audience through a day-in-the-life in Amis Nation, drawing special attention to the river in the community that runs to the ocean. The river in this area plays a central role because it was the only means of transportation, communication and trade up until 1984-85. With the human relations in this Amis community built between water (river/ocean) and land, Hatfield searched for the voices that featured the surrounding local life and place. By recording and participating in the fishing activities through voice register, Hatfield conceptualized the role of the river in the community and its significance for relationship-building between the fish-net users, dubbed ‘netizens’. In this, the understanding of sound is not limited to the human or even animal, but rather includes the human and non-

human. Engagement and entanglement of sonic worlds of the Amis and Pangcah people and their environment are present through the weaving together of the sounds of frogs, birds, the ocean, river and conversations. Hatfield explained that non-humans add stability to our (human) world – not only through their performance, but in the way the environment holds our history which in this case is expressed sonically.

During his ethnographic work on voice register, Hatfield explored the ways that the animations of sounds were connected to traditional memories, historic narratives and personal understanding among the population of Cepo. Hatfield reported that the river today has changed its role and is mostly left to tourists. It now sounds different with boat motors and tourists surrounding the area. The Amis and Pangcah are no longer tied to the river as they once were; they are at least also in schools, city centres and convenience stores. The river is still influential, which can be seen (or rather, heard) in contemporary pop music produced in the area in which sounds from the river and ocean are incorporated throughout. Other examples such as the informants' code-switching between aboriginal and mandarin accents, the hidden and then reconnected aboriginal identity through language use, and the improvised lyrics of a fixed melody were also given as illustrations of voice proper. Throughout his research, Hatfield sought to utilize the register of everyday voice to construct a sense of organization and mobilization of the people, and even to emulate life itself.

Hatfield sees his work as both an ethnographer and an artist. The register and animation of voices as materials not only work as media to connect local social relations, but also find resonance among the urban population: indigenous people who wish to reach out for ancestral roots and an interethnic audience that desires the continued presence of their ancestors. Hatfield concluded his talk by emphasizing human narratives and responses to the register of sounds and voices, and the significance of their interpretation and reproduction to an external audience.

Questions and comments at the end of the talk included: thinking about meshwork (instead of net) as a metaphor; questions about how people in the community react to being recorded; and the link between anthropomorphism being interesting and productive in thinking about the netizen action taking place at the 'mouth' of the river, where much recording takes place. The audience thanked Hatfield for his poetic presentation of his work with the Amis Nation. More information on DJ Hatfield and his work can be found at <http://djhatfield.com/> and <https://taiwansoundscapes.org/>.