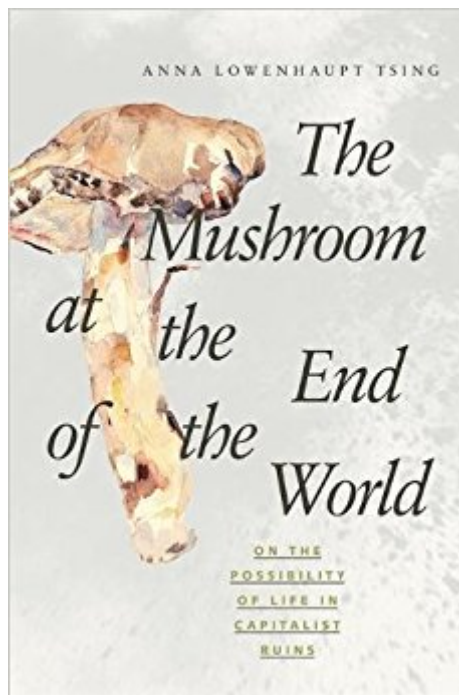




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The Mushroom At The End Of The World: On The Possibility Of Life In Capitalist Ruins



Synopsis

Matsutake is the most valuable mushroom in the world •and a weed that grows in human-disturbed forests across the northern hemisphere. Through its ability to nurture trees, matsutake helps forests to grow in daunting places. It is also an edible delicacy in Japan, where it sometimes commands astronomical prices. In all its contradictions, matsutake offers insights into areas far beyond just mushrooms and addresses a crucial question: what manages to live in the ruins we have made? A tale of diversity within our damaged landscapes, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* follows one of the strangest commodity chains of our times to explore the unexpected corners of capitalism. Here, we witness the varied and peculiar worlds of matsutake commerce: the worlds of Japanese gourmets, capitalist traders, Hmong jungle fighters, industrial forests, Yi Chinese goat herders, Finnish nature guides, and more. These companions also lead us into fungal ecologies and forest histories to better understand the promise of cohabitation in a time of massive human destruction. By investigating one of the world's most sought-after fungi, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* presents an original examination into the relation between capitalist destruction and collaborative survival within multispecies landscapes, the prerequisite for continuing life on earth.

Book Information

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Winner of the 2016 Gregory Bateson Prize, The Society for Cultural Anthropology Winner of the 2016 Victor Turner Prize in Ethnographic Writing, Society for Humanistic Anthropology Finalist for the 2016 Northern California Book Awards in General Nonfiction, Northern California Book Reviewers One of Flavorwire's 10 Best Books by Academic Publishers in 2015 One of Kirkus

Reviews Best Nonfiction Books of 2015 in ScienceOne of Kirkus Reviews Best Nonfiction Books of 2015 in Business and EconomicsOne of Times Higher Education's Best Books of 2015"Unusually rewarding. . . . Bursting with ideas and observations, Tsing's highly original ethnographic study follows this spicy smelling mushroom's global commodity chain. . . . Consistently fascinating, [Tsing's] story of the picking and selling of this wild mushroom becomes a wonderful window on contemporary life."--Kirkus Reviews, starred review"Tsing weaves an adventurous tale. . . . Her engrossing account of intersecting cultures and nature's resilience offers a fresh perspective on modernity and progress."--Publisher's Weekly"The Mushroom at the End of the World evolves into a well-researched and thought-provoking meditation on capitalism, resilience, and survival."--E. Ce Miller, Bustle.com"A beautiful, humble book. . . . [A]nthropology at its best."--Darwin Bond Graham, East Bay Express"This was a year of many of books about the Anthropocene--the name now frequently invoked to describe an era of incalculable human impact on geological and ecological conditions. Few of these books are as focused and useful as Tsing's, which follows the supply chain of the Matsutake, the most valuable mushroom in the world, through Japanese gourmets, capitalist traders, Hmong jungle fighters, industrial forests, Yi Chinese goat herders, Finnish nature guides, and more.' How else to negotiate the conditions--if there are any--for our survival?"--Jonathan Sturgeon, Flavorwire (One of Flavorwire's Ten Best Books by Academic Public of 2015)"A fascinating account of the biology, ecology, genetics and anthropology of the world's most valued mushroom."--Louise O. Fresco, Times Higher Education"The anthropologist Anna Tsing joins a range of scholars exploring the ongoing devastation of our environment and undoing the old binary of 'nature' and 'society'--in this case, taking the charismatic Matsutake mushroom as her protagonist, tracing its existence within ecosystems, markets, and cultures across the globe. I'm interested in this rather remarkable book, both in its empathetic meditations on 'companion species' and in its experimental mode of history writing."--James Graham, Metropolis"[Tsing] writes clearheaded prose with an ear for lyrical phrases. . . . [The Mushroom at the End of the World] is a wonderful meditation on how humans shape and distort the natural landscape, and in return, are shaped and distorted by a wildness of their own making."--Casey Sanchez, Santa Fe New Mexican"Provocative. . . . Beginning with an account of the matsutake mushroom, Tsing follows the threads of this organism to tease out an astonishing number of insights about life in the Anthropocene."--Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory"[An] extraordinary book."--Jim Igoe, American Anthropologist"The publisher can really be congratulated. Rarely can one immerse oneself into an academic work with informative and sensuous pictures and figures that set a pace and allow the reader to explore the senses of smelling, grabbing, searching and walking. Tsing's

book is not a conclusive analysis of post-capitalist processes but an outline for living sensuously, creatively and freely with each other."--Jenni Mäkelä, Suomen Antropologi

"The book will be of considerable interest at the complex intersection of social science, natural science and humanities. That is where anthropology is ideally located but achieving this is rather rare. . . . Without ever lecturing at the reader or hammering on some academic conviction, the book instead reveals a range of things that are variously urgent and pleasant, keeping ecological disaster in sight while allowing plenty of time for curiosity, diversity and surprise."--Hjorleifur Jonsson, Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology

"Through careful study of matsutake, [Tsing] discovers connections to other objects that create dynamic and moving webs across time and space. The methodological carefulness and precision, even on a sensuous level, is impressive. . . . The mushroom poses difficult questions about responsibility. . . . Tsing's well-researched and thought-provoking book is a testament to that."--Jenny Jarlsdotter Wikström, Angelaki

"Scientists and artists know that the way to handle an immense topic is often through close attention to a small aspect of it, revealing the whole through the part. In the shape of a finch's beak we can see all of evolution. So through close, indeed loving, attention to a certain fascinating mushroom, the matsutake, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing discusses how the whole immense crisis of ecology came about and why it continues. Critical of simplistic reductionism, she offers clear analysis, and in place of panicked reaction considers possibilities of rational, humane, resourceful behavior. In a situation where urgency and enormity can overwhelm the mind, she gives us a real way to think about it. I'm very grateful to have this book as a guide through the coming years."--Ursula K. Le Guin

"If we must survive in the 'ruins of capitalism'--what some call the Anthropocene--we need an example of how totally unexpected connections can be made between the economy, culture, biology, and survival strategies. In this book, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing offers a marvelous example with the unlikely case of a globalized mushroom."--Bruno Latour, author of *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*

"This is a thoughtful, insightful, and nuanced exploration of the relationships between people and landscapes, landscapes and mushrooms, mushrooms and people. Anthropologists, historians, ecologists, and mushroom lovers alike will appreciate the depth and sensitivity with which Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing follows this modern global commodity chain, from the forests of North America and China to the auction markets of Japan."--David Arora, author of *Mushrooms Demystified*

"It isn't often that one discovers a book that is at once scholarly in the best sense and written with the flowing prose of a well-crafted novel. Speaking to issues of major concern, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* is a brilliant work, superbly conceived, and a delight to read."--Marilyn Strathern, emeritus professor of

social anthropology, University of Cambridge" This book uses the matsutake mushroom as a lens through which to examine contemporary environmental history, global commodity production, and science. With soaring prose, penetrating intellect, and sustained creativity and originality, it links disparate topics in new and profound ways. Spanning an astonishing number of fields, this work is destined to be a classic."--Michael R. Dove, Yale University

This book was a really creative look at capitalism and systems outside of capital--I was really impressed with how accessible it was (she made assemblages seem reasonable and even useful!) The middle dragged a little bit for me- I'm not sure if it's because I have a hard time following economic flows or if because I was just too sleepy while reading it to understand, but it was still a brilliant book that I feel like will take me a long time to tease apart and really sit in. (I am interested, if anyone else is, in thinking about taking her 'latent commons' and putting it in conversation with JosÃ© Esteban MuÃ±oz's brown commons... hmu yo.)

Many of us who study human/plant relationships have been waiting eagerly for this book, and I at least am not disappointed. Anna Tsing is a fine writer, a superb ethnographer, and an insightful and original thinker, and this long and detailed book shows off her skills perfectly. It's a worldwide survey of gathering, trading, and selling matsutake mushrooms, the gourmet mushrooms that currently run over \$50 a pound in markets. They are prestigious in Japan, and necessary or nearly so for high-end gifts, and the world has caught on. The most interesting ethnography herein is of the matsutake pickers in Oregon--a mixed lot of southeast Asian hill people, Latin American migrants, and Anglo-Americans who want to live far out in the woods--many of them Vietnam vets. Tsing takes us also to Japan, Finland, and Yunnan (southwest China). In addition to the ethnography, Tsing is thoroughly grounded in the science of mushrooms. In dramatic contrast to those political ecologists and critical thinkers who make it a point of pride not to know any science, Tsing not only knows it but is sharply insightful into what really matters, and shows her usual skill at telling the reader. She starts with basics but goes into some real detail, e.g. on matsutake taxonomy. The take-home messages of the book include a focus on assemblages--transient or long-term linkages of people, environments, plants, and policies--and on ruined landscapes. In Oregon, matsutakes grow in overcut, undermanaged conifer land that went to lodgepole pine (on whose roots they grow as symbionts). In Japan, similar mismanagement long ago led to matsutake forests, but now those forests are what is wanted, and management is trying to restore them from overgrowth. In China, mismanagement is threatening forests in general. But from the ruins come new assemblages, which

will support new lifeways. All this comes at the end of capitalist expansion and "progress," if not of the whole world. The book is something of a breathless speed-travel, but you can find full details about much of the stories in her other writings, and especially in articles and forthcoming works by her collaborators, especially Michael Hathaway. My main complaint is about the startoff. The very first page (vii) tells the old story about western philosophy seeing Nature as just a mechanical, passive backdrop, and says "The time has come for new ways of telling true stories beyond civilizational first principles" of that sort. This is mildly annoying to those of us who have been doing exactly that for 50 years. It rather elides the whole tradition from Thoreau and Emerson through Burroughs and Muir and Leopold and down to Bill McKibben and Gary Snyder. The arrogant nature-as-stuff-to-waste paradigm created its own backlash long ago. A minor point. More important is that capitalism and socialism may both come to an end as resources run out, so Tsing's book is timely and valuable; more to the point, it will be a classic.

A beautifully written, smart, absorbing book that is also profoundly moving

A brilliant ethnographic account of how to make a community within and against the homogenizing effects of globalization. Written with passion and grace.

Awesome

In the emerging world of multispecies ethnography, Tsing's book is among the best and most readable. Exquisite. Inspired me so much as a scholar.

Very good.

The history of the commercialization of mushrooms is an original strategy to approach the understanding of the environmental crisis we face today.

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