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**The Mushroom at the End of the World** is a book written by Chinese-American anthropologist Anna Tsing. We were assigned the first two chapters for reading, along with the prologue of the book. This book is basically a multi specie ethnographic study of matsutake mushroom and its ecology. In the prologue, the writer deems this book not as a critique of fantasizing the idea of progress, but rather as an expression of the imaginative challenge of living without the idea of modernization with the help of these mushrooms. I think Anna Tsing did not just want to pour some more scholarly work over criticism to modernization, but instead took a completely different approach where she goes on to imagine a different world.

The first chapter starts off with a quote by Ursula Le Guin about how the human population is moving on towards progress without looking back. I think the idea she ponders over is that of unlimited growth and progression which we have in modern day society. Anna Tsing discusses about Anthropocene and how it can be problematic as the ‘anthro’ part is where, according to her, humans originate with capitalism. The timeline doesn’t begin with species but with capitalism. She talks about precarity and what this means. We think of precarity as some exception of what is currently going on but it actually is just a condition of our time. Thinking about precarity can change our social analysis. In my opinion, a precarious world is basically changing the way we look at things.

She continues on the themes mentioned in chapters before moving on to the idea of contamination. She makes a claim that there’s an idea of contamination due to which a gathering becomes a happening. She says that all of the people making groups, they contaminate each other and they make something greater than the sum of what all of these individuals would make alone. She talks about the idea of survival and keeping precarity in mind and makes us remember changing with the circumstances is the essence of survival. The modern idea of survival is saving one while fighting other which these shows and movies make us see. In her view it is a similar to the idea of conquest and progress, which is the idea of good triumphing over evil and expanding the greater good. But she does not use the word survival in this sense. She says that survival requires collaboration which requires contamination. Thus, indirectly we cease to exist without survival. She does a wonderful job linking back to the idea of saving oneself which is very individualistic notion we have. The idea she links to, is basically the anthropocentric idea of self-containment, which ignores contamination where transformations occur through encounter.

She continues to discuss about Oregon’s forest and ecological links. She says that the stories that come out of a place, is a good way to understand contaminated diversity. And the point I think is that these contaminated diversities can only be understood by looking at how these things came about.