

What: The Perils and Potentials of Microbial Abundance: From Fermented Foods to Astrobiology – A talk by Stefan Helmreich and Heather Paxson

Keywords: Distribution > Productivity, Distribution > Retail / sales opportunities, Policy

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HumanNonHuman Collaborative, UMN

Who: The HumanNonHuman Research Collaborative sponsored this event. It was program hosted by the Institute for Advanced Study at UMN from 2009-2011.

Why: Helmreich and Paxson explain how governments have spent considerable regulatory power in order to control microbial life in the food system. They note that this has resulted in the elimination of historically valued microbes, like those used to produce artisanal cheeses. They argue that this is a particularly useful example of Foucault's "biopolitics" concept.

How: Helmreich and Paxson are professors of Anthropology at MIT. Dr Helmreich's research examines the lives of biologists working to understand the conceptual boundaries around "life" as a unit of knowledge. Dr Paxson studies human reactions to bioscientific research, particularly in ethical decision making.

A video of this talk is housed at the IAS website. People interested in Foucault, biopolitics, culture, and DIY food movements may find it useful.