



## SESSION ABSTRACT

### **Environment and Intimacy from Human to More-Than-Human Perspectives**

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This panel queries the enactment of intimacies in a contemporary world characterized by uncertainty, environmental change and a growing acknowledgement towards the more-than-human. We understand the intimate not as a quality of physical personal relation, but as a set of sensory experiences unfolding from individual, social and nonhuman horizons. How do these experiences become relations, which also transcend human-nonhuman binaries, emerging and inhabiting spaces? How do political, economic and ecological horizons affect the way such intimacies breathe, grow, move, and desire? How do different qualities of environment, where body/environment is understood as a continuum, produce different experiences of intimacy? Considered in the context of increasing ecological, political and social change, how do these ongoing transformative processes (re)shape the sense of togetherness and our experiential, affective ways between people and the other-than-human?

We welcome diverse contributions exploring relations of intimacy and environment through different types of presentations such as lecture-performance, bodily practice, new medias, scholars' sensoriality or any other creative format propositions.

## SESSION SCHEDULE

**Thursday, October 1, 2020 | Slot 3 | Room 4**

Alessandro Guglielmo: *The God in the henhouse: an ecological intimacy with the Sacred*

Elisabeth Tauber: *Shepherds, livestock and predators – an ethnography of intimate relations*

Aladin Borioli: *The 'Intimacy Machine'*

Sandro Simon: *Conchoidal Intimacies in Volatile Deltaic Lifeworlds*

**Thursday, October 1, 2020 | Slot 4 | Room 4**

Tatiana Bulgakova: *Crying as a Vehicle for Transcending the Human among the Indigenous Peoples of Siberia*

Martin Thalhammer: *Intimate and intimidating relations between bark beetles and humans. Thoughts on potentials and constraints of a Multi-Species Political Ecology*

Mirjam Lewandowsky, Fiona Schrading, Janna Wieland & Birgit Althans: *Ecologies of Care and Affective Environments in a More-Than-Human Perspective*

## **SESSION PAPERS**

### **The God in the henhouse: an ecological intimacy with the Sacred**

*Guillermo, Alessandro (ND, Bologna, ITA)*

Through this intervention, I will reflect upon environmental intimacy using my fieldwork experience in an Advaita ashram which I placed, for anonymity reasons, in an imaginary country called “Euroamerica”. I will thus outline the modes in which a symbolical, material and lived environment comes to be embodied in what I called “an ecology of the sacred”. Sacred in fact, as outlined by T. Csordas (2004: 163-172), has the perceptive capacity to entail an “intimacy” with a complete “Other”, a capacity which is bodily present and influences our construction of the self.

Modern Advaita is a philosophical/practical school originated in the Indian subcontinent, which holds reality as undivided and, lastly, one with a formless god (Lucas 2014: 7). Living here entailed to take care of a small community of chickens, turkeys and a cat which were hosted in the sanctuary’s hen house. Being reality considered to be one with god, that work was presented as “for god, by god”: in this sense, to take care of chickens meant to take care of god and, lastly, of oneself – thus creating a continuum between these agents. Therefore, I outlined the ways in which a non-human agency is embodied through emotion and perception, becoming at the same time a subject and an object for care processes. This “co-respondent” form of care necessitates developing intimacy between human and non-human actors. Thus, a new embodied ecology takes place, where each human animal cares for each part of this environment and feels cared for, enacting a co-respondent “sacred intimacy”. Finally, I will present this intimacy as a way to «stay with the trouble» (Haraway 2018) and shape the co-relation with our environment.

### **Bibliography:**

Csordas, T. J. (2004), “Asymptote of the Ineffable: Embodiment, Alterity, and the Theory of Religion” in *Current Anthropology*, 45 (2), pp. 163-185.

Haraway, D. (2018), *Staying with the trouble: Making Kin in the Chtulucene*. Durham, Duke University Press.

Lucas, P. C. (2014), "Non Traditional Modern Advaita Gurus in the West and Their Traditional Modern Advaita Critics" in *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 15 (2), pp. 93-114.

### **Shepherds, livestock and predators – an ethnography of intimate relations**

*Tauber, Elisabeth (Free University of Bolzano, Bressanone, ITA)*

In recent years shepherds working during the summer months on the alpine pastures in the South Tyrolean mountains (Eastern Alps, Italy) face a new challenge, that of the return of the wolf. They take care of livestock and often watch the animals during the nights together with their herding dogs when they know that wolves are nearby. Their relationship with the sheep and the wolves is characterized by their sole human presence amidst livestock and predators in a harsh mountainous environment. Their concern for the livestock and their 'dialogue' with the wolves, in which they engage when they approach, is intense, intimate, extremely vigorous and concentrated. This physical and mental 'dialogue' demands a lot from the shepherds. They are sure that the wolves understand when they are present as shepherds protecting the livestock. They are also convinced that the sheep feel safe through their presence. Therefore, their work remains concentrated throughout so that they can immediately recognise dangers and needs. These men and women belong to a small group of shepherds who do not reject the return of the wolf in the Eastern Alps and plead for the professionalization of the work of shepherds. In doing so, they have exposed themselves to political hostility from the large farmers' associations, among others, which points to an ecological-economic field of tension that can only be considered in this presentation. The herd protection supported by the EU is based on technical aspects such as specialized dogs, electric fences, etc., but the knowledge of the shepherds shows that herd protection goes far beyond these technical assets. Their unanimous relationship with the animals for which they are responsible and their negotiated interplay with the predators, in which the shepherd tries to understand what the wolf's intentions are, is indispensable for good shepherd work. Their understanding is that of a human relationship with non-human subjects with whom they have to negotiate the use of the grazing land in the high alpine region. Film and sound material is used for the presentation of the ethnographic data.

### **The 'Intimacy Machine'**

*Borioli, Aladin (Independent researcher, Bevaix, SE)*

The 'Intimacy Machine' is an ongoing multi-faceted project which is developing a hybrid Electronic Monitored Hive (henceforth E.M.H.). This machine allows for the development of a new kind of relationship with bees – an intimate one, without the need of proximity (see Jacob Metcalfe). For the VANDA conference, I propose a short lecture about the overall project and a multimedia exploration of the world of bees through the 'Intimacy Machine' in video format. This project stems from my master's thesis in visual anthropology – E.M.H.: towards a technological enhancement of an interspecies relationship – and the practice of art and beekeeping. What exactly is an E.M.H.? To avoid misconception, this is not a new

type of hive design but an electronic monitoring system that can potentially go inside any type of beehive with the aim of tracking, monitoring and recording bee behaviour in order to develop a less intrusive and time-consuming beekeeping practice. The very idea of E.M.H.s seem promising; indeed, the physical proximity of beekeepers is often a disturbance for bees. However, the embedded technology has a clear political aim: rationalise beekeeping practice to make it more profitable and in some scenarios take beekeepers out of the equation and deprive them of the ontological dance they have been conducting with honeybees for millenniums. In reaction, the 'Intimacy Machine' proposes to hack and transform the very idea of an E.M.H. into a machine which rejects quantitative data about colony management in favour of generating qualitative data, enabling beekeepers and humans to share sensibilities and become more curious about the world of bees – without proximity. The data are harvested from a prototype E.M.H. and also from collaboration with universities (e.g. Freie Universität Berlin & Queen Mary University of London). The project does not aim to definitely escape the physical world, but it intends to create specific places of refuge – refugia – (online and offline), where we can create new sorts of intimacy between bees and humans on a more egalitarian basis.

### **Conchoidal Intimacies in Volatile Deltaic Lifeworlds**

*Simon, Sandro (University of Cologne, Cologne, GER)*

This paper inquires mollusc-spirit-human intimacies in times of increasingly volatile environmental, spiritual, and socio-economic dynamics. With the help of audio/visuality and a focus on how material, semiotic and social absences and presences evoke, resonate and conflict (with) each other, it will trace the shifting agentivities, strategies and relations of the involved.

In the Sine-Saloum Delta, Senegal, molluscs have influenced multispecies co-becoming and the bio-physical set-up since millennia. Humans have gleaned, eaten and traded them, and used them for houses, dams, streets, amulets, jewellery, perfume, or pottery. Furthermore, molluscs have always been mediators between humans and ancestral spirits.

In these different assemblages, molluscs shift between different emergent roles. And like stepping stones, or rather, stepping shells, they can bring forth repetition with difference (cf. Lefebvre 1992; Deleuze and Guattari 1987), whereby beats and pauses are bound together, providing orientation and giving rise to imaginative horizons.

For example, the material presence and absence of molluscs on the sandbanks are both ways of communicating on the quality of the relations between spirits and humans and to get a glimpse onto future calamity or fortune. The sensual experience with molluscs again creates projective and embodied relation, from French colonialists comparing the visual aesthetics of houses built from and streets laid out with white shells to metropolitan Paris, over today's aural detection of strangers by the way they walk on the shelly roads to the tactility of gleaning for molluscs underwater and in the mud beyond one's view. Furthermore, the sharpness of the molluscs' shells that leaves gleaners with lasting scars or their "stubbornness" when it comes

to human attempts of transplanting or cultivating them, reflects their role as unruly beings in their own terms.

With the rise in sea levels and siltation, governmentalization of space and commercialisation of mollusc gleaning or the demise of Animism, such mollusc-spirit-human intimacies are indeed in change. Their enactments, or, the efforts to bring together presences and absences in meaningful, progenerative ways, turn more arhythmic, individual and hidden and increasingly rely on proximate bodily encounters.

### **Crying as a Vehicle for Transcending the Human among the Indigenous Peoples of Siberia**

*Bulgakova, Tatiana (Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia, St. Petersburg, RUS)*

According to the traditional ideas typical for the indigenous shamanic cultures of Siberia, there exist some special ways of going beyond the human and physical worlds. One of the most effective ones is emotionally rich sounds of crying and its intonational variants, such as shouting and singing that imitates crying. (In some indigenous languages, "crying", "shouting" and "singing" are used as synonyms.) Within that worldview, emotionally tinged sounds of crying work as a means of connecting people to each other and entering a space that lies outside of human and physical space, like into a human and physical world's "extra dimension". This view forms strict prohibitions on crying in "inappropriate situations", and on the contrary, encourages the use of intentional shouting, crying or singing in case a person is consciously looking for an opportunity to act in a nonhuman space beyond the physical world. Those ideas lie in the basis of the rituals that affect distant objects in order, for example, to cause wind, calm storms, or disperse clouds.

Transcending beyond the physical and human world is provided not by words as such (only by words), but mostly by the way those words are pronounced, which sharply distinguish them from the words of ordinary speech, as well as by non-articulated crying (by crying-like and shouting-like intonation). Therefore, in those moments when such an output occurs through crying, shouting or singing (for example, during singing an epic or accomplishment of shamanic rituals), the performer tries not to allow any pauses in his story, so as not to interrupt the thread ("the rope") of the sounding that holds the narrator and the listeners in the space of nonhuman world. Consequently, when the narrator takes a breath, the listeners and assistants fill the unintentional pauses with special exclamations, and by means of that they prevent the group of listeners from falling out into the ordinary human world and keep their general progress through the space of the invisible nonhuman space.

**Intimate and intimidating relations between bark beetles and humans.  
Thoughts on potentials and constraints of a Multi-Species Political Ecology**  
*Thalhammer, Martin (CEU Phd Student Environmental Sciences, Vienna, AUT)*

When Anna Tsing decided to put a mushroom into the heart of her anthropological inquiry, I was sceptical at first. Where would anthropology be without the human, without culturally mediated human realities, without its focus on power relations? Would it be possible for anthropology to decentre humans without calling into question its disciplinary identity?

For me these questions of reservation have melted into thin air. Being a forester myself and having come across the bark beetle species *Ips typographus* has radically changed my way of thinking about the entanglements of human and non-human entities. Not only because the bark beetle has shaken a century-old forest management system to its foundations, but also because it seemed to have quite wisely divided its human adversaries by causing disagreement among them. In the course of the bumpy history of human and non-human's intertwined interventions into Austrian forests and against the background of a specific political economy of today's Austrian forestry, the bark beetle has without doubt achieved the role of a powerful actor.

Based on my experiences as a forester and as a political ecology pursuing anthropologist, my talk will shed light on the intimate and intimidating relations between bark beetles and humans. In doing so, I will discuss potentials and constraints of a Multi Species Political Ecology not only focusing on human practices of dealing with the bark beetle, but also looking at the power relations inscribed into the politico-economic relations (in-)between beetles and humans. Whereas the potentials of such an approach may be evident, the challenges of getting the Marxist heritage in political ecology and the rather post-humanist Multi Species approach to a common denominator are manifold. May it be the danger of mixing up "all actors" as equally important and thus of somatising inter- and intraspecies inequalities, a Multi Species Ecology remains a contradictory matter.

Depending on one bark beetle's willingness to be trapped in a jar and to serve as an interview partner, my talk will be either a "lecture-performance" or a classic lecture.

**Ecologies of Care and Affective Environments in a More-Than-Human Perspective**

*Lewandowsky, Mirjam (Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf, GER); Schrading, Fiona (Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf, GER); Wieland, Janna (Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf, GER); Althans, Birgit (Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf, GER)*

In our contribution, we, an interdisciplinary research group (media & culture studies, art theory, pedagogy, cultural anthropology), would like to discuss a concept of "care" as a specific form of affective relationality from a more-than-human perspective. In this contribution we want to look at processes of affecting and being affected in order to work out entanglements of affect and care. We ask: How can care be described as

a specific, intimate and embedded relation that lasts beyond the moment of being affected and aims at creating/continuing/repairing affective arrangements, thus at relations of sustainable connectedness and togetherness? How can we describe these specific "affective arrangements" as affective spaces of care relations?

We follow approaches of feminist science and technology studies that expand feminist debates on care and understand care as more-than-human ecologies that do not exist independently of their environments, infrastructures, power relations, non-human beings and places. How can we understand care as "ecologies" and "affective environments"? Starting from the entanglement of cultural and social science research on affect and feminist and neo-materialist approaches to care we understand affects as situated in specific micro-relational milieus and thus as part of material-discursive apparatuses. Apparatuses as a set of (endlessly) expandable material-discursive practices form matter and the (re)configuration of the world(s). The material-discursive conditions of care and its practices emerge as those which are at the same time intertwined with practices of the socio-cultural environment. Caring is thus not only to be understood as an intentional, purposeful action of a (sovereign) subject that seeks to remedy a previously defined need or deficiency, but as a reciprocal, relational and affective happening of being intimately affected by and affecting others (human and nonhuman). Following this relational and material-discursive understanding, the question arises how we can think relations of caring that emerge from ecological intimacies and affective encounters and go beyond a narrower, anthropocentric concept of care. In contrast to conventional lecture formats we would like to propose an open round table discussion to engage the participants into a debate about how we begin to care in more-than-human world(s).