

MEGA SEMINAR 2021

# TO BEGIN AGAIN

FULL PROGRAM

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# KEYNOTES

## **Keynote I**      Eduardo Kohn

Stalden, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 13:30-15:00

### **A Psychedelic Science**

*Eduardo Kohn, McGill University*

“How can you find in the *I* that you are a *we* you don’t yet know?” Manari asked me, shortly before nightfall. We drank the decoction. A half hour passed, and to my relief I was still there. I took another gourdful and a moment later was utterly discomposed. It is one thing to write, as I often had, about shamanic metamorphosis. It is another to undergo the dissolution of first-person flesh into emptiness, to become the yawn of a jaguar’s throat channeling the force of the forest, a conduit for the snapping, eyeing, pulsing torrent of life flowing through a form no longer my own. I reflect here on anthropology as a psychedelic science, one that can mirror the mind-manifesting nature of the world-called-forest. Drawing on my research in and around Amazonian forests, and especially on ongoing collaboration with the Sapara leader Manari Ushigua I examine what tools we might develop to “begin again” in these times of planet-wide anthropogenic ecological crisis. Beginning again means finding in our individual pasts a shared possible future. This is an ethical practice that finds its direction by falling back on the forms that the mind-manifesting forest that makes us makes manifest.

## **Keynote II**      Daniel M. Knight

Stalden, August 24<sup>th</sup>, 12:30-14:00

### **Life on the Edge: Vertigo and the Making of New History**

*Daniel M. Knight, University of St Andrews*

Here I argue for the concept of ‘vertigo’ to account for life on the cliff-edge of history and time, where a new timespace has opened that may seem unfamiliar and daunting, but also full of potential. From Kierkegaard to Serres, Proust to Runia, the cliff-edge has been employed to illustrate the dizzying confusion experienced by people teetering on the verge of a new era, which some may embrace by leaping into the widening whirlpool (*ilinx*) of the unknown, while others scramble to cling by their fingernails to fading versions of Self and society. Life on the vertiginous cliff-edge provokes nausea, dizziness, breathlessness, the sense of falling, and

unknowingness of Self, while spitting out questions of modern belonging and critiques of birthright futures. Possessing both creative and destructive potentiality, new history may be forged in the *ilinx*, yet being stripped of recognizable points for competent and confident navigation evokes fear, disorientation and anxiety. Considering crisis as both rupture and chronic condition, this paper puts vertigo at the fore for understanding how people navigate uncertainty and the unforeseen.

**Keynote III** Lisa Stevenson  
Stalden, August 24<sup>th</sup>, 17:30-19:00

**Panning for gold in the *Machángara*: Reflections on anthropology,  
portraiture and uncommon love**

*Lisa Stevenson, William Dawson Scholar, McGill University*

In this paper I provide a portrait of two Colombian forced migrants living along the banks of the Machángara river in Quito, Ecuador. Roland Barthes once wrote that a certain photograph of his mother achieved “the impossible science of the unique being.” In this paper I consider the possibility that anthropology is one such impossible science, burrowing as it (sometimes) does into the eloquence and compass of the singular. In those moments of what I would call anthropological portraiture—when the unique being is being described or addressed, it no longer makes sense to ask of our anthropological writing—“what does it mean?” but rather, “is it alive?” Such a shift, from the hermeneutics of the text to the liveliness of the written image is not made once and for all, but is a repeated and always temporary return to an enchanted way of being in the world and of doing anthropology. There is nothing naïve about such a return—in those moments our habitual modes of reasoning can become undone and the impossibility of our science can be acutely felt.

# EVENING SALONS

## Ethnographic Salon

Pejsestuen, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 19:30-21:00

*Convenors: Helle Bundgaard (KU) & Line Dalsgård (AU)*

### Description

Deleuze & Guattari once wrote: "We do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it. We lack creation. We lack resistance to the present". We agree. So much dead communication and so little creation! Fear of failure? Perhaps, but life has never been safe. We invite you to a shared exploration of resistance to conventional academic writing.

Continuing from last year's success, we invite you to participate in the Ethnographic Salon, this year also in English (Danish presentations are welcome). We invite poems, short stories or essays, or other formats, written for the occasion or released from their hiding place in the drawer. Classical "thick description" or fiction, as you wish. Texts that keep interpretive possibilities open instead of striving for closure. Texts that provoke or charm the listener with their beauty, or both. We believe we can learn from art and literature and experiment with words in order to explore alternative ways of being alive in the writing.

We propose the following 'obstructions' (benspænd):

- Write from field experience
- Experiment with the format
- Write yourself into the text
- No references or other academic scaffolding.
- Allow yourself to focus on literary qualities

Please join us for an unusual evening. Last year we had a wonderful evening, with contributions from both PhD students and more seasoned people. We hope this year's event will be equally enjoyable.

### Schedule

19:30-19:35 Introduction *Helle Bundgaard & Line Dalsgård*

19:35-19:43 **There is a demon of smoke in a smashed up restroom downstairs, and so am I, Woman, and Snoop Dogg: A Chinese dream** *Anders Sybrandt Hansen*

- 19:43-19:50 **A Flash of Fear** *Stine Ilum*
- 19:50-19:58 **Tick description** *Aja Smith*
- 19:58-20:03 Very short break
- 20:03-20:11 **Cooking for gangsters** *Anja Kublitz*
- 20:11-20:19 **“16<sup>th</sup> February 2020”** *Katrine Mandrup Bach*
- 20:19-20:27 **Backpack** *Adrienne Mannov*
- 20:27-20:32 Very short break
- 20:32-20:40 **Den grønne dame** *Cecilie Rubow*
- 20:40-20:48 **Navigating soundscapes in air and water** *Cecilie Baann*
- 20:48-20:56 **Pagal, pagal, pagal (insane, insane, insane): Male ‘mad-dification’ of angry and armed women in a Mumbai slum** *Atreyee Sen*

## **Anti-Racism Salon**

Forpagterboligen, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 19:30-21:00

*Convenors: Annika Lindberg (KU/Bern), Flora Botelho (AU) & Cameron Warner (AU)*

### **Description**

Join us for a discussion of how to discuss racism in everyday life with friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues. We will use ‘patchworking as method’ in order to generate ‘artefacts’ for discussion and documentation. The salon will end with an open-ended discussion of what kind of practical steps we can each take to make to make our workplace and society less racist.

Coffee and tea will be served.

# PANEL OVERVIEW

## **PANEL 1A      Engaging with interventions on new beginnings: Options, constraints, and dilemmas**

Stalden 2, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 15:30-18:00

*Convenors: Ayo Degett (KU) & Nanna Schneidermann (AU)*

*Discussants: Jonas S. Bach (AU) & Hanne O. Mogensen (KU)*

### **Description**

The Covid-19 pandemic has taught us that rapidly shifting life conditions of entire societies are not confined to the lives of people in areas prone to natural disasters, armed conflict, or political instability. Yet, when faced with disruption or difficult circumstances people often experience interaction with actors who wants to support their transition to a new start through certain interventions. These might appear in the shape of medical or technological interventions, therapeutic interventions, institutional interventions, humanitarian interventions or other.

We are curious to learn how the interventions, that people engage with, influence the way they see, perceive, and grab the options available to them in their new beginnings. And how the relations between intentionality, chance and effect play out in the processes of these interventions.

We are interested in papers that allow for a comparison of interrelationships between new beginnings and interventions in them across scales:

- In the conflicts, dilemmas, paradoxes, or absurdities that unfold in the relation between interventions and the people who embark on a new beginning, in a new country as a migrant or a refugee, with a new medical diagnosis, in a treatment for substance abuse, in a new role presenting as a different gender than before, or in a new life stage as for example a parent, a graduate, a widow or a divorcee.
- Or other actors starting afresh such as a country or a city starting over after breakdown and conflict, endangered species who are returning in large numbers, technologies that are taking up new roles etc.

This panel invites explorations of the relationships between new beginnings and interventions that are aimed at supporting individuals, families, groups or communities in their journey

towards a fresh start or a re-direction of life. The interventions that people start their journeys with, alongside and against, and the way they influence lives of people.

## Schedule

- 15:30-15:35 Welcome & Introduction
- 15:35-15:50 **Access to Justice in Uganda** *Christian B. N. Gade*
- 15:50-16:00 Comments by discussant *Hanne O. Mogensen*
- 16:00-16:15 **Social death as a new beginning and intervention for persons with Alzheimer's disease** *Ida Marie L. Glavind*
- 16:15-16:25 Comments by discussant *Jonas S. Bach*
- 16:25-16:40 **Technologies of Motherhood** *Nanna Schneidermann*
- 16:40-16:50 Comments by discussants *Jonas S. Bach & Hanne O. Mogensen*
- 16:50-16:55 Short Break
- 16:55-17:10 **Drawing on humanitarian pasts** *Ayo Degett*
- 17:10-17:20 Comments by discussant *Hanne O. Mogensen*
- 17:20-17:35 **The Future is Floating** *Lasse Bech Knudsen*
- 17:30-17:40 Comments by discussant *Jonas S. Bach*
- 17:45-18:00 Plenary discussion and rounding up

## Presentations

### **Access to Justice in Uganda**

*Christian B. N. Gade Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

#### **Abstract**

Transitional justice mechanisms (courts, truth commissions, local justice mechanisms, etc.) are often presented as interventions that are used to deal with violations of the past in order to bring about better futures. This presentation will focus on the International Criminal Court's "Access to Justice" project in Uganda, which was supposed to bring a trial in The Hague – the one against Dominic Ongwen, a former brigade commander of the Lord's Resistance Army – closer

to the victims of the committed crimes. This was done by means of new innovative transitional justice methods, including video screenings from the trial in the areas where the crimes were committed. The presentation will elaborate on how the victims who participated in the project assess the intervention, and how the intervention may have specific unintended effects. The data source is a mixed-methods study combining 3,000 survey responses with focus group interviews and observations.

## **Social death as a new beginning and intervention for persons with Alzheimer's disease**

*Ida Marie Lind Glavind, Industrial PhD-student, Danish Alzheimer Society & Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

### **Abstract**

In this paper, I argue that receiving a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease marks the beginning to an end. Drawing on material from my current Ph.D. project, I show how persons with Alzheimer's disease in Denmark experience social death and a loss of belonging through exclusion and marginalization. Further, I discuss and problematize the interventions available for persons living with Alzheimer's and other dementia illnesses. As the interventions' declared aim is to reduce symptoms of dementia through efforts of improving cognition, they reproduce cultural values around cognition as the most essential element to maintain for having a good life. Thereby they overlook the social side of dementia and how people with dementia need support and help to maintain social relations and a sense of belonging.

## **Technologies of Motherhood – intervening with the beginning of life in Cape Town**

*Nanna Schneidermann, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University & University of Cape Town*

### **Abstract**

This paper examines the role of medical and everyday interventions in the beginning of life in one of the most unequal cities in the world. Pregnancy and birth is a central, yet ambiguous and multifaceted, site of intervention, from public health programmes, mobile-health platforms, ultrasound scans to forceps and caesarean sections. These technologies of motherhood have come to define and characterize differences between the private health care sector, the public clinics, and alternative birth practitioners in Cape Town. They are used, taken for granted, aspired for and resisted. They are enacted in multiple and at times mutually exclusive ways; as



means to managing different forms of risk, as interventions that are risky in themselves, as luxury commodities, as alienating and dangerous. But they are central to choices, practices and experiences of pregnancy and birth, and reflect and engage processes of commodification of health services in South Africa, but also (post)colonial intersections of status, power, wealth and modernity. Based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork among mothers on the urban margins of Cape Town, the paper argues that technologies of motherhood make pregnancy and birth into political events in a city characterized by economic, social and ethnic inequality. In tying technologies of motherhood with ideas of urban modernity and affluence, their use come to signify particular forms of belonging and morality. Mapping out different approaches to technologies of motherhood tells stories of women's attempts to place themselves as good mothers in relation to urban modernity and a changing state. In short, technologies used in pregnancy and birth become the contested grounds upon which good health and motherhood is predicated in Cape Town.

## **Drawing on humanitarian pasts - when creating new beginnings in a refugee settlement**

*Ayo Degett, Industrial PhD Student, Danish Refugee Council & Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

### **Abstract**

For refugees who live in camp or camp-like settings, interventions by humanitarian regimes are an integrated part of their daily lives and meant to ease their transition into to a new beginning in displacement. South Sudanese refugees in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement in Uganda returned multiple times to settlements in Uganda, as results of various armed conflicts erupting in South Sudan. These recurring displacements under similar refugee regimes and interventions have provided refugees with profound detailed knowledge of the interventions available including their procedures and the humanitarian actors implementing them. These insightful experiences have taught the refugees important aspects of what to expect and how to make best use of the options available.

In this paper I explore how refugees in Rhino Camp draw on their memories of humanitarian arrangements in the past to perceive the conditions of their present and to articulate their desires for improvements. I build on Ramah McKay's work on *humanitarian nostalgia* (McKay 2012: 301) to show that the Rhino Camp residents' nostalgic memories of humanitarian pasts - and the ways they are deployed to perceive alternative futures – are centrally important for

understanding their frequent and emotional demands, claims and critique in situations of interaction with humanitarian actors. My overall argument is that looking into the historicity of the ways refugees experience being subjects of aid will open useful understandings of how they deploy their memories to claim improved assistance.

## **The Future is Floating**

*Lasse Bech Knudsen, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University  
(presenting virtually)*

### **Abstract**

In 2019, the United Nations suggested to develop a sustainable floating city to deal with two pressing threats: rising sea levels and too-rapid urbanization. Named Oceanix City, the project is spearheaded by UN-Habitat and non-profit organization Oceanix in collaboration with Bjarke Ingels Group, MIT's Center for Ocean Engineering, and artists like Olafur Eliasson and James Cameron. Oceanix City aims to be humanity's next frontier by offering a better urban future for 10.000 residents per city.

Oceanix City finds policy basis in UN's 2017 "New Urban Agenda," which aims to completely rethink the way we plan, finance, develop, govern, and manage cities. In contrast to urban planning on land, Oceanix City will be built as hexagonal platforms rising with the oceans; be financed through high-risk investments calculated by re-insurance firms; meet UN's seventeen SDG's; be autonomous but subject to the same laws applicable on land; and aim to be affordable to all climate refugees.

In this paper, I argue that the development of Oceanix City is an intervention to future-proof human habitats at a planetary scale. Based on official documents, interviews with key stakeholders, and observation of the effort to build a pilot of Oceanix City, I look at how technological interventions to make life afloat possible challenge the idea of nation states as territorially grounded; how Oceanix City pushes institutional interventions on who gets to develop "frontier solutions"; and how the concept pushes and is legitimized by humanistic interventions by officially aiming to provide sustainable and affordable housing and services.

**PANEL 1B      On the Uses and Abuses of History for Danish Anthropology**

Forpagterboligen, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 15:30-18:00

*Convenors: Kirsten Marie Raahauge (KADK) & Victor Cova (AU)*

**Description**

Beginning again may mean returning to half-forgotten traditions just as much as trying to get a fresh start. Both are fraught with self-deception: that we can get back to the old ways of doing and thinking as if nothing had happened, that we can get away from it all. The story that Danish anthropologists tell each other is often of the second variety: there was once a war between structuralism and Marxism, and then in the 90s we just moved on to something else entirely. This earlier Danish anthropology is often taken to be so remote that it is barely taught, if at all, to younger generations of scholars. Yet as anthropologists we know that change and continuity often manifest where we expect them less, continuity where we thought we had changed, change where we thought we were most faithful to what came before. As Nietzsche argued in his essay *On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life*, the point is not to remember it all as it really happened, or to forget it all, but to choose what to remember and what to forget so that we may go on living. This panel proposal asks what does remain of the "old" anthropology and what really has changed from the time of the war of "isms", but also what could and should be brought back that was forgotten, as well as what remained, disguised, that should finally be overcome.

The format is simple: participants should choose an article by a Danish anthropologist other than themselves published before 1990 that particularly exemplify the breaks and continuities with the sort of anthropology they do or wish they could do today. It may be a particularly good example of the sort of anthropology you are glad you don't have to read anymore, of the sorts of intractable debates you are sad are still taking place under different names, of the sorts of long term fieldwork you wish you could do, or the article that made you want to become an anthropologist in the first place and that has remained a model ever since. With this panel we hope to provoke an internal reflection on the history of Danish anthropology as a living intellectual tradition constituted through and through by dialogues and borrowings with others (France, Norway, Sweden, Germany, England, Australia, North America, Brazil...) and which has come to play an increasingly important role in global anthropological debates.

## Schedule

- 15.30-15.40 Welcome and introduction *Victor Cova*
- 15.40-16.00 **Pre-postmodernist anthropology** *Morten Axel Pedersen*
- 16.00-16.30 **Anthropological roots** *Maia Ebsen & Astrid O. Andersen w. Katrine Vintov*
- 16.30-16.50 **Between the devil and the deep blue sea** *Kirsten Marie Raahauge*
- 16.50-17.20 **Structuralism and Marxism, before Marxist Structuralism** *Victor Cova*
- 17.20-18.00 General Discussion

## Presentations

### **Pre-postmodernist Anthropology**

*Morten Axel Pedersen, Professor, SODAS & Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

#### **Abstract**

Based on a re-reading of the edited volume *Den Ny Antropologi* (1975), and Friedman's *Tribes, States and Transformations* from the same year, this paper revisits the contrast between instrumental and symbolic action, and more generally between materialism and idealism, that undergirded key theoretical divergences and debates between rising DK-based anthropological stars in the decade before the advent of postmodernism and postcolonialism

### **Anthropological roots: an auditive intervention in the making of Danish anthropological history**

*Maia Ebsen, Katrine Vintov, & Astrid O. Andersen, Board Members, Antropologforeningen*

#### **Abstract**

In 2020, two books were published by Aarhus Universitetsforlag about and by the first professor of anthropology in Denmark, Johannes Nicolaisen: "Antropologen Johannes Nicolaisen. Feltforsker, fornyer og formidler" by Ole Høiris, and "I renernes land. En antropologisk rejse" - a post mortem publication of a manuscript written by a young Johannes Nicolaisen reporting from his first real fieldwork in Sami Norway in the winter of 1945-46, edited by Ida Nicolaisen. Antropologforeningen, contributing actively to the alternative "writing" of Danish anthropology through the production of events and podcasts, has taken

these new publications as an occasion to produce a podcast series: *Antropologiske Rødder* (Anthropological Roots), which engage with Nicolaisen's work and his contributions to the development of anthropology in Denmark. In this presentation, we revisit the work of Johannes Nicolaisen, and mirror some central empirical and theoretical traces with ones in contemporary anthropology. We ask where traces of Nicolaisen are to be found in anthropology today, beyond the two above-mentioned books; and we discuss how his strong commitment to the importance of fieldwork affected future generations of anthropologists in Denmark. We attend to these questions through snippets and reflections on our ongoing and documented process of production of the podcast series *Antropologiske Rødder*.

## **Between the devil and the deep blue sea. Spatial anthropologies between structuralism and all the new materialisms**

*Kirsten Marie Raahauge, Professor MSO, Institute for Architecture and Design, The Royal Danish Academy*

### **Abstract**

In Niels Focks' brief, easily read article on the Waiwai house (1986), he proposes a transparent reading of this specific house as a signifying space, yet he also points to the larger contexts that it is embedded in and that some of its signifying capacities are connected to, thus bridging the small world of the house and the vast world of the surrounding universe. As a young student of anthropology, this made sense to me, along with other less easily discernable semiotic or structural analyses of places in the world. Now, many years later, these old-fashioned ways of making sense of the messy world are ridiculed for their simple and transcendent belief in the possibility of finding some kind of order or pattern, and also for having a transcendent approach to notions and systems that are invented in Western philosophies, anthropologies and other positioned -ies and -isms. Much of the critique is well put, and a lot of caveats are well placed, such as the one noted by anthropologist Jesper Schou in Synsvinkler (1993); he simply quotes Pierre Clastres, thereby displaying the obviousness of the challenge: "Pour la première fois, je pouvais observer directement, car elle fonctionnait, transparente, sous mes yeux, l'institution politique des Indiens." [1] Contemporary interpretations, at least in my corner of the world, focus on new materialism, agencies, materialities, peripheries, networks, absences, vibrant matter, affects, spatial impact and natureculture-entanglements. While this boosts new energy into the academic debates and gets rid of old-fashioned distortive images of the world, it also evokes a sensation that something has been lost. The precision of academic lingo? The framework for how to talk about what? The transcendence of dealing with imaginaries or

cultures? Or something else? What was lost, when old-fashioned ways of making sense fragmented into “something else entirely”? Is it lost at all? Is it still the same, hidden in the new ways of making sense of the world?

Fock, Niels 1986 Et sted i skoven - en verden - et univers. I: Jordens folk, Årg. 21, nr. 2 (1986), S. 61-69

Schou, Jesper 1993 Kolofonen-citat. I: Synsvinkler. Tidsskriftet Antropologi, nr.27 (1993), kolofonsiden

1 “For the first time, I was able to directly observe the political institution of the Indians, since it was at work, transparently, right in front of my eyes” (my translation). Pierre Clastres: *Chronique des Indiens Guayaki*. Paris: Plon 1972, s113.

## **Structuralism and Marxism, before Marxist Structuralism**

*Victor Cova, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

In 1964, a review of Niels Fock's *Waiwai. Religion and society of an Amazonian tribe* concluded that she was looking forward to its companion volume on economy and material culture - a volume which, to my knowledge, was never published. The same year, Lucien Sebag published *Marxism and Structuralism*, a largely aporetic volume that followed the antinomy to its conclusions - and committed suicide a year later. Meanwhile, Maurice Godelier was publishing a study on the so-called Asiatic mode of production and beginning to combine his first interest in Braudelian economic history with Levi-Straussian structural anthropology - what would lead to "Structural Marxism". In this paper I return to Fock's early work to raise that moment where "structuralism" and "Marxism" were still open questions as a counterpoint to the present, now that the effort to overcome "structural marxism" itself with "post-structuralisms" appears to have run its course. What was at stake, ethnographically and anthropologically, in the question of "structuralism and marxism", that has been forgotten since?

## **PANEL 1C      Extraordinary Moments**

Brænderiet, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 15:30-18:00

*Convenors: Cecilie Rubow & Line Dalsgård*

### **Description**

To experience the extraordinary may mean to begin again. A waking up to a new life or a reconfirmation of one's existence. Or perhaps a moment 'out of time' or in an 'other space', which shows to be transformative only in its reverberations. It may be extraordinary in its intensity or because it, promising or brutally, prompts a distancing towards all that, which one uses to think of as reality or "me".

An experience of the extraordinary is also a figure on a ground. It can tell us about the ordinary. We figure the extraordinary moments when doing fieldwork as a means to reflect upon our own cultural background and predispositions. But we may also look *with* informants into the extraordinary and participate in their familiarity with the world. If this is extraordinary, what then is the ordinary? On which background does this moment stand out as exceptional?

The extraordinary may be conceptualised as the sublime, the transcendent, enchanted, or perhaps as a moment of "resonance", extra-subjectivity or letting-go. Or as liminal shock, uncanniness, phobic anxiety and mortal fear. But does any of these concepts cover the extraordinary experience satisfyingly? Are there more to the experience? Is the conceptual distinction between ordinary and extraordinary even sustainable? Should middle grounds and in-betweenness not be overlooked? And how do we, methodologically and conceptually, capture its after-life?

We invite papers which take the experience of the extraordinary as a question and explore it empirically and conceptually. We will look for the ethnographic thickness that expands the extraordinary moment to its limits and welcome explorations combining the auto-ethnographic introspection with conceptual curiosity.

## Schedule

- 15:30-15:40 Introduction of panel & participants *Cecilie Rubow & Line Dalsgård*
- 15:40-16:00 **Staying behind** *Maria Louw*
- 16:00-16:20 **At the edge of the sensible** *Aja Smith*
- 16:20-16:50 Discussion & Break
- 16:50-17:10 **The conflict over milk** *Yayi Zheng*
- 17:10-17:20 **Solid objects?** *Line Dalsgård*
- 17:30-17:45 Discussion

## Presentations

### **Staying behind: Extraordinary moments towards the end of life among Kyrgyz elderly people**

*Maria Louw, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

#### **Abstract**

Among Muslims in Kyrgyzstan, it is expected that one starts pondering life's end and preparing for one's afterlife around the time when one retires. Drawing on fieldwork among elderly Kyrgyz people who become old in the absence of their younger relatives, this paper explores the afterlife as an imaginative horizon which intersects with the everyday lives of the elderly people in ways that sometimes collapse the distinction between the transcendent and the immanent. Experiencing themselves as unhinged from the worlds of the living, many of the elders are prepared to die. The *arbak* (ancestor spirits) often settle in their homes as connections with living others fade, appearing in dreams and visions, providing comfort, but also sometimes leaving them puzzled. The *arbak* are seen as bridges to the afterlife – a life many of the elders long for – but, to the puzzlement of the elders, they often encourage the elders to stay and persevere. In the paper, I explore the homes of the left-behind elders as uncanny spaces replete with openings to the otherworld. In these spaces, routine activities, which tend to appear as meaningless to the elderly (why should I get dressed in the morning when there is no one to get dressed for?) may also sometimes, in the light of the messages from the ancestor spirits, take on religious depth as acts of divinely inspired perseverance.



## **At the edge of the sensible: Cultivating doubt in radically engaged anthropology and spirituality**

*Aja Smith, Postdoc, Interacting Minds Center and Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

Extraordinary experiences have long been a central interest for anthropologists studying spiritual phenomena. During fieldwork, many have themselves undergone such experiences, caused by and fueling their confidence in radical participation as the soundest approach to understanding spiritual phenomena. These anthropologists inadvertently find themselves faced with the question of the ontological status of such phenomena, responses to which range from embracing them as ontologically real to steering clear of judgement. Arguments pertaining to the authority of the anthropologist follow a similar path, belief either being framed as a precondition for understanding such matters or as undermining analytical validity. This paper outlines a third position. Based upon radically engaged fieldwork conducted with people dedicated to spiritual and mindfulness-meditation training in Denmark, I explore doubt as a transformative experience that destabilises both ontological certainty and the alleged analytical invalidity of radically engaged anthropology, and argue for doubt as a valuable anthropological disposition.

### **The conflict over milk**

*Yayi Zheng, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

While I stayed with a Borana family during my fieldwork in Southern Ethiopia in 2019 - 2020, the family took me as their daughter. I was always offered a cup of raw milk. Yet, I could not digest it well. It was after being ill so many times that I decided to turn down the offer. This had caused intense arguments with my Borana parents. The father would repeatedly demand me to drink milk, while I found excuses to avoid it. I explained I would get sick, which, however, never appeared reasonable and acceptable for him. I was grateful that although the father started to call me “a bad guest” instead of my daughter, the family continued to let me stay. Yet, when I wanted to join the children for herding, he simply said, “You do not drink milk, so you do not herd my cattle.” The conflicts over milk were painful yet extraordinary moments in my fieldwork. Drinking milk was essential and ordinary for any Borana. Despite knowing that it would significantly hurt my relations with the family, I was not able to do so. These moments were stressful, yet I got to learn the expectations for a Borana daughter and

that milk was part of the Borana kinship with their cattle. While rejecting the milk, I was simultaneously rejecting the cows. How could I then herd the family cattle? My Borana parents wanted me to drink milk, not only because they tried to offer me their best food, but more importantly, by commensality of milk, they invited me to join their kinship. The profound meanings of milk were unfolded through my uncomfortable yet extraordinary conflicts with the family.

## **Solid Objects?**

*Line Dalsgård, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

What is the liveliness of a piece of green glass, found on a beach in England by a promising young man, who for a moment lets his fingers search in the wet sand? Of the rounded warm granite stone I hold in my pocket? Or of golden lava running out through the cracks of what appears to be grey passive rock? What is the liveliness of the dead eyes of a football player who falls on the pitch, immediately gone, as if he fell through a wall? What is the liveliness of life, the moments when I awaken to it, and death comes near enough to blow its vivifying breath into colours, forms and movements around me? Moving from a short story of Virginia Woolf, a few Icelandic moments, and the shock of Christian Eriksen's collapse during the Euro 2020 I explore some qualities of the extraordinary, as it emerges as a swift simultaneity of thought, feeling and flesh. My interest is the embodiment of time and its counterparts, dissolution and death.

## **PANEL 1D      Learning and/as beginning**

Enghuset, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 15:30-18:00

*Convenors: Cathrine Hasse (DPU, AU) & Andreas Roepstorff (AU)*

### **Description**

It can be difficult to maintain a focus on human learning when engaging with societal issues such as the impact of COVID-19, artificial intelligence, social media and climate change. The aim of this panel is to highlight human learning processes as new beginnings of import for such larger issues.

From an anthropological perspective, learning is not tied to institutionalized education and schooling. It is an ongoing process of learning to learn – an educational endeavor crucial to human survival. Whether viewed from moment to moment or from generation to generation, learning is always a new beginning, based in the need to figure out a ‘next’ response to any previous social and material experience. At the core of human life, learning entails an ongoing, everyday transformation of who we are, what we do and the environments in which we live. Delving more deeply into learning processes can help us understand how crises, whether human-made or not, both afford and require new embodied, and not just cognitive, learning. From a learning perspective, it is never too late to begin again. It does however matter which learning resources are available, who may legitimately draw on these, who is willing (required, allowed) to gain new insight from whom, and what power relations are involved in these processes, including power relations between machine-based and human learning.

This panel calls for papers that engage with questions of how processes of change – both large and small – entail learning and how attending in more detail to basic learning processes might change our conditions for new beginnings at both personal and societal levels. We welcome papers that address formalized and/or ad hoc learning processes in endeavors such as political and bureaucratic decision-making, organizational and educational reform, design processes, transposing in-person to online pedagogy and/or attempts to change one’s own or others’ behavior with regard to crises (war, health, climate, etc.), and more. As artificial processes of learning (AI and machine learning) increasingly intervene in human learning, we also welcome papers that address how human and machine learning processes challenge, support and transform each other. Following recent discussions in new materialism, post humanism as well as core questions in classical anthropology regarding the intrinsic intergenerationality of human

life – we want to work towards at new anthropology that takes learning seriously as an existential human condition.

## Schedule

- 15:30-15:35 Brief Introduction *Cathrine Hasse & Andreas Roepstorff*
- 15:35-16:00 **Playing, learning, reflecting and the conundrum of surprise** *Andreas Roepstorff* (presentation & discussion)
- 16:00-16:25 **The new nature of children and cities** *Sally Anderson* (presentation & discussion)
- 16:25-16:30 Break
- 16:30-16:55 **Studying organization digitization** *Mette Marie Vad Karsten* (presentation & discussion)
- 16:55-17:20 **The visual learning of machine learning** *Jamie Wallace* (presentation & discussion)
- 17:20-17:45 **Learning with potentials** *Cathrine Hasse* (presentation & discussion)
- 17:45-18:00 Collective Dialogue & Discussion

## Presentations

### **Playing, learning, reflecting and the conundrum of surprise**

*Andreas Roepstorff, Professor, Interacting Minds Center & Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

#### **Abstract**

It is the new black in psychology and cognitive science to claim that reducing uncertainty is what life, in the most general understanding, is about. This does not leave much space for important aspects of human lives, as they are lived. However, the approach also opens for a conceptual space, where playing, learning and reflecting is intimately intertwined as ways of creating and resolving surprises. I will explore this space from an anthropological perspective.

## **The new nature of children and cities: Social aesthetics and worldmaking**

*Sally Anderson, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Anthropology, DPU, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

We are living in a time of new beginnings, with grassroots organizations and municipal governments alike working hard to fashion biodiverse, nature-based solutions to mitigate urban problems with air, water, noise and more. Educators and planners are also working hard to reconnect ‘nature-weak’ children with nature – through outdoor schooling, citizen science programs, garden projects, and designing biodiverse play-biotopes for parks and schoolyards. In REGREEN, an EU H2020 project, educators, modelers and mappers are devising ways of mapping the ‘nature’ along routes children take to school and close to schools. The aim is to provide urban planners with visual tools for thinking about nature education in urban settings. While green spaces along school routes afford everyday experiences of nature, those close to schools, provide natural resources for lessons in science, art, natural history, etc. In contrast to much present educational hype, the project’s aim is not to create a heavy moral stance of caring for nature, nor a Latin glossary of flora and fauna. The aim is rather to create an underplayed, everywhere present social aesthetic, a taken-for-granted sense of ‘what is’, ‘what should be’ and ‘what must be attended to’. Somewhat like the relationship we have with traffic lights that keep us safe if we follow the rules, and need immediate fixing if they break down.

This paper draws on MacDougall’s notion of social aesthetics (1999, 2015) to discuss regreening cities as educational acts of world-making that affect generations to come, just as the urban planners of yesteryear affected our senses of what cities are/should be. Of concern is the relationship between worldmaking and aesthetics. When humans work hard to begin again, for example to create new solutions to living densely together in growing cities, the new worlds invested in tend to prove just as stubborn to change as the old. The question pursued here is thus: keeping the ongoing human need to learn to learn in mind, how might we fashion more light-handed human-nature relations and natural learning environments that afford tweaking, adapting, experimenting and changing along the way, in ways appropriate to situations at hand.

## **Studying organizational digitization – a case of multiple layers of learning**

*Mette Marie Vad Karsten, Lead Anthropologist, DBI – The Danish Institute of Fire and Security Technology*

### **Abstract**

What does it take for an organization to execute digitization initiatives and engage in cross-departmental and cross-disciplinary work to build digital programs, which externalize pieces of knowledge and expertise previously kept internally in organizations? What does it take to think differently about professional expertise, to collaborate in new ways that are relatively new to an industry or academic discipline, or to transform analogous input into digital output? And not least: what does it take for an anthropologist to keep track of such changes and transformations?

In this paper, I draw on examples from fieldwork at the Danish Institute of Fire and Security Technology in Denmark; an organization increasingly engaged in digitization and digitalization of fire safety in the Danish architecture, engineering and construction industry. With this organization as an ethnographic backdrop, my answer to the initial questions above would be: a great deal of hard work, plenty of misunderstandings and collaboration, and steep learning curves. On numerous occasions, the development of the digital products I traced anthropologically was put on a hold as economic, managerial, or other organizational structures dominated and steered the products in often unimagined directions. What I shall argue in this paper is that doing organizational digitization – and doing industrial fieldwork amidst such processes – is inherently about learning. In this case of digitization of fire safety expertise, such learning and transformation was rarely frictionless or straight forward. Rather, it was oftentimes slow and incremental.

On this year's MEGA seminar, we reflect upon what it means 'to begin - again'. With the case of digitization in organizations, where ruptures, stops, and reshufflings often dominate such transformation, I would like to consider how we may understand organizational learning in such a setup, and reflect upon what such ethnographic engagement can tell us about our own learning and beginnings as anthropologists, researchers, professionals and collaborators.

## **The visual learning of machine learning**

*Jamie Wallace, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Anthropology, DPU, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

Machine learning involves complex sets of statistical and engineering approaches and tools able to determine the response of robots to the physical world. Increasingly criticized from the learning sciences as merely dependent upon mathematical functions and data collection detached from the continuous material phenomena and cultural entanglements of human learning, machine learning is nonetheless the result of the very human activity of computer science and robotics. Typically, working in multidisciplinary teams their collaboration and dissemination of knowledge involve multiple forms of visual inscriptions, written text and mathematical formulae. This paper takes a visual anthropological approach to their learning by considering the use of photos, graphic notation and computational visual media used in the development of machine learning and computer vision. It builds upon Tim Ingold's notion of attentionality to consider visual inscriptions beyond that of the symbolic presentation of rational scientific proof. Rather, by looking across representational forms and practices it considers what researchers are attending to and caring for as they are learning to be "answerable" to one another. It considers how inscriptions of real world and simulated environments, artefacts and bodies are sequenced and juxtaposed. It goes on to show how machine learning is dependent upon ways of visually depicting impressions of absence and presence through visual proposals, arguments and "taskscape".

## **Learning with potentials**

*Cathrine Hasse, Professor, Department of Educational Anthropology, DPU, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

"How should we live?", asks Tim Ingold, in a brief yet comprehensive book on anthropology (Ingold 2018). Any answer to this question must grant a significant role to learning. But what *is* learning? Some would equate it with experience, but this, on its own, is not enough to deepen our understanding of what learning really is. In this chapter, I will argue that learning is fundamentally a process that lies behind the ways we attend to the world. It is an ongoing process of transformation by which the material (technological) traces of what we have previously learned are mobilised in the course of learning something new. The potentials of such learning are not realised or fulfilled by willful acts, on the part of either teachers or of

learners, but inhere in the ongoing creation of fields of attention, emergent agency and the mutual responsiveness – or correspondence – that these make possible (Ingold 2017). We can understand this process in three ways, each of which challenges instrumental understandings of learning used in AI and robotics.

1. Whether or not a technology is present or not, learning takes place in the relationship between a sociomaterial environment and the meaningful conceptual resources with which preceding learning has equipped humans but not machines.

2. Again, regardless of the presence of a technology, conceptual learning is a process of embodiment that involves human and non-human ultra-social collectivity.

3. The potentials conferred by preceding learning reside not in the head nor even in the body of any individual person, but in the relations among and between a collectivity of persons and their material environment.

Our correspondence with the social and material environment, and our ways of attending to it, are continuously developed within the context of these relations. Thus, what we call creativity, improvisation and imaginations of a future world or world-making are rooted in an ultra-social process of learning. I shall make use of a number of ethnographic studies of humanoid robots to clarify these points.



## **PANEL 2A      Evoking Ecologies: Multi-modal anthropology as new beginning?**

Stalden 1, August 24<sup>th</sup>, 9:00-11:30 & 14:00-16:30

*Convenors: Karen Waltorp (KU), Ton Otto (AU), Cecilie Rubow (KU), & Stine Krøijer (KU).*

*Discussants: Panelists & Eduardo Kohn (McGill)*

### **Description**

In this panel we are interested in thinking with the concept of ‘ecologies’ across very different fields. And we are similarly interested in experimental research methods and ways of working in ‘alternative imagistic and sensorial modes’ as Eduardo Kohn suggests. We do not seek the masterly but alternative ways of knowing and representing in a shared exploration of how to evoke ecologies. For anthropology, still wrestling with the crisis of representation and new decolonial arguments for letting anthropology burn (Jobson 2020), this might be a new beginning?

It could be argued that two of the most important forces affecting contemporary global culture are the ecological crisis and the rapid spread of digital media. We invite here to think very broadly with the term ecologies: The root ‘eco’ can be taken in its original Greek sense of ‘oikos’, that is, ‘house, domestic property, habitat, natural milieu’ – but also in the sense of eco-system. An inspiration is Gregory Bateson’s idea of an ecology of mind (1972), and Felix Guattari’s conceptual framework of three ecologies (2000). The latter extends the definition of ecology to encompass social relations and human subjectivity as well as environmental concerns. All approaches to ‘ecologies’ are equally welcome: Studies of/with the deep ecology movement, or new takes on ecology that focus on media ecologies, digital ecologies, or even memory ecologies. We also welcome contributions dealing with the question of *which* ecologies we can study in relations to *what* kinds of inquiry – how does thinking with this term configure the questions we ask in specific ways?

Ecology is defined as that branch of biology dealing with the interrelationships between living organisms and their environment. Many anthropological studies of environmental issues in the Anthropocene era contribute to this field, and researchers push for new ways to disseminate acutely important findings to broader publics in ways that do not reduce that which they seek to portray and communicate. In working with other formats for communicating, the ways of knowing and ‘becoming familiar with’ also transform.

How can we research ecologies? How can we draw on the conceptual affordances of the term? How can we *know* through producing and sharing knowledge in different registers i.e. sound, images, objects, installations? We invite contributions in alternative formats to the written academic paper: multimedia, multimodal or experimental textual formats (vignettes, spoken words, ethno-fiction), an object, a video clip, audio clip/montage, images, poster presentations, AR, VR, web or other. The idea is to present and discuss work-in-progress, and presentations involving new, early-phase explorative tinkering with new technologies or formats are particularly welcome.

## Schedule

### Morning Sessions 9:00-11:30

9:00-9:10 Welcome & Introduction

#### *Session I: Exhibiting*

9:10-9:25 **The belongings of the of the dead** *Ton Otto*

9:25-9:40 **Multimodal (Memory) Ecology** *Anne Chahine*

9:40-9:55 **Forest Documents** *Stine Krøijer*

9:55-10:10 Comments by discussants *Cecilie Rubow & Karen Walторp*

10:10-10:20 Discussion

#### *Session II: Ecologies*

10:20-10:35 **The ecology of cis-lunar space** *Nina Holm Vohnsen*

10:35-10:50 **Ecologies, interventions, and new beginnings?** *Birgit Bräuchler*

10:50-11:10 **Ecologies tell stories – about landscapes** *Inge-Merete Hougaard, Kathrine Dalsgaard & Stine Krøijer*

11:10-11:10 Comments by discussant *Ton Otto*

11:10-11:30 Discussion

## Afternoon Sessions 14:00-16:30

14:00-14:05 Welcome Back

### *Session III: Narration*

14:05-14:20 **Modular fantasies and inventive engagements** *Jonas Falzarano Jessen*

14:20-14:35 **Data as infrastructure** *Brit Ross Winthereik*

14:35-14:50 **Broken Myths** *Cecilie Rubow*

14:50-15:05 **Bunker beginnings in sceptic landscapes** *Mads Daughjerg*

15:05-15:15 Comments by discussant *Eduardo Kohn*

15:15-15:25 Discussion

### *Session IV: Flow of Images*

15:25-15:40 **IKERASAK** *Christian Vium*

15:30-15:45 **Science TV** *Adrienne Mannov & Astrid Oberborbeck Andersen (w. Eva La Cour & Tinne Zenner)*

15:45-16:00 **Two scenes** *Karen Waltorp*

16:00-16:15 Comments by discussant *Eduardo Kohn*

16:15-16:30 Discussion

## Presentations

### **The belongings of the dead. An exploration in multimodal memory ecology**

*Ton Otto, Professor, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

#### **Abstract**

Inspired by the concept of ecology and theories stemming from neurobiology about the autopoietic (and sympoietic) processes of the living, I wish to explore how human selves are realized in constant exchange with an environment that can be understood as a multimodal memory ecology. Acknowledging that this ecology is constituted and structured by the availability of a wide range of media – from material infrastructures and the printed press, to digital images and social media – I will focus on the ubiquity of material things in our daily

lives and how they provide an ecology for memory practices that influence the constitution of our selves. In particular I will investigate how the things left behind by our deceased can reveal ongoing processes of remembering, forgetting and the constitution of self-other relationships. My case study is based on a section of the Moesgaard exhibition ‘The life of the Dead’ in which we materially evoked or made ‘present’ different examples of how things mediate evolving relationships between a person (a self) and relevant dead as well as living others.

## **Multimodal (Memory) Ecology - Reflections on a ‘metabolistic’ venture**

*Anne Chahine, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

This contribution focuses on the potential of multimodal forms of inquiry concerning memory and the mediation of self while working with young people from Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland). I am exploring the concept of ecology for its potential to contextualise the interdependency of different actors involved while engaging in multimodal research practices. Actors are hereby more widely understood as ‘organisms’ that stand in relationship with each other and include human as well as non-human entities. The presentation foregrounds a study where young Greenlanders were invited to engage in the performative process of creating ‘future memories’ for a digital space called ‘The Future Memory Collection’. The individual ‘memory texts’, consisting of an object, story and other media, became part of a larger whole once put in relation to each other in the online realm. These cultural products were then converted into workshop material and re-used for co-analysing their meaning and representational value in focus groups with young people, also from Kalaallit Nunaat.

For the MEGA Seminar, I will be sharing insights from these different multimodal ‘spaces of encounter’ and highlight their interconnectedness and potential to be contextualised as ‘metabolistic’ in nature, referring to a living, breathing, interdependent, and un-finished research practice as such. The format will either be a regular paper and/or a short audio-/videoclip.

## **Forest Documents**

*Stine Krøijer, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

### **Abstract**

My presentation takes point of departure in three collaborative exhibitions, which were aimed at teasing out the ecological agencies of forests through engagements with different audiences.

Based on fieldwork with and among the Siekopai in the Ecuadorian Amazon, audiences at the climate summit in Paris, at the ethnographic Weltmuseum in Vienna, and at a Danish art museum were invited into an animated landscape through a combination of video works, photo installations, sound images and social interactive art titled Forest Documents. In this presentation, I will show snippets of these works and of the thoughts and stories about ecological agency elicited from audiences through the interactive art project. I will reflect on our plans to give the exhibition a new beginning in Ecuador - in a different and charged political landscape - and what this may tell us about collaboration and the compilation of ecological agencies.

### **The ecology of cis-lunar space: studying the industrialization of space**

*Nina Holm Vohnsen, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

#### **Abstract**

Cislunar space is the name for the volume of space between Earth and Moon. This space is sparsely occupied, mainly by one international space station and a steady growth of satellites and space junk in orbit around the Earth. Now and then, an asteroid passes by close enough to earn it the name near-Earth-object or – if it impacts Earth – a meteorite. Yet the industry derived from commercial space activities in cis-lunar space is projected by leading American investment banks to grow within the next 30 years to form an economy of almost \$3 trillion – up from 350 billion today. This projection is in and of itself instrumental in realizing its conclusion – investors and businesses are scrambling to be part of the new great space adventure. So how does one, as an anthropologist, study what in investment circles are called “the industrialization of space” projected to take place in the coming decades? In this presentation, I will explore what for the purpose of this panel will be described as the ecology of cis-lunar space. Ecology is here taken to designate the relationship between organisms and their environment. The organisms under scrutiny are not bio-organisms belonging the Earth’s biosphere. Rather they are human thoughts, visions, and ideas residents of Earth’s noosphere (Vernadsky) and expressed in business cases and investment strategies to be realized in new space technology or - infrastructure. The presentation will take place in the year 2050 as a guided tour of the cislunar noosphere and introduce the spectator to key sites of leisure and commerce.

### **Ecologies, interventions and new beginnings? Indigeneity and land in Indonesia**

*Birgit Bräuchler, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

### **Abstract**

Indonesia's current president wants to develop Indonesia from its margins. One target area for capitalist investment to foster new beginnings are the Aru Islands in Maluku Province, Eastern Indonesia. Governments, investors and local population groups invoke diverging ecologies. Government and investor argue that nature must be adapted to the economic needs of the islands' inhabitants so that the area can finally prosper. For people indigenous to the area societal relations and cultural meanings are more important; for them, such capitalist intrusions cause the disturbance of an ecological balance that is deeply ingrained in the cultural and societal set-up of indigenous livelihoods. Given existing power relations in Indonesian politics and the weak legal standing of indigenous people, such clashes are often reduced to a hegemonic state against oppressed marginalised people, which overlooks or ignores power struggles and divergent interpretations within the respective parties. This paper focuses on these tensions within the Aruese *adat* community and follows the pluralisation and diversification of indigenous ecologies in response to outside interventions that threaten to drive a wedge between those longing for a new beginning and those resisting the investment plans. Access and entitlements to land are central in these struggles and are legitimised through customary law, national laws or a global indigenous rights discourse, depending on the interests involved. The politics of culture figures prominently on all levels.

### **Ecologies tell stories – about the landscape**

*Inge-Merete Hougaard, Postdoc, LUCSUS, Lund University & Guest Researcher, Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

*Kathrine Dalsgaard, Research Assistant, Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

*Stine Krøijer, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

### **Abstract**

What stories does the landscape tell? And who tells stories about the landscape? This joint presentation of the research project on Narratives and Co-creation in Multifunctional Land consolidation (*'Lokale Landvindinger'*) takes point of departure in the notion of landscapes as co-created. In Denmark, the quest to address climate change has sparked an increased interest in changing landscape and land use. Intensively cultivated fields are envisioned as extensively grazed meadows, drained wetlands are set to be 'let loose' to flood, and low-lying organic soils are imagined as nature parks and recreative areas. All this is to come about through a state-

mediated mechanism aiming for a process of multifunctional land consolidation. In this, landscapes are not just the ‘background’ on which human activity unfolds, but *affect* human social and cultural life. Together with more-than-human actors like dikes and drainpipes, grass and grazers, moths and machines, humans tell stories about landscapes and thereby come to co-create them in relational webs that we for a lack of better word think of as ecologies. In this presentation, we will outline the plan of the research project to create 100 stories on and from the landscape and develop a not-yet-specified interactive map. We suggest that researching ecologies through non-conventional academic methods - using audio, visual or audio-visual methods, as well as undertaking sensory and other experimental explorations - also paves the way for communicating research in alternative ways. As an example, a recent project intended to reduce GHG emissions from low-lying organic soils through the removal of drainage and pumps, has resulted in a new lake appearing in the landscape. The lake is popularly called ‘*Heltzens Sø*’ (*Heltzen’s Lake*), named after the owner of the land on which it appeared. What landscape stories does the lake tell? And what does Mr. Heltzen tell? Going beyond the human view, we intend to explore the co-creation and sharing of landscape stories as narrated by ecological selves and find ways to mediate it through the interactive map.

## **Modular fantasies and inventive engagements: A collaborative anthropology of digital water futures in the making**

*Jonas Falzarano Jessen, PhD Student, Department of Culture and Learning, Aalborg University*

### **Abstract**

Scholarship on phenomena like ‘digital water’ – a cyber-physical ‘ecosystem’ consisting of a large number of sensors and intelligent processing and sharing of data – often takes shape as a critique of ecomodernist dream-worlds of systemic solutions and universal scalability. With this paper, I take the fantasies, water regimes, and forms of expertise that emerge out of – and are stored within – smart water infrastructures as ethnographic objects of inquiry. Drawing on reflections from fieldwork and ethnographic encounters among what I describe as the “digital water pioneers” in Denmark, I am invested in understanding the performativity of systemic, holistic views of digital water ecosystems in generating material and semiotic effects in the world.

Along with the rise of Danish initiatives for the development and export of holistic water technologies, the question of scalability is challenged by an increasingly changing, complex

and uncertain world. As an emic term, modular thinking, i.e. reusing standardized or partially standardized elements of a digital water solution across various contexts, is envisioned to pose a solution. On the contrary, anthropological research on modular simplification, as an etic term, deem it as a naïve approach prone to failure. But can modular thinking act as a leap towards an inventive, interdisciplinary and (eco)systemic knowledge production?

While exploring the idea of modularity in invoking imaginaries of scalability and digital futures within the Danish water industry, this paper encourages, also, to reflect on the potential theoretical and methodological implications, affordances, and possibilities of a collaborative anthropology of water and data eco-systems.

Through ethnographic reflections on my collaboration with the members of the interdisciplinary research group that I am part of, this paper stands, finally, as an invitation to (co)imagine the role of anthropology in encouraging alternative poetics and politics of relations in the field, of interdisciplinary knowledge-production and representation in situations of shared concerns. What possible equitable water futures are (un)made through digital water imaginaries? How does ‘modular thinking’ potentially affect digital water ecosystems? And is it possible to develop an ethnography *of* and *with* the actors that contribute to their emergence? (The presentations will be modular/presenting a prototype).

## **Data as infrastructure: Collapsing ecologies and their life-forms**

*Brit Ross Winthereik, Professor, Center for Digital Welfare, Department of Business IT, IT University of Copenhagen*

### **Abstract**

Infrastructures are integral to human life. They are also ubiquitous as electricity networks, water pipes, industrial food production, sewage systems, information and communication technologies, financial systems, and much more. They permeate our societies and can be found in all corners of the world (Anand et al., 2018; Winthereik & Wahlberg, in press).

Infrastructure studies have taught us that as infrastructures grow, their purposes tend to change. This has been described as ‘function creep’ but is more aptly seen as both a change in the functioning of the infrastructure itself and as a transformation of its context or field of operation. Digital infrastructures seem to be especially prone to this kind of change due to the many potentialities ascribed to them. In her book on surveillance capitalism Shozana Zuboff (2019) described how technology companies utilize metadata about costumers to predict new needs for products and services. Zuboff’s work marks an interesting moment in infrastructures studies,



where data went from being that which was transported along IT systems to becoming the infrastructure for services and innovation.

In this paper I empirically ground the proposition that data are changing its role from that which is being transported around into becoming infrastructure themselves. Fieldwork in a Danish municipality that seeks to become data-driven anchors the point that in Denmark, data has become infrastructure for welfare. What we are seeing is akin to a new body politics, where the data infrastructure does not consist of meta-data alone (like Zuboff described is the case for big tech), but of blood samples, DNA, school grades, number plates and face images and other more closely representing bodies. This infrastructural transformation from system to data is both a transformation of citizenship and state relations, also impacting on rights and justice.

For infrastructure researchers it can be considered a shift from infrastructures to ecologies in which data reside as a a life-form, a promissory entity oriented towards future potentials. Helmreich and Roost's rendering of the difference between forms of life and a life-form is useful here. To them the latter supports "a universalistic approach that can be found in the computer-simulation driven field of Artificial Life, with its attempt to abstract the logical form of life in different material forms" (Helmreich and Roosth, 2010).

Thinking with the notion of data ecologies as environment that nurtures a collapse between entities and their representation in data (Douglas-Jones, Walford & Seaver, 2021), in the paper I explore whether and how ontics can offer a conceptual departure point for anthropological navigation within this collapse.

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## **Broken myths: Helene dies again**

*Cecilie Rubow, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

### **Abstract**

In this non-paper I will tell the story about Helene, a Swedish woman who fled her husband's wicked family and desperately plunged into the cold sea, where a rock emerged and took her to Tisvilde, a small village in North Zealand. When local people carried her away from the beach, the steep hills opened up, split in two halves revealing a spring with clear and cold water. When the procession continued inland and put down Helene to have a rest, the ground opened up and swallowed Helene. From that day on the spring has flowed with healing water and people who sleep at the grave are cured from their illnesses.

This story has been retold during more than four centuries in different versions and for different purposes. I will retell some of the versions by weaving them into changing ecologies of land and religion.

## **Bunker beginnings in sceptic landscapes: Ecologies of collaboration on the Danish West Coast**

*Mads Daugbjerg, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

This paper discusses different ecologies in which the ruined World War II bunkers on the Danish (and European) West Coast are embroiled. Drawing on field material and research interventions from a Danish section of Hitler's 'Atlantic Wall', I discuss how the bunkers might be usefully understood as key elements in different 'ecologies of collaboration'. This, I suggest, is an apt terminology and analytical prism, since the bunkers in their present weathered and ambiguous state are results of several historic layers of 'collaboration'. Firstly, their construction in the 1940's was dependent on opportunistic Danish labourers and companies collaborating with the German occupation (i.e. collaboration understood harmfully, in the dictionary's sense of 'working secretly to help an enemy or opponent'). Secondly, as nigh-immovable concrete structures partly submerged in the sand and slowly being taken over by their surroundings, the bunkers are excellent examples of those kinds of more-than-human 'collaborative' ecologies involving a multitude of forces and species that are a cornerstone of much work within the environmental humanities. Finally, and not least, the research interventions that I draw upon from 2017-18 were explicitly meant to 'rethink' and 'innovate' tourism typologies and heritage practices along the North Sea Coast and foster 'new

engagements' and possibilities of collaboration – of the benign, positive kind – between locals and (predominantly German) visitors to the area. Inspired by George Marcus and others, we sought to accommodate new beginnings by organising an in-situ film festival in the bunker landscape, involving local landowners and other stakeholders in an attempt to utilize the aesthetic possibilities and special atmospheres of the bunkers in new ways. However, we found ourselves struggling to stitch together the desired patchworks in what I came to understand as a 'sceptic' landscape full of cumbersome structures and troubled memories. In fact, I will tentatively argue, the limited success of our research collaborations might be better understood if we view them in light of the historical role and perception of the bunkers as outcomes of negative 'collaborative' ecologies. Our bunker festival can be seen as a multimodal ethnographic experiment in itself, and I will draw on images and footage from the event to support my presentation.

### **IKERASAK: towards an immersive anthropology**

*Christian Vium, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

#### **Abstract**

IKERASAK is a small settlement in the vast fjord systems of north-western Greenland. It is also the name of my most recent research-based exhibition comprised of 8 film-channels and 16 audio-channels, exhibited at Fotografisk Center, Copenhagen in the spring 2021.

In this talk, I will present excerpts from the exhibition (moving images, photographs, sound, text, print, and archive material), and elaborate on the ways in which I have tried to create an immersive ecology that invites audiences to reflect upon notions of time, remembrance, and place, through a multimodal collapse and re-assemblage of temporal and spatial scales in three dimensions. I will discuss how collaborating with the inhabitants of Ikerasak around the analysis of vernacular archives, and working in and across diverse media and formats inform my anthropological research practice, offering insights into particular moments of analytical clarity that emerge during the production of the exhibition.

IKERASAK is part of my ongoing research project 'Reframing Colonial Histories' (The Carlsberg Foundation), which investigates Danish colonial histories through an interventionist, multimodal approach.

### **Science TV: Multimodal interventions in cryptography research Generating and Performing Interdisciplinary Research and Communication Ecologies**

*Adrienne Mannov, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

*Astrid Oberborbeck Andersen, Associate Professor, Department of Culture & Learning, Aalborg University*

*Eva La Cour, Visual Artist & PhD Student, Valand Academy of Art, University of Gothenburg*

*Tinne Zenner, Visual Artist, Filmmaker & Programmer*

## **Abstract**

With the copious and omnivorous generation of digital data circulating around the planet and multiple, seemingly endless ideas for how to exploit this data for the common (capital) good (Zuboff 2019)), debates about how technologists may control the effects of this utopian vision of ubiquitous computing (Dourish and Bell 2011) remain sparse. New legal frameworks such as the GDPR have left publics, not quite “naked”, but “wearing a thong”<sup>i</sup>, offer important first steps in developing ways to protect publics from data abuse. Others have simply suggested generating fewer digital data (Rogaway 2015) as a way to cap abuse. A third method involves technical tools that can limit the ways in which data is used and who might have access to it. These are, among others, cryptographic tools. The mathematics and engineering behind these tools are however specialized scientific fields that require expert insight. This is a kind of scientific knowledge ecology that excludes social considerations, and its borders are defined by academic silos. The engineers we work with approach the contemporary and future world as a cyber-physical system, that is, environments built with and functioning across the physical - digital divide, with tendency to exclude historical, social and legal sensibilities and specifications (Barocas and boyd 2017). In addition, the general public often operates with, if any, very rudimentary insight into this field. Few end-users of cryptographic technologies fully understand how they function, or when and how they fail, which leads to trust issues.<sup>ii</sup> For these reasons, we have worked with our co-researchers from math, cryptography and engineering on collaborative forms of research and dissemination (on our VR prototype, see Andersen et al forthcoming; on our app, see Mannov et al 2020). In this panel, we present works-in-progress from our Science TV production both to uncover and rework/re-design cryptographic sensibilities in an interdisciplinary space, and to generate ways in which these logics might be shared with non-technical outsiders and include social considerations. In our presentation, we attend to ecologies at two levels. One is cyber-physical systems as ecologies that are constituted by biological processes as well as physical and digital infrastructures, where algorithms and data are as common as humans and other species. The second is the ecology of research and communication practices, which we extend to beyond-academic systems and

modes of knowledge production, and which we seek to expand beyond “knowledge” to also include sensing and sense-making. Through a multimodal presentation of our Science TV works-in-progress, we wish to spur discussion about how broadening the borders of scientific knowledge ecologies might be possible through creative and collaborative methods and modalities, and might enable new spaces for sensemaking and debate about what it means to inhabit cyber-physical worlds.

## **Two scenes: An Afghan-Danish Film Collective in a Media Ecology**

*Karen Waltorp, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

### **Abstract**

With a starting point in collaborative efforts in the ARTLife Film Collective, I here invoke the term ecology as a metaphor to think with. I am concerned with an integrated notion of environments, where media is one aspect of the broader ecology of ideas, images and machines/technologies. The term *media ecology* points to a shift from a focus on specific media platforms to the cross-cutting patterns of engagement and media as an integrated environment, using a broad lens that also considers their connections to wider socio-political systems. I draw on Gregory Bateson’s ecology of mind (2000 [1972]) and Felix Guattari’s ethico-aesthetic frame of *ecosophy*, counting the environment, social relations and human subjectivity as three ecological registers (2014 [2000]), fusing this with feminist film and media scholar Laura Marks’s notion of flows of images (2015, 2016).

We and our informants live in worlds saturated with media, also interfacing with imaginaries and cosmological ideas and notions (Waltorp 2020). Separating these flows of embodied, (un)conscious knowledge and images from the digital circuits and broadcast media is an artificial divide. Participant observation can help us gain situated understandings of how these realms relate, how images flow across- and are made meaningful to people. In the ARTLife Film Collective an integral part of the inquiry is *how* we meet and interface with the actors and expectations of the media industry in a productively peripheral position (see Waltorp and ARTLife Film Collective 2021). Studying (in) this media ecology, drawing on multimodal approaches and as part of a collective where things only become manifest as we go along, implies a dialectic move between strict and loose thinking (Bateson 2000) across registers. Thinking through 2 scenes from a film by the Film Collective – counting four women of Afghan background and one Danish Anthropologist - a red thread emerges in terms of how the media images impact on how one can imagine oneself, and how digital media play a part in (re)acting to the mirror that others hold up, articulating oneself otherwise.



## **PANEL 2B      Cyclic Beginnings and the Newness of Repair**

Stalden 2, August 24<sup>th</sup>, 8:45-11:15

*Convenors: Cæcilie K. Kildahl (AU), Miriam Waltz (AU) & Maia Ebsen (KU)*

### **Description**

Current anthropology on rupture and radical social transformation has largely emphasised the centrality of human motivation, intention, aspiration and agency as the driving forces behind radical ‘breaks’ with the old world and the formation of new ways of engaging with the world to come. The emphasis on rupture often entail a radical break with the old order, suggesting that breaking with the old completely is a viable option. However, work on agricultural practices suggests a different form of beginning again, where rupture and transformation occur within cycles that may signal a fresh start but are rooted in the past at the same time.

In this panel, we wish to address alternative visions and ways of engaging with transformations and the formation of beginnings. We wish to approach change – social or ecological - through the driving force of ecological cycles. This means taking seriously the agency of plants, insects, microbes and such. Moreover, we wish to invite papers addressing beginnings as cyclic endeavours that always already embody a materiality from the past. In this sense, cyclical beginnings are never simply beginnings but always also transferring something through re-usage (of soils, ideas, practices, traditions).

This panel’s focus begins in ruined landscapes (Tsing, Stoler), which often entail repair more than radical newness. With this panel, we aim to discuss anthropological engagement within different kinds of cyclical time-spaces through the notion of repair. Repair work is often seen as conforming rather than breaking with the old world (Henke, Guthman). Following this, how may we perceive beginnings as repair work? Moreover, how may we understand newness through the act of repair?

We invite people to share their ethnography of cyclical, ecosocial beginnings, and to reflect upon the work being done to accomodate or erase old patterns and styles of thinking into new cycles, where things inevitably sediment, stay behind and carry over.

## Schedule

- 9:00-9:10 Introduction & Welcome
- 9:10-9:30 **The Ocean Cleanup of Entangled Species** *Johanne Tarpgaard*
- 9:10-9:30 **Exploring Team Cultures Through the Notion of Repair** *Kasper Pape Helligsøe*
- 9:30-9:50 **Ocean Matters** *Fine Brendtner*
- 9:50-10:10 **Repairing agrarian worlds through no-till** *Cæcilie Kramer Kildahl*
- 10:10-10:30 **Repairing and destroying interspecies relations of maize, farmers, and fall armyworm in Kenya** *Miriam Waltz (w. Konstantin Biehl)*
- 10:30-10:55 Open Question Session
- 10:55-11:20 Prepared Questions by Panelists
- 11:20-11:30 Wrap-up and Concluding Remarks

## Presentations

### **The Ocean Cleanup of Entangled Species**

*Johanne Tarpgaard, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

#### **Abstract**

Plastic pollution is just one of many ocean crises that communities and organizations all over the world try to “repair.” It is a compound crisis of “natureculture” – a complex outcome of the interaction of anthropogenic histories with ecological and chemical dynamics. The first report of plastic debris in the ocean appeared in the beginning of the 1970s, and in 1997, Captain Charles Moore discovered what was later known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

Focusing on the case of The Ocean Cleanup, which was founded in 2013 by the 18-year-old Dutch inventor Boyan Slat, this talk examines an example of repair work that is inspired by human motivation and aspiration that aims to clean up 90% of floating ocean plastic pollution. Bringing together discard studies, science and technology studies, and more-than-human anthropology, I explore the question of what belongs at sea and the difficulties of trying to do repair-work, in an environment that is controlled by currents, temperature, and chemical saturation. What happens when what we try to repair has already shifted form, and the plastics at sea are no longer a distinct form of matter?



How, this talk asks, might we better attend to the ways in which plastics and life exist and move together, and how these entanglements inform notions of beach and ocean clean ups? And what can more-than-human perspectives on ocean plastic pollution teach us about the tensions within practices and analytics repair?

## **Exploring Team Cultures Through the Notion of Repair**

*Kasper Pape Helligsøe, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

In this paper, I explore workplace team cultures through Christopher Henke's concept of "repair". Since the Hawthorne studies of the late 1920s and early 1930s, working in teams has been widely recognized as a desirable way of organizing a workforce. As this form of organization has become increasingly popular in organizations around the world, the concepts of "organizational culture" and "team culture" have attracted the interests of companies in search of a way to synthesize the personal of the worker and the collective of the organization. Companies today want to work with their cultures, including the international software company in which I conducted most of my ph.d.-thesis fieldwork. The problem is, however, that in the notion of culture that dominates organizations and organizational theory, including the influential work of Edgar Schein, culture is seen as something homogeneous and stable - something that is just there. On the contrary (and in accordance with current trends in mainstream anthropology), I argue that culture is not fixed but in a constant state of becoming which enables leaders and team members to actively influence their team culture through their everyday actions. Exploring team culture through the notion of repair, defined as a social practice for negotiating order, places the active "work" that goes into creating, maintaining and transforming team cultures at center stage. Approaching team culture and teamwork through the notion of repair thus emphasizes that team culture isn't just there, it is something that individuals shape and is shaped by in their everyday work lives at team-based organizations.

## **Ocean matters: Material agency in environmental conservation efforts**

*Fine Brendtner, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

Not least since the coining of the term "Anthropocene", as the geological epoch in which anthropogenic activity becomes the primary driving force for ecological crisis, a positivist understanding of the separation of humans and nature within science is wavering.

Facing manifold ecological crisis, natural scientists turn toward habitat mappings in order to locate vulnerable ecosystems with a view to protecting them from harmful anthropogenic impacts. I investigate one such conservation effort at sea by building on ship-based fieldwork with marine biologists of the Icelandic Marine and Freshwater Research Institute on their visual survey cruise in order to locate vulnerable marine habitats. This research has come up against the insistent curiosities of material influences, such as the ocean's waters as the medium in which imaging tools and vision are embedded, which cannot be accounted for by human-centric analysis alone. I therefore argue that through looking to the practices around and outcomes of visual tool use in deep sea science, oceanic knowledge (be it marine scientific or anthropological) can be seen as a dynamic system that is co-created in interaction between human and other-than-human actors. Looking to the material environment as an analytical tool (Benett 2010), rather than as a descriptive background for ethnographies, highlights the co-constitutive knowledge practices between human and more-than-human entities. It renews the question posed within environmental anthropology and STS studies, of how human epistemologies shape their environments by asking instead: how do environments shape human epistemologies?

This paper traces the outlined argument and opens up further questions about the way in which material influences of environments as well as weather patterns and ecological cycles might enact agency in changing ways.

## **Repairing agrarian worlds through no-till**

*Cæcilie Kramer Kildahl, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the notion of 'repair' in relation to no-till farm practices and asks what new beginnings look like in this context. Taking its departure in the windy spring fields of mid-West Jutland in Denmark, and conventional farmers' different incitements and troubles related to no-till practices, this paper will address how no-till practices confronts dominating farming paradigms build on a premise of high yield efficiency, while simultaneously maintaining patterns of short-term, high yield systems. I will argue that sustainable repair work in agro-industrial settings often fail to transform agricultural practices because it fails to accommodate or consider the implications of what it means to be a farmer in a short-sighted, industrialised agrarian world.

## **Repairing agrarian worlds**

The plough has historically been seen as a technology of modernity paving the way for unprecedented growth, progress and weed control. Tilling allowed, and still allows farmers, to “reset” their fields every year by turning the soil around and thereby combating weeds and other unwanted species. However, today’s climate challenges – erosion, drought, GHG emissions and more - require “healthier” soils, and tilled soils are vulnerable to erosion and mud slides caused by extreme drought and heavy rainfalls. Thus, ploughing is today problematized, and no-till (NT) is offered by agro-scientists as a ‘sustainable’ alternative to restore soil structure and reduce GHG emissions. But how to begin again as a farmer who have used the plough for decades and for whom the plough is as much a technology of wonder allowing high yields, as one of climate disasters?

Based on field work among an ERFA group (i.e. an experience exchange group) consisting of eight conventional farmers in Denmark who all, for different reasons, have decided to remove the plough from their production system, I will show how not tilling the soil introduces new challenges unfit for the demands of the modern farming industry, and reinforces old patterns of maintenance and accommodation of status quo. Discussing the concept of repair, I will show how the lack of agro-scientists in understanding and integrating the demand of farmers and their perception of repair-work in the scientific strategies around agricultural transformation limits the way in which sustainable transformation is feasible, and how “tweaking” sustainable initiatives becomes a repair-strategy for the farmers to secure their high yield.

## **Repairing and destroying interspecies relations of maize, farmers and fall armyworm in Kenya**

*Miriam Waltz, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University (Presenting)*  
*Konstantin Biehl, PhD Student, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo*

### **Abstract**

In this paper, we explore how concepts of repair and mending allow us to understand the relationship of Kenyan farmers and the maize they grow. Based on fieldwork in Nyanza, Western Kenya and Upper Meru, Central Kenya, we discuss how repair can be applied to relationships between humans, maize plants and pests. Maize dominates Kenyan diets and is an effective subsistence crop for many farmers. Its relatively high yields come together with a vulnerability to drought, mould, and pests. We will focus on the fall armyworm (FAW), the larvae of a moth species spreading out rapidly in Africa since 2016. Not all crop damages are

reversible and often attempts to do so fail. However, we argue that specifically in the case of the recent and devastating threat by FAW, post-infection-use of pesticides, industrial and traditional, can be understood as forms of repair.

In this specific figuration, repair is an uncertain endeavour and thus requires tinkering and experimentation: Neither can the damaged plants recover themselves nor can farmers directly repair the damage (See also Tironi 2018). In cases of new pests like FAW, farmers have to try new substances and techniques, look for sources of knowledge on the pest and improvise to destroy larvae and enabling recovery. Attempts to repair damaged farms introduce substances that are destructive to insects perceived as a problem (Harbers 2015; Heuts and Mol 2013). However, in addition to this intended destruction, pesticides have the potential to harm humans in the proximity and contaminating crops. Therefore repair, like other forms of care, is not an innocent practice and may lead to unintended, adverse consequences (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). While farmers are aware of this unintended side effect of their practices, they are faced with the disruption and destruction of their livelihood (Jackson 2014; Grant 2020), and oftentimes their close relationship with maize does not evoke feelings of love and affection (Archambault 2016) but despair, anger and frustration (Berglund 2019).

With attempts to repair infected farms discussions emerge around old and new ways of tending to land and crops, which connect small-scale farming today to larger political and economic forces that have historically shaped these landscapes. In this paper we will focus on pesticides as both a new beginning where old styles of farming are re-evaluated, while at the same time forming part of long cycles of agricultural ‘innovation’ that may extend into the future in uncertain ways.

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## **PANEL 2C      Why are you telling me this? Intention and the algorithm**

Forpagterboligen, August 24<sup>th</sup>, 9:00-11:30

*Convenors: Anders Sybrandt Hansen (AU) & Matthew Carey (KU)*

### **Description**

Standard theories of communicative (prototypically linguistic) interactions assume they are composed of a series of layers: a semantic element (what is being said?) and a pragmatic one (what is the context of utterance? and why is the speaker saying this?). Full communication requires speaker and listener to take all of these discrete elements into account. Such theories have, however, been complicated in recent years by the proliferation of what are, *prima facie*, non-intentional communicative agents. These may be Facebook or other social media bots, artificial intelligence conversational constructs, robot journalists, etc. In this panel, we propose to begin again by asking how humans understand and navigate such communicational contexts. How is our use of language transformed by the proliferation of non-human communication and what difference does this make? Do we bracket out intention, attribute it to some ulterior agent, reinject it later on, or do without it altogether? What does this tell us about our interactions with other non-intentional or supra-intentional agents such as inscrutable Gods or spirits? And how does this affect our understanding of such activities as poetry or art? We encourage contributors to examine all forms of interaction with non-intentional communicative agents: from talking fridges to Semitic gods.

### **Schedule**

9:00-9:10      Introduction *Anders Sybrandt Hansen and Matthew Carey*

*First Mini-Session (chaired by Anders)*

9:10-9:25      **What is Behind your Personal Nurse?** *Eva Otto*

9:25-9:40      **Do robots mean what they say?** *Frederik Vejlin*

9:40-10:00      General discussion

*Second Mini-Session (chaired by Matthew)*

- 10:00-10:15 **I am actually the robot?** *Fie Lund*
- 10:15-10:30 **“That doesn’t look like a valid rider account. Try again”** *Katrine Terkelsen*
- 10:30-10:45 **The earth is calling... and this is the last call** *Quentin Gausset*
- 10:45-11:15 General discussion
- 11:15-11:30 Wrap-up

**Presentations**

**What is Behind your Personal Nurse?**

*Eva Otto, PhD Student, SODAS & Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

**Abstract**

Based on my fieldwork in a Danish Digital Agency, I will take a point of departure in the building of an app that attempts to create the “feeling that you are communicating directly with your operating nurse”, while in reality being a formalized structure of push-notifications from the app at relevant times. This case forms part of the growing amount of communications in digital contexts that uses an avatar – in this case the communication from your favorite nurse - to give the impression of direct and personal communication.

Through this example, I demonstrate how this new type of communication is infused with an overflow of intentions from the perspective of the producers, ranging from “a good experience” to surplus sales. The creation of the avatar requires the producers to imagine the future situations in which the communication will take place and attempt to design what they see as an ideal flow of communication. However, because the avatar is dependent on technological affordances, this has the effect of breaking down the design of the communication into specific elements that are of importance to the technological infrastructure, including elements such as timings, number of messages, and the ability to interject in a flow of communication.

By looking at the interaction with the avatar-in-becoming, we learn how one side of this new form of communication is a continuous negotiation between actors imagining an “ideal communication” and what might be seen as the ‘grammar’ of the communication - the specific sales context and technical forms which shape how such communication is formed. Besides, the case might also teach us about the asymmetry of new communication forms such as the

digital avatar. The digital avatar, from the perspective of the producers, rather than non-intentional or supra-intentional, might be seen as super-intentional, however this is not how it is meant to be perceived by its users.

## **Do robots mean what they say? Curious robots, intentional agency, and the logics of experimentation**

*Frederik Vejlin, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

In this talk, I explore two quite different attempts at implementing some form of intentional agency in social robots that I witnessed during my fieldwork in 2017 at the Hiroshi Ishiguro Laboratories (HIL) in Japan. In the first case, the researchers at HIL staged a demonstration of the android ERICA's Intention-Desire System (the I-D System) for a film crew from Al Jazeera, who visited the lab to record a documentary on social robots in Japan. In the second case, I describe a human-robot interaction experiment designed to evaluate whether the algorithmic implementation of *intrinsically motivated curiosity* in the humanoid Robovie would produce more interesting and humanlike interactions when compared to a learning system that attempts to replicate socially appropriate behaviour. I combine Alfred Gell's discussions of intentionality and the art nexus in *Art and Agency* (1998) with Andy Pickering's redescription of scientific experiments as *dances of agency* (e.g. 1995, 2012) to discuss the different configurations of intentionality and agency that emerged in the two situations. I argue that although both ERICA and Robovie might arguably exhibit some interactive forms of intentional agency, the combination of their respective algorithmic systems and the relational matrix in which these were deployed shape their agential possibilities in qualitatively different ways. I show how ERICA's behaviour proceeds from a *logic of replication* that inhibits full participation in the dance of agency, thus resembling Gell's figure of the 'secondary agent', whereas Robovie's algorithmic curiosity enacted a *logic of experimentation* that enabled the robot to take the lead, improvise new 'choreographies,' and thereby perform as a 'primary agent'. Finally, I use this discussion to cautiously approach the question of whether social robots mean what they say and why this might not be the best question to begin with.



## **I am actually the robot! Autism and disembodied communication**

*Fie Lund Christensen, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

It has been suggested that social media is for autistic people what sign language is for the deaf (Dekker, 1999). Because social media is free from body language and eye contact, it opens up the possibility of communication for autistic people. Some of my interlocutors who used online forums, expected them to be more direct and with less to read in-between lines, making them a ‘safe space’. Autistic people have been described as having an ‘autistic sociality’ (Ochs & Solomon, 2010) and as in constant communication with their surroundings, including objects (Baggs, 2007). It has been argued that people with autism have a different kind of brain-wiring; whereas the more common neurotypical brain makes use of a variety of hints that provide others with cues, explaining behavior and intent, for the autistic person these intents drown in an overload of sensory information. To answer this call, I posit that, in the eyes of the autistic, I am a non-intentional communicative agent: I am a robot!

## **“That doesn’t look like a valid rider account. Try again.” Decoding communication from an algorithmic manager in the case of digital platform work in Brussels**

*Katrine Duus Terkelsen, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

Most of us are used to interacting with technologies in our daily life. We all know the agony of trying to fill out an oversimplified questionnaire that only accepts two valid answers: “yes” or “no” because the answers must be quantifiable and must make sense to a machine. Imagine you had the same kind of communication with your manager. How would you adjust to that kind of relationship? The manager cannot see or hear you, but only cares about the data you provide through a machine. Also, you cannot see or hear your manager. She only communicates through short messages, often no more than a sentence at a time, delivered to you through the same machine. Sometimes she might send you an email, but only to communicate major organizational changes or tell you that you will now be transferred to a piecemeal system, being paid 5 euro per order instead of the hourly pay of 9 euro you had received until now. And even in this case, when the email changes the way you are being remunerated, you get the sense that you are not the only one that receives the email. Having an algorithmic manager was the case for the 23 riders of the digital food delivery platform, Deliveroo, that I interviewed in Brussels

in the first half of 2018. The Deliveroo app, which is the riders' main form of communication with the company, mediates between hungry customers, restaurants who want to increase their take-away business, and the very riders I talked to that sought out the flexible work of bicycle delivery.

In this paper, I will outline an empirical example of the communication — the utterances, thoughts and actions — that the app provokes. Together we will hopefully get to discuss the role of technology in the recent phenomenon of digital platform work and, more importantly, what kind of implications this type of communication has for the way we relate to each other (including non-intentional communicative agents).

## **The Earth is calling... and this is the last call**

*Quentin Gausset, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

### **Abstract**

In all human societies, natural imbalances are commonly interpreted as signs of societal imbalances calling for human action, as if animals, plants, rocks, the land or the earth were speaking to us (or some spiritual entities through them), and as if the state of nature was telling us something about the state of culture and the corruption of society. This paper explores different ways through which this communication unfolds, using a variety of examples found at different scales, ranging from taboos and divinatory omens in Cameroon to the latest IPCC scientific report on global warming. It revisits the structuralist insights of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas to show how totemism, animism and *la pensée sauvage* are still guiding the way we perceive ourselves through our environment and vice versa.

## **PANEL 2D      New Beginnings for Old Spaces**

Brænderiet, August 24th, Panel Session 2 &3, 9:00-11:30 & 14:00-16:30

*Convenors: Birgitte Romme Larsen (DPU, AU) & Kirsten Marie Raahauge (KADK)*

*Discussant: Mads Daugbjerg (AU) (for Session I)*

### **Description**

Buildings, places, and landscapes come to gain new uses, as their prior functions, meanings or ownerships for one reason or the other expire. House owners move or pass away, and new inhabitants overtake. Residences burn down or are demolished leaving bare ground for new constructions. Companies relocate or are declared bankrupt and their estates are sold on to other businesses. Metro stations are established where before there were graveyards or public squares. Welfare services are being centralized, rendering local community schools, healthcare centers, or nursing homes into empty buildings that are turned into asylum centers or alcohol rehabilitation units. State institutions are relocated from urban centers to peripheries or vice versa. Military grounds become left-over and are changed into outdoor museums. Nature habitats are overtaken by coalmining or tree felling industries. Real-estate companies buy up farmland, landscapes are turned into national parks. New beginnings simultaneously live off and feed into the closures afore them.

The panel wishes to engage with the new beginnings following from such material switchovers and spatial alterations not as ruptures, but as transition processes wherein past, present and future imaginaries co-exist as spatial layers of cultural and social meaning. Revolving around the relation between material/social traces and that which is no longer there, these beginnings encompass a tension between the present and the absent, thereby becoming part of a plurality of entangled durations. In addition, they interact with larger contexts, giving way for an interplay of material, spatial and social processes in local, regional, national or transnational settings. The many turns, which anthropology has gone through over the last decades (spatial-, material-, atmosphere-, sensual, periphery-, local- etc.-turns) might offer fertile grounds for an investigation of this field of new beginnings.

Against this background, we invite presentations based on ethnographic research addressing issues such as:

- How do spatial changeovers reshape local communities and affect self-understandings and everyday routines of established residents as well as the newcomers?

- How do co-existing, unfinished processes of meaning and identity entangle, and what are the spatial, material, social and cultural ramifications of this entanglement?
- How do interactions between material and social processes – and/or between dissolution and becoming – play out within spatial transitions?
- How do such interactions influence the reuse of space, and the social traditions and cultural imaginaries embedded in the former uses of the space?

## Schedule

### Morning Session 9:00-11:30

#### *Landscapes*

- 9:00-9:05 Introduction to the session *Birgitte Romme Larsen & Kirsten Marie Raahauge*
- 9:05-9:25 **‘Samhället’ and ‘kineserne’** *Sally Anderson*
- 9:25-9:45 **Life in Radioactive Ruins on the Hao Atoll, French Polynesia** *Lis Kayser*
- 9:45-10:05 **I still have no idea where those bricks come from, but that’s not the point**  
*Trine Brinkman*
- 10:05-10:25 **Children’s Notion of Locality and Sense Making in the Changing  
Landscapes of a Danish Ghetto** *Asger Martiny-Bruun*
- 10:25-10:45 **Fenced off** *Michael Eilenberg & Annika Pohl Harrison*
- 10:45-11:15 Comments by discussant *Mads Daugbjerg*
- 11:15-11:30 Plenum Discussion

### Afternoon Session 14:00-16:30

#### *Cities & Buildings*

- 14:00-14:20 **Rendering new futures for disadvantaged housing areas** *Marie Stender*
- 14:20-14:40 **Creative Ruination** *Oscar Salemink*
- 14:40-15:00 **Old concrete is the stuff of dreams** *Asmus Randløv Rungby*
- 15:00-15:20 **The Italian House** *Katrine Mandrup Bach*

15:20-15:40 **Between Relocations and Transformations, Absences and Presences**

*Birgitte Romme Larsen & Kirsten Marie Raahauge*

15:40-16:00 Comments by convenors *Birgitte Romme Larsen & Kirsten Marie Raahauge*

16:00-16:30 Plenum Discussion

## **Presentations**

### **‘Samhället’ and ‘kineserne’: Emerging relationalities in shifting processes of ownership appropriation, erasure and recontextualization**

*Sally Anderson, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Anthropology, DPU, Aarhus University*

#### **Abstract**

This paper explores processes of appropriation, erasure and recontextualization based in different regimes of ownership. It draws on a heuristic juxtaposition of 1) *private* home ownership in a residential area on the outskirts of Copenhagen and 2) *state* ownership of Swedish mountain terrain encompassing traditional dwelling places (*orrnsadji*) of reindeer herding groups (*siida*) with users right to the land. I use this rough comparison to trace different forms of erasures and remainders. The paper argues that the legal right to own, appropriate, remake and erase the living space and landscape of former owners/users, does not redeem legal owners from relational questions of rightful proprietorship or from becoming a new category of others.

### **I still have no idea where those bricks come from, but that’s not the point: Landscape transitions and use wear readings as newcomers working engagements with Lolland**

*Trine Brinkmann, Assistant Professor, Københavns Professionshøjskole (KP)*

#### **Abstract**

In September last year I came across a pile of bricks and broken tiles outside Rødbyhavn on the island of Lolland. It was lying on a small section of grass, next to the road, in the same area as the Fehmarnbelt Tunnel currently being built. At first, I thought I had found some overlooked leftovers from a demolished house. But considering that I was standing in the outskirts of an archaeological excavation site, the chance of having discovered something not already taken into account by the local historical museum was unlikely. So I started asking around. One employee at Museum Lolland-Falster was absolutely certain that there used to be

a house on that very spot and wondered why it had not been documented. A woman from the local historical archive convincingly told me, that nothing had been there, and came to the conclusion, that it was material waste having been dumped there randomly.

Currently Lollandic landscapes are undergoing apparent and very observable changes. In the Rødbyhavn area the construction of the Fehmarnbelt Tunnel is heavily influencing the scenery. In other parts of Lolland, the changes are perhaps less remarkable for someone passing through. However, changes are there. Houses are being torn down and gardens turned into field or, in some villages, small public park-like settings. Thus, as a newcomer to Lolland, one quickly finds oneself engaged in conversations of what once was, and what is about to be.

Inspired by Jason De León this paper explores such conversations as kinds of mundane use wear readings, engaging the newcomer as well as the settled in local landscape transitions. In that sense the reading of the, sometimes very modest, material expressions of these landscape transitions can be considered as an informal kind of work, which everyone, including the unemployed in-migrant, can take part of.

*The paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in relation to the research project, Remote Relocations: Work, Precarity and the Inclusion of Newcomers on Lolland. This part of the project focuses on unemployed people's experiences of moving to Lolland from other Danish municipalities.*

## **Children's notion of locality and sense making in the changing landscapes of a Danish Ghetto**

*Asger Martiny-Bruun, PhD Student, Department of Educational Anthropology, DPU, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

Social housing areas on the Danish governments' hard ghetto list are subject to spatial alterations, demolitions, and remodeling of entire neighborhoods to open the areas for outsiders, attract middle class families and counter territorial stigmas. The plans to change the landscapes is spurred by a moral panic in political discourse and research reports that children in ghetto areas might grow up in parallel societies with social, cultural, and moral values that deviate from normal society (Regeringen 2018; Jensen et al. 2015: 9, 49; Frederiksen et al. 2015; Johansen & Jensen 2017).

With this paper I will present an initial analysis of my ongoing fieldwork (August 2020 – October 2021) as part of a Ph.D.-project about children and their parents' everyday lives in

deprived neighborhoods. I ask how their sense making is influenced by ongoing spatial transitions, looming evictions, and reshaping of landscapes, and how parents and children negotiate social categories, moral hierarchies, and notions of locality/belonging. Through ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and participatory methods (photography, drawing, map-making and/or storytelling) I explore how children and their families understand the landscape they inhabit, how they dwell in it, as well as how they shape and are shaped by it and its changing topography.

Literature:

Frederiksen, N. Ø., Breu, S. V., Glad, A (2015). Fokus på sårbare familier i udsatte boligområder. En kortlægning af problemstillinger og indsatser. Hvidovre: Center for Boligsocial Udvikling

Jensen, N. R., Petersen, K. E., & Wind, A. K. (2015). Daginstitutioner i udsatte boligområder: pædagogisk udvikling i arbejdet med udsatte børn og familier: Et forsknings- og udviklingsprojekt. (1. udg.) København: Institut for Uddannelse og Pædagogik (DPU), Aarhus Universitet.

Johansen, M.-L. E & Jensen, S. B. (2017). "They want us out": Urban Regeneration and the limits of integration in the Danish welfare state. *Critique of Anthropology* 2017, Vol. 37(3) 297-316.

Regeringen (2018). *Ét Danmark uden parallelsamfund.*

## **Fenced off: The spatial alteration of the Danish-German borderlands**

*Michael Eilenberg, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

*Annika Pohl Harrison, Postdoc, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

In June 2018, Danish lawmakers authorized a 70-kilometer long fence along the Danish-German border to prevent the migration of wild boars and the spread of African Swine Fever, a risk and economic threat to Danish pork export. The construction of the fence marks a not previously seen alteration of the natural landscape in the borderlands. The new physical barrier has not only disrupted the natural environment, but farmers, exercisers, dog walkers and local communities in general.

Historically the Danish-German border has been rather fluid and affected by the national orientation of the local populations. A material fence stretching the entire length of the border thus entails a radical interference into the landscape and lives of border communities and wildlife, as well as a visualization of the divide.

This paper will explore how this spatial alteration caused by the fence, has affected border communities both in regards to its tangible materiality as well as the political and emotional debates about (bio) security. Thus, it will investigate the intricate links between biosecurity, and wildlife fencing in the area, and discuss how such processes have affected and nurtured debates about the other, and invigorated old borderland anxieties of separation, exclusion and conflict among neighboring communities. Debates that are deeply entrenched in the history of the Danish-German borderlands.

*Session II: Cities and Buildings – 14:00-16:30*

### **Life in Radioactive Ruins on the Hao Atoll, French Polynesia: On Decay, Regeneration, and Nostalgia**

*Lis Kayser, PhD Student, DIIS & Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

#### **Abstract:**

Although France's Centre for Experimentation in the Pacific (CEP) has faced local and global criticism for testing 193 atomic devices in French Polynesia from 1966 to 1996, many of the 1,200 residents of the Hao atoll feel nostalgic about their nuclear military past. The Hao population experienced substantial socio-economic change when their atoll was transformed into a major military-logistic base for France's nuclear testing program. On the local level, the CEP represents an agent of positive change, introducing lucrative job opportunities, free access to electricity, and a vibrant island life with nightclubs and numerous leisure activities. When the CEP left Hao in the year 2000, some of the abandoned military buildings have been reinhabited by local residents. Based on ethnographic research conducted on the Hao atoll in fall 2019, this paper examines the interplay between the islanders' dwelling in military ruins, nuclear nostalgia, and the radioactive past haunting the present and future. Using an anthropological lens, this paper shows the extent to which the reuse of the CEP infrastructure has challenged nuclear imaginaries, collective identity, and power relations. I argue that radioactive ruins on the Hao atoll represent icons of a romantic Cold War lost. My study offers an alternative analytical angle to the general understanding of how people experience and make sense of the radioactive afterlife of the Cold War in French Polynesia.



## **Rendering new futures for disadvantaged housing areas**

*Marie Stender, Anthropologist & Senior Researcher, BUILD, Aalborg University*

### **Abstract**

Young women in summer dresses biking through cosmopolitan urban areas where children are catching butterflies and growing vegetables in lush green gardens. The architectural renderings applied in current regeneration projects typically conjure a bright new future for disadvantaged areas. These areas were in fact typically designed by prominent modern architects as utopian welfare spaces providing quality housing for all, well-designed communal facilities and easy access to green spaces where children could play freely. Yet, some of these areas have today come to occupy the reverse role as dystopian places, included on the Governments ghetto-list and publicly notorious for their social problems, crime and deprivation. 15 of these disadvantaged housing areas will be regenerated over the next ten years entailing extensive physical and social makeovers. This paper explores the rendering of new futures deployed in this process and discuss how such architectural visions of spatial changeovers affect local communities of residents as well as newcomers. I focus particularly on the colorful computer-generated images used as part of the place making process, where not just future built environments but also the cultural identity and social life of these neighborhoods is designed: What futures do they evoke, and how does this affect local perceptions of the place and residents' own future in it? Though such images are often brushed aside as utopian sales material, I argue that architects by copying, cutting and pasting images, also shape urban imaginaries, reconfigure social spheres and outline possible futures of places and people.

## **Creative Ruination: Industrial chic and urban reinvention in Beijing's and Shanghai's art districts**

*Oscar Saleminck, Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

### **Abstract**

As emergent global cities, Beijing and Shanghai are reinventing themselves as post-industrial, service-oriented cities prone to the twin processes of heritagization and gentrification. Since the 2000s, both cities have become hubs of artistic production and consumption, especially since the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai. Much of the production and subsequently consumption of contemporary (visual) art is concentrated in formerly industrial areas and buildings, such as 798 and Caochangdi in Beijing, and in Shanghai M50, Redtown and the former harbour and airport area now known as Westbund. Whether suppressed (Caochangdi), tolerated (798, M50) or actively stimulated (Westbund) by

the authorities, these areas follow the usual gentrification pattern, where artists took possession of abandoned industrial buildings for cheap and spatial studios, followed by galleries, cafés and restaurants, bookshops and other services, and increasingly also (private) art museums. In contrast with the “white cube” aesthetics dominating the contemporary art world, the industrial heritage affords an “authentic”, barebones aesthetics that strips layers of ornamentation while presenting an industrial “authenticity” afforded by Bauhaus and brutalist architecture – much like the romancing of medieval and classical ruination of buildings that had become obsolete in the Romantic period. In this paper I seek to disentangle these processes of heritagization and gentrification as they intersect with notions of aesthetics and authenticity in Beijing and Shanghai.

## **Old concrete is the stuff of dreams: Balancing political economy and dreaming in a Malaysian creative hub**

*Asmus Randsløv Rungby, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

### **Abstract**

5 stories tall, with smashed windows and blue paint peeling in large flakes from the outer walls was how they found it - a fixer-upper but with potential. This former apartment block on the peripheries of Kuching, the capital of the Malaysian state of Sarawak, had been out of commission for at least a decade when my interlocutors from a recently evicted creative hub secured access to it and began planning to refurbish and restore it as an artist space, an event venue and a café. This abandoned building was immediately positioned as the solution to the organization’s struggle for economic survival and a catalyst of their ambitions for the future. Yet, at the same time encounters with deceitful contractors, manipulative real estate owners and shoddy construction work began to fray at the organization.

Based on long term ethnographic fieldwork in Kuching and among this group of creative hub organizers, this article attends to the process of restoring this old apartment block to new purposes. I show how the creative hub group’s efforts revolving around this building necessarily become both centripetal and centrifugal. Centripetal in that the buildings materiality and potential for many activities became a vessel for visualizing dream-plans of collaborative futures through techniques of 3D modelling, mural sketching and building schedules. Centrifugal in that the setbacks and problems that arose in the process, which included both losing a minor fortune to a deceitful contractor and contract negotiations with the building’s formal owner, drove conflicts and mistrust fraying the group apart. In building

this argument, I engage with Lefebvre's (2011) conception of producing space and Bornean conceptions of dream sight (cf. Michael R Dove 2011; Islam and Abdullah 2016) not as conflicting ideas but as dialogical partners. Ultimately, I suggest that both the political economy of space and the mythico-imaginative visuals of dreams are important frames of reference for understanding how multiple forces shape the reinvention of this building and the social life it comes to house.

## The Italian House

*Katrine Mandrup Bach, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*



In this house of Italy  
Built by faith and love  
Of the land of origin  
They live and perpetuate themselves  
With the work of Italian institutions  
Under the glorious signs  
Of the Savoy shield and the fasces  
The millennial spirit of the homeland  
The cult of Dante's language  
The shining tradition of the triple victory  
The animating power of Rome  
Once again empire

23 October 1916-38  
Reigning Vittorio Emanuele III  
Leader of Fascism and Head of  
Government  
Benito Mussolini  
Founder of the Empire

### Abstract

The above text is carved into a five-metre-tall epitaph on the façade of what is known as The Italian House in Port Said, Egypt. The eye-catching yellow building once stood as the first to greet newcomers to the Suez Canal, but today, surrounding apartment buildings have swallowed and hidden it away from view. Its doors and windows have long since been boarded up and while the building still formally belongs to the Italian state, no plans have been for its future. However, in 2018, the building was once more in the spotlight – the local heritage initiative Port Said Ala Ademo, a group of 200 youths from the city, made it the spectacle of their annual celebration of the heritage festival *Nas wa Turath*. The building had long been a

staple of their tour of the city, but during the festival it was the stage for a light show, photo exhibition and concert. In the opening speech, the building was described as encompassing the message and mission of the Port Said Ala Ademo: “[The Italian House] looks like an open book – some people think it looks like a dove! And that is exactly what the Ala Ademo is trying to do – spread knowledge like a book and peace like a dove!”

The Italian House has changed hands many times before ending up abandoned – or adopted by the Port Said Ala Ademo. In this paper, I wish to go through some of these hands, the changing meanings and purposes of the building in order to understand how a building, that on the surface seems to be a fascist symbol of empire, has become part of a reinvention and celebration of Port Saidian urban heritage and key in the quest for regaining a cosmopolitan identity.

## **Between relocations and transformations, absences and presences: A view from the Danish periphery**

*Kirsten Marie Raahauge Professor MSO, Institute for Architecture and Design, The Royal Danish Academy*

*Birgitte Romme Larsen, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Anthropology, DPU, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

When buildings are emptied of their former activities, given new assignments and users, left as abandoned buildings, or given a more turbulent life housing new and altering protagonists and projects, it seems that a lot is activated: memories of the past, imaginaries of the future, conflicts between groups, confusion as to what is happening, revival of traditions or reworking of rituals, renegotiation of networks and relations in the surrounding city and local area etc.

With a point of departure in our respective fieldworks in towns in the Danish provinces, concerning the everyday encounter between local community and relocated state jobs in Nakskov (BRL), and the effects on the town of Tønder of relocating welfare amenities to larger cities (KMR), new uses of buildings and abandoned buildings will be discussed with a focus on transformations as a social, material, and spatial mode of being. The paper will be a joint presentation, where we discuss abandonment and relocation of buildings and institutions as an interplay of material and cultural imaginations. In our dialogue, we will deal with our ethnographic material about the effects of moving into an old building, and the effects of moving out of it, as well as more general themes that go beyond our concrete sites with a particular view to the perspective of periphery and centre as a socio-spatial figure, and the ways in which this links with nostalgia, time, and memories, as well as transience and stability.

## **PANEL 2E      Beginning Anew in a Mobile World**

Enghuset, August 24<sup>th</sup>, 8:45-11:15.

*Convenors: Mikkel Rytter (AU), Susanne Bregnbæk (UCC), Annika Lindberg (KU/Bern)*

### **Description**

We inhabit a mobile world of imagined, repeated, or stolen new beginnings. In Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West*, borders appear as doors, which open up passages to new worlds; worlds, which begin anew with the new people who inhabit it.

Yet, access to mobility is unevenly distributed, as are the opportunities to start anew and refashion our lives. Beginnings often imply optimism and hope, but people who for various reasons have been displaced might also be compelled to begin a new life in a new part of the world without their loved ones, haunted by traumas and past grievances. For many displaced people, beginning again may seem more like the situation described in Greek mythology, where the Gods condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, only to watch it fall back of its own weight. In this workshop, we engage with the fine line between what it means to begin again in a mobile world as opposed to starting all over: for people on the move, for the states and societies where they arrive, and for researchers of borders and migration.

The workshop format invites participants to share and reflect on a story of attempted, repeated, or contested new beginnings. They can be presented in the form of a fieldnote, an artefact, a piece of ethnographic fiction or audio-visual material. We therefore invite empirical, conceptual or artistic contributions, which address one or several of the following themes:

*Beginning again.* Beginnings might be experienced spatially, as people find themselves in new cities, countries, and neighborhoods. They are also social and existential, as they might entail upward or downward social mobility, going somewhere as opposed to being stuck, and entail new relations, networks, education, work and careers. Finally, what does it actually mean for displaced people's sense of self to begin again?

*Governing new beginnings.* Restrictive migration and border regimes confine displaced people to waiting, belatedness, and trap them in endless circulation. Through so-called integration programs, states seek to regulate the ways in which migrants build their lives. How do bordering practices structure, limit and condition people's opportunities to begin again?

*Ghosts and other remnants of the past.* How does birth of the new go hand in hand with forms of loss? To what extent do beginnings constitute a break from the past? People continue to carry bodily experiences, traditions, kinship, memories, and at times also trauma, and war memories from the past, even as they ‘start anew’. Displacements of the present are also embedded in histories of colonialism, capitalist expansion, and dispossession. How do these ‘ghosts’ of the past continue to reverberate in the lives of people and in societies of a mobile world?

*Restarting migration research.* Researchers of borders and migration operate in a restrictive and polarized political landscape, where research is expected to make an ‘impact’. How can we reinvent our research methodologies, build novel collaborations with actors outside academia, ‘undiscipline’ our disciplines, and realign our notions of accountability to support struggles for migrants’ rights? Relatedly, how can we overcome the sedentarist, presentist and methodologically nationalist bias characterizing much of migration research?

## **Schedule**

### **Morning Session 9:00-11:30**

#### *Restarting migration research - methods, ethics and research practices*

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 9:00-9:10   | Welcome & Introduction  |
| 9:10-9:30   | <b>Restarting migration research</b> <i>Annika Lindberg</i>   |
| 9:30-9:50   | <b>“First get yourself the Arab experience”</b> <i>Hanne O. Mogensen</i>  |
| 9:50-10:10  | <b>Potentials and pitfalls of common interests</b> <i>Sara Lei Sparre, Johanne Korsdal Sørensen &amp; Stine Hauberg Nielsen</i> |
| 10:10-10:30 | <b>Tech and Internal Migration Control</b> <i>Carolina S. Boe</i>   |
| 10:30-10:50 | <b>How you became my mother</b> <i>Mikkel Rytter &amp; Lærke M. Nielsen</i>   |
| 10:50-11:20 | Plenary Discussion  |
| 11:20-11:30 | Wrap-up   |

## Afternoon Session 14:00-16:30

### *New beginnings in a mobile world*

- 14:00-14:10 Welcome back and re-cap
- 14:10-14:30 **A normal life** *Susanne Bregnbæk*
- 14:30-14:50 **Palestine in Denmark** *Anja Kublitz*
- 14:50-15:10 **Images of Syrian pasts and futures** *Christine Crone & Nina Grønlykke*
- 15:10-15:30 **“Everything collapses again”** *Sarah-Louise J. Mortensen*
- 15:30-15:50 **After-Faith** *Michael A. Ulfstjerne*
- 15:50-16:20 Plenary Discussion
- 16:20-16:30 Wrap-up

## Presentations

### **Restarting migration research: Acts of refusal**

*Annika Lindberg, Visiting postdoctoral fellow, University of Copenhagen & University of Bern*

#### **Abstract**

It is, by now, a truism and a standard opening of academic papers and conference openings that migration policy across the Global North has become increasingly militarised, repressive and violent. The lethal effects of Europe’s border regime have engaged a virtual industry of academics, NGOs, human rights advocates, activists who have documented and analysed these processes in the hope that (critical) *knowledge* will help challenge the structures and practices that produce them (Cabot 2019). But how is the *knowability* of this violence, and the conditions of critique, limited by the format, funding, and language of academic research? In this talk, I will try to open a set of questions, departing from Tuck and Yang’s (2014, 223) notion of ‘*refusal* to do research, or a refusal within research, as a way of thinking about humanizing researchers’ (my emphasis). Rather than a simple ‘no’, or an urge not to conduct research, they suggest that *refusing research* can be a generative starting point for exploring the role and

implication of social science research in structures of power and inequality, and challenge us to move beyond the imagined necessity of knowledge – any knowledge – and ask whom it is for, and at whose expense (including some of our own) it is generated. I will build on fragments of my own experiences from researching state violence, border and mobility control, and partaking in the dominantly white public space that is European academia (Ahmed 2007), and reflect on situations where concrete practices of refusal would have been and can be the more generative and desirable option. Especially in light of recent political attacks on researchers engaged in anti-racist, decolonial and anti-Islamophobic projects – of which the European border regime forms part – in Denmark and elsewhere in Europe, there is a need to proactively imagine our conversations to be otherwise. *Beginning again* seems like a good place to start to expand the range of possible futures.

### **“First get yourself the Arab experience”. Ugandan women beginning anew as domestic workers in the Middle East.**

*Hanne Overgaard Mogensen, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

#### **Abstract**

An increasing number of Ugandans migrate to the Middle East in the search for an income. Numerous companies, webs of unauthorized agents and rows of posters lure women into “buying” themselves jobs as domestic workers in Arab families. Together with my Ugandan colleague, Julaina Obika, I have followed a group of women working in the Middle East, as well as their relatives, neighbours and friends in Uganda, in order to understand the living situations, partnership experiences, livelihood options and imaginings about the future, that bring them to the Middle East. We hear stories of women who have been locked up, beaten, starved, humiliated, over-worked, denied treatment when sick, and even killed; and we hear stories about heroic escapes from brutal families and their long and complicated journeys home with the help of social media, relatives, NGOs, and at times Ugandan politicians. They tell of being robbed of their freedom and confronted with degrading perceptions of their gender and with racism. But their stories are also about moving ahead, venturing into the world, coming closer to “riches” and to “the dot.com world”. They are stories about trying to make a life for oneself and one’s children – about moving on and starting anew through confinement to the home of their employers. Once they return to Uganda, they are usually left with nothing but the hope that they - thanks to their “Arab experience” - will be given a



chance to start anew once more, this time maybe in a better job in a different part of the world.

The paper draws on long-term involvement with a family network in Uganda in addition to the research project on labor migration. I recently published a literary ethnography based on this family network. I wish to continue their story, this time from the point of view of two members of the family who are presently domestic workers in the Middle East. Writing literary ethnography based on long-term involvement with people raises a series of questions about ethics and representation. I intend to explore new ways of dealing with these questions in my second book about the family, including exploring the border and the dynamic relationship between ethnography and fiction.

## **Potentials and pitfalls of common interests: migrants in public care work in Denmark**

*Sara Lei Sparre, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*  
*Johanne Korsdal Sørensen, MANTRA, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*  
*Stine Hauberg Nielsen, Postdoc, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

Migration and care work are usually associated with unprivileged women from the South who leave their families and sometimes children to take up labor-intensive care work for older adults or families with smaller children in Europe, North America or the Middle East (Hochschild 1995; Coe 2017; Olwig 2015; Dalgas and Olwig 2015). Increasingly, however, migrant women are also employed in the formal, public care sector at least in Northern Europe. Due to an acute and future lack of skilled social and health workers, local state authorities in Denmark are actively recruiting migrants for vocational training and skilled work in the elderly care sector.

In this paper, I will present my first reflections on how to reinvent research methodologies and build novel collaborations with actors outside academia based on a new research and innovation project on recruitment and retention of SOSU students and staff with migrant background to the elderly care sector. The project is a collaboration between anthropologists, software developers, three municipalities, two SOSU schools, trade unions and other stakeholders in Denmark. Thus, rather than focusing on restrictive migration and bordering regimes, which limit and condition people's opportunities to begin again, I wish to explore potentials and pitfalls for migration research in practice-oriented research on state-sponsored attempts to recruit otherwise less-privileged migrant for skilled labor in Denmark.

To bring matters to a head, what happens with anthropological migration research, when researchers, migrants and authorities basically have common interests? What are the potentials and pitfalls in research of such common interests?

## **Tech and Internal Migration Control. New uses and experiences of electronic monitoring as an « alternative to detention » in the USA**

*Carolina Sanchez Boe, Postdoc, Interacting Minds Centre, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

Most asylum seekers, who cross the USA-Mexican border into Texas, can look back on a long and perilous journey along the migrant route through Latin and Central America. Once in the US however, new obstacles appear, as their mobility is restricted in immigration detention centers and through so-called “alternatives to detention”. Rising numbers of asylum seekers are released from detention with monitors strapped on their ankle or with facial recognition software installed on their phones. Rather than being an alternative, ICE statistics show how the numbers of immigrants detained *and* the numbers of immigrants submitted to electronic monitoring have both risen exponentially in a parallel development. The increased involvement of tech in internal migration control in the USA poses unprecedented challenges to struggles for migrants’ rights and for anthropological fieldwork. Based on collaborative audiovisual research with monitored asylum seekers in Texas, this paper analyzes the embodied effects of ‘digital confinement’ and the legacies of past violence they resonate with, when starting over in a new country also marks the beginnings of new spatial and temporal limitations, as well as unprecedented forms of dispossession and inclusion in capitalist expansion.

## **How you became my mother: Kinning and new beginnings among unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan**

*Mikkel Rytter, Professor MSO, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

*Lærke Møller Nielsen, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

A relatively large part of the asylum seekers that came to Denmark during ‘the long summer of migration’ were under the age of 18 and travelled without adult relatives. The numbers of unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan were 844 in 2015 and 527 in 2016. As minors they receive professional help, care and guidance in the in the asylum process, and are placed in special centers for minors. When they finally are granted temporary residency as refugees,

they get a legal guardian, a volunteer Danish citizen that agree to help the youngsters establish a new life in the municipality they have been assigned to. Inspired by Signe Howell's (2006) work on transnational adoption in Norwegian families this paper discusses the dynamics of kinning processes where unaccompanied minors and their legal guardians over time attempts to develop strong emotional ties. The stumbling transformation of 'order of law' into 'order of nature' (Schneider 1960) not only constitute a new beginning of family relationships, but may also promote a future model for sustainable inclusion of refugees in Denmark. The paper is based on data collected by Lærke Møller Nielsen in 2019 as part of the ARTlife-project.

## **A normal life: The transformative experience of escaping the confinement of the European asylum system**

*Susanne Bregnbæk, Associate Professor, University College Copenhagen*

### **Abstract**

This paper explores what it means to begin again after having been granted asylum following more than a decade of having resided within the European asylum system. I will provide an extended case story of a family from Myanmar with four children born in exile, who received asylum in Denmark last year. The aim is to explore the psychic, social and political effects of this transformative experience (cf. Paul). How can loss give way to birth of the new? Following philosopher L.A. Paul "a transformative experience teaches you something new, something that you could not have known before having the experience, while also changing you as a person" (Paul 2014, 17). Hannah Arendt's term natality sheds light on the way in which the faculty of action can interrupt the sheer biological life cycle: "We are not born to die but in order to begin" (Arendt 1998, 246, Bregnbæk and Gammeltoft 2021). In this paper I explore ethnographically what it is like to begin again. More specifically, what intergenerational aspirations emerge and are renegotiated when beginning again as a family in a Danish small town?

## **Palestine in Denmark: Refusing to Begin Again**

*Anja Kublitz, Associate Professor, Department of Politics and Society, Aalborg University,*

### **Abstract**

In this paper I will explore all the strenuous work Palestinians in Denmark put into transforming the new (Denmark) into the old (Palestine). I will do so by twisting the hitherto siting of

Palestinian culture (Olwig and Hastrup 1997) to a specific place by pushing our understanding of Palestinian practices and symbols so that they do not simply refer to something or somewhere else, but rather are practices and artefacts that can be used to invoke Palestine anywhere. Inspired by my interlocutors' practices and statements, I will set Palestine rolling, make it move. Not because I want to undermine the Palestinian national project, but because I want to examine how the Israeli "spacio-cide" of Palestine (Hanafi 2009) has not eliminated it, but rather multiplied it. In other words, by refusing to begin again, Palestinians are making sure that Palestine never ends (cf. Povinelli 2021).

## **Images of Syrian pasts and futures: Remembering and forgetting with documentaries**

*Christine Crone, Postdoc, Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, University of Copenhagen*

*Nina Grønlykke Møllerup, Associate Professor, Saxo Institute, University of Copenhagen*

### **Abstract**

Today, 10 years after Syrian people took to the streets across the country demanding political change, the position of exile has enabled Syrian documentarists an opportunity for reflection. Thus, a question raised in Syrian documentaries engaging with the revolution and the following war is how images of hope and trauma should be used to remember or forget the past and allow this moment of pensiveness to enable new beginnings. Do new beginnings require breaking with the past (to set us free and escape nostalgia) - or is dealing with the loss and sorrow necessary for moving forward? This paper reflects on how visual documentation of Syrians' lives over the past decade, with the death, violence and sorrow this entails, is used in documentaries as methods for selective, collective remembrance and forgetting. These documentaries offer different suggestions for how to establish new beginnings - and ask if new beginnings are ever really an option. The paper is based on viewings of documentaries and conversations with documentarists as part of the research project, Archiving the future: Re-collections of Syria in war and peace.

## **“Everything collapses again” – Syrian refugees’ shifting orientations and new beginnings under the recent revocation of residence permits in Denmark**

*Sarah-Louise Japhetson Mortensen, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University.*

### **Abstract**

Since January 2021, the Danish Immigration Service has revoked the residence permits of hundreds of Syrian refugees coming from the Damascus area. The revocations risk separating family members with different refugee statuses by rejecting the prolongation of residency of those with a temporary residence permit (§7,3). However, while their cases are appealed to the Refugee Appeals Board and they wait for a final decision, the families can continue their everyday activities of building a life in Denmark. The situation has created a sense of panic and increased temporariness among Syrian refugees in general: Who is next? What to do? And when will we know? During my ongoing fieldwork among Syrian refugee families in Denmark, Jamal, a young Syrian man, exhaustedly exclaimed: “everything collapses again!”.

In the light of this “collapse”, the paper explores Syrian refugees’ contradictory experiences of continuously building their lives in Denmark while planning new beginnings elsewhere. Furthermore, it unfolds the temporality of beginnings and the sense of self, when it seems to become a part of one’s life trajectory to begin again.

### **After-Faith**

*Michael Alexander Ulfstjerne, Assistant Professor, Department of Politics and Society, Aalborg University (CPH)*

### **Abstract**

In this talk I trail the trajectory of two close friends who were absorbed into Salafist environments upon the onset of their integration programs as unaccompanied minors in Denmark. One, Tarek, eventually travelled to Syria to fight for IS while the other, Malik, broke with the community including his close friend, setting into motion a sequence of subsequent beginnings. These include a turn towards atheist convictions following support-group meetings in “After-faith” (*Eftertro*) – withdrawal from his close-knit group of devout believers, in turn, opening up for a very different life as a youth in Denmark – the forming of new friendships, love relations, and eventually, parenthood. Building on periodic encounters spanning across more than a decade from 2010 I reflect upon the line between starting over

and new beginnings through a curated set of ethnographic vignettes that touch upon evolution, re-enchantments, butterflies, and bitter repetitions. Analytically, I take a point of departure in literary theory devising *beginnings* as a *method* that authorizes, directs, but also limits what may follow.

## **PANEL 3A Dwelling in our times: Ethics and ethical lives in the current world**

Stalden 2, August 24<sup>th</sup>, 14:00.16:30.

*Convenors: Atreyee Sen (KU), Samantha D. Breslin (KU), & Marie R. B. Odgaard (AU)*

### **Description**

In one of his seminal texts in *New Left Review*, ‘How to Begin from the Beginning’ Žižek (2009), argues that humans in their lifetime can never reach a ‘summit’ of ethical reflexivity. Despite bold and quick steps towards ascension in critical thought, human contemplation stumbles, falls and returns to new beginnings. Taking a leaf out of his book, this panel will discuss afresh the new and emerging ethics of human life in a time of identity-based movements and resistance against forms of democratic truth. While navigating intersubjective spaces between the violent and the intimate, communities and individuals experience an existential openness to shared human vulnerabilities to phenomena beyond our control. Yet, they also realize the sharp and vivid ways in which political, ideological and geographical disparities get highlighted through collective engagement with crumbling definitions of ‘the ethical’. We are interested in this queerness of ‘our time’, and the peculiarity of dwelling in it. The ambition of this panel is to bring together approaches examining the push and pull of ethical life in our current world. We invite paper proposals representing a wide range of geographical locations. These could potentially include (not exhaustively) topics on morality, gender and/or sexuality, violence, protest, economic exchanges, globalization, political practices, human and nonhuman relations, solidarities and disparities. We also encourage alternative forms of presentation.

### **Schedule**

#### *Cluster I: Subjectivities*

- 14:00-14:15 **An ethics of queer invention in Amman, Jordan** *Marie R. B. Odgaard*
- 14:15-14:30 **Ethics and Aesthetics of the New Russian Merchant** *Vera Skvirskaja V*
- 14:30-14:40 *Discussion*

*Cluster II: Relations (and technology)*

- 14:40-14:55 **‘No more requests after this’** *Susan Reynolds Whyte & Michael Whyte*
- 14:55-15:10 **Ethics of Surveillance and Uncontrollability** *Michal Frumer*
- 15:10-15:25 **Riding for freedom and flexibility** *Katrine Duus Terkelsen*
- 15:25-15:35 Discussion

*Cluster III: Values and Anthropology*

- 15:35-15:50 **Hitler Love** *Atreyee Sen*
- 15:50-16:05 **Fighting a War for Ethical Engineering** *Samantha D. Breslin*
- 16:05-16:15 Discussion
- 16:15-16:30 Concluding discussion & wrap-up

**Presentations**

**An ethics of queer invention in Amman, Jordan**

*Marie Rask Bjerre Odgaard, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

**Abstract**

In her book *Queer Activism in India*, anthropologist Naisargi Dave formulates activism as ‘... the previously unthinkable that is now a flickering possibility, just on the verge of entering upon the world of norms’ (Dave 2012: 10). What is the ethical potential of studying queer inventions in Amman, Jordan? In rendering the cracks and nooks of the urban space of Amman - and the lives of a number of friends in the city - this presentation discusses how queer people connect their experiences of self in the present to a past and a future. A past inhabited by grandmothers, grandfathers and colonial figures. A sense of future through ruptures in family dynamics, through artistic performances, or simply through leisure-time spent with friends. All of which spark affective atmospheres and feelings like desire, joy and shame (see e.g. Ahmed 2006, 2014, Muñoz 2009). Returning to the opening quote, I wish to move beyond the realm of political activism in itself, and look at the ways in which critical, phenomenological anthropology might itself be a kind of invention. An affective experience of a flickering possibility of writing a queer story, even if only temporarily so.



## **Ethics and Aesthetics of the New Russian Merchant**

*Vera Skvirskaja, Lecturer, University of Copenhagen (Presenting virtually)*

### **Abstract**

Anthropologists, as well as the international business community, have provided many insightful analyses of post-Soviet styles of (violent) entrepreneurship and business ethics. Russia's market-driven economy has brought to the fore different sociological types of business people – from the reformed Communist Party/Komsomol members and educated professionals making fortunes from privatised state assets, to the shuttle and market traders and racketeers turning into 'oligarchs from below', and the proverbial New Russians. The 1990s and 2000, when these developments were taking place, had largely failed to produce the ethical foundations of post-socialist society in Russia writ large, while the model of the Russian neoliberal (e.g. Yurchak 2003) has not only been insufficient to grasp the range of discursive practices available for the 'fashioning of the self' to the Russian entrepreneurial class, but has itself become politically marginal and in many cases oppositional in Putin's Russia.

This paper focuses on the ways in which the state and the Orthodox Church have come to articulate new ethics of moral economy to propagate a specifically Russian kind of entrepreneur. In this moral economy, radically different from the Western moral economy (however defined), the loyal merchant-patriot, whose genealogy was brought to a halt by the Soviets, has become a key actor. Drawing on the concept of 'ethical citizenship' (as different from 'cultural citizenship' or 'social citizenship', e.g. Muehlebach 2012) and the ethnographic fieldwork among Russian entrepreneurs and transnational traders (2015-2019), the paper discusses the interplay of ethics, power and the politics of culture in present-day Russia.

### **'No more requests after this': ethical entrapment in long-term engagement**

*Susan Reynolds Whyte & Michael Whyte, Professors, Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

### **Abstract**

In this essay, we try to reflect on our growing entanglement with the crises and financial needs of people in Uganda, whom we have known for many years. This is not so much an academic analysis, as a personal essay—an attempt to grapple with ethical dilemmas around deep personal engagement with inequality. Our reflections start with one instance of a young woman who promised she would not ask for more support if only we would send money one last time

so she could start an independent life in the city. Many times we have attempted new beginnings by telling our friends that we were withdrawing from our role as ATM machine and that they had to stand on their own. Not only has it failed, but the quagmire deepens. How did we get here? Starting from those days fifty years ago when we used to give sick people lifts to hospital in our Land Rover, we will consider at least three dimensions of entrapment. First, we have become elders and are well established with good jobs. In a Ugandan family, that obligates. Second, the advent of mobile phones and digital technology means that we cannot withdraw the way we used to, when we just went home to Denmark. WhatsApp, e-mail and Remitly make constant appeals and money transfers easy. Finally, the political economy of Uganda has changed dramatically with rampant corruption and precarious incomes. Inequalities have increased and so have aspirations to lives people cannot afford. Medical expenses have skyrocketed as more expensive tests and treatment are on offer. Decent schooling is so desired and so unremittingly costly term after term. During the Covid lockdown, our friends trying to make it in town are struggling even more. The ethical qualms are personal for us, felt as some combination of obligation, guilt, irritation, and entrapment. At the same time, we have privileged insight into life conditions and a constant set of ready interlocutors—who cannot refuse consenting to our research. Undue inducement indeed. We offer a personal perspective, but would like to raise general questions about the changing ethical dilemmas of fieldwork in conditions of inequality.

## **Riding for freedom and flexibility: Moral economies of digital platform work in Brussels**

*Katrine Duus Terkelsen, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

This paper examines the moral economy of digital platform work in two delivery companies, respectively a corporation and a cooperative. The two companies both use a digital platform to plan their deliveries and to communicate information about the deliveries to the riders that transport the goods. However, the degree of co-determination on the distribution of work among the riders differs greatly in the two companies, and so does the degree of accountability on the riders' part. In the corporation, the platform forms the main medium of interaction between participants, i.e. all communication between the company, the clients, and the riders are handled through the platform. Conversely, at the cooperative the riders have full access to all aspects of the platform due to the cooperative's management style. The managerial and

infrastructural differences between the corporation and the cooperative create and manifest two very different work environments, labour contracts, and moral economies. In their job advertisement, the corporation promises the riders flexibility. The cooperative talks instead of a spirit of liberty. One of the riders offered his analysis of the difference between the corporation where he used to work, and the cooperative he was now a co-owner of: “Here [at the cooperative], we want to provide the spirit of liberty, what they [the corporation] say is not really freedom”. This paper will dwell on the different experiences and understandings of work among riders from both platforms, looking into the difference between flexibility and freedom that the co-owner points to. I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork on both platforms during the first half of 2018. Meanwhile, I also followed the political discussion on digital platform work and the political initiatives these prompted in Brussels and beyond. By juxtaposing the different experiences and understandings of work among the interviewed riders and situating them in the political discussion of digital platform work that took place during my fieldwork, I will attempt to sketch out the moral economies of digital platform work in Brussels.

### **Ethics of surveillance and uncontrollability: The ethical sensibilities of a clinical nurse**

*Michal Frumer, PhD Student, The Research Unit for General Practice, Aarhus & Aarhus University*

#### **Abstract**

What sorts of ethical sensibilities are cultivated in practices of surveillance medicine in the Danish welfare state? I explore this through the specific case of a clinical nurse at a diagnostic lung cancer clinic, immersed in what I call the uncontrollability of cancer potential. The clinical nurse, Birgitte, navigates continuous questions of “letting go” or “pushing on” in relation to the health and well-being of people in CT surveillance of small tissue changes of their lungs. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in and around two of these diagnostic clinics, I explore how, in her daily clinical practice, Birgitte finds a way through competing and sometimes incommensurable commitments towards a public health ideal, the welfare state, and people in CT surveillance. I suggest that these practices are a form of moral becoming through subtle acts of attending to the lives of people marked by challenges of health and well-being.

## **Hitler love: The ethics of deploying Nazi symbolism in Indian politics**

*Atreyee Sen, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

### **Abstract**

An adulation of Hitler, a love of reading *Mein Kampf*, and the ignorant use of Nazi symbolism has a prominent position in the evolution of the Indian political landscape. Often referred to as ‘Fuhrer Fever’, a postcolony that rode the wave of Gandhi’s variation of non-violence into throwing off the colonial yoke, displays an affective relationship with the world’s most frighteningly successful dictator. This presentation will discuss the constantly shifting ethical challenges of reading, teaching, emulating and admiring Hitler, and its casualisation in everyday social, political and economic life in the region. It will highlight the different ways in which the brutal legacy of genocide is diluted by political communities to uphold Hitler’s leadership skills and charisma, in order to produce a fractured but potent ideology of masculinity and national pride on the ground. The question remains whether there can be a universal set of ethical values learnt from world history. Can we as anthropologists and relativists indulge in ‘anxious’ ethical analyses as we chart the extensive but complex evocation of Hitler and *Mein Kampf* in India?

## **Fighting a War for Ethical Engineering**

*Samantha Dawn Breslin, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen*

### **Abstract**

Engineering is practically and paradigmatically intertwined with the production of instruments of war and with ‘engineering mindsets’ that prioritize technical knowledge and preclude consideration of social and ethical impacts. Researchers and educators have been working to change discourses and practices in engineering but are often marginalized in the discipline, in alignment with broader complicities in and legacies of exclusionary norms and practices that reproduce inequities not least relating to gender and race. This paper considers the efforts by a team (including myself) at the University of San Diego working to produce more ethically aware undergraduate engineering education based on values including peace and social justice, and examines how they use metaphors of revolution and war in interpreting and enacting change. In particular, the use of metaphors of war contribute to accentuating interpersonal conflict between different ‘sides’ of change efforts, while obscuring the context and structures that support metaphoric (and non-metaphoric) war-related practices in engineering. But such

metaphors also provide, for some, a way of expressing the personal pain entailed in enacting change, and highlight the need for a “revolution” to overturn current paradigms and hierarchies in engineering. This paper thus questions the possibilities and preclusions entailed in metaphoric wars for change and the role of anthropologists in contributing to interdisciplinary efforts towards producing ethical engineering.

## **PANEL 3B      The Power of Routine? Configurations of the Ordinary in Times of Crisis**

Forpagterboligen, August 24<sup>th</sup>, 14:00-16:30

*Convenors: Laust Lund Elbek (SDU) & Jonas Strandholdt Bach (AU)*

### **Description**

On the Italian island of Lampedusa—a frontline site of the so-called ‘refugee crisis’—the local population deals with the influx of boat migrants by relying on well-established codes of public civility and courtesy (Elbek 2021). In a drinking shed in Aarhus, the Covid-19 health crisis has introduced hand sanitizer and attention to social distancing among the locals meeting there over beers, but the turn-out has been steady, and as one of the users commented: ‘Everything is almost business as usual’ (Bach 2021).

Crises of differing scales and intensities abound in social and political life. Epidemics, wars, famines, and financial crashes are key events in our collective historical consciousness. On a smaller scale, we may experience various forms of personal or communal crisis: loss, unemployment, failing (mental) health, violence, and abuse are cases in point. Whether personal, societal, or in-between, ‘a crisis’ conventionally denotes some form of temporary collapse of the ordinary order of things—crises are *critical* precisely because they disrupt or negate ‘business as usual.’ Yet, as the ethnographic examples above indicate, we suggest that ‘crisis’ and ‘the ordinary’ do not stand in a mutually exclusive relationship. On the contrary, the ordinary may interweave with crisis in a variety of ways. ‘Normalcy’ can be a structuring principle of hopes and aspirations in times of upheaval (e.g. Jansen 2015), protracted conditions of crisis may themselves become normalized (e.g. Vigh 2008), and clinging to routines and regular everyday rhythms can be an important strategy for dealing with prolonged conflict or hardship. Politicians often employ ‘crisis’ as a powerful semantic tool for legitimizing more or less draconian agendas (Koselleck 1959, Roitman 2013), but political discourse is rarely a trustworthy reflection of everyday life ‘on the ground.’

In this Introduction we will reflect on how people mark, maintain and approach configurations of the ordinary in times of crisis. By encouraging attention to how the ordinary and the critical interrupt, interrogate or perhaps even enable one another, we wish to centralize the not always straightforward connections between the rule and the exception. What may we learn about

change by examining continuity? What may repetition tell us about difference? Can things stay the same when they fall apart?

## Schedule

- 14:05-14:25 Welcome and introduction *Laust Lund Elbek & Jonas Strandholdt Bach*
- 14:25-14:45 **Notions of safety in crises and everyday policing in Denmark** *Anna Bræmer Warburg*
- 14:45-15:05 **Momentary recovery in everyday life with ADHD during Corona crisis** *Gitte Vandborg Rasmussen*
- 15:05-15:15 Short Break
- 15:15-15:35 **De Facto In-betweenness** *Mikel Venhovens*
- 15:35-15:55 **The Anti-Crisis Machine** *Kristoffer Albris V*
- 15:55-16:30 Mediated plenary discussion

## Presentations

### **Notions of safety in crises and everyday policing in Denmark**

*Anna Bræmer Warburg, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

#### **Abstract**

Over the last decade, ‘safety’ (*tryghed*) has become an increasingly central component in policies and interventions targeting organized crime and terrorism in Denmark. To a great extent, new security policies and forms of policing are triggered by crises that demand policy responses, for instance gang conflicts and terror attacks. While policy responses aim to enhance safety – to normalize safety in everyday life – crises intensify and often escalate new policing measures, which are characterized by exceptional politics, punitivism and increased police presence, particularly in certain areas designated as ‘problematic’. This paper explores the (often paradoxical) notions of safety in Danish security governance and engages with questions such as how responses to crises carry over into everyday policing and vice versa, and how safety is operationalized by police officers on the streets across times of crises and everyday policing.

## **Momentary synchronization in everyday life with ADHD during Corona crisis: The world as a realized utopia**

*Gitte Vandborg Rasmussen, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University*

### **Abstract**

During March 2020 the Danish Authorities closed down Denmark implementing a range of restrictions to regulate the social behavior of the population to prevent Corona-virus to spread. To avoid increased mental health problems among the mental vulnerable part of population, this group was strongly encouraged to establish new daily structure and routines as soon as possible. As part of the HOPE project, I conducted intense online fieldwork during April-August 2020 on everyday life with ADHD during the first lockdown. Contextualized by data and insights from my long-term fieldwork on family life with ADHD, this paper explores experiences and management of the (lost) structure during initial phases of Corona crisis. Surprisingly, everyday life did not change much according to the interlocutors, despite the massive societal interventions and changes. Most interlocutors reported an improved mental health during lockdown - what used to be seen and experienced as mental disadvantages, e.g. “having an unstructured and slightly anxious mind”, turned out to be an advantage in managing life during the pandemic. Inspired by Flaherty’s concept of timework (2011), Rosa’s theory of social acceleration (2014), and Nielsen’s idea of ADHD as a rhythmic disturbance (2016, 2017, 2020), this paper discusses the momentary feeling of normalization in the context of the changed societal temporal regime emerging during Covid19. The analysis leads to an overall discussion of the paradoxical need for structure in everyday life with ADHD, and the paper argue, that the degree of mental illness, in this case ADHD, differs according to temporal structures and demands from the surroundings.

## ***De Facto In-betweenness: Conflicting New Beginnings in a ‘Frozen Conflict’***

*Mikel Venhovens, Independent Researcher (formerly Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University)*

### **Abstract**

This paper aims to explore the tangible affects of the ‘frozen conflict’ of the de facto Republic of Abkhazia. Situated on the Northeastern side of the Black sea, the Republic of Abkhazia finds itself in an uncertain socio-political limbo since the end of direct hostilities of the Abkhaz-Georgian War of 1992-93, which has led to a situation which is labelled by the international community as a ‘frozen conflict’.



Frozen conflicts are formally often defined as conflicts of which the direct violent stage has ended in a stalemate and without a peace treaty, with the warring parties waiting at an established line of contact. The assumption is that the ‘frozenness’ of these conflicts can thaw at any moment. Until then, the region and its population are frozen in time, situated in a supposed state of permanent crisis.

But behind the line of contact, dynamics and processes of normalization and in-betweenness are instigated and new routines and realities are created by the new de facto authorities, thereby concretizing the current and desired situation. These new routines and realities contain contrasting hopes and futures, fueled by different views of histories, and made explicit through the lived experiences of different ethnic groups, the material landscape and the everyday interactions between people of different population groups.

This paper focuses on the aftermath of direct hostilities of a conflict, and the strained and prolonged period of post-conflict tensions and politics that follow. Although a frozen conflict implies the ceasing of ‘hot’ hostilities, on the ground the conflict often continues through other forms of violence. How useful is the usage of the term ‘frozen conflict’? How does such a conflict look like in everyday life? What does it entail, and what does it mean for people who are affected by these ‘frozen conflicts’?

## **The Anti-Crisis Machine**

*Kristoffer Albris, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen  
(Presenting virtually)*

### **Abstract**

As social scientists have noted at least since the end of the first world war (Prince 1920), disasters and crises prompt a range of social responses where people quickly and often without prior experience have to adapt to radically different and new circumstances. Despite more recent arguments arguing for the existence of chronic crises (Vigh 2008) or of chronic disaster syndromes (Adams et al. 2009), there is a conceptual aspect to such notions that have been subject to too little theoretical scrutiny. In this paper, I discuss how community resilience activities that establish routines and stabilize institutions in disasters and crises are social mechanisms that aim to do away with the sense of crisis at the individual and the collective level, rather than to make the crisis permanent or to extend it indefinitely (cf. Roitman 2013). Communities are in this sense, to paraphrase Ferguson (1990), *anti-crisis machines*. Furthermore, I will discuss how the normalization and routinization of everyday life amidst

crises and emergencies is about more than merely coping. When people are faced with conditions of permanent risks or a sense of continuous emergency, fundamentally pragmatic mechanisms kick in that aim to make life workable and manageable. I unfold this perspective on the normalization of crisis by drawing on research on river floods in Germany. I focus on communities that have experienced flooding along the Elbe River in eastern Germany, in which the authorities have decided not to build structural flood protection in the form of dikes or walls, as the economic costs would outweigh the benefits. I highlight how, when protection is forfeited, the question of whether and how to adapt to the circumstances or to move away prompts a fundamental interrogation for people living in these areas of how to make life workable, and how to lean on neighbors, friends, and even strangers to continue life in proximity to the water.