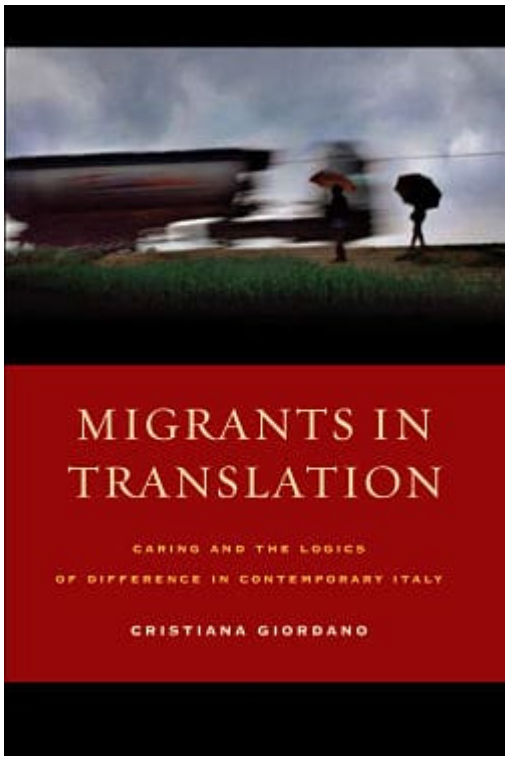
Migrants in Translation

David Orr
November, 2015

Contemporary phenomena of migration and human trafficking pose challenges to modern states, which may struggle to deal effectively and fairly with how to address issues of integration and fulfil their humanitarian and therapeutic responsibilities. *Migrants in Translation*, taking its point of departure from a small ethno-psychiatric clinic (the Centro Franz Fanon) in Turin, examines how various Italian state and non-state agencies involved in the care of female asylum seekers, refugees and migrants respond to these demands. The ethnographic trail leads through NGO offices, the police department and the shelters run by Catholic nuns, as Giordano tracks the legal and biopolitical processes within which the

women – many of whom are classed as victims of human trafficking – are caught up. However, it is the Centro Franz Fanon, a specialist ethno-psychiatric consultation service that advises and takes referrals from the other agencies on matters of 'culture,' that remains the connecting narrative thread running through the book. Its distinctive approach and close engagement with anthropological debates provide Giordano with a counterpoint against which to compare the work done in the other institutions. The result is a stimulating and insightful meditation on how the state's politics of difference and recognition shape migrant experience, and on whether ethno-psychiatry might offer clues as to how to think through these notions differently.



For Giordano, what state and non-state institutions achieve through the politics of recognition is, more often than not, to make identity, culture and experience 'digestible'. This image captures the paradoxical effect of processes of recognising, 'knowing' and pinning down identity on the basis of belonging to a specific ethnicity or community, or of having undergone a particular experience (e.g. being trafficked). Though the intention may be to make space for diversity and protect the right to (cultural) 'difference', the result is often to translate 'difference' itself into something that, having purportedly been understood and classified, can be absorbed and assimilated. Such 'recognition' of difference, working along predetermined pathways and through preassigned categories, ultimately leads into reductionist niches that serve to make difference manageable and to exclude the possibility of an encounter that might challenge and transform existing assumptions.

This notion of digestibility applies as much to the diagnostic categories used by mental health services as it does to the bureaucratic state processes that

determine migration status. While the need for awareness of cultural context in psychiatry is now widely recognised (APA 2013: 749), medical anthropology has repeatedly shown how in practice this can often unfold within the same restrictive frameworks as the state's politics of recognition. To take just one example, Santiago-Irizarry (2001) describes how well-intentioned 'culturally sensitive' services for Latinos in the United States ended up projecting essentialised and static identities on to their clients, which only reinforced tendencies to match them against perceived Anglo-American norms. In Giordano's analysis, however, something very different is happening through the Centro Franz Fanon's engagement with culture. This is described in Chapters 1 and 6, which engage ethnographically with the ethno-psychiatric clinic, exploring how its practitioners approached their therapeutic work with Nigerian and East European migrant women, and how they tackled questions of culture in the process.

Chapter 2 adds depth to this portrait by exploring the intellectual influences that inspired the centre's outlook: Fanon's radical anti-colonialist writings; theorists of psychiatry and culture such as Tobie Nathan, Ernesto De Martino and Octave Mannoni; the political thought of Gramsci; and Franco Basaglia's democratic psychiatry movement of 1970s Italy. The ideas and politics of these thinkers, alongside anthropological training that in some cases has involved extended fieldwork, inform how centre practitioners juggle different notions of culture in their clinical work. Both the author and the therapists identify the tensions between clinical and anthropological understandings of culture. The ethno-psychiatrists' solution is to use culture "*as if* [it] is a tool" (p. 49), something that can be used to develop an interpretation or build a therapeutic relationship. However, this may be only one stage in the therapeutic process. Their ultimate aim is for the most part to destabilise hegemonic explanations of their clients' situations (be they psychiatric or cultural) and help them to explore different perspectives and possibilities.

> *The book highlights the distinctiveness of this goal and of the ethno-psychiatric consultation service itself by exploring the migrant women's experiences of the other agencies with which they come into contact.*

Chapter 3 discusses ethno-psychiatrists' work with other services and practitioners to whom they provide 'cultural' input and supervision. Here the practical limitations of ethno-psychiatry become manifest, as we see how difficult the clinicians find it to destabilise established dichotomies between 'pathological behaviour or cultural norm' and 'victim or agent'. The force of these discourses comes from how they provide a basis for the state to include migrants on its own terms, rather than in ways that might take seriously their real concerns.

Chapter 4 develops the theme of migrants' agency through an examination of the *denuncia*, the formal filing of charges against the traffickers who exploited the migrant women. That many of Giordano's informants sometimes challenge the identity of 'victim' that this process crafts for them, find the question of exploitation far from clear-cut, and regard the *denuncia* as an imperfect representation of their experiences, seems largely irrelevant to the legal process involved. It is only through the production of *denuncia* narratives that follow the expected conventions that these women can be 'digested' by the state; confession along certain, expected lines is often the only way to regularise their residential status. Thus, the cultural mediators who assist them with the process find themselves restructuring the women's accounts as they seek an uneasy balance between the messiness of real-life experience and the confines of what law enforcement agencies expect to hear.

Photo by European Commission DG ECHO (flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Chapter 5 considers life in the shelters run by Catholic nuns for women who have been trafficked. The script laid out for residents is one of progress from the state of dependency that they have been left in by their experiences of exploitation, towards an idealised independence and maturity. Paradoxically, some of the women take the view that the forms of independence they are encouraged to strive towards actually leave them with less agency than they had when they were supposedly being victimised. The chapter argues that the state and the church are closely compatible in the ways that they deal with migrant women, having recourse to similar confessional logics and employing similar teleologies of redemption.

This account of other agencies underlines the different position occupied by the Centro Franz Fanon. A space that seeks to avoid teleologies in favour of listening, it attempts to remain open to multiple forms of 'difference' without foreclosing meaning or prioritising cure at the expense of care. It embraces neither psychiatry nor culture as monolithic explanations for behaviour. Giordano argues

that this ethno-psychiatric institution opens possibilities for the radical disruption of fixed categories and discourses through which other institutions position the migrant. Rather than 'recognition', she suggests that the work of the centre is better encapsulated in the term 'acknowledgement', an outlook that connotes an awareness and openness to the other's experience rather than a need to assimilate it by translating it to known categories.

> *One area that seems under-examined is the views of the women themselves on the ethno-psychiatric encounter. The ethnography of the ethno-psychiatry clinic conveys little about how the clients responded; though rich, it focuses largely on the therapists' perspectives.*

We read the latter's theoretical and clinical justifications for certain interventions, but are told little about how useful users of the service find the therapy sessions. To what extent did they value the therapists' stance in relation to culture and interpretation, and to what extent did they view the centre as just another institution to navigate? Giordano may have felt that the limits of her data made it difficult for her to make informed judgements on these questions, but the lack of reporting on the women's views on ethno-psychiatry stands in contrast to the ample discussion of their views on the other institutions considered. This is unfortunate, as it leaves her analysis of ethno-psychiatry's potential resting largely on theoretical grounds, rather than on empirical demonstration.

Despite this gap, *Migrants in Translation* makes an important scholarly contribution in highlighting the rigidity of the discourses that shape the social rehabilitation and integration of trafficked women. More broadly, it productively explores how the various practitioners involved with them employ the concept of culture in the course of their work, and how this might be done differently. These achievements make the book a rich ethnography with much to say to scholars of migration, mental health, and the uses and abuses of culture.

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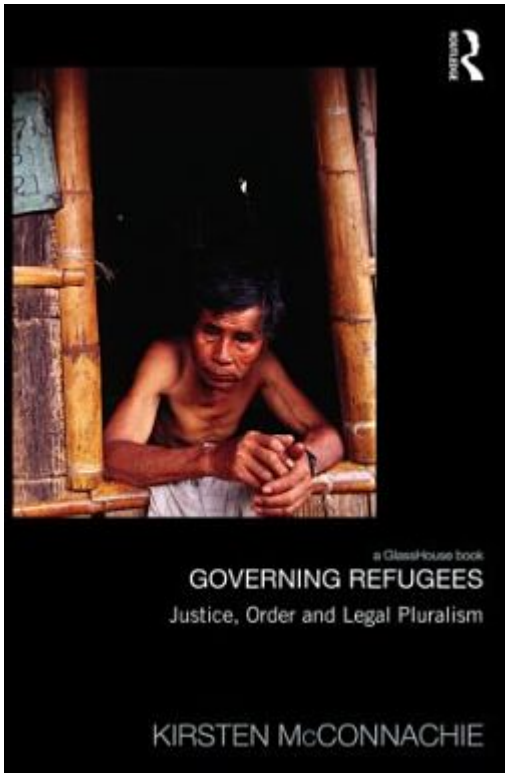
Governing Refugees. Justice, Order and Legal Pluralism

David Fazzino
November, 2015

I was visiting Chiang Mai, Thailand, at around the same time travel magazines began to herald Myanmar as the “it” destination of 2015. When I mentioned my desire to get with “it” to a *Song Thaew* driver he advised against it by simultaneously shaking his finger and head at me followed making the motion of a machine gun, in essence conveying the ever-present danger of a visit. This sharply contrasted with the welcoming full colour spreads in *Condé Nast* and *Travel and Leisure* that claimed relative stability, marginalised the possibility of danger, and evoked the pleasure of a destination whose time had come. Of course, as Lipstiz (2006) has noted for New Orleans, the touristic gaze and representation thereof often gloss the cultural depth and experiences of a place that many anthropologists attempt to convey in their writings. Beyer (2015: 3) situates the legal context within which Myanmar’s citizens live, noting that

> *In contemporary Myanmar, it is proving difficult even to find the law, a necessary precondition before one can hope for justice. The law in Myanmar is shrouded in an aura of secrecy due to the inaccessibility of the legal process. Owing to its entanglement with politics, it also has a reputation for serving only the powerful.*

The marginalisation of citizens from the State legal system is highlighted in McConnachie's *Governing Refugees: Justice, Order and Legal Pluralism*, which conveys the experiences of Karen refugees through an examination of the politics and practices of everyday life, and the legal repercussions thereof, in refugee camps located near the Thai-Burma Border. McConnachie grounds her analysis theoretically in legal anthropology and comparatively by initially providing a thorough overview of refugees worldwide, then moving into a comparative approach, thereby situating the specifics of Karen in Thai refugee camps with other well-researched refugee camps. McConnachie marshals the existing literature to situate and ground her analysis of what actually happens in camps, something that she notes is generally missing in the literature on refugees.



She begins Chapter 1, *Governing Refugees*, by noting that refugee camps are not "isolated zones of 'exception' but a pluralistic and networked web of legal and political relationships" (p.3). McConnachie touches on the material circumstances of Karen refugees in camps by noting their political vulnerability and economic dependence in the face of ever-diminishing resources associated with donor fatigue. At the individual economic level, jobs are scarce and opportunities for self-employment are rare. Many refugees come to the camps with extensive practical knowledge of subsistence agriculture, however these skills are often left underutilised with a lack of access to the tools and land necessary to carry these practices out. Likewise, prohibitions on cutting bamboo in forest preserves surrounding refugee camps create a reliance on The Border Consortium to provide building materials. Additional anxieties of refugees include the possibilities of resettlement and repatriation coupled with the arrival of more recent refugees that work in unison to shift camp demographics, loyalties, and expertise. Despite these uncertainties, McConnachie describes camp life as structured and industrious. Furthermore, McConnachie highlights that refugee camps offer up new possibilities for agency by destabilising gender-based expectations, allowing women to more fully participate in education, formal leadership, and civil society.

In Chapter 2 McConnachie situates the Karen historically in Burma by discussing the development of ethnic identity, nationalism, and resistance.

> *In one of the world's most protracted armed conflicts, the Karen have been the victims of continuous and oftentimes escalating violence at the hands of Burmese Army from the 1960s onwards with a proliferation of documented human rights abuses and hundreds of thousands of internally displaced*

persons.

The first ‘temporary shelters’ in Thailand, now refugee camps, occurred in 1984 when the Burmese Army, rather than retreat during the wet season, maintained their position, forcing the Karen to remain in Thailand. McConnachie concludes this chapter by suggesting that the long-standing political marginalisation of the Karen helped to foster the robust and resilient governance heritage of Karen community governance structures, which have historically worked to provide essential services at the village level.

One manifestation of the Karen’s governance heritage is apparent in the refugee camps themselves, which are an environment that actively produces “thriving social capital and community” (p.39). McConnachie, in Chapter 3, *The Camp Community*, notes three dynamic and sometimes contested types of communities that comprise the camp: 1) A situational community of encampment in shared experiences of deprivation, stigma and vulnerability; 2) A ethno-national community of Karen or “Karenness” that does not have to contend with “Burmanization” or state-sponsored ethnic subjugation; and 3) A community of shared governance, designed to maintain the social and moral order, brought by the Karen from their villages. McConnachie explores the “governance palimpsest” of Karen refugee camps in Chapter 4, noting continuity of pre-colonisation and pre-missionisation: practices, sanctions levied, and beliefs, which have been supplemented by newer additions of Christianity and the Karen National Union. Despite this trend of overall continuity, McConnachie notes that refugee camps are not autonomous and refugee camp leaders vie for diffuse and negotiated authority with Thai authorities and international agencies, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Chapter 5 highlights the intricacies of camp governance. McConnachie begins by stating that globally, “two primary discursive threads exist in refugee policy, host governments see refugees as threatening and seek containment, while humanitarian agencies approach refugees as victims in need of protection” (p.81).

McConnachie explains how policies stemming from containment and protection, or concerned paternalism, including the concern over the *potential* for the abuse of power by camp administrators, limit the individual and collective autonomy, sovereignty, and agency of Karen refugees. This concern for the *potential* of abuse is used in attempts to limit the camp's internal governance structures, including the administration of justice, which McConnachie refers to in Chapter 6 as "the struggle for ownership of justice" wherein regimes of knowledge and legitimacy are continually contested by state, international, and camp actors.

> *McConnachie particularly critiques the UNHCR's approach, which delegitimises and dismisses popular support amongst refugees for camp governance structures in the name of protecting refugees who are supposedly misguided, oppressed, or ignorant of the way true governance structures should operate in terms of human rights standards and due process.*

She notes that the supposedly legitimate alternative state justice systems are riddled with their own procedural and human rights concerns. In Chapter 7 McConnachie examines "the influence of international human rights norms on camp justice practice" (p.132) primarily through the action of Karen Women Organisation (KWO), which struggles to harness the authoritative power, and funding, of international agencies whilst attempting to maintain KWO's local legitimacy. KWO works to translate international normative standards of sexual and gender based violence into locally meaningfully dialogues. This culturally moderated approach to human rights is done in order to raise awareness, increase reporting of incidences, and ensure that sexual and gender based violence cases are handled in the camp, or by Thai authorities where requested by the victim/survivor. Tensions in normative standards also apply to youth, whom camp management considers to be unduly influenced by outside forces that produce "delinquents" whom are a source of camp disorder.

These same youth are portrayed as "victims" by international human rights staff, drawing from the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In the ten-page final chapter entitled *Beyond Encampment*, McConnachie effectively and succinctly concludes her text in three ways. First, she summarises her main contentions regarding Karen refugees in Thailand, primarily "that camps can be functional societies even after decades of encampment" (p.155) and where appropriate compares and contrasts these to other refugee camps and populations. Secondly, she explains that although the overall success of self-governance in camps has arisen due to very particular historical circumstances, it has nevertheless occurred and hence can work. McConnachie suggests that external agencies should begin by considering whether a 'community' exists with clear and locally legitimate community representatives. She is careful not to romanticise, overstate, or simplify the practice of self-reliance, noting that international support, "will always be essential not only for financial assistance but also for political advocacy… [particularly]… as a buffer between refugees and the host society" (p.162). Lastly, in the book's final subsection, *Nothing about refugees, without refugees*, McConnachie suggests a key shift is necessary in continuing discussions of repatriation and the future of the Karen refugee camps in Thailand, namely providing a place at the table for those historically left out of discussions, given that said inclusion often results in more just and lasting results whilst minimising anxiety and worry amongst refugees.

Taken together, McConnachie's *Governing Refugees: Justice, Order and Legal Pluralism*, is a valuable contribution to legal anthropology and refugee studies. It is exemplary in providing sound support for the value of ethnographic work in unsettling simplistic assumptions underlying ideologies (or 'pernicious premises' (p. 2)) which, when used to justify State and international policies, are detrimental to the agency of vulnerable populations. Along these lines,

> *McConnachie echoes the call of many anthropologists and international human rights advocates to take seriously commitments to indigenous sovereignty embedded within the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.*

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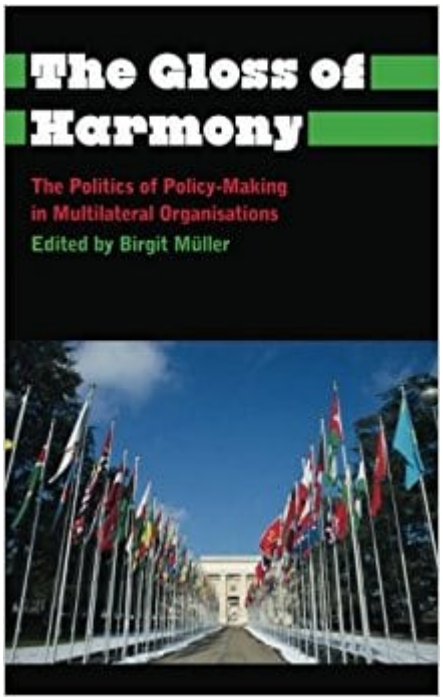
The Gloss of Harmony

Taras Fedirko
November, 2015

I spent much of my fieldwork at a department of the UK Government grappling with a confusing dynamic between civil servants I worked with, and their 'stakeholders' from the civil society and large businesses. At formal meetings about the policy that the Department implemented, those attending did their best to hide their feuds and divisive interests in order to create an atmosphere of consensus. After the meetings, be it during bureaucratic de-briefs or private phone calls, people mobilised all their knowledge of relationships among their colleagues, of their interests and conflicts, in order to decode what actually had been said and done in the formal settings of the meetings. If the policy was to be implemented successfully, consensus and harmony had to reign in the assemblies. But it only made sense to people through the lens of the organisational backstage.



The accounts collected by Birgit Müller in the ten chapters of her volume *The Gloss of Harmony* provide for an interesting read that will resonate with the fieldwork experience of many researchers studying formal organisations. The essays persuasively explain how conflicts and tensions around the production of international norms are dissolved and dissipated by 'technical' means to generate consensus and make the world governable without really governing it. Authors have all conducted fieldwork within multilateral international organisations of the UN system that have little if any constraining mechanisms, yet are tasked with governing such important areas as human rights, protection of biodiversity, and environmental management. The lens of organisational ethnography has allowed researchers to follow policy negotiations at great length, and to account for how these negotiations relate to and enact institutional and normative frameworks of the organisations. As Müller puts it, the "chapters point to the disarticulation between practices of and in these organisations and their rationalising models" (p.3).

> *Focusing on mechanisms of governance that result from tensions between organisations' aspirations and goals, and their mandate, the authors describe the work that goes into negotiating policies by consensus.*

For example, Marion Fresia (chapter three) focuses on the "making of global consensus" on refugee protection norms at the Executive Committee of UNHCR. Exploring perspectives of different actors involved in the "tense and fragmented arena" of negotiations (p.64), and relationships among them, Fresia suggests that "international organisations […] formulate and implement norms and policies that cannot be described in a realist and instrumentalist way as the simple product of interstate bargaining or of western imperialism. Nor do they appear as the mere

expression of the institutional interests of international experts or international organisations" (p.70, reference omitted). These norms and policies, she argues, result from a complex dynamic of relationships among different actors, who are also differentially involved in negotiations.

Similarly, Tobias Kelly (chapter six) describes how the bureaucratic procedures of the international system of human rights monitoring are not simply transparent forms of information-gathering, but can hide as much as they reveal. In particular, Kelly argues that "[a]s a result of the technical ways in which human rights obligations are interpreted, the shame of torture is dispersed into arguments about procedure" (p.135). In her essay on the genealogy of the international oversight of rights (chapter five), Jane Cowan traces changes in the value placed upon organisational transparency. She observes that whereas in the Minorities Section of the League of Nations behind-closed-doors negotiations were a preferred method, in the present-day UN Universal Periodic Review transparency is performed to the global public, even though it comes with its own obfuscations (p.126).

Like Cowan, who describes the complexity of social arrangements through which the states mobilise support and contest attempts of international organisations to exercise influence, Brigitta Häuser-Schaublin pays attention to brokering and delicate negotiations about the restitution of cultural artefacts at UNESCO. Suggesting that such negotiations are laden with powerful symbolism — e.g. of decolonisation, or loss of face and shame for former colonial powers — the authors conclude that the governance of artefacts' return deals not just with the practicalities of return as such, but also with the symbolic value attached to contested artefacts.

Revealing the social and normative complexity of international norms of soft law, essays by Fresia, Bendix (chapter one), Cowan, Kelly, and Hauser-Shäublin complicate our understanding of the organisations they study, and of the relationships between norms, official policy documents, and practices of knowledge formation. The chapters by Müller and MacDonald focus on the other

end of the spectrum, looking at the practical implications of the "gloss of harmony" at sites of policy implementation.

All of the essays explore bureaucratic practices and political interests through which policy decisions and blueprints are articulated and made coherent. In this, they source their inspiration from David Mosse's (2005) work on development policy. Thus, in her introduction, Müller suggests that the volume belongs to the line of organisational anthropology that instead of showing how an institution thinks, "explore[s] how people think and act inside the organisation" (p.5). This is refreshing, as much of the existing literature on the topic tends to adopt a critical stance that reduces the complexity of organisational sociality to either assumed political or economic interests, or analytically discernible outcomes, such as the promotion of neoliberalism.

Yet, although describing and explaining the complexity of the social lives of policy in international organisations, these rich and insightful accounts tell their readers little by way of ethnographic exploration of how exactly "people think and act inside organisation". Complexity here is an effect of juxtaposition of actors' perspectives, rather than an artefact of detailed description of personal trajectories, actions and aspirations. This certainly does not take away from the analytical merits of the volume, but a more ethnographic description of what goes on at meetings and offices, of the mundane work of policy writing and negotiation, and of the material media through which this work takes place, would have only made it better.

> *In my opinion, the chapters are at their best when they discuss exactly what might seem mundane, uninteresting, and intentionally devoid of conflict.*

Document form, the specificities of technical interpretation of policy "language", bureaucratic procedures and expert knowledge all fall into this category. Antithetical to politics because they are "technical", they are but politics by other means, we are told, as for example in Peter Bille Larsen's chapter on best practice guidelines on environmental management. Larsen (chapter four)

interestingly characterises the non-binding normativity of guideline documents as unstable, stating that "[t]heir non-definition may in fact be seen as a defining quality or property allowing for their elasticity and perceived utility" (p.79). This insight into the form of international soft norms goes some way in explaining how the norms hold across contexts and for different actors. Larson's argument is reminiscent of the work of Annelise Riles (2000) and Tess Lea (2008), both of whom showed, for the UN Conference on Women and the Australian Territorial Health Service respectively, how consensus is often a matter of the form of documents, and the affordances that this form possesses. Larson's argument also echoes that of the other contributors (esp. Bendix, Fresia, Kelly), who, in Müller's words, describe how policy "[d]rafts are tamed until they become acceptable and polite, cleansed of their conflictive elements and rendered 'technical'" (p.8, reference omitted).

At the same time, looking for politics, the book seems to overlook what else could be at stake for people who inhabit and transit through organisations in question, or even how exactly these people relate to the politics of policymaking that the authors identify. Equally, the reader won't find much about ethical, epistemic or aesthetic commitments that these people might have to, say, consensus decision-making or technical means that help them achieve consensus.

This might well be an effect of the peculiarities of fieldwork in international organisations, which as Bendix says is ethnographically taxing. The dynamics of communication is dense, people are many and difficult to follow, and access is difficult to obtain. The editor and some of the contributors explicitly acknowledge that "doors to negotiation rooms [can be] closed to the external observer" (p.6). This acknowledgment, however, begs a question: how do the formal settings of meetings and committees, which the researchers observe and analyse, relate to the parts of organisational 'lives' that remains invisible to the ethnographic eye? What do we lose by not being able to observe the mundane flow of organisational sociality, and analysing instead the public performances of organisations at meetings? Where do the meetings enacting the gloss of harmony, which the essays so artfully deconstruct, fit in terms of broader processes of organisation?

It’s difficult to answer without access to that which remains behind the closed doors.

The Gloss of Harmony doubtlessly is a useful book, for it demonstrates both the strengths of ethnographic study of international organisations, and the limits of our method. It is a rich collection, and its essays cover a lot of ground and are thus difficult to do justice to. All in all, it is a necessary read to those working in similar fields, especially because of the way the essays ground the production of international norms in the organisational dynamics of UN institutions.

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Tsing and Descola in videos!

#CFAS

Allegra
November, 2015

Allie’s conference week has been packed full of interesting reads from the Biennial Conference of the Finnish Anthropological Society. Tired of reading already? We conclude the week with delicious dessert: here is an assortment of

videos for your enjoyment! So please kick your feet up, let your alert eyes ease up, and join us in this latest addition to Allegra TV!

First up, Anna Tsing's keynote speech.

Then an interview with Anna Tsing.

Philippe Descola is interviewed in the third video.

And finally, Descola's Westermarck lecture that ended the conference.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUV13S4fnmo

The second Helsinki Knots Symposium: 23 October 2015

Allegra
November, 2015
Relations and Dependencies, the second Helsinki Knots Symposium, tackled how two disciplines, anthropology and sociology, deal with the interplay between the intellectual and political/economic conditions of their existence.

> *The day considered, for example, how anthropologists think about money and in what way money might be becoming involved in some of today's knottiest problems.*

Jane Guyer asked: in what currency are the refugees paying for their trip across

the Mediterranean? That apparently simple question draws on decades of work that Guyer has done in Africa and elsewhere on the way that the money in people's pockets entangles them in often unpredictable ways with both structural and ideological elements in the rest of the world.

The day also considered the moment when sociology was separated from anthropology in France (Éric Fassin), and how Lévi-Strauss was deeply implicated in making that distinction; the subsequent implications for an ability to discuss issues of race (previously associated with the word 'anthropology' in France) within sociology and anthropology was an unintended consequence of that history. This example neatly demonstrated the way that the disciplinary divisions with which we live are neither fixed across time and space; but it also demonstrated how social and political conditions are deeply implicated in the disciplinary classifications we choose.

The degree to which Facebook makes use of everyone's data and follows them wherever they may go in the internet was the topic of Beverley Skeggs' presentation. She powerfully demonstrated how most people voluntarily give up any semblance of privacy, and allow themselves to be disambiguated into categories for the purposes of targeted marketing: we are, it seems, simultaneously whole persons (e.g. we have a particular monetary value in marketing terms), but also bits and parts of persons who are recombined to suit certain kinds of marketing packages. Skeggs also notes how hard it is to find out exactly what Facebook knows, even if the organization insists on knowing everything about you.

> *The paper brought out strongly how sociology needs to keep up with these new social and structural forms, and also points the way to new potential developments in anthropology.*

Finally, Ruben Andersson looked at the strange way in which the crossing of territories has become big business in the world today. While the media are focusing on the numbers of people crossing, and some media are looking at the

causes, Andersson used ethnographic techniques to turn his gaze onto the very big and profitable business of monitoring and securing borders, and of handling the flow of people across them. It was an important reminder of the way that we create our own crises, and often make money out of them; it is not simply that an explosion somewhere led to the fleeing of hundreds of thousands of people: it is also that what they encounter in attempts to get from somewhere dangerous to somewhere safer entangles them with a complex set of economic, political and social conditions that need to be understood three dimensionally.

> *The symposium aimed to explore the way sociology and anthropology form a part of these new forms of existence that they are studying, both conceptually and politically.*

In particular, the aim was to explore how both relations between different conceptual approaches, and the conditions of dependency that allow their production and dissemination, affects the political, social or cultural significance of the research that is done.

Keynote speakers

Jane Guyer, Johns Hopkins; “Knots in the Study of Money: Do they strengthen the grip and/or downplay entanglements of the threads?”. Discussant: Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen, Tampere.

Éric Fassin, Paris VIII. “The Great Divide: Sociology, Anthropology, and Race in France since Lévi-Strauss”. Discussant: Soumhya Venkatesan, Manchester

Beverley Skeggs, Goldsmiths London; “A new regime of accumulation? tying in and tying up, tracking relations on Facebook. ” Discussant: Keir Martin, Oslo.

Ruben Andersson, LSE and Stockholm; “Borderline ethnography: thoughts on impact and ethics amid Europe’s ‘refugee crisis’”. Discussant: Marie-Andrée Jacob, Keele

Discussant for Symposium as a whole: Atreyee Sen, Copenhagen.

Organizer: Sarah Green, Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Helsinki (sarah.green@helsinki.fi), this year in association with Sociological Review, as part of a wider intellectual project to develop engagement between sociology, other disciplines and the world in which we all live.

Featured Image by Pekka Nikrus (Flikr, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Landscapes: Panel Selection #CFAS

Aleksis Toro
November, 2015

Today our coverage of the Biannual Conference of the Finnish Anthropological Society continues with selected notes from panels – brought to you by Maija Lassila and Aleksis Toro, the people also responsible for the wonderful interviews of Anna Tsing and Philip Descola. Perfect accompaniment for getting in the mood for AAA2015 – or for just generally relishing the latest in debates on landscapes!

Aleksis:

I attended the panel entitled “Ecological Re-enchantment” and the following are brief comments on the stimulating papers and themes. The panel, convened by Timo Kallinen, brought together papers exploring certain new, revived and persistent ways of valuing and relating to nature. These are often seen as spiritual alternatives to modernization processes, which construe nature in reductionist, linear and homogenizing forms. Thus, for example, in Kallinen’s paper based on research in Ghana, he noted how the secularizing effects of missionary activity that took place a century ago were intended to induce African converts to abandon their traditional commitments to sacred environments, in order to facilitate more efficient resource extraction.

> *Recently, however, a revaluation of traditional and religious ways of relating to the environment has occurred, and government agencies and NGOs have launched ecotourism projects centered on places, natural formations and nonhuman species that are considered sacred.*

Kallinen examined how local conceptualizations of these processes have altered ideas about modernity, how they are viewed by diverse religious groups and what they imply about the relationship between religion and economic development in Ghana.

Talal Asad has suggested that religion is a human universal to the extent that it makes more sense to ask about how secular formations are construed and maintained. Not only are notions of native spirituality being revalued in conservation politics, as Kallinen described, religious values such as biblically inspired notions of ecological stewardship are also challenging secular environmentalism. The ideological and practical alliances that indigenous peoples form with conservation agencies are of course complex and ambivalent. This includes their links to what have been called “post-secular” emergences of spirituality making western publics more receptive to ontologically diverse notions of enchanted natures. Various modern modes of valuing nature, such as commodification for tourism, seem susceptible to articulations with forms of

ecological re-enchantment.

Susannah Crockford observed similar processes in her rich paper on the sacred power vortexes that local residents experience in the iconic, red rock canyon landscape surrounding Sedona, Arizona. In recent decades this landscape has become a locus of "New Age" beliefs. These beliefs are centered on spiraling energy vortexes, which call to people to visit and live near their psychic energies, enhancing practices of healing, meditation and channeling. Drawing on the work of Durkheim and Eliade on the sacred, Crockford asked whether there is something particular in the landscape that evokes these figurations of sacred agency, or if it functions more like a blank canvas for such projections. She noted that early American settlers, who displaced Native American peoples from the area, viewed the landscape as harsh rather than spiritual. However, local people today associate its powers with the autochthony of Native American cultures.

The sacred vortexes of the Sedona landscape partake of genealogies of American identity including the history of Manifest Destiny, a mimetic link with the symbolism of the Native American other, and the transcendentalist tradition of valuing the American landscape as a wilderness to see God. The contemporary re-enchantment of the landscape occurs in the midst of the expansion of the tourist industry of the Grand Canyon and the San Francisco Peaks and contemporary derogatory stereotypes of Native Americans.

> *The power vortexes of Sedona are construed and experienced as having always been there. Conceivably, such forms of ecological re-enchantment need to occlude their historical origins to appear "more real" than the pervasive forms of standardization that bind modern living. Yet a widespread tendency to experience transcendence as an emplaced phenomenon seems to exist among diverse groups of people, revealing sacred sites as immanent forces and agents of nature. This made me wonder whether a potential sacredness amenable to creative variation is somehow implicitly available in the world.*

In Magnus Course's subtle and perceptive paper there was perhaps a suggestion

of such a phenomenological property in the world. He began by noting that a certain lament for something missing, possibly for a lost heterogeneity, attends to the modern process Weber called the disenchantment of the world. Course contrasted the disenchantment affected by modern linear time with cyclical rhythms of nature, such as the tide, through ethnographic insights gleaned from his research in Gaelic-speaking communities in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland. The Hebridean landscape has been transformed since the early 19th century through the boom and bust phases of global capitalism. These drove the forcible clearance of lands for sheep farms and the removal of local people to coastal communities to work in the kelp and fishing industries, resulting in a decline of the clan system and communal living.

Today the linear and homogenizing forces of modern economic modes affect local communities through declining fish stocks and climate change. However, as contemporary Hebridean sensibilities are tied to the sea through coastal living and commercial fishing, local rhythms of life are connected to the tide and the phases of the moon. Course reflected on an image from Robert Pogue Harrison's book *The Dominion of the Dead*, that of the sea that has no past, and obliterates human temporality and history. Besides its rich metaphorical associations, this evocation of the dialectic of revelation and annihilation that occurs at the edges of the tides indicates how tidal rhythms, by resisting singular chronotopes such as modern linear time, affect a form of ecological re-enchantment.

Jamie Alexander's vivid presentation of her research on the cultural and spiritual ties to the land of Xhosa-speaking township dwellers of the Eastern Cape resonated with many of the themes touched on in the other papers. Although today multiple histories and claims of ownership curtail access to the surrounding landscapes, the people of the Xhosa townships continue to value and sustain connections to their ancestral and nonhuman powers. Alexander described the multivocality of experiences of local ways of belonging to the sacred landscape as a source of powers to heal, places for rites of passage, and various narratives that

link people, families and clans across domestic, communal and wild sacred spaces.

She noted the problems of access deriving from histories of apartheid and colonial policies separating people from the land, and recently due to economic inequality and farmlands being given away for conservation. The consequences for some local people include a condition of being culturally "stuck" due to being unable to access sites essential for conducting rites of passage. Alexander then discussed the challenges of mapping the webs of belonging that stitch people to the ancestral landscape through relationships between the human and nonhuman worlds.

> *This reflected how such knowledge could conduce to wider recognition of local uses and values of sacred landscapes, providing a common ground of understanding for conserving biocultural diversity.*

Maija:

I attended panel 7 Geographies of Capitalism and Landscapes of Globalization, and panel 11 Landscape and New Politics of Nature. I decided to write short summaries of these two panels and give examples of some of their papers. The focus is on the panels' environmental topics as they present from different angles the current anthropological research done on resource extraction, local landscapes, and actors in the situations where landscapes are transformed. The two panels fulfilled each other nicely, as panel number 7's starting point (with also other than environmental topics) was from a more global perspective, whereas panel number 11 brought out the contradictions, ambivalencies and overlapping that capitalist processes produce in particular places and in social relations.

Panel session number 7, Geographies of Capitalism and Landscapes of Globalization took place on the second conference day. The panel explored landscape as a connecting point between local and global capitalist processes. In

the panel landscapes were, following Anna Tsing, understood as conjunctures and consisting of different encounters, places, where historical capitalist processes, current exploitations and differing power structures meet. The panel's presentation took ethnographic narratives as starting points to look at large-scale global, capitalism and how it turns out locally, and in varied ways. The panel's commentator was professor Thomas Hylland Eriksen, who provided several insights to the presentations.

Cynthia del Castillo Tafur from the University College London and Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru had conducted ethnographic research in the Peruvian Amazon on the Camisea Gas Project, and its effects on the indigenous Machiguenga communities, who live on one of the most biodiverse regions in the world. Castillo Tafur has especially focused on women in her research in the Cashiriari village, and she discussed about the ways in which the hydrocarbon project has changed women's position in the community structure, increasing their household burden through the increased wage labour of both women and men. The material wealth has meant new consumer patterns and needs, but at the same time the cultural and the natural resources have been viewed in the community as decreasing.

Satu Ranta-Tyrkkö from the University of Tampere presented her post-doctoral comparative ethnographic project between two different mining regions of Orissa, India and Sodankylä, Finland. She approached the question of capitalist mineral extraction and its effects from the point of view of low-income people, and what would the exploitation's consequences mean from the point of view of social work.

> *In the final comments to the panel, Thomas Hylland Eriksen brought out different concepts that the panel had evoked. What was common to all the presentation were the large-scale landscape changes, and the changes in the ways people articulate their relationship to the landscape. When there are profound changes in one's surroundings that are marked by memory and belonging, what can one do?*

Hylland Eriksen mentioned the term ”solastalgia” originally presented by philosopher Glenn Albrecht, which means the powerlessness and the sense of loss experienced, sometimes intense sadness that people feel, when their landscapes change.

In the panel number 11, Landscape and New Politics of Nature that took place on both conference days the focus was in landscapes, where natures are produced and created by active agents especially in the situations that the recent rush for land, forests and minerals or conservation has caused. The panel looked into human and non-human interaction, such as humans’ relationships with the landscape that is also inhabited by spirits, animals and ancestors, as well as the interaction between actors from local village levels to, for example, transnational corporation or state scales. The panel’s critical goal was to look at the material properties, such as resources or objects that have been thought central in the making of landscapes, and rather pay attention to the new concepts that emerge in the changing landscapes and social changes produced within this landscapes,

in the active nature making of all the actors involved, including non-humans.

Following the presentations that were based on ethnographic fieldwork in various environments and places from Indonesia and Papua New Guinea to Madagascar, New Caledonia and Lapland, it became clear that there is no one single structure to connect all the contexts, where new politics of nature emerge. However, in places where different scales clash, people have to define their positions and social relations anew. For example, several presentations brough out palm oil cultivation as contrasting and transforming local social worlds but palm oil cultivation has different outcomes according to particular places and their histories.

Pujo Semedi from the Gadjah Mada University noted how in West Kalimantan the transformation from swidden agriculture to palm oil cultivation has caused the marginalization of women in agriculture and politics of land. Palm oil cultivation has brought a social and spatial reorganization of farmers' economy. With palm oil land has been transformed to belong only in the male domain, contrary to the situation before, when women had an active role in land owning and farming activities.

Tuomas Tammisto from the University of Helsinki paid attention to palm oil plantations in contrast to village relations in the Pomio district of Papua New Guinea. The palm oil plantation is an ambivalent place for villagers who have started to work there, and the social relations and the politics that emerge in the intersection of village/plantation are overlapping and contradictory.

Jenni Mölkänen focused on vanilla cultivation and environmental conservation in her presentation, and showed how the Malagasy vanilla cultivators' way of making nature through their work of care of the vanilla plant, and conservation efforts for the sake of ecotourism are two kinds of politics and processes of creating nature, and understanding nature. A pristine environment that foreign tourists expect is another kind of production of nature than that of Malagasy cultivators to whom the "biological nature" cannot be limited outside humans.

Anu Lounela from the University of Helsinki paid attention to the landscape as made ”valuable” in its social and material aspects through climate change mitigation programs. Lounela explored the effects of the REDD+ program on the Ngaju Dayaks in Central Kalimantan, how they relate to their landscape after these new value producing actions, and what changes REDD+ has brought them.

All in all, I think the both panels were suggesting that the research done on the capitalist processes’ entanglement with social and historical landscapes, and capitalism in the making of the new politics of nature, is a strong and growing research field in anthropology. There are differences in whether to approach capitalism more from a world system point of view, or starting from the complexities of capitalist processes in particular historical and social landscapes. For the anthropologist, the ethnographic fieldwork and getting inside of what really happens is the key to opening up the difficult questions of capitalism and the new politics of nature.

#AAA2015: Allegra’s Favorites

Allegra
November, 2015

This week, anthropologists will be making their way to Denver for the yearly academic (and sometimes chaotic) ritual that is #AAA2015. The "Familiar/Strange" theme of this year's AAA meeting lends itself easily to reflexivity, as we confront what it is anthropology sets out to do, and how we go about doing it. Appropriately, then, the program hums with themes like otherness, exoticism, and alterity, accompanied by preoccupations with method, disciplines, teaching, and activism. Read on to see Allegra's previews of some of our favorite panels, and let us know which ones you're most looking forward to in the comments!

It's always a good sign when you run into words in the program that your computer's spell check can't recognize, and this year's titles do not disappoint. Some of the finest wordplay shout outs go to: "homo islamicus" (on disciplines

and moral economies of the Islamic subject), "b/ordering infrastructures" (on contested spaces and mediated mobility), "ngo-graphies" (a roundtable on NGOs and nonprofits), "making the familia(r) strange" (on migrant kinship networks in Latin America), "toxicities and toxic cities" (on environmental contamination), "queerying Palestine" (from the Association for Queer Anthropology), and "the value of (neo)liberal arts" (on the marketing of the college experience).

The fun doesn't end with the titles, though! For the extra adventurous is a special fieldtrip into the urban jungle of Denver: "Cannabis Cultures," a free public engagement event sponsored by the Association for Political and Legal Anthropology (APLA). You'll get to tour a grow house, dispensary, and hear a forum of experts discuss "the political, economic, and social processes that transform a cultural object (marijuana) from strange (criminal) to familiar (legal)." There's even a souvenir t-shirt!

APLA will also be sponsoring several panels and workshops throughout the week. "Undisciplining Law and Economy," "Speaking of Evidence," and "The Actant Archive: On Surveillance, Subversion, and Self-Fashioning" draw attention to methodology and practice within political and legal anthropology. In these panels, scholars ask how we differentiate between the domains of law and economy, how evidence is constituted in bureaucracies, and how archives fit into theoretical and ethnographic explorations of data technologies.

Several panels seem to have their finger on the pulse of current events that have increasingly been demanding the attention of anthropologists. "This Too Is Ferguson," "Ferguson and Beyond," and "Race and Revolution, from Fanon to Ferguson," among others, address themes of the Black Lives Matter movement and the anthropology of policing. Added to this, the ongoing issue of the Israeli academic boycott has its own panel, and "The Syrian Civil War" panel opens up the urgent conversation about refugees and human rights.

Some other titles that look exciting include "Creative Disorientation: Ethnographic Sensibility as Improvisational Art," "Looking Across Boundaries:

Poetry as Social Action," "Capitalizing on the Carnivalesque: Questioning Transgressive Humor, Language, and Power," "Keywords for a Counter-Neoliberal Anthropology," and finally, from the blogosphere itself, "The Internet and Anthropology: Ten Years of Savage Minds." We look forward to the lively discussions we hope these topics provoke, whether within or between panels–as always, as much anthropology happens outside of the scheduled sessions as in them!

Anthropology as the study of composite worlds – an interview with Philippe Descola

Aleksis Toro
November, 2015

An academic interview is just a snapshot but it can offer a vivid account of a life's work. The following is an edited version of an interview with Philippe Descola, whose distinguished career includes many innovative contributions to debates in the ethnography of Amazonia and anthropological theory, which have played a large part in the so-called ontological turn of contemporary anthropology. I had the privilege to interview Professor Descola, who currently holds the Chair in the Anthropology of Nature at the Collège de France, when he visited Helsinki to attend the Biennial Conference of the Finnish Anthropological Society and deliver the Edward Westermarck Memorial Lecture, entitled "Landscape as Transfiguration."

My first question was about Professor Descola's transition to anthropology from his early studies in philosophy and how he embarked on his ethnographic project

with the Achuar of the Upper Amazon. He talked in response about the long tradition in France of prominent social scientists, such as Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss, converting from philosophy to anthropology. Although he commended the training provided by the French method of teaching philosophy as the history of discursive formations, he recalled feeling:

"…dissatisfied by the fact that the questions that were being asked were the questions that had been asked ever since 2500 years ago from the Greeks onwards about being, about truth, about the legitimacy of certain kinds of scientific propositions about morality etc., without taking into account other ways of asking these questions that had been observed by anthropologists and historians elsewhere. "So there was a self-centered dimension to philosophy which I found problematic. This is why, rather than being interested in experiments of thought, like many others in France I began to be interested in real life experiments of how people lead and organize their lives – questions that were not conceivable in the philosophical panorama in general."

About his early interest in anthropology, he said:

"I had read Tristes Tropiques when I was 16 or 17 and I was fascinated, not so much by the Indians in the book because it's an intellectual biography, but by the man, Lévi-Strauss, someone who was at the same time obviously a very learned and sensible person, who wrote very well with a very incisive mind, who could write as well on Debussy and Rousseau and the Bororo Indians in Brazil. This form of humanism, of very broad culture, fascinated me in the person. So I said, 'if this person is an anthropologist, then anthropology must be a fascinating science also.´"

At the time, in addition to reading classic texts of structural anthropology, Professor Descola was one among many in his generation who were immersed in the texts of Marx and Engels. He soon found, in a book entitled Rationality and Irrationality in Economics by the young Maurice Godelier, recently returned from fieldwork in New Guinea, an analysis of pre-capitalist modes of production that

fascinated him. Here was, he recalled, “a rigorous way to enter the question of the diversity of forms of life in the world. So that’s when I decided to become an anthropologist.”

After an initial stint of fieldwork in the southern Chiapas in Mexico, which failed to provide the inspiration he felt he needed to conduct a long-term ethnographic project, Professor Descola revived earlier plans to do fieldwork in Amazonia. Going over reasons of this, the main one was that notwithstanding Lévi-Strauss’s work on mythology and a few good ethnographies, anthropologists knew next to nothing of Amazonia and Amazonian people at the time.

> *Reading the long record of ethnographic literature on Amazonia revealed a leitmotif of Amazonian people as mysterious and enigmatic—as French chroniclers of the Brazilian coast in the 16th century wrote, they were “Without Faith, King or Law”—meaning they exhibited few or none of the institutions like villages, chiefs or rituals that Europeans expected them to have.*

Perusing the texts, Professor Descola noticed that:

“What they all emphasized was that these people were naturals. They were in fact in a way glued to nature. Either positively, in Montaigne’s sense as naked philosophers, or as groups intent on killing each other, incapable of controlling their natural instincts… I was struck by this and I thought there must be something in their relation to nature for this leitmotif to go on for centuries. And at the time the main type of publications on Amazonia in the United States belonged to the so-called cultural ecology school, which was extremely reductionist and interpreted all cultural features as products of adaptation to nature, so there was a continuity in that sense. So I left for fieldwork with the idea of studying in depth

how these people related to what I still called at the time, 'nature.'"

My next question was about the process of gaining ethnographic insight and how his experiences in the Ecuadorian Amazon with the Achuar continued to inspire him. He responded that doing ethnography in unfamiliar settings is useful because it leads to astonishment, which he said is crucial in creating the epistemological distance that destabilizes one's assumptions:

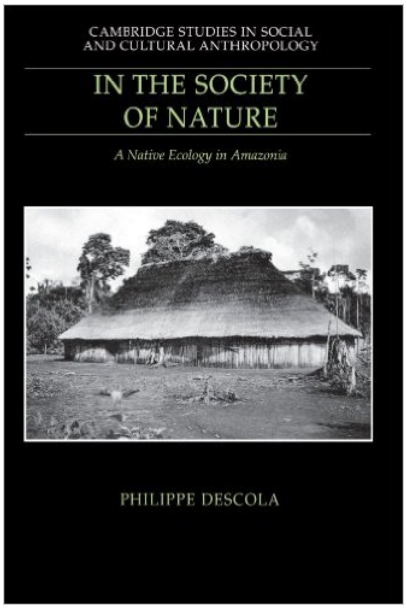
"And this is why Amazonia was very interesting, because it was perhaps the farthest one could go in terms of differences. There was a sort of logical scandal in these people. Where was society there? Especially among the Achuar, who were living in a completely scattered habitat, feuding amongst themselves, having no chiefs… I had heard a very interesting description by a Dominican missionary at the end of the 19th century who said the Achuar had no religion except birdsongs and dreams. And that was very clever to understand, because dreams are one of their means of communication with the spiritual dimension of nonhumans, and birdsongs are songs that the Achuar and the Jivaro in general sing constantly in order to connect with them. So he had a clear idea that their religion was that, but this lucidity was not very common at the time."

> *Professor Descola then recounted a memorable incident from his fieldwork that occurred when a woman in whose house he was staying was bitten by a dangerous snake by the river. He was able to help her by giving her a serum injection, but her husband was "completely devastated" and blamed himself for the incident.*

"I tried to speak with him to lift up his spirits, but he said it was his fault because it was the revenge of the Master of the Animals. The day before he had gone to the forest with a new shotgun – he used to hunt before with his blowgun only – and he killed many more of a troop of woolly monkeys than he would have needed to. "It's a very classical story among hunters everywhere in the world: his hubris made him responsible for the revenge that took the form of a snake bite on his wife."

Becoming acquainted with such entanglements, Professor Descola said, takes time as one learns the local language which appears, in a lively image, like disconnected subtitles of a film. Although people were forthcoming, until they were able to converse he and his wife were accepted, he recalled, as interesting distractions to observe. Over the first few months of fieldwork, Professor Descola gathered data on the use of plants and animals. Of this process, he said:

"Progressively, I came out of this gathering of technical and quantifiable material to understand what people were saying about the things I had been measuring. And obviously, there was a huge void between what I was considering at the time, which was the way these people were adapting to their environment, and the way they thought about it, which was as a series of interactions with nonhumans treated as social partners. "So that's when I came to realize that it was absurd to think of a society adapting to a natural environment. 'Nature' and 'society' were useless concepts for that."



These experiences became the basis for Professor Descola's first monograph, published in English as In the Society of Nature. The book describes how Achuar ecological practices were deeply interwoven with cosmological ideas connecting the lives of humans with plants, animals and spirits in an encompassing web of social relations. When I asked about its theoretical influences, Professor Descola noted that many people at the time were grappling with combining the incompatible approaches of Marxism, structuralism and phenomenology. He recalled his dissatisfaction with the materialist perspective that predefined society in terms of causally related layers, from the material base to the ideological system, and with the structuralist idea of "nature as good to think with," or of nature as "a sort of catalogue of properties, which the mind uses in order to construct interesting and complex combinations in myth and classification."

> *Having learned that the Achuar were concerned with nonhumans as social partners, rather than with nature as an intellectual problem, Professor Descola realized one had to do away with "nature" altogether, and turned his attention to how people interact with nonhumans.*

Subsequently, in his first teaching position, Professor Descola ran a research seminar exploring this question in societies neighboring the Achuar and progressively in other parts of the world. He discovered that the features he observed among the Achuar were very common in Amazonia, based on the fact that game animals were considered as affines, generally defined as in-laws, and noted the complexity and usefulness of this qualifying relationship. Recalling the beginning of an important scholarly relationship, Professor Descola recounted:

"This is when I began to read Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, who took affinity from the point of view of the relationship with humans, while I was interested in affinity as the relationship with nonhumans, and we discovered that there was a continuity. We arrived to affinity from different perspectives and interests: he came to affinity by studying cannibalism and Tupian attitudes towards affinity, while I came to it by studying the relationship with game animals, and we discovered that it was the same realm of social relations, in general."

Through systematic discussions with his seminar students and extending his ethnographic focus to North America and Siberia, Professor Descola discovered that there, too, people related to game animals through a relationship of affinity. Realizing this could not be attributed to a hunter-gatherer mode of life in places like Amazonia with an 8000-year-history of plant domestication, he concluded it had to be "a specific outlook towards nonhumans that is found in different places of the world. And this is when I decided to revive this old concept of animism, which had fallen into disrepute."

Given that cultivated plants were also related to in terms of a Dravidian kinship category, consanguinity, Professor Descola had a basis for his initial theory of animism, which he then gradually developed in conversation with his

main “sparring partners” Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Bruno Latour and Tim Ingold. These discussions and reading ethnographies of Aboriginal Australia indicated that the initial contrast he made between animism and Lévi-Strauss’s theory of totemism, a seemingly reverse case of treating differences between social groups in terms of categories of nonhumans, was “too classificatory.”

This was how he came to formulate the combinatorial matrix of four ontological modes put forth in his book Beyond Nature and Culture, first published in 2005. It stemmed from realizing that:

“…the relationship between what I call animism, totemism and naturalism—which is “our” way of doing things since the 17th century, if you wish to give a date—and what I called analogism, were all transformations of each other, as transformations of an initial contrast between, on the one hand, interiority and physicality, and on the other hand, difference and resemblance, which provided a sort of initial matrix to differentiate ways of detecting continuities and discontinuities between humans and nonhumans…”

In response to my question about how he intended this model of ontologies to be used, Professor Descola explained that he wrote the book not knowing how it would be received, having since been pleasantly surprised by the diverse interest it has generated. He continued that his intention was to provide analytical tools to go beyond classical social science concepts like history, society and nature.

> *This implies, he emphasized, studying the elementary systematizations of detecting continuities and discontinuities in the world that people learn in their native social settings, which appear to fall into one of the four ontological modes.*

“These are models intended as an analytical device to understand the conditions for bringing together, in what I call collectives, certain features and excluding other features. It’s a heuristic model in that sense… I speak of collectives because I’m interested in the form of aggregates that exist all over the world with humans

and nonhumans. “We” naturalists are one of the aggregates. We decided that there were beings which were natural and beings which were humans. This was a very important dividing line with a lot of consequences, and this dividing line resulted in the fact that we deal with societies as societies of humans. So we have excluded nonhumans from our collectives. Others have brought them into their collectives, but in very different fashions.”

He then offered views on the need for an ontological sensibility in anthropology: “What we have to study and understand is how people constitute these aggregates, and this is repeatable for every other concept. The subject, for instance: a subject is not necessarily derived from the individual subject as it is conceived in the west. And epistemology, which is in fact a reflection on what is knowable, is not either something that can be understood as it is in the west under the conditions of the truth of statements. So every philosophical or metaphysical problem that has been posed in the west has been posed in a different manner elsewhere, and you have to go beyond the traditional concepts to understand them. This is why it’s ontological. You cannot say it’s sociological because being sociological would mean that society would explain everything, which is not the case. Society is the product, the thing to be explained. It’s not the explanatory factor.”

> *Professor Descola went on to reflect that this reframing of the intellectual basis of the social sciences has certain political implications, due to the ontological underpinnings of processes of massive ecological change, resulting among other causes from the divisive conceptualization of nature and society in the modern ontological mode:*

“This idea is partly responsible for the current situation. It was responsible for very good things also. I’m not a moralist… I think it’s a partial apprehension of the world. Any ontology leads to a specific systematization of certain properties of the world, so any ontology gives a blueprint for composing certain kinds of worlds. But there are no worlds that are better than others. They are all partial

realizations of potentialities, qualities, processes or relations that obviously exist independently from us, and these partial realizations are legitimate. We can fight the consequences of western hubris and of what naturalism has provoked, but as such it's not more wrong than an animist or analogist point of view. So in that respect, if I were to give a definition of anthropology, it would be the study of the art of composing worlds."

In the remainder of the interview, Professor Descola discussed some of the abiding and new features of ethnographic fieldwork, and the connections of his earlier work to his current research on images and landscapes. Departing from the discursive sources on which he initially relied for his model of ontologies and turning to visual material for evidence, he conceived a project to ascertain:

> *"…both how images are good iconic clues of certain ontologies, in the sense that they reveal connections between beings and things that are indicative of a certain way of forming connections in a specific ontology, and at the same time how they are agents that can play an active part in the life of humans in certain circumstances, because in each of these ontologies they are activated by certain formal devices, which are also specific to ontologies."*

Professor Descola's recent work on landscape, which forms the basis of his Westermarck Lecture, draws on the concepts of iconic figuration and transfiguration, offering more precision than current, loose criteria for landscape as a generic integrating concept, to analyze the constitution of images into landscapes in settings, such as lowland South America, with no conventional forms of landscape representation of the kind that inform the varied but comparatively narrow range of European genealogies of the concept of landscape.

You can watch a video of the interview here, or see all conference videos here.

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‘Auto-rewilding’ landscapes and the Anthropocene – Interview with Anna Tsing

Maija Lassila
November, 2015

Anna Tsing is professor of anthropology at the University of Santa Cruz, California and the Nils Bohr professor at Aarhus University, Denmark, where she

heads the Living in the Anthropocene research project. During an interview on the 23rd of October 2015 we spoke about the developments of professor Anna Tsing's research, ethnography, multispecies landscapes, and the Anthropocene. Anna Tsing is known for her research on global interconnections and the environment, and for her books *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen* (1995) and *Friction* (2005) among others. Her latest book *The Mushroom At the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (2015) has just been published by Princeton University Press.

Maija Lassila: In terms of the environmental focus in your research, how did you end up writing *Friction: Ethnography of Global Connection* (2005)?

Anna Tsing: The environmental focus came out of the fieldwork. I'm really a believer in that ethnographic method. It leads you to the ethnographic situation, to inform your analytic questions and frameworks. When I was doing my PhD research I was impressed how I learned to see landscape. It was completely surprising to me. I still remember walking to a place where you could see out over the mountains and people explained that this was something beautiful, describing 'here's the place I lived five years ago', or 'my uncle lived over there'. It could be seen because the vegetation changed, and they identified every place they could see through these personal and communal histories. That was insightful to me and changed how I saw landscape.

When I planned a second project, I first wanted to do research about the landscape, the issue of how landscapes become historical. I did preliminary research, but the logging crisis had already begun. Instead of everyone talking about their histories there, people wanted to talk about the fact that these logging companies had come and were destroying the forest. The social and historical nature of the landscape had to be incorporated into the new crisis that was happening and changing my fieldwork site. It was really a drastic transition. When earlier it had been about historical continuities that could be seen in landscape patterns, this new crisis was about landscape transformations that

utterly changed everything. So *Friction* was re-designed over and over again in relation to what was happening. I allowed myself to follow the developments, for example, meeting the Indonesian nature lovers in the process.

In *Friction* you describe in the mid- 1990's immense forest destruction in South East Kalimantan by logging companies. Both in your descriptions of frontier areas, and how different people encounter each other in those frontiers, there is a marginality, a messiness and an awkwardness present. How and why did you begin to focus on this messiness and marginality in your research?

The marginality came first in *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen* (1993). It had to do with the self-perception, and others' perception of what it meant to be on the edge of the state, on the edge of national projects. The messiness probably came out of that ethnographic situation in a slightly different way. I worked among personal encounters and community factions that were forming. In that process the awkward, messy nature of what comes out of interactions became clear. It can't be said that there is one overall structure to everything because people were continually showing me different sides of the situation, and the kind of contingencies through which a particular outcome had occurred.

Was there not a straight or main story line?

There was not a single story that was easy to impose on the situation. Things had certain fluidity to them, which I guess required paying attention to the awkward interactions. Some of it had to do with misunderstandings, which is something that I talk about in *Friction*. These scale-making projects don't work together very well. That brings me back to the marginality part that you talked about because margins are not exemplars of the imagination of the people at the center. The people at the center have a particular way of understanding the situation that actually doesn't fit at all. In those misunderstandings you get a sense that they are messy and awkward. I was continually struck during interviews for *Friction* in Jakarta and the countryside; the interviews did not match up, even when people

were talking about the same thing.

Do you think that messiness is present in all social interaction?

I do. I think it is present even in those kinds of situations where people stress the 'overarching order', where they have to figure out a way to suppress the messiness for a little while. However, you can't repress it.

In your latest projects on multispecies worlds, and in Matsutake Worlds Research Group you have focused on more-than-human landscapes, on landscapes and the world made of multispecies connections and histories. In your research in South East Kalimantan from the beginning of the 1980's, were you already thinking of the landscape as a multispecies place?

I think I was not explicitly, but I was already interested and in part because the ethnography brought me to it. People knew so much about plants and animals and brought them to life when seeing and describing a landscape. However, I didn't pursue it much. In the new Matsutake project, the interest came from trying to learn something about the mushrooms and listening to people tell me about these mushrooms. I realized that to learn about mushrooms you have to learn about the interaction between fungi and trees, and how the interaction makes forests and changes landscapes. Something also happened in anthropology that made this a very exciting time to do this work. An interest in how interspecies interaction creates who we are and what are landscapes had popped up. It is fascinating how people working on themes like ethnicity or gender, or political revolutions or state are suddenly interested in multispecies relations.

It seems that the multispecies research has really started to flourish in recent times.

That is because there are new things happening in the natural sciences that make it possible to have collaborations that weren't there before. For example, developmental biology has addressed multi-species relations, exploring what

allows organisms to develop and become what they are. So there's a possibility for a dialogue. This is for ecologists too who are interested in disturbance dynamics and how human history plays a role in changing landscapes. It is exciting how it has come from many different disciplines including the arts. I think artists have been really a key component of making this interdisciplinary conversation happen, especially in terms of the concept of the Anthropocene.

> *The most interesting thing about the Anthropocene that makes it worth talking about is the interdisciplinary discussion that it sparks.*

Do you think that the concept of the Anthropocene and the research around it will have some profound impact on how science and different disciplines are organized?

It could. I think the fear is, and what anthropologists share on any topic that becomes 'hot' is that there will be a flourish of artificial articles and books and people will get bored. The chances are good that that's what's going to happen. But we hope that the impact will be more profound. Especially in thinking about all the topics that were present in the conference here, on landscape, materiality and sociality. Precisely in those kinds of domains the Anthropocene could make an interesting difference in how we understand the materials that we are writing about, human and non-human.

As the 6th wave of extinction and the climate change touch all the corners of the planet, do you think that the environmental situation will do something to the way we think?

I think there is a big set of challenges for anthropologists. I agree that those planetary problems are absolutely acute right now. It is up to anthropologists to figure out a way that we can talk about the problems that doesn't obscure global inequalities and heterogeneities, which often happens when people talk about planetary problems. What completely disappears is the kinds of things that anthropologists know about, the history of colonialism, of race, of religion, of

class, the state – all the things that we have worked on over the years. I think there's a huge challenge for anthropologists to do Anthropocene in a way that brings those kinds of issues back into the story that's been told about the planetary issues.

In your keynote lecture you talked about the weedy landscape, and the 'auto re-wilders' of the landscape. In what ways do you think anthropology is especially suited to study the landscape connections between humans and other species? You also talked about noticing. Is noticing at the heart of this research?

We'll start from the second part and I think what I have been arguing is that rather than the 'whole sale' adoption of what some branch of natural sciences offers, we should be more acute in our noticing.

> *What we're doing in fieldwork is noticing; we notice human relations with each other; we notice spirits; we notice all kinds of things. We should start noticing the plants and animals around us too. In fact, there's a lot we can learn just by paying attention.*

That's one of the basic ideas that I am trying to promote. I can't think of any better discipline to study these things. We are already good at studying things that are out of order if you know what I mean. We have always been interested in kinds of people and institutions, belief systems, that are not the ones that are maybe at the center of the world, things that you're not supposed to notice, things that are by the side of the road. I think noticing the engagement between humans and non-humans is another part of that.

There's a kind of continuity in the *Friction* story here, in that those weeds and auto re-wilders are coming together in the moments of friction. It is also the plants and animals that are part of the story of what comes together and creates a history.

As many species disappear many people on the planet must experience loss. How can we approach that loss?

I think anthropologists have been slow in noticing the loss. We have to get better at noticing loss. There's so much pressure on us to be optimistic about the state of the world that we don't admit to loss. I'm interested in thinking about loss, and in an Anthropocene conference that I went to in September a geographer said we need to think harder about the relationship between catastrophe and mourning, and it stuck in my head. We have tons of ways of moving on, and I'm including myself in that too. Maybe staying with some of this catastrophe and mourning is useful because we haven't done it very much in anthropology. We have been thinking about catastrophe and mourning about other social issues and humans, but in this distinctive set of issues we haven't been willing to talk about it much. I think we could look environmental bad news more in the face, and I want to try to do that too.

In the keynote lecture you mentioned the 'eco-modernists'?

In the Anthropocene, I'm annoyed with the developing of this louder voice from these 'eco-modernists'. They advocate for what they call the 'good Anthropocene', where humans are entirely in control by using more capitalism, more technology,

more of the very kinds of practices that caused the problems in the first place. Instead of being critical or imagining that their solutions have problems too, they just say ‘no, just put us in charge and we’ll take over and fix everything’. I think if the Anthropocene discussion is going to be worth anything those people can’t get the upper hand in defining what the conversation is about.

Coming back to the Matsutake project and your latest book, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, the mushrooms grow in landscapes that are disturbed by humans. Did they even grow in Hiroshima after the catastrophe?

Yes, but disturbed only to a certain extent. You are not going to get a mushroom to grow in the middle of this table, or a parking lot. This mushroom grows only with trees and so if the trees are destroyed you are not going to get mushrooms anymore. This mushroom shows that we are not going to have to kill all the humans on the planet for things to stay alive. It has been possible for humans to live with other species. I think we need to look carefully at that history of what we now call the Holocene of humans and other species. We didn’t do it great and we caused a lot of extinction but there was a certain amount of human and non-human living together despite the agricultural systems, marine fisheries and other kinds of human disturbances. We’ve had those disturbances without killing everything off. Matsutake is a kind of creature from that set of disturbances. The fact that it happened to grow in Hiroshima is because not all the pine trees were killed. You can’t give the mushroom too much credit there were other factors as well.

Are they somehow a sign of hope?

They are at least the kind of stuff that humans are capable of living with. We don’t necessarily need a pristine environment to get these mushrooms and we can have something that’s working towards, and good enough, to collaborate with other species, towards something that takes into account that trees and fungi need each other. So maybe you wouldn’t want to wipe out all of the forest. Yes, in hindsight I

think that I focused on Matsutake as it's more hopeful than lots of other fungi I could have picked. It is hopeful in a certain kind of way because it grows in disturbed landscapes.

What advice would you give to scholars and students starting in anthropology?

I would like to encourage students and young scholars to stay interested in the world. Sometimes anthropology gets very involuted and people just want to debate theoretically. I would like to tell young people that while that seems like the smartest thing you could do right now in five years nobody's going to care about those little debates around defining a term, or what some theoretical point is. Five years is a very short time. Before you even get your degree nobody cares. But if you're curious about the world, tie that to knowing the world and to a set of those big questions and theoretical points, then your work continues to matter. I want to encourage students and young people to stay curious about the world even as they are asking their theoretical questions.

Does the curiosity come first, before the theorizing?

I think so. Of course you can't help to bring the theorizing with it. It's not that I don't want people to do theory. I don't want them to get so trapped in a small place with nothing but theory, that the world disappears and its just theory. Then I think we're just not very good philosophers. We get obsessed with those little debates, but we don't necessarily make things happen in those debates. We feel so excited about them in the moment they are happening. I think you can have that same excitement and have your empirical work too.

> *The empirical work should never be seen as a drag, a bag of bricks that you have to carry with you. It's what makes the theory sing.*

Thank you Anna Tsing!

You can watch a video of the interview here, or see all conference videos here.

Featured Image by Jef Safi (flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

LANDSCAPE! Conference of the Finnish Anthropological Society 2015 #REPORTWEEK

Anu Lounela
November, 2015

This week, Allegra makes a five-day trip to the northern capital of Finland – Helsinki! Our fantastic local allies have put together a comprehensive string of posts on the Biennial Conference of the Finnish Anthropological Society – titled **Landscapes, sociality and materiality** – as well as the Knots – Part 2 - Conference, which complemented this Nordic week of Anthrofun!

We share the best highlights of these events via four fabulous posts. Tomorrow, we set things in motion with an interview of Philip Descola, Professor of

Anthropology of the Collège de France. His interview continues themes highlighted by the Edward Westermarck lecture that he held at the event at its closing

On Wednesday we will feature an interview with Anna Tsing, Professor of Anthropology at the University of California Santa Cruz; her keynote opened the event. Both interviews will be complemented by videos of the lectures.

On Thursday we will feature review articles on several of the panels, and on Friday we will share notes and videos of the Knots – Part 2 event by Sarah Green, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Helsinki.

> *To get us in the mood, let's take a brief glimpse at the event's highlights!*

On October 21 and 22 this year, more than 200 researchers from over 30 countries gathered in the House of Science and Letters, a building near the Helsinki seafront preserved in the Nordic Classical style of the 1920s. The building houses Finland's academic societies, and it also served as the venue for the two-day Biennial Conference of the Finnish Anthropological Society, held under the theme "Landscapes, Materiality and Sociality." The conference, which included fourteen panels, a poster session and a film session, focussed on the notion of landscape, exploring also how this concept has become a pivotal concept of anthropological research over the past years.

> *How are human lives entwined with other species and the various materials, and how do they jointly constitute the landscapes that we live in? Through what kinds of institutions, technologies, practices and experiences do people construct, inhabit and imagine particular places and locations? How are landscapes produced and processed through large-scale processes of capitalism, which transform the conjoint lives of humans, plants, animals and other nonhumans in specific places?*

Both the event's keynote by Anna Tsing and the Edward Westermarck Memorial

Lecture given by Philippe Descola, concluding the event, reflected the variety of approaches that characterise debates on landscapes both as objects of multidisciplinary study and as culturally specific places structured through the relations of people, materials and nonhuman species.

In her keynote Anna Tsing reflected critically on the concept of the Anthropocene, addressing landscapes as assemblages that both come together and fall apart. She described how 'human-disturbed' landscapes escape human designs and become reassembled by feral and invasive species of plants, animals and other organisms through a process she calls "auto-rewilding." Based on a genealogy of landscapes as gatherings of multiple species negotiating collaborative survival, she offered alternative readings to the processes of domestication, conquest and industrialisation that interrupt universal histories of the Anthropocene.

To get past the human exceptionalism that arguably remains latent in concepts of alternative ontologies, she cited Verran's notion of ontics as one that can include the practices through which all species enact their modes of being, and help to observe the ways they touch, overlap, layer and mutate, ordering landscapes in complex ways. She concluded with a call for transdisciplinary collaboration in mapping processes of auto-rewilding in unsettled landscapes and new forms of theory, description and noticing that would be able to attend to them.

Philip Descola's Westermarck lecture began by tracing two different lines of conceptualization of landscapes: one that regards landscape as a picturesque object of the visual gaze, another of landscapes loosely defined as objective places inhabited by humans. Arguing that understanding how landscapes are actualized from potential features, especially in cultures with no emphasis on pictorial traditions of landscape representation, requires attending to the processes and figurative codes through which images, beings and objects are constituted as landscapes, he expressed a wish to develop a third approach based on the concept of transfiguration.

Taking Amazonian gardens and anthropogenic forests as examples of animist,

> *metamorphic landscapes, he showed how the appearance of such sites becomes changed and reversed in the perspectives of humans and nonhumans, disclosing them as iconic signs that stand for something else.*

In the panels debate over these themes continued via specific focus on the concept of landscape as well as via ethnographic case studies. Jointly they addressed built environments, infrastructures and technologies, ritual and the sacred, identity and memory, and capitalist processes. Some panels focused on technologies and infrastructures that create both opportunities and challenges that influence policy-making and the emergence of new political articulations. Case studies focussed of conditions of mobility of goods and people and the politics of social movements were also featured, considering, for example, social identities created in the process of urban mobilizations that problematize the moral legitimacy of austerity policies and responses to environmental fears.

> *Many papers highlighted the role of social memory in the co-formation of landscapes and identities, as people recollect their past ties to places and revalue them, for instance, through experiences of migration and diasporic social life.*

Several papers in different panels focused on diverse forms of sacred landscapes, exploring how sacredness relates to the continuity and emergence of identities, political claims of authenticity, authority and ownership, ecological stewardship based on religious values, and processes of re-enchantment in ostensibly modernized social contexts. These tied in with another panel of papers focused on the role of ritual processes in creating landscapes, and how they articulate varied historical and political contexts with a variety of ontological notions concerning relations with nonhumans.

Numerous papers also examined contemporary capitalist processes that drive extractive industries such as mining and plantation economies, as well as infrastructural projects such as road building, considering how landscapes can

operate as connection points for processes on different scales. As the local landscapes reshaped by these processes may be cohabited not only by humans but various nonhumans such as spirits and ancestors, varied configurations of actors evidently influence the formation and negotiation of landscapes in ways essential to the politics of nature.

These different approaches reflect the variety of ways in which anthropologists are studying landscapes today. For some scholars the variety of uses and definitions of the landscape concept raises questions about its ambiguity. Others are drawn to it for its novel possibilities that these kinds of debates open, not only for examining human socialities but also their involvements with different materialities and entanglements with nonhumans. As an integrative concept, landscape facilitates debates about the universal and particular features of the associated processes and their local configurations. There is no doubt that transformed and human-disturbed landscapes have inspired discussions about the Anthropocene(s) and capitalist geographies, while anthropological explorations of indigenous notions of landscapes, exemplified by Philippe Descola's reflections on Amazonian gardens, extend the relevance of the concept of landscape and make anthropological comparison possible.

> *What seemed, in the end, to unite many of the conference papers and attendees was an effort to go beyond dualisms at both theoretical and ethnographic levels by analytical use of an anthropological concept of landscape.*

#Events: the Wacky, the Bizarre…

and the Hairy!

Allegra
November, 2015

>INSERT BLURB – BLA-BLA-BLAHBLA-BLAH<

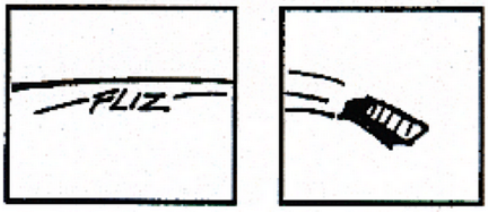
Fine, this was no editorial omission although the thought is fun, right! Rather it was a carefully deliberated opening intended to capture the cull complexity of this month's events list: this time, we are featuring the Wacky, the Bizarre – and of course, the Hairy. Like many things with Allegra, this list too was the outcome of some unplanned banter, a few wacky exchanges, and the rest you see in front of your eyes!

Why do we dwell on this background? To offer both ourselves and our scholarly community a reminder of the importance of such a creative space – a space that is becoming increasingly jeopardised via continually tightening insistence by funders to define, in advance, just what a scholar proposes to study, via what methods, data, and theoretical framework.

Often such insistence appears all too innocent, as merely ticking the right box in that funding proposal to get the needed resources to then do the wacky, bizarre – and perhaps also the hairy. However, it's not as simple as this as concurring to these formalistic requirements inevitably impacts the what and the how of the eventual venture, so we argue.

So it is with these words in mind – and just for general fun – that we share this these events that recently caught our eye, curated by the fabulous Aude Ferrachat. For a few of them, the submission deadline has passed, but we wanted to share them anyway for general inspiration.

And remember: Do get in touch with Andrea at andreak@allegralaboratory.net or audef@allegralaboratory.net if you want your event to be featured in our next monthly list…and send us your reports on events you organised. All this information is then stored in our calendar and shared on social media platforms. We look forward to hearing from you!



Conference: The Comic Arts Conference

25-27 March 2016, WonderCon, Los Angeles, CA and Comic-Con, San Diego, CA

The Comics Arts Conference accepts 100-200 word abstracts for papers, presentations, and panels taking a critical perspective on comics (juxtaposed images in sequence). We seek proposals from a broad range of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives and welcome the participation of academic and independent scholars. We also encourage the involvement of professionals from all areas of the comics industry, including creators, editors, publishers, retailers, distributors, and journalists.

The CAC accepts individual presentations of 20 minutes and discussion, round-table, or book launch panels of 60 minutes. If you'd like to submit a 90 minute panel consisting of three individual but thematically linked presentations, please submit each presentation individually on the submission site and indicate the larger panel theme in box 4.

For San Diego only, we also accept poster presentations. Poster presentations will be displayed during one 90-minute period, and offer an opportunity for one-on-one discussions with attendees and fellow presenters. [more]

Deadline for proposals for WonderCon, Los Angeles, CA : 1 December 2015
Deadline for proposals for Comic-Con, San Diego, CA: 1 February 2016

Conference: Framing the Face: New Perspectives on the History of Facial Hair

28 November 2015, Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London NW1

Over the past five centuries, facial hair has been central to debates about masculinity. Over time, changing views of masculinity, self-fashioning, the body, gender, sexuality and culture have all strongly influenced men's decisions to wear, or not wear, facial hair. For British Tudor men, beards were a symbol of sexual maturity and prowess. Throughout the early modern period, debates also raged about the place of facial hair within a humoural medical framework. The eighteenth century, by contrast, saw beards as unrefined and uncouth; clean-shaven faces reflected enlightened values of neatness and elegance, and razors were linked to new technologies. Victorians conceived of facial hair in terms of the natural primacy of men, and new models of hirsute manliness. All manner of other factors from religion to celebrity culture have intervened to shape decisions about facial hair and shaving.

And yet, despite a recent growth in interest in the subject, we still know little about the significance, context and meanings of beards and moustaches through time, or of its relationship to important factors such as medicine and medical practice, technology and shifting models of masculinity. To promote research on this issue we will be hosting a one-day workshop in London. [more]

Registration open: 7 October 2015 here

Conference & Book Fair: The (After) Lives of Things: Deconstructing and reconstructing material culture

7-9 April 2016, University of Edinburgh, Scotland

Material things have been used to fashion identities and form social relationships throughout history. This panel seeks to shed light on the intersecting histories of materiality and process in the production and consumption of material culture. It invites papers that examine how physical and intellectual practices such as collecting, repurposing and remaking conveyed materially embedded messages about the subjective experience of their owner-makers, as well as the period in which they were undertaken more broadly. Such practices performed not only physical but semantic changes upon these objects which, due to their revised contexts, reciprocally enacted changes upon their possessors. Examining how these processes allowed individuals to construct identities, spaces, and social bonds, this panel will address issues central to the 'material turn' that has characterised recent scholarship within the humanities and, in particular, that of art history. [more]

Graduate Student Workshops: APLA at AAA 2015 Meeting

18-22 November 2015, Denver, CO

Each year during the AAA meetings, the Association for Political and Legal Anthropology (APLA) sponsors a series of special workshops in which small

groups of graduate students and faculty convene around thematic conceptual, theoretical, and methodological issues. These workshops offer an intimate mentorship context in which students can engage in intensive discussions regarding specific problems in their anthropological research and writing. This year's workshop topics are the following (descriptions can be found below):

– Exploring Exclaves
– The Afterlife of Ethnographic Fieldwork: Prospects and Limits of Post-Fieldwork Collaborations
– Anthropology and the Repugnant Cultural Other
– Secrets, Silences, and Limits to Knowledge
– The Anthropology of Policing and Punishment

[more]

EXTENDED Deadline for proposals: 23 October 2015

International Symposium: "Have we become too ethical? Managing vulnerability in human subject research

9 November 2015, University of Sussex, England

Concern: When is ethics review too constrictive and when too permissive?

Aim: To formulate the basis for feasible, fair and effective ethical review at home and
in transnational collaborative research

Well-known experts in the field of social-science research ethics and research funders will debate:

- Contextual factors in ethical review
- Competence of reviewers of human subject research
- Informed consent

[more]

Chiatura, my pride

Ian M. Cook
November, 2015

Today Allegra TV features a film that is the first in a series of five ethnographic films produced by Ian Cook , Stephanie Endter, Anna Dziapshipa and Mikheil Svanidze in 2011, during a workshop in Georgia co-organised by Plotki and Sakdoc.

Here is what the filmmakers Stephanie Endter, Max Kuzmenko, Lisa Müller, Ulrike Penk and Kajetan Tadrowsk say about their film:

“Chiatura was once one of the most prosperous industrial cities in Georgia, boasting rich resources of manganese. Due its location in a steep valley surrounded by high mountains, Chiatura installed a system of cable cars to transport workers to and from the mines, as well as manganese from the mines to the factories. With deindustrialisation the manganese industry shrank and

Chiatura’s population halved, but many of the cable cars still run, establishing a net between the city and its people. Chiatura, my Pride explores how this extraordinary transport system gives character to the city forty years after its installation.”

We will be featuring the rest of the films on Allegra TV in the near future, so stay tuned!