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VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC: AN ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES PERSPECTIVE

Keynote Speakers
Cymene Howe & Eben Kirksey

February 16-17, 2023
Online via Zoom

Organized by Tatiana Konrad,
Chantelle Mitchell,
and Savannah Schaufler

Thursday, February 16, 2023	
9am (CET)	Opening Remarks Tatiana Konrad, Chantelle Mitchell, and Savannah Schaufler
9:15am - 10:45am (CET)	Keynote Presentation <i>Chair: Chantelle Mitchell</i> "The Virosphere: Learning to Live with the Unknown" Eben Kirksey (University of Oxford, UK)
Break	
11:00am - 12:30pm (CET)	Panel 1 <i>Chair: Nina De Bettin Padolin</i> Viral Temporalities in a Pandemic World <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It Came from Elsewhere: Reading Narratives of Ancient Arctic Pathogens through the Lens of COVID-19" K. M. Ferebee (Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, Finland) • "COVID-19 as a Hyperobject: Analyzing the Anthro-Ecological Temporalities during the Coron(a)l Interregnum in India" Sanchar Sarkar (Indian Institute of Technology, India), Sadhna Swayamsidha (Indian Institute of Technology, India) • "'Awairness': Or the Changing Phenomenologies of Air" Maximilian Gregor Hepach (University of Potsdam, Germany)
Break	
1:30pm - 3:00pm (CET)	Panel 2 <i>Chair: Savannah Schaufler</i> Viral Encounters in a More-Than-Human World <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "From Anthropause to Whole-Earth Vision: Approaching a More Compassionate World through the Possibility of Supported Shifts in Human Behavior" Julie Hawkins (University of New England, Australia) • "COVID at the Zoo: Immunity, Property, and Critical Animal Studies" Ishaan Selby (McMaster University, Canada) • "Rethinking Pestilence: Viral Destabilizations of the Secular, Environmental Apocalypse" Chantelle Mitchell (University of Vienna, Austria)
Break	
3:15pm - 4:00pm (CET)	Panel 3 <i>Chair: Sneha Kar Chaudhuri</i> Indigenous Studies Perspectives, Methodologies, and Practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "'The Remaking of the World': Indigenous Aesthetic Solutions to Environmental Degradation Exemplified by Two Eco-Performances" Nina De Bettin Padolin (University of Graz, Austria)

Friday, February 17, 2023	
9:00am - 10:30am (CET)	<p>Keynote Presentation <i>Chair: Tatiana Konrad</i></p> <p>“Ecocentric Justice: The Air We Breathe” Cymene Howe (Rice University, USA)</p>
Break	
10:45am - 12:15pm (CET)	<p>Panel 4 <i>Chair: Abellia Anggi Wardani</i></p> <p>COVID-19 Care Imaginaries in Localized Contexts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “COVID-19 Community Kitchens in Bengal: Lived Contexts and Socioeconomic Environments” Sneha Kar Chaudhuri (West Bengal State University, India), Hindol Palit (Barrackpore Rastraguru Surendranath College, India) • “COVID-19 and the Rise of Illegal Timber Trade in Myanmar: Stories from Local Community Groups Living in Karen State, Myanmar” Riyad F. Anwar (Knowledge-Hub Myanmar, Myanmar), Hsumon Hein (Knowledge-Hub Myanmar, Myanmar) • “Sounding the Impact of COVID-19 on Environmental Health in Lagos, Nigeria” Deborah Temisan Lawal (Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Nigeria)
Break	
1:45pm - 3:15pm (CET)	<p>Panel 5 <i>Chair: Deborah Temisan Lawal</i></p> <p>Environmental Pollution, and COVID-19 Vulnerabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Anthropause Environmentalism: More-Than-Human Temporalities of Lockdown Life” Jonathon Turnbull (University of Cambridge, UK), Adam Searle (University of Nottingham, UK), Jamie Lorimer (University of Oxford, UK) • “Understanding the Links Between Environmental Degradation and Respiratory Health for Rohingya Refugees in Cox’s Bazar” Abellia Anggi Wardani (Center for Social Integrity, Myanmar), Thurain Soe (Center for Social Integrity, Myanmar), Tengku Shahpur (Center for Social Integrity, Myanmar) • “Plast(dem)ic’: Sustainability Reset, Excessive Plastic Waste, and COVID-19” Savannah Schaufler (University of Vienna, Austria)
3:15pm - 3:30pm (CET)	<p>Closing Remarks</p> <p>Tatiana Konrad, Chantelle Mitchell, and Savannah Schaufler</p>

“The Virosphere: Learning to Live with the Unknown”

Eben Kirksey (University of Oxford, UK)

Abstract

The history of virology has been driven by anxiety about disease and death. Traditionally, virologists worked to identify and isolate the agents driving infectious diseases. New research suggests that most viruses are benign, mutualistic, or symbiotic. Scholars in the environmental humanities have an opportunity to engage with the “virosphere”—the totality of viral biodiversity which swirls around us in an unseen and largely unknown realm. Since cloudy epistemologies and ontologies structure our current relationship with the virosphere, perhaps it is easy to be afraid of forces that we can barely understand. Ecological interactions with mind-boggling complexity could suddenly shift, destroying our life support systems. The unruly realm of viral biodiversity could generate a new pandemic at any moment. But what if we approached the virosphere with curiosity and wonder. Is it possible to empathize with a virus?

Biographical Note

Eben Kirksey is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Oxford where he teaches Medical Anthropology and Human Ecology. He earned his PhD at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and helped found one of the world’s first Environmental Humanities programs at UNSW Sydney in Australia. The Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, hosted Kirksey for the 2019-2020 academic year, where he finished his latest book, *The Mutant Project*.

“It Came from Elsewhere:**Reading Narratives of Ancient Arctic Pathogens through the Lens of COVID-19”**

K. M. Ferebee (Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, Finland)

Abstract

As climate change chips away at Arctic ice, one category of popular fear has concerned what unfrozen biological horrors might return from the deep past. From the television show *Fortitude* and the graphic novel *Sweet Tooth* to novels such as Jim Shepard’s *Phase Six* and Sequoia Nagamatsu’s *How High We Go in the Dark*, contemporary culture seems fascinated by a vision of the climate change pandemic.” COVID-19 has also been described as a “climate change pandemic,” a sign of the so-called “pandemicene” in which we are living.¹ Yet COVID-19 emerged from a densely populated city in an industrialized nation, not from some unimaginable nonhuman past. In many ways, the contrast between fantasies of a climate change pandemic and that pandemic as it materialized showcases important failures in our approach to climate change. This paper builds on Jen Hill’s analysis of the Arctic’s symbolic role as staging-ground for imperial anxieties, arguing that current attempts to mobilize the Arctic in a similar fashion face failure do their reliance on a model of the natural world as *meaningful*.² This model has come under scrutiny by thinkers in eco-deconstruction, and COVID-19 challenges it by “refusing humans the prime narratorial position.”³ Yet it is this very quality of the COVID-19 pandemic that resists satisfying narrativization. In contrasting media narratives of COVID-19 with the fantasies of Arctic pandemics that populate *Fortitude*, *Sweet Tooth*, *Phase Six*, and *How High We Go in the Dark*, this paper argues that narrative cannot function to confront climate change unless we drastically reimagine the form.

Biographical Note

K. M. Ferebee is a postdoctoral research fellow with the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, where her work examines the mobilization of Arctic narratives in constructing environmental meaning during the Anthropocene. From 2021-2022 she served as a research fellow with the Narrating the Mesh (NARMESH) Project at Ghent University, where her work included analysis of climate change narratives and an investigation of human/nonhuman dynamics in the 2021 evacuation of Kabul, Afghanistan (where she lived and worked from 2019-2020). She holds a PhD in English from The Ohio State University; her doctoral dissertation examined narratives of contamination and mutation in literatures of the Anthropocene.

¹Ed Yong, “We Created the ‘Pandemicene,’” *The Atlantic*, April 28, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2022/04/how-climate-change-impacts-pandemics/629699/>

²Jen Hill, *White Horizon: The Arctic in the Nineteenth-Century British Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).

³Ted Toadvine, “Thinking After the World: Deconstruction and Last Things,” in *Eco-Deconstruction: Derrida and Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Matthias Fritsch, Philippe Lynes, and David Wood (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 50–80; K.M. Ferebee, “We Are the Virus: Fantasies of Animal Re-Emergence in Narratives of Irradiated Chernobyl and COVID-19,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 22, no. 3 (2023).

“COVID-19 as a Hyperobject: Analyzing the Anthro-ecological Temporalities during the Coron(a)ial Interregnum in India”

Sanchar Sarkar (Indian Institute of Technology, India),

Sadhna Swayamsidha (Indian Institute of Technology, India)

Abstract

Far from just defining itself as a health hazard, the overarching impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally reconfigured our narratives of existence. The magnitude, scale, sphere of influence and the spatio-temporal expanse of the coronavirus portrays its comprehensive understanding as a force that has put to test the human perception about their species exclusivity, their denial and most importantly their limitations. COVID-19 can be considered as a “hyperobject,” in the context of Timothy Morton’s framework, as a phenomenon of expansive proportion spread across time and space that uses its hyperobjective register to engage with the anthropological, ecological and geographical aspects of navigation in real time.

India has experienced unprecedented challenges to curb the spread of the coronavirus at all fronts. The country has witnessed an alarming possibility of total collapse in its health system and economic infrastructure amid the massive outbreaks of the coronavirus in the last two years (2020-2021). India, during the coron(a)ial interregnum (2020-2021), has recorded a staggering 0.5 million deaths due to airborne transmission of the coronavirus. The coronavirus affected population clusters in the urban spaces of the country led to the suspension of the virus aerosols in the air. This paper intends to analyze the change in trajectories of urban human living and how the distinct characteristic of the anthropause initiated by the lockdown in India during this COVID-19 interregnum provided a considerable time (coron(a)ial interregnum) for the polluted air in Indian metropolises to decontaminate itself. The paper will focus on how a hyperobject like COVID-19 functioned contrarily at the human and ecological scale. In the context of the human, COVID-19 obstructed the acceleration of the human forces (anthropause). As a result of this, the decarbonization of air became a distinct eco-atmospheric characteristic in India during the COVID-19 interregnum.

Biographical Note

Sanchar Sarkar is a research scholar (PhD) at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences in Indian Institute of Technology Madras. He is currently pursuing his PhD in environmental humanities under the supervision of Dr. Swarnalatha Rangarajan. He is engaged with writing research papers on specific topics that trace the contemporary trajectories of ecocriticism in post-apocalyptic environment and literature. His interest lies in the field of eco-speculative fiction and he is also passionate about visual narratives that represent and engage with the insights of environmental consciousness.

Sadhna Swayamsidha is a research scholar (PhD) at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Madras. She is currently pursuing her PhD in environmental humanities under the supervision of Dr. Swarnalatha Rangarajan. Her interest lies in the area of place studies. She is passionate about indigenous narratives that involve intergenerational trauma and eco-spiritual healing. She is currently working on indigenous landscapes in the Anthropocene.

“Awairness’: Or the Changing Phenomenologies of Air”

Maximilian Gregor Hepach (University of Potsdam, Germany)

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic presented public health officials in the UK with a phenomenological challenge: How does one render an invisible threat visible, an intangible virus tangible? One approach was the visualization of COVID-19’s spread: across time with the help of charts showing a steep increase in cases, across space with the help of maps showing a case average region by region.

Another approach sought to highlight the possibility of COVID-19’s presence in experience, principally as traces left on surfaces, on the keypad of an ATM machine or on the signal at a pedestrian crossing. Internalizing this tactile logic meant an intensification of one’s sense of touch, an increased awareness of the porous nature of one’s own body. This sense of porousness heightened with the realization of COVID-19’s airborne nature, necessitating mask wearing, social distancing, ventilation, etc.

Prior to the pandemic, a whole industry faced and continues to face a similar phenomenological challenge. In marketing products which measure air quality and filter the air, companies must turn the air one breathes conspicuous, so that it becomes a matter of concern for consumers. Strategies to achieve this include emphasizing the number of breaths one takes in a day (25,000) or visualizing allergens, viruses, and bacteria in everyday spaces with a sickly greenish hue. The pandemic has accelerated this attention paid to the air, paving the way for further commodification.

This paper makes sense of this awareness shift with the help of phenomenological theory. In highlighting the conspicuous absence of air as an object of experience in the history of phenomenology, this paper argues that air is not so much an object, but a medium of experience.¹ A change in “awairness”—pandemic or otherwise—is then not a change in the literal objects of experience, but a change in the very way one experiences. In returning to phenomenological theory in order spell out what changes to the givenness of experience mean, this paper concludes by drawing an analogy between air and climate, arguing that changes in climate too are experienced as a change in the givenness of experience.

Biographical Note

Maximilian Gregor Hepach is a post-doc with the DFG and AHRC funded “Weather Reports—Wind as Model, Media, and Experience” research project at the Department of Arts and Media, University of Potsdam. He is in the process of completing his PhD in Geography at the University of Cambridge, titled “Is climate real? A phenomenological approach to climate and its changes.” Aside from the Environmental Humanities, his research interests include phenomenology, Japanese philosophy, media studies, and cultural geography.

¹Eva Horn, “Air as Medium,” *Grey Room* 73 (2018).

**“From Anthropause to Whole-Earth Vision:
Approaching a More Compassionate World through the Possibility of
Supported Shifts in Human Behavior”**

Julie Hawkins (University of New England, Australia)

Abstract

Parallels between dealing with COVID-19 and Earth’s accelerating ecological crises are useful to consider, since both environmental factors and human behavior have caused spread. Since human behavior can either increase or reduce the spread of both, and consistent behavior in one direction has positive effects by reducing suffering and death, and the strain on medical systems, the Anthropause proved we can alter our behavior at a planetary level. Human behavior is determined by societal and individual values and ethics, as well as circumstances: we need to think of ourselves in relation to our whole planet, Earth. Diversity in human cultures has created both a range of value systems and an increase in ethical concerns. We can steer ourselves toward a more compassionate behavior and future: examine our values; decrease the suffering of future generations; uplift our values to include respect for all life; learn to honor nature, and thereby improve the lives of future generations on this fast-warming planet. We can end environmental degradation and restore ecosystems—it takes a shift in human behavior, and a values system that honors all life. Our society has values for acting for the highest good, but there has been a downward spiral in human behavior toward other humans and toward Earth’s nonhuman populations, putting all future generations at risk. The anthropause demonstrated how to change our behavior, clean up pollution, and reduce the strain on Earth’s ecosphere by modifying our cultural and industrial activities. We need to uplift our consciousness and conscience—through metanoia—to levels that can honor life, respect all species, and restore ecosystems. This shift benefits Earth’s entire ecosphere. We offer some adaptive frameworks for undertaking this massive task, based on doctoral research into philosophical and ecological ethics and values, including contemplative eco-theological practices. We must support a fresh whole-Earth vision.

Biographical Note

Julie Hawkins has recently completed a PhD in Eco-Philosophy at the University of New England (Australia), and presented papers that explore aspects of the ecological self, eco-philosophy and eco-theology, and environmental/ecological ethics and values. Of these, a virtual paper from the 2020 APTO Virtual Conference is under consideration for publication. Her research explores a deepening of nondual ethics, aesthetics, compassion and awareness in western eco-philosophy, and how these inspire effective solutions that may be applied into the future. She has worked as a casual academic in Humanities, Education and Arts since 2010. Her earlier PhD was a study of “Futuristic Humans, their Technological ‘Worlds’, and their Relationship to Non-Human Nature” (2014), and identifies eco-philosophical concepts and ecological motifs in works identified as ecological speculative fiction. Both doctorates identify ways for human disengagement from non-human nature and the world-as-it-is to be addressed. Julie is a member of the International Society of Environmental Ethics, and feels inspired to present the doctoral research through speaking, writing and teaching.

“COVID at the Zoo: Immunity, Property, and Critical Animal Studies”

Ishaan Selby (McMaster University, Canada)

Abstract

In this paper, I want to explore the recent vaccination of zoo animals against COVID-19. My hope is that such an exploration will expand the frame of critical theories of immunity from beyond their implicitly humanist frame. Beyond concerns about animal reservoirs, the phenomenon of vaccinating zoo animals seems to suggest a care for the animals themselves since these creatures do not exist in large numbers and by and large do not interact with humans. My tentative claim is that the preservation of these animals is contingent on their status as a particular kind of property, one mediated through an imaginary of sentimentalism. This paper expands the recent critiques of sentimentalism to a critique of property.¹

The immunitary operations here serve to protect and conserve these animals in line with a discourse of possession. For thinkers like Donna Haraway and Ed Cohen, the immune system and the models of health that flow from such an idea are historical objects rather than being merely a scientific fact.² The body under the schema of immunity is conceived of as a possession that must be protected against external invaders. For contemporary biomedicine, the immune system is less of a hard border and more of a shifting assemblage, operating through a dialectic of exclusion and partial incorporation. As Dinesh Wadiwel suggests, the human immunizes itself against the animal through ingestion, an experimentation against a broader community where animals might be recognized as fellow constituents of the world.³ The vaccination of zoo animals represents a shift or expansion of these ideas by bringing together concerns over immunity as a shifting border that requires policing with the governance of non-human life in pandemic times. Ultimately, I argue for an abolitionist politics attentive to questions of ownership and security that displaces the centrality of the human.

Biographical Note

Ishaan Selby is a PhD Candidate in English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University. He is currently working on a dissertation that reads together animal abolition and Black abolition through a critique of property. When not reading and writing theory, he can be found thinking way too much about Batman and the X-Men.

¹Kyla Schuller, *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018); Xine Yao, *Disaffected: The Cultural Politics of Unfeeling in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

²Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991); Ed Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

³Dinesh Wadiwel, *The War Against Animals* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

**“Rethinking Pestilence:
Viral Destabilizations of the Secular, Environmental Apocalypse”**

Chantelle Mitchell (University of Vienna, Austria)

Abstract

The contemporary period is one increasingly defined by ecological upheaval and continued warnings of presently shifting environments, tied directly to anthropogenic climate crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has emerged within this context as a crucial, globe-altering event, presenting as a severe consequence of unequal human/more-than-human relationships. Acknowledging the rapid reorientation of the contemporary humanities—from the environmental, to the emergency, to the pandemic—this paper addresses the implications of apocalyptic discourse in the context of the current climate crisis.

Tracing a viral thread across apocalyptic speculations and proclamations (i.e., from pandemics as metaphors for ends and catastrophes in literature, to the endless doomscroll of apocalyptic discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic), this paper seeks to attune to the more-than-human resonances of such discourse, particularly as tied to climactic shifts. With the secular demonization and denigration of carrier species (i.e., the bat or the pangolin), alongside tropes of the virus as willful agent of destruction or retribution, critiques of apocalyptic narratives present alternative framings for human/ecological crises, born from relational engagements.

This paper draws from existing scholarship across environmental apocalypse discourse and COVID-19 in the humanities, including that of Earl T. Harper and Doug Specht, Christos Lynteris, and Darcie DeAngelo, to address ways of rethinking the virus beyond its positioning as an unprecedented harbinger of endings. The multiple and vectorial more-than-human/human relationships which have emerged amidst COVID-19 offer an opportunity to rethink the “pest” in pestilence, and subsequently, offer a critique of apocalyptic narratives. Doing so allows for a radical recasting of such relationships in crucial new lights, with particular attention to considerations of relationality and questions of agency.

Biographical Note

Chantelle Mitchell is a project assistant for “Air and Environmental Health in the (Post-)COVID-19 World” at the University of Vienna. Her research interests across the environmental humanities include extraction, temporality, and affect. She holds a Bachelor in Art History and Philosophy from the University of Western Australia, and a Masters in Curatorship from the University of Melbourne. Chantelle maintains a collaborative research practice with Jaxon Waterhouse (Australia), which has seen them publish with *Green Letters*, *e-flux*, *art+Australia*, *Performance Philosophy*, *On_Culture*, and *un Magazine*, amongst others. Together they have delivered exhibitions across Australia for the University of Melbourne, Edith Cowan University, Sawtooth ARI, and FELTspace, and presented work in Switzerland and Romania.

“The Remaking of the World’: Indigenous Aesthetic Solutions to Environmental Degradation Exemplified by Two Eco-Performances”

Nina De Bettin Padolin (University of Graz, Austria)

Abstract

As global reports show, the earth is on the verge of multiple climate change tipping points; thus, a radical shift toward a planetary world system that is inclusive of all living beings is essential. This paper examines the virtual eco-performance *I.F.: Indigenous Futurities: Dancing Earth in CyberSpace* (2020) and *When the Salmon Spoke* (2020) and assesses how virtual theater can offer viable solutions in times of multiple crises. Considering how these two theatrical productions aesthetically engage with the medium of the online performance to create planetary and relational worldviews in times of social distancing, this paper questions how the virtual performances aesthetically imagine an inclusive future based on a human co-existence with the more-than-human by implementing Indigenous ecological knowledges. Both productions highlight the environmental destruction that systems of coloniality and capitalism cause by visualizing climate change-related impacts on Indigenous communities. Thus, the technical and visual reading of the virtual productions will be accompanied by an exploration of how Eurocentric perceptions of nature reinforce extractivism and the commodification of the more-than-human. Here, the performances make a connection between environmental violence and coloniality to visualize the unsustainability of destroying the planet and to further depict that those already most marginalized are most affected by the impacts of the climate crisis. By asking questions such as “What is the Message from Humans to Earth of Love in a Time of Corona?” (*I.F.: Indigenous Futurities*), both productions suggest that humans have to act as stewards of the earth. Thereby they recognize humanity’s critical role in protecting the planet. Thus, this paper will show how the performances are deeply decolonial and resurgent and convey an epistemic shift away from Eurocentric epistememes toward Indigenous understandings of how to live with nature.

Biographical Note

Nina De Bettin Padolin is a PhD candidate in American literature and project assistant at the Institute of American Studies at the University of Graz. In her dissertation project, she focuses on Indigenous ecological epistemologies, planetarity, and ecocritical drama and theatre in the US, Canada, and Mexico. She graduated from the University of Graz with two master’s degrees (English and American Studies; Interdisciplinary Gender Studies) where her research areas were Chicana literature, postcolonial theory, and gender studies.

“Ecocentric Justice: The Air We Breathe”

Cymene Howe (Rice University, USA)

Abstract

A corona is likened to a crown: a gaseous emanation from the sun and stars or the apex of the human body. But the term now carries many more deadly definitions, bundles of spiky proteins and organ collapse that cluster around the viral form. This paper considers how the corona virus invites us to see the air we breathe as a constellation of effects that gather the global climate crisis and the global COVID-19 pandemic into a calling for ecocentric justice—an antidote to the precarities facing both environmental and human health. Looking to the elemental condition of air as a circulatory phenomenon now (and always-ever) embedded with viral capacity, this paper contemplates on the necropolitics of COVID-19, through both stats and states. But it also, equally, turns to the qualities of breath and breathers as subjects of shared air, space, and contagion. In such attunements to the atmospheric, wider ecocentric attentions, and states of awareness appear and proliferate. In our conditions of climatological disruption and human pandemic, there is also the means of response and a greater relationality created between human bodies and animal bodies, air and atmosphere that draws us into practices for (what I am calling) “ecocentric justice”—respect and responsibility for the human and the non-human, the living and the non-living: all those within the sphere of the air we breathe.

Biographical Note

Cymene Howe is Professor of Anthropology at Rice University specializing in ecosocial phenomena, more-than-human worlds, and the affective and material conditions of climatological precarity. Her books include *Ecologics: Wind and Power in the Anthropocene* (Duke 2019), *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Critical and Cultural Theory*, and *Anthropocene Unseen: A Lexicon* (Punctum 2020). Her current research examines climate adaptation practices among populations facing massive ice-loss in the Arctic region and those contending with sea level rise emanating from that ice-loss in coastal cities around the world.

“COVID-19 Community Kitchens in Bengal: Lived Contexts and Socioeconomic Environments”

Sneha Kar Chaudhuri (West Bengal State University, India),
Hindol Palit (Barrackpore Rastraguru Surendranath College, India)

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic in India ushered in unprecedented crisis in the public health sector but also precipitated the scenario of economic downslide in the form of unemployment, migrant labor crisis and food scarcity in both urban and rural sectors. As one of the major measures to counter the COVID-19 pandemic, national lockdown in India saw the rise of community kitchens in various states in India, organized by the state government and other organizations. This paper will critically engage with the lived experiences of the functioning of such makeshift food arrangements and the related socioeconomic inflections of such provision to provide for the urban and rural poor and the needy.

A community kitchen is a name given to a group of people who prepare and share healthy meals with people, at an inexpensive rate. Taking the case of West Bengal as an example, this paper will look at how communities react to the stigma caused by a pandemic in the form of mobilization through food. It will also address the ways community kitchens differed in terms of resource distribution and other features depending on the human environment and largely divergent habits and standards of living in the metropolis, suburbs, and rustic places. The importance of community kitchens lies in the ways in which they negotiate the problems of scarcity of resources due to environmental crisis in the forms of low production of food crops and lack of farming resources generated by the pandemic. This paper also includes dimensions of political intervention in relationship to the functioning of these community kitchens. The paper will study how food forms the basis of the shared experience and collective memory of the lockdown and the pandemic and how such experiences cater to community values and practical modalities of the socioeconomic dimensions of lived environments.

Biographical Note

Sneha Kar Chaudhuri is Associate Professor of English, West Bengal State University, India. She was UGC- JRF with the Department of English, Jadavpur University (2004-2008) and has obtained her PhD in 2008. She is also the current Editorial Board member of the international peer-reviewed journal, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, published by Swansea University, Wales, UK. She has published book chapters and scholarly articles in various reputed peer-reviewed national and international journals and edited volumes published by Sage, Anthem Press, Swansea University, Sambalpur University, Jadavpur University, Stree-Samya, Ananda Publishers (ABP) among others. Her co-edited volume entitled *Tagore's Ideas of the New Woman: The Making and Unmaking of Female Subjectivity* has been published internationally by Sage and Stree-Samya in 2017. She has completed an edited volume on the films of Shyam Benegal by Edinburgh University Press (2022). Her areas of specialization and research interests include post-colonial fiction, Adaptation Studies, and Gender Studies.

Hindol Palit is State-Aided College Teacher currently working in the Department of English, Barrackpore Rastraguru Surendranath College, West Bengal, India. He has completed his MPhil in 2018 from the Department of English, West Bengal State University. He is currently pursuing his PhD from the Department of English, West Bengal State University. He has published book chapters and scholarly articles in a few well-reputed national journals and edited volumes published by Bankura Christian College, The Criterion and Boibhashik. He has presented papers in the seminars and conferences organized by esteemed institutions such as Bankura University, Amity University, Rishi Bankim Chandra College, Khalisani Mahavidyalya. His areas of specialization include post-colonial fiction and Bengali resistance literature.

“COVID-19 and the Rise of Illegal Timber Trade in Myanmar: Stories from Local Community Groups Living in Karen State, Myanmar”

Riyad F. Anwar (Knowledge-Hub Myanmar, Myanmar),

Hsumon Hein (Knowledge-Hub Myanmar, Myanmar)

Abstract

Multiple reports appraise several European nations for pushing effective lockdown measures that not only mitigate spread of the virus but also inadvertently yield net positive outcomes in their respective environmental protection goals. Unprecedented lockdowns, strict travel restrictions, and closure of national borders have resulted in a noticeable decline in nitrogen dioxide concentration in some European cities. The same cannot be said for Myanmar. The country, despite being riddled with nationwide civil strife caused by the coup staged by the military authority (Tatmadaw) in February 2021, has been actively enforcing nationwide protective measures similar to European nations (i.e., lockdown, travel restriction, vaccine distribution, and border check) to combat the spread of COVID-19. The result, however, indicates a contradicting account for Myanmar where rather than seeing proof of ecological recovery caused by COVID-19 measures, some of its states instead see a rise in environmental degradation in the form of deforestation.

Against this backdrop, this research investigates how local communities in Myanmar cope with COVID-19 protective measures and how such measures would lead them to become either perpetrators or victims of illicit timber trades. Our community perception is centered around the collected stories of people living in the southernmost region of Myanmar, Karen State. Karen State presents a unique environment for the research with its people constantly threading the danger lines of COVID-19 infection and crises emerge from tension between the Tatmadaw and the local de-facto government, the Karen National Union (KNU). The region is characterized by the overlap of authorities between the former and the latter. For this, two community groups shall be observed: the rural community governed by KNU in Kawkareik Township where Wor Lay Reserve Forest is located; and the rural community living near the Shwe Yang Mountain where Tatmadaw made its strong political presence.

Biographical Note

Riyad F. Anwar is a Makassar-based researcher specializing in empirical legal studies, refugee rights, and the studies of regional integration of both ASEAN and the EU. He received his Research master's degree from Tilburg School of Law in Tilburg, the Netherlands. Aside from teaching International Law at the Law Faculty of the University of Hasanuddin in Makassar, Indonesia, he also currently works as Research Fellow in Knowledge-Hub Myanmar. His past research portfolio for community-based research in Myanmar includes writing monthly contextual analysis reports for the violent incidents within the Karen State, producing three series of themed reports on Rohingya in Malaysia, and most recently, drafting monthly policy briefs advocating for Rohingya rights in Rakhine State.

Hsumon Hein is an agronomist who strongly willingness to implement research in the development sector of Myanmar (Burma). She holds a bachelor's degree from Yezin Agricultural University specialized in Natural Resource Management and Environmental Economics and participated in national-level research by coordinating with government, INGOs, NGOs, and PhD candidates from Australia and the Czech Republic in the past years. She is currently working as a Yangon-based Research Assistant for Knowledge Hub Myanmar. Her research milestone dealing with the community is "Gender Analysis of Climate Change Perception and Adaptation Strategies in Pinyinana and Yemathin Townships".

“Sounding the Impact of COVID-19 on Environmental Health in Lagos, Nigeria”

Deborah Temisan Lawal (Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Nigeria)

Abstract

This study examines the use of music as a potential tool for chronicling the environmental effects of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigerian space, particularly, Lagos state. Nigeria has the largest population in Africa while Lagos is the largest city in Africa. Therefore, the possibility of environmental and human casualty is increased in Lagos compared to other states. Other factors that contributed to the spread of COVID-19 are the large flow of human and vehicular movements in the country as well as the inbuilt culture of communal lifestyle. Because people rely on physical closeness and daily interaction, they took for granted the health implications involved in close physical interactions. In addition, the lockdown contributed to an involuntary overdependence on scarce resources such as water, clean air, sanitation facilities, vegetation, land space and food. This has contributed to environmental and ecological issues such as air pollution, solid waste, among others. More so, insisting that people adopt new practices to stay safe such as regular hand washing and use of nose mask required consistent repetition for major compliance. As much as there abound different studies on how the pandemic has disrupted education, economic growth, social relationships, physical well-being and environmental sustainability in Lagos, very little scholarly research exists on how Nigerian popular music engages with the impact of COVID-19 on environmental and lifestyle changes among Lagos city dwellers.

This study is therefore interested in the role of music, particularly popular music as site of memory for COVID-19 as it affects environmental health and sustainability of Lagos. This study asks: how does music offer a site of memory for COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences on the environment? How are popular musicians advocates for the prevention of and rehabilitation from effects of COVID-19 in African urban cities like Lagos? What is the perception of Lagos dwellers on the impact of COVID-19 on the environment? Musicians who address issues on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and environmental/lifestyle changes in Nigeria include Cohbams Asuquo, Adewale Ayuba and Minister Poi. I employed ethnographic research using interview method and textual analysis of selected songs in the context of ecomusicological theory and the idea of musical environmentalism. I conclude that music and sound has the potential to advocate for and sensitize on the effect of COVID-19 on environmental sustainability and transformation in African cities.

Biographical Note

Deborah Temisan Lawal lectures at the Department of Music, Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Ogun state, Nigeria. Her research focus includes multidisciplinary studies and the trajectory of sound, space and place, urban narratives, ecomusicology, climate change, sustainable development goals, environmental humanities, popular music, history of music, and gender issues. Deborah's personal goal is to network with people who are research inclined and passionate about contributing their skills and expertise to ameliorate the ambivalent living conditions in African cities and beyond. She is a strong believer in the power of positive thinking.

**“Anthropause Environmentalisms:
More-Than-Human Temporalities of Lockdown Life”**

Jonathon Turnbull (University of Cambridge, UK),
Adam Searle (University of Nottingham, UK),
Jamie Lorimer (University of Oxford, UK),

Abstract

This paper offers a detailed empirical account of how human-environment relations were reconfigured in the UK and Ireland during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 lockdowns. Natural scientists categorized this period as the COVID-19 anthropause; an unparalleled opportunity to mechanistically examine how nature is affected by human activities. This paper brings this scientific concept into conversation with geographical work to consider lived experiences of anthropause. This paper conceptualizes anthropause as both a lived condition and an historical moment of space-time decompression, and identifies the character of a socially inclusive, digital anthropause environmentalism that emerged during lockdown.

To make this argument, we turn to the Self-Isolating Bird Club, an online birdwatching community operating across several social media platforms which, at the pandemic's height, reached over fifty thousand members. This paper traces three key changes to human-nature relations illustrated by this group. We examine how people connected with nature using digital technologies and via online communities as a means of coping with lockdown. We show how these online networks promoted novel forms of access to conservation, and reconfigured expertise concerning what counts as a meaningful engagement with nature. Finally, we explore the active steps taken by our participants to create more convivial relations as they reimagined local green spaces as sites of potential more-than-human flourishing. We suggest that the COVID-19 anthropause event recalibrated the fabric and rhythms of everyday life in ways discordant with the “Great Acceleration” and spacetime compression characteristic of the Anthropocene. Taking issue with prevalent dystopian models that propose digital media and urbanization separate humans from nature, we identify affirmative modes of anthropause environmentalism and explore their potential for conservation in a world that is increasingly urban, digital, and powered by vernacular expertise. To conclude, we offer suggestions as to how environmentalists might harness the lessons of anthropause to prepare for the coming “anthropulse.”

Biographical Note

Jonathon Turnbull is a cultural and environmental geographer at the University of Cambridge whose ESRC-funded PhD research focuses on the return of nature to the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. His interests include animal(s) geographies, digital ecologies, and the weird. In 2020, he co-founded the **Digital Ecologies** research group. With Jamie Lorimer, Adam Searle, and Christian Rutz, he is conducting an interdisciplinary research project on “anthropause environmentalisms.”

Adam Searle is a cultural and environmental geographer at the geography department at Nottingham University, UK. His research focuses on the relationship between humans, other animals, and technologies. He completed his PhD at the University of Cambridge, examining the spectral ecologies of de/extinction, and his current project, “Synthetic Biogeographies,” examines the environmental geographies of genome-editing technologies in agriculture and conservation. Adam co-founded the Digital Ecologies research group with Jonathon Turnbull.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND VULNERABILITIES IN COVID-19 CONTEXTS

Jamie Lorimer is an environmental geographer at the University of Oxford whose research examines the production of environmental knowledge, and how this knowledge comes to shape the world around us. He focuses on powerful understandings of nature and their consequences for human and nonhuman life across different spatial scales. Past projects have examined human relations with a range of organisms, from elephants to hookworms, and policy domains including conservation, health, and agriculture. He combines concepts and approaches from more-than-human geography with those from science studies, using ethnographic, participatory, and historical methods. His research has been funded by the ESRC, The British Academy and the Wellcome Trust, amongst other sources.

“Understanding the Links Between Environmental Degradation and Respiratory Health of Rohingya Refugees in Cox’s Bazar”

Abellia Anggi Wardani (Center for Social Integrity, Myanmar),
Thurain Soe (Center for Social Integrity, Myanmar),
Tengku Shahpur (Center for Social Integrity, Myanmar),

Abstract

From 2016 to 2017 multiple attempts were made by the Myanmar Government to force the minority Rohingya community to leave Myanmar culminating in what was labelled by the UN as a ‘genocide’. Over 700,000 refugees fled to neighboring Bangladesh, where they face an environmental and health crisis.¹ After the massive outbreak of diphtheria, and now the COVID-19 pandemic, Rohingya refugees living in camps remain vulnerable to health issues, particularly respiratory infections with children being the most at risk.² This paper will examine the connections between environmental and air degradation, with the living conditions of Rohingyas in refugee camps as it pertains to the spread of respiratory diseases. This research will rely on primary and secondary data sources and will start with an in-depth literature review to understand the relationship between climate change and respiratory issues for refugees. Primary data will be collected through focus group discussions with Rohingyas in Cox’s Bazar to understand their lived experiences and perceptions as well as with healthcare professionals to understand the medical challenges. A descriptive analysis will be used to examine both the primary and secondary data that will situate the findings into themes and categories for explanatory purposes.³ This paper argues that the squalid and densely populated living conditions coupled with the degradation of the natural environment caused by the forced migration of the Rohingya to Bangladesh could cause a health crisis. Moreover, the stigmatization that could emerge from this issue will further marginalize them and hinder any hopes for a dignified repatriation process. The paper will contribute to expanding the current literature on the linkages between environmental degradation, refugee crises, and conflict. Furthermore, it will illustrate how all these separate spheres are connected in this humanitarian catastrophe and provide recommendations to solve this complex issue.

Biographical Note

Abellia Anggi Wardani holds a PhD in Culture Studies from Tilburg University, Netherlands. Her research interests include economies of peace, everyday peacebuilding, livelihoods, community formation, post-conflict society, and ethnography. She has been doing research in Myanmar and Indonesia since 2014. Prior to working at the Center for Social Integrity, she has worked with Geneva-based international agency focusing on mediation for peace working on projects to resolve conflicts in the eastern part of Indonesia from 2015 to 2019.

Thurain Soe is an ethnic Rohingya born and raised in Yangon. Graduated with BA English from the University of East Yangon in 2018 and worked as a translator throughout the years. Soe joined the Center for Social Integrity (CSI) in 2019 to aid in the humanitarian sector and has been working under different job titles in CSI over the past three years. Soe has organized and participated in workshops on diversity and inclusion of diverse communities and religions to better the understand the religious context of Myanmar, but most of the time, tasked with handling data on conflict and violence occurring in northern and central Rakhine. Still learning and coping in this journey of data monitoring. Also works as a sports reporter mainly for football during the weekends as a side project. Soe loves sports and is fond of martial arts.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND VULNERABILITIES IN COVID-19 CONTEXTS

Tengku Shahpur holds an MA in Conflict Transformation and a BA in Business Law. He is a peacebuilder and researcher and was formally the program manager for peace interventions in Mindanao and the DPRK. In this role, he facilitated the training of the second-line leadership of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front after the signing of the Bangsamoro Organic Law. His work in the DPRK (North Korea) focused on sharing community narratives with the international community through film, with the objective of humanizing the North Korean people. He also conducted research on community opinions of the ceasefire in Myanmar from 2015-2018. He is currently a researcher at Knowledge Hub Myanmar / Center for Social Integrity working on the Rakhine Violence Monitoring Archives.

¹United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), "Rohingya Refugee Crisis," <https://www.unocha.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis>.

²Mashura Shammi, Mushfiqur Rahman Robi, Shafi M. Tareq, "COVID-19: Socio-Environmental Challenges of Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh," *Journal of Environmental Health Science and Engineering* 18 (2020): 1709-1711; Ridwanur Rahman and Khaleda Islam, "Massive Diptheria Outbreak among Rohingya Refugees: Lessons Learnt," *Journal of Travel Medicine* 26, no. 1 (2019).

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“Plast(dem)ic’: Sustainability Reset, Excessive Plastic Waste, and COVID-19”

Savannah Schaufler (University of Vienna, Austria)

Abstract

Plastic waste is an undesirable by-product, disposed of after its use, and with no further purpose. Mainly consisting of discarded commodities such as to-go plastic, packaging, and hygiene products, waste is as omnipresent as the material it is predominantly made from in contemporary era: plastic. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the increasing demand for single-use plastics for hygiene and sanitary purposes is more evident than ever, further exacerbating the global problem of plastic waste.¹

Until the mid-20th century, products such as consumer goods, textiles, electronics, and packaging were mainly produced for repeated use. It was not until after World War II that non-biodegradable plastics entered the market as a mass product.² According to microbial ecologist Erik Zettler and colleagues, societies today live in and among the “plastisphere”—an industrial-natural ecosystem that has evolved from living in a human-made plastic environment.³ Further, the term “waste regime” by sociologist Zsuzsa Gille argues for the intertwined, global relationship of waste through the lens of social institutions and conventions, its perception and politicization.⁴

Referring to a plastic outbreak of pandemic proportions, this paper introduces the term “plast(dem)ic” to elucidate the ever-increasing number of disposable plastics that are produced and stream into ecological systems, and their amplifications amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing upon the coronavirus pandemic and the cultural and behavioral aspects of disposable waste and plastic use, this paper demonstrates the haunting ubiquity of disposed plastic waste in Western Europe and the US. In this context, “plast(dem)ic” represents a reconceptualization of the planetary health approach in times of crisis.

Biographical Note

Savannah Schaufler is a project assistant for “Air and Environmental Health in the (Post-)COVID-19 World” at the University of Vienna. During her studies at the University of Vienna, where she graduated with honors in Evolutionary Anthropology, she participated in several inter- and transdisciplinary projects at the intersection of cultural, human, and biological sciences. In addition, she is finishing her bachelor’s degree in Cultural and Social Anthropology and has already published in peer-reviewed literature. She is also a trained paramedic and has worked as a medical assistant for several years.

¹Yiming Peng et al., “Plastic Waste Release Caused by COVID-19 and Its Fate in the Global Ocean,” *PNAS* 118, no. 47 (2021).

²Heinrich Böll Stiftung and Global 2000, “Plastikatlas. Daten und Fakten über eine Welt voller Kunststoff” (Umweltschutzorganisation Global 2000, 2019): 12.

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Organizing Committee

Dr. Tatiana Konrad, MA *Principal Investigator*

Tatiana Konrad Tatiana Konrad is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Austria, the principal investigator of “Air and Environmental Health in the (Post-)COVID-19 World,” and the editor of the “Environment, Health, and Well-being” book series at Michigan State University Press. She holds a PhD in American Studies from the University of Marburg, Germany. She was a Visiting Fellow at the University of Chicago (2022), a Visiting Researcher at the Forest History Society (2019), an Ebeling Fellow at the American Antiquarian Society (2018), and a Visiting Scholar at the University of South Alabama (2016). She is the author of *Docu-Fictions of War: U.S. Interventionism in Film and Literature* (University of Nebraska Press, 2019), the editor of *Plastics, Environment, Culture, and the Politics of Waste* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023), *Cold War II: Hollywood’s Renewed Obsession with Russia* (University Press of Mississippi, 2020), and *Transportation and the Culture of Climate Change: Accelerating Ride to Global Crisis* (West Virginia University Press, 2020), and a coeditor of *Cultures of War in Graphic Novels: Violence, Trauma, and Memory* (Rutgers University Press, 2018).

Chantelle Mitchell, MA *Project Assistant*

Chantelle Mitchell is a project assistant at the University of Vienna for the FWF funded project “Air and Environmental Health in the (Post-)COVID-19 World.” Her research interests across the environmental humanities include extraction, temporality, and affect. She has published with *Green Letters*, *e-flux*, *art+Australia*, *Performance Philosophy*, *On_Culture*, and *un Magazine*. She holds a Bachelor in Art History and Philosophy from the University of Western Australia, and a Masters in Curatorship from the University of Melbourne. Chantelle maintains a collaborative practice with Jaxon Waterhouse (Australia), which has seen them present at numerous Australian and international conferences, alongside exhibitions for the University of Melbourne, Edith Cowan University, Sawtooth ARI, and FELTspace, with forthcoming exhibitions across Australia.

Savannah Schaufler, MSc *Project Assistant*

Savannah Schaufler is a project assistant at the University of Vienna for the FWF funded project “Air and Environmental Health in the (Post-)COVID-19 World.” During her studies at the University of Vienna, where she graduated with honors in Evolutionary Anthropology, she participated in several inter- and transdisciplinary projects at the intersection of cultural, human, and biological sciences. In addition, she is finishing her bachelor’s degree in Cultural and Social Anthropology and has already published in peer-reviewed literature. She is also a trained paramedic and has worked as a medical assistant for several years.

Air and Environmental Health in the (Post-)COVID-19 World

air.anglistik@univie.ac.at
<https://airproject.univie.ac.at>
<https://twitter.com/AirEnvProject>

This project explores air from two distinct perspectives: pollution and pandemics. While air pollution has been an issue for centuries, it is through the COVID-19 pandemic that humanity worldwide has acutely and concurrently recognized the physical presence of air. The largely airborne virus has made air dangerous, whereas such phenomena as masks, social distancing, and significantly reduced social interaction—key tools in fighting the spread of the virus—further emphasize the polluted nature of air. This interpretation parallels environmental views on air pollution as a critical global threat.

Moreover, the project examines the role of racism in perpetuating current environmental and health crises and, through race, engages with the problem of environmental justice. The project raises several concerns: How does the virus challenge and emphasize the idea of air being polluted? How does wearing masks correlate with filtering air, protecting air, and believing in clean air? How does social distancing both help fight the spread of the disease and generate the myth that we can partition air, and thus do not breathe common air? How can the danger of air infected with the virus help reinforce the alarming nature of environmental degradation, including through air pollution, and mobilize humanity to work toward a healthier environment?

The project examines the changing meanings of air through environmental and medical humanities, literary and cultural studies, race studies, and history. Via this transdisciplinary approach, it foregrounds the coronavirus as flash point for new meanings of unclean air. Tracing the history of airborne pandemics through literary and cultural narratives, the project establishes linkages among air, viruses, pollution, and the human, and thus contributes to the environmental humanities through its unique approach to planetary degradation, air pollution, and environmental health.

RACE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN THE ERA OF COVID-19: RETHINKING 'SOCIAL DISTANCING'

Organized by Tatiana Konrad, Savannah Schaufler,
and Chantelle Mitchell

KEYNOTE SPEAKER:
Nikiwe Solomon

JULY 13-15, 2023
Virtual Conference via Zoom

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Environment, Health, and Well-being

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This series tackles the relationship between health and the environment, paying particular attention to changes occurring over time and across place. It seeks to illuminate the causes and consequences of human, more-than-human, and environmental ill-health, while also attending to possibilities for well-being, flourishing, and repair. Encouraging an expanded notion of health, *Environment, Health, and Well-being* presents scholarship that considers human well-being as directly correlated with health systems; extends the notion of health and well-being beyond the purely human frame; and interrogates planetary health through specific landscapes, ecologies, and human and more-than-human activities. Recognizing the ecological, political, social, and viral turbulence of our current times, the monographs and edited collections in this series look to interdisciplinary practice within the field of the environmental humanities as a way of understanding the present, reflecting upon the past, and rethinking possibilities of the future.

Environment, Health, and Well-being, while grounded in the environmental humanities, understands the barriers to environmental health as tied to legacies of extraction, consumption, colonization, and unlimited growth. It is thus especially interested in scholarship from Indigenous, race, gender and queer, and disability studies, as well as approaches that address histories and futures of labor and profit. *Environment, Health, and Well-being* welcomes projects from new and established scholars, in and outside of academia, which make visible for audiences the timeliness and necessity of interdisciplinary research on the relationships between humanity and environments. The contributions in this series capture the multifaceted nature of environmental health and foreground the importance of perpending the planet's well-being in these ecologically precarious times.

SUBMISSIONS AND QUESTIONS?

Email Tatiana Konrad at tatiana.konrad@univie.ac.at





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