

Gruppe 5: Turbulent worlds and the imagination

“Monstrous beings, human becomings: analysing unsettling encounters in Fiji, Norway and Australia in times of turmoil”

Geir Henning Presterudstuen, UiB

In this paper I draw upon monster anthropology to discuss people's experience of turmoil and turbulence in Fiji, Norway and Australia. By comparing unsettling encounters, as well as their social effects, from these vastly different ethnographic contexts I demonstrate how monsters can be conceptualised as cultural technologies, which presence in local lifeworlds provide unique insights about the temporal and social context in which they appear. Often emerging in times of turmoil and upheaval, monsters are at once embodiments of specific cultural moments, harbingers of radical change, and reminders of the past. By defying easy categorisation, they thrive on liminality and emerge at the interstices of the settled order of things. They are at once extra-ordinary and mutually constitutive of the communities they threaten. This ability, to at once exist within and without the human realm, makes monsters productive analytics to understand the human experience of the current historical moment of planetary crisis, as well as point to potential ways to overcome it. Indeed, as I conclude my paper, I present monster anthropology as an approach distinctly different from, and complementary to, the common philosophical trope of haunting, in that it demands reflection on the intimate relationship between monsters and human becomings.

“Håp i en turbulent verden: En etnografisk studie av norske klimaaktivister i Extinction Rebellion”

Anette Olafsen, NTNU

Denne presentasjonen baserer seg på en etnografisk studie av norske klimaaktivister fra gruppen Extinction Rebellion i Oslo. Presentasjonen tar utgangspunkt i hvordan medlemmene av Extinction Rebellion forstår verden. Extinction Rebellion mener at verden står overfor den største klimakrisen og økologiske krisen i menneskets historie, og reagerer på dette med sivil ulydighet og ikke-voldelig direkte aksjon. I presentasjonen går jeg nærmere inn på ulike forståelser av kroppen, og utforsker hvordan kroppslige erfaringer påvirker menneskene i gruppen, både individuelt og kollektivt, og hvordan enkelte responderer på disse erfaringene. Videre utforsker jeg hvordan en visjon om hvordan fremtiden kan se ut bidrar til å opprettholde et håp, både for jorden, naturen, fremtidige generasjoner og for en selv. Håpet fungerer som et positivt element for å navigere mot fremtiden. Denne gruppen med mennesker responderer på en turbulent verden, spesielt med tanke på klimaendringene. Dette byr på utfordringer for flere i forhold til en følelse av håpløshet og maktesløshet, og avslutningsvis argumenterer presentasjonen for hvordan disse følelsene mobiliseres inn i handling gjennom aktivisme heller enn lammelse og fravær av handling.

“A creature in the mosaic”*Jon Rasmus Nyquist, NTNU*

In this paper I juxtapose two ways of thinking about fire and fiery landscapes: a mosaic imaginary and a creatural imagination. Fire managers in Western Australia burn and fight fires and interact with fire almost daily for most of the year. As they do so, modes of thought take shape, among others, two distinct ways of thinking that coexist seemingly without interfering much with each other. One is a mosaic imaginary in which the landscape is seen as a set of nesting and interlocking shapes. The second is a creatural imagination which involves talking about and imagining fire as though it were a creature that cannot possibly be understood. I look at the fire managers' lively thought through concepts of fabulation, fascination, and thinking with images. The creatural imagination draws people in and has a grip on them. It can also be seen as an acknowledgement of the ineffable, and it can reflect a willingness to extend oneself and make one's own thought pliable in response to something in the non-human world. I suggest that the creatural imagination is shaped at the same time as a response to what fire itself demands and as an imprint of what the more conventional imaginaries leave out.

“Treatment during turbulent times: Wellbeing imagined by Norwegian patients with rheumatism”*Anna Ulrikke Andersen, NTNU*

Since 1976, Norway has been sending patients with rheumatism to the renowned institute Dr. Simo Milosevic, in Igalo, Montenegro for rehabilitation. Here, the Norwegian patients stay for 4 weeks, undergoing a series of passive and active treatments, proved efficient (Strumse, 2011: 125). Many people return year after year, describing the institute in Igalo as their second home (Interview with Laila Holgersen 2020). In the summer of 2023, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork following two Norwegian groups of 160 patients undergoing treatment. Due to the high currency exchange rates and cuts from the government, fewer patients were sent this year. Meanwhile, the institute in Igalo is facing financial issues and possible bankruptcy and closure. In September, the Norwegian programme announced that they would not be renewing the contract with the institute in Montenegro.

This paper asks how patients on the ground think and feel about these problems, and how they imagine their possible future without being able to travel to Igalo. This recent ethnography is discussed in the context of existing sources, media coverage and interviews, covering the other two closures in the 1990s (war) and 2020s (covid). I eventually ask how the essay film genre, known to 'straddle facts and fiction' (Corrigan, 2011), might help us approach these imaginaries.

“The significance of stable currency to the resolving of conflicts”*Jonas Bugtene Boulifa, NTNU*

This presentation argues that having access to a stable currency is critical for the co-operation among citizens in what I call market-relationships. This presentation argues that having access to a stable currency is critical for the co-operation among citizens in what I call market-relationships. People are engaged in such relationships when they use

money to acquire what they need in their daily lives. One feature of this co-operative practice is the continuous communication that takes place through the definition of prices. By approaching prices as a communicative system of meaning and not strictly an allocative mechanism, I seek to understand how prolonged and elevated inflation can be a source of social conflict. Based on my own fieldwork conducted in Buenos Aires, I argue that people adopt new forms of money as they are unable to use the Argentine peso for functions normally associated with state-issued currency. Because the peso is rapidly decreasing in value, it becomes unsuitable for making long term commitments involving transactional relationships. Contracts need constant re-negotiation and the possibility for conflict rises, as there are no clear answers to what prices should be. The argument presented is thus concerned with the consequences of inflation for individual decision-makers, and how their choices are conditioned by the social networks of which they are a part.

“Climate inaction as a failure of the imagination”

Oliver Clifford Pedersen, University of Neuchatel

Crises, or “omveltninger”, are often described as abrupt disruptions in the status quo, destabilising people’s sense of time and their imaginations. However, when these crises are slow-building, non-discrete, multifaceted, or displaced in time and space, it becomes challenging to identify them. This also complicates studies of how people’s imaginations emerge, change, for whom they change, and what barriers exist. I aim to explore climate inaction as a failure of the imagination. The climate collapse scientists warn off can best be compared to a boiling frog analogy, in which the frog does not realise that it is slowly being boiled due to the slow raising temperature. Since the 1970s and 1980s, we have known about the detrimental effect of burning fossil fuels and relying on indefinite growth on a finite planet. Nonetheless, the effects have been gradual at best and often displaced to those who have had the least hand in causing the problem. Adopting a sociocultural psychological lens on imagination, I will explore how the nebulous nature and temporality of the climate crisis might reduce people’s capacity to imagine its ramifications. In doing so, I will use diaries written over 20 years to illustrate and analyse how people experience and imagine the climate crises over time.

“Imagining a borderless world: Barriers and openings”

Heidi Mogstad, CMI

‘To be alive, or to survive, is more and more co-terminus with the capacity to move’, Achille Mbembe argues. Therefore, he believes Europe is left with a choice. We can either close ourselves off from the rest of the world – which would entail implementing even more deadly policies – or ‘imagin[e] together different ways of reorganising the world and redistributing the planet among all of its inhabitants.’ In this paper, I will consider difficulties with and possibilities for imagining a borderless world, that is, a world with significantly more freedom of movement for everyone with needs and desires to cross borders. Drawing on long-term fieldwork with Norwegian volunteers and refugee advocates, I describe how their cosmopolitan belief in an interdependent world and radical human equality are challenged by their narrow or ‘post-utopian’ political demands and imaginations. I specifically point to their failure to normalise migration and confront national and humanitarian ‘(b)order of things’ (De Lauri; Malkki). I thereafter consider some

cracks and openings, including efforts to 1) challenge welfare chauvinism and think anew about borders in response to climate change, 2) 'convert' asylum seekers to kin, and 3) expand the subject of humanitarian care and protection to include animals in war.

“Accommodating Others: Ethnographic Explorations of Lysningen at Utøya”

Knut Christian Myhre, NTNU

This presentation explores ethnographically the memorial site entitled Lysningen or 'The Clearing' that commemorates the 69 young people that were killed on the island of Utøya by the right-wing terrorist Anders Behring Breivik on July 22, 2011. Drawing on Martin Heidegger's cognate and conterminous notion of *Lichtung*, I explore how the memorial site constitutes an opening where beings of different kinds may emerge and appear, and that thereby affords and accommodates the presence and co-existence among a range of others - including the dead and the bereaved. The presentation furthermore explores how the notion of a clearing also entails uncertainty or risk, as it does not predetermine who or what may appear in or through the opening among those present. On this basis, the presentation argues that Lysningen entails what Heidegger termed *Gelassenheit* or 'letting-be', and discusses whether and how it also enables a sense and attitude that may productively be engaged by means of the Ancient Greek notion of *adiaphora*. As Lysningen affords and accommodates a range of others, the presentation finally argues that it constitutes a creative and imaginative mechanism that resonates with ethnography, as well as a mode of being that may respond to a variety of contemporary challenges in our turbulent world that extend from terrorist violence to climate change.

“The mangrove condition”

Irmelin Joelsson, NTNU

This paper explores how thinking with *mkoko*, the mangrove, indigenous to the East African littoral, can offer a productive development of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1976) subterranean concept of the rhizome. Being at once terrestrial and marine, sedentary and itinerant, the mangrove challenges the land/sea binary, and its varieties inhabit intertidal shorelines, beaches, swamps, and estuaries, across the tropical climatic regions. Mangrove's Latin name is *rhizophora*, and derives from the Greek *rhiza*, "root", and *phoros*, "bearing". With its characteristic adventitious roots, the mangrove is a nursery for various fish, molluscs, algae, vertebrae, birds, and insects, while simultaneously stabilising the shorelines, buffering the effects of hurricanes, tsunamis and protect people behind the coastal fringes. The halophytic "root-bearer" sustains a fragile ecosystem of human and non-human relations that Arturo Escobar calls the "mangrove world" (2016: 17-18), and which composes its own "mangrove songs" (Lipset 1997: 18-19). Yet, tracts of stubby roots across the tropical littoral testifies that mangroves also become fuel wood and building poles, and swamps threatened to be filled in. Routed through the Middle Passage and across the Black Atlantic, Martinican poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant's (1997: 205-206) conceptualised the Caribbean rhizome as mangrove. Reaching out in all directions, entering dialogues across oceans, beaches, and ecologies, transcending various boundaries, as a "multitude of multiple roots", the mangrove proliferates connections (Ferly 2012: 4, 8). In this presentation I outline a few preliminary arguments through which I trace and extend the conceptual kinship of Deleuze and Guattari's poststructuralism through Glissant's creole poetics of relation, arriving at the Swahili intertidal shoreline. Professor of linguistics, Ana Deumert (2019), suggests Glissant's mangrove as a think-

ing-tool to understand interconnections and social worlds in the humanities. Thinking with the East African mkoko, along Dar es Salaam's urban beaches, I outline an errant ethnography intertwined with the moon and tide, that encourage a Swahili rhizome of thinking difference, multiplicity, comparison, and relation.

“The Speculative realms of railway suspensions: making sense through conspiracies, gambling and improvisations”

Charline Kopf, UiO

It had been three years since the railway workers in Senegal and Mali had seen the last train pass. Nonetheless, they continued to come to their workplace to tend to their routines and wait for the resumption of services. In this paper, I examine what speculative and calculative practices - as affective, bodily and intellectual labour - the workers engaged in to face the disruption of the railway. How did they make sense of their loss of short- and long-term predictability and how did they explain the suspension of trains? Ranging from rumours and conspirational theories to gambling and improvisations, I argue that these unsettling times give rise to particular forms of speculative imaginations and practices that are geared towards 'the making present and materializing of uncertain futures... an engagement with uncertainty for profit as well as for survival' (Bear, Birla and Puri 2015: 387). Exploring how the workers engaged in a continuous, critical reassessment of their expectations, of what they deemed real or fake, I demonstrate how they established patterns and orders that allowed for some predictability and stability in their everyday lives and also made for a patchwork of livelihood strategies.