



# **SANT 2024 “IMPROVISATION”**

## **Conference in Uppsala, 24-26 April 2024**



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# CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Wednesday: 24th of April, 2024

Room:	22-0008	2-0076	3-2028	2-0024
09.30-10.00	Registration	—	—	—
10.30-11.00	Opening Address	—	—	—
Break	Coffee			
11.15-13.00	Roundtable 3	Panel 3-1	Panel 1-1	Panel 4-1
13.00-14.00	LUNCH			
14.15-16.00	Panel 8	Panel 3-2	Panel 1-2	Panel 4-2
Break	Coffee			
16.15-18.00	Plenary Keynote Disc.	—	—	—

**Conference Dinner** at 19.00 at “La Jefa” (<https://www.lajefa.se/>), Svartbäcksgatan 19, Uppsala. A Buffet Dinner, drinks not included.

## Thursday: 25th of April, 2024

<b>Room:</b>	<b>Thunberg, SCAS</b>	<b>6-1023</b>	<b>3-2028</b>	<b>2-2050</b>
09.15-11.00	—	Panel 4-3	Panel 7-1	Panel 10-1
Break	—	Coffee		
11.15-13.00	—	Panel 2	Panel 7-2	Panel 10-2
13.00-14.45	—	LUNCH (self organized)	—	—
15.00–16.30	Alisse Waterston’s Keynote	—	—	—
17.00	Reception at SCAS*	—	—	—

\* Due to the limited number of seats at SCAS (85 seats), attendance of keynote lecture is organized on the first-come, first-served basis. Please note that the reception at SCAS is for keynote participants only.

## Friday: 26th of April, 2024

<b>Room:</b>	<b>22-0008</b>	<b>2-2050</b>	<b>3-2028</b>	<b>2-0024</b>
09.15-11.00	SANT ann. meeting	—	—	—
Break	Coffee	—	—	—
11.15-13.00	Roundtable 2	Panel 9-1	Panel 6-1	Panel 5-1
13.00-14.00	LUNCH			
14.15-16.00	Roundtable 1	Panel 9-2	Panel 6-2	Panel 5-2
Break	Coffee			
16.15-17.00	Artist Performance			



## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

**Alisse Waterston** (Presidential Scholar and Professor Emerita of Anthropology, City University of New York, John Jay College of Criminal Justice)

Thursday, 25th of April, 15.00–16.30, **Thunberg, SCAS**

### **Improvising Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness: Anthropological Perspectives**

In this keynote lecture, Alisse Waterston probes the idea of “improvisation” as it applies to: understanding the human struggle to survive amid harsh conditions (*improvising life*), ways anthropologists are breaking free from constraints of standardized methods and means of communicating knowledge (*improvising liberty*), and how engaged anthropologists may put knowledge to work in the effort to sustain the earth and the living things in it (*improvising for the pursuit of happiness*). Invoking aspects of her own work and that of other scholars, Waterston offers an anthropological perspective on a process captured by the action word “improvising,” creating something new from what is available.

### **A Constellation of Improvisations: Stories through Encounters**

Wednesday, 24th of April, 16.15-18.00, room **22-0008**

**Keynote Discussion** featuring *Ana Chiritoiu* (Uppsala University), *Tomas Cole* (Stockholm University), *Thaïs Machado Borges* (Stockholm University) and *Nina Gren* (Lund University).

Anthropological work rests mostly on “encounters across difference” to borrow Anna Tsing’s formulation. These encounters however are less planned and more improvisational in the sense of how they are formed and how they are experienced, documented, narrated, and represented.

What does improvisation mean in relation to anthropologist’s engagement with the world? How does one work around the messiness of improvisation? How can

anthropology work towards a constellation of methods, theories, and stories that can both capture and inspire encounters that could not be imagined otherwise.

The speakers in this plenary keynote discussion will present their view on the relation between improvisation and the stories they tell as anthropologists. They will discuss the limits and potentialities of thinking improvisation as methodology. Building on their experiences across a diverse set of contexts and engagements, they will revisit and imagine their previous and future works redefined by what can be thought as a constellation of improvisations.

**Moderator:** Sverker Finnström (Uppsala University)



# PANELS

## **Panel 1: On the Fringes of Truth: Meaning-Making in Ambiguous Realms**

Wednesday, 24th of April, 11.15-13.00; 14.15-16.00, room **3-2028**

**Convenor:** Emy Lindberg, Uppsala University, [emy.lindberg@antro.uu.se](mailto:emy.lindberg@antro.uu.se)

**Discussant:** Steffen Jöhncke, University of Gothenburg

This panel investigates the roles of rumour, gossip, dreams and irony in shaping and challenging our perceptions of truth. We explore how these practices improvise narratives that oscillate between clarity and ambiguity. Drawing on case studies from Iceland, Ghana, Sweden, the UK, Madagascar, and Indonesia we analyse the intricate dance of meaning-making around the elusive concept of truth. Examining ethnographic examples, we observe rumours actively seeking truth, irony suspending truth to sustain enchantment, gossip fostering conviviality despite uncomfortable truths, and dreams that, in spite of being unlikely to come true, create meaning in the present. This collaborative project was initiated at the 2023 AAA conference and aims towards publication as a special issue. At this stage, we welcome questions and comments from fellow anthropologists. Join us in unravelling the complexities of truth, ambiguity and meaning-making in diverse cultural contexts.

**Session 1:** 24th of April, 11.15-13.00, room **3-2028**.

**Presenters:**

**Signe Askersjö** (University of Gothenburg)

*Speaking the Unspeakable: Unveiling Untold Truths through the Dynamics of Gossip*

Few spaces in everyday life thrive with gossip as the workplace. It is a space that requires constant negotiations with people you meet eight hours a day – people you sometimes struggle to get along with or perhaps do not even like. At the same time, for many people, the workplace is a space that offers the possibility to fall in love or

to find long-lasting friendships. It is also a space with structured and manifested hierarchies of power and these power dimensions can be difficult to negotiate as they may be perceived as rigid and cemented. All these characteristics of a workplace make for a space where gossip flourish and become fundamental aspects of most social interactions. In this paper, I argue that gossip are both seeds of conflicts and convivialities in social life and that they come to shape truths that are worth fighting for. Building on in-depth ethnographic fieldwork amongst employees at a department store in Sweden, this paper explores the double-sidedness of gossip in how gossip are used to build trust amongst colleagues by critiquing (and at times diminishing) the power of the managers at the store. By looking closely at the practices of gossiping, I illustrate how gossip have transitory effects in how these practices can transform most social relationships as well as how gossip can destabilize and transition power dimensions in everyday life.

**Emy Lindberg** (Uppsala University)

*Kojo's Dream: Aspirations for Migration among Footballers in Ghana*

The paper examines dreams of football migration among aspiring international footballers in Ghana. On the basis of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Ghana and Sweden between 2017-2019, it analyzes the dream of football migration by unpacking the stuff that the dream is made of. It asks who creates and who benefits from these dreams, and more importantly, will the dreams come true? The paper shows that the dream consists of a multilayered set of intersecting dreams including aspirations for migration, footballing success and economic prosperity. These dreams are furthermore shared by the individual footballers, their friends, families and the people that work in the football industry. They are in many ways global dreams that become pervasive, almost irresistible in their character. In that sense, they form part of what can be called an economy of dreams - in turn shaped by larger historical and contemporary processes of colonialism, capitalism and neoliberalism. I call this a dream machine. The football dream machine produces dreams that on the one hand are designed not to come true. At the same time, for the professional Ghanaian footballer, there is in fact ample evidence that footballers manage to "go outside". Using the story of the footballer Kojo as a backdrop, the paper finds that by adopting the identity of a successful professional player already in Ghana, the aspiring migrant footballers partake in the dream machine, not only

consuming these dreams, but also creating and performing them. Doing so, the players navigate the racialized football industry and a context of perpetual joblessness, seemingly designed to not make their dreams come true. Through the persona of the professional footballer, the players create desired outcomes that can, but does not have to, result in migration.

**Anders Norge** (University of Gothenburg)

*Ambalavelona: Rumours of Madness, Hysteria and Possession in  
Madagascar*

Rumours of a frightening kind of sorcery have spread from the Sihanaka region to the rest of Madagascar since the late 1950s. ‘Ambalavelona’, as it is called, renders its victims completely beside themselves with sudden outbursts of screaming, shaking and other aberrant behaviour. It appears to emerge chiefly in periods of societal transition, notably around Malagasy independence in 1960. The evocative name ‘ambalavelona’ translates as ‘enclosed alive’ referring to the helpless state of being at the mercy of the sorcery. However, what this “sorcery” is remains unclear and shrouded in all sorts of rumours. Some ascribe it to spirit possession or a type of nefarious love magic, while others perceive it as the work of the devil or a psychiatric disorder. Indeed, ambalavelona is among the most rumoured phenomena in Madagascar. In my fieldwork, I have traced the rumours of ambalavelona back to their alleged place of origin among the Sihanaka, a people notorious throughout Madagascar for their “sorcery” – especially ambalavelona. I heuristically approach ambalavelona as a culture-bound syndrome, that is, an assemblage of psychiatric and somatic symptoms endemic to a specific culture. Despite the prevalence of ambalavelona in everyday discourse, gossip, and media in Madagascar, a comprehensive ethnographic exploration of the practices and experiences surrounding this enigmatic phenomenon remains conspicuously absent. This article aims to address this gap by undertaking a focused and thorough ethnographic study of ambalavelona, shedding light on its cultural significance, social dynamics, and lived experiences.

**Alexander Sallstedt** (Uppsala University)

*I Want to Believe: On the Relation Between Irony and Enchantment Among Icelandic Artist Men*

While often considered a social strategy or a figure of speech, irony can also be considered a principal mode of human experience. In this paper, I consider these three classifications of irony as one. Based on fieldwork in Iceland amongst mid-twenties hipsters, I suggest that their continuous, ironic, transposing of the line between the fictional and the real served as a means to cultivate and maintain enchantment. In doing so, I specifically draw from the work of Walter Benjamin (1996) and William Egginton (2002) who theorizes irony in mimetic and aesthetic terms. In line with Michael Taussig's (2020) supposition that times of upheaval conjures more and greater forms of imitation, I finally suggest that the hipsters' ironic dispositions mirrored a world marked by fake news, uncertainty, and the abundance of representations.

**Session 2:** 24th of April, 14.15-16.00, room **3-2028**.

**Presenters:**

**Lilliana Buonasorte** (University of Bristol)

*'Doing' Disability 'Right': Rumour, Speculation and Performativity amongst Disability Benefit Claimants*

In this paper, I dissect the sticky complexity of claiming disability benefits – a bureaucratically ambiguous realm where multiplicities of truth unfold. Drawing upon my fieldwork with recipients of the UK disability benefits, I explore how disability benefit claimants respond to and create meaning(s) from this bureaucratic opacity. Utilising rumour, gossip and speculation, disability benefit claimants perform the complicated dance of welfare eligibility. To be a benefit claimant in the UK is to enter a space comprised of competing narratives; a cacophony of commonsense logics on what a disability claimant 'should' be. The benefit process, characterised by rigid biomedical classifications of disability, sits against a wider political landscape which portrays benefit claimants as 'undeserving scroungers'. Discordantly, claimants' own lived experiences refuse to 'fit' within the parameters of disability taxonomies. My collaborators examine these commonsense logics of biomedicalised and moralised deservingness – perceived truths on what disability benefit claimants 'should' be -

and strategise accordingly. Evocative of Cassandra Hartblay's 'disability expertise' (2020), my research explores how rumour, speculation and performativity are exercised by benefit claimants. Disability benefit advocates advise claimants to 'show [benefit assessors] what you're like on your worst day'. Facial expressions and physical appearance, my collaborators warn, will be narratively reconfigured as able-bodiedness and, therefore, ineligibility. Through rumour and speculation, my collaborators 'do', or perform, disability. Overarchingly, my research proposes the following questions: can we disentangle the ontological 'truth' of disability? Or rather, extricate these multiple truths? Through rumour, speculation and performativity, how might we reconceive disability as a relational category?

**Anton Angwald** (The Swedish Defence University)

*Disinformation and strategic frames - introducing the concept of a strategic epistemology towards media*

Efforts to raise awareness about foreign disinformation might accidentally increase distrust towards legitimate media. We argue that state discourse on disinformation is comparable to strategic framing in journalists' coverage of political events, and that it might imbue audiences with cynicism. Furthermore, in contrast to an experimental paradigm that depicts disinformation audiences as passive, we suggest that news consumers actively appropriate and produce content themselves. Conceptualizing media content as 'strategic' rather than sincere might influence audiences to share and produce media content strategically. This Machiavellian tendency leads to similar effects on bias as motivated reasoning. Most accounts of motivated reasoning assume that limits of psychological processing are the reasons for biased judgements of what is true and fake, however, we argue that biases can also be due to culturally acquired second-order beliefs about knowledge. To explain this, we build on ideas about 'folk epistemology' and propose the term 'strategic epistemology towards media'. Resistance-building efforts against disinformation risk promoting such a strategic epistemology towards media and this can have harmful effects on democratic dialogue. To avoid this, educational interventions should be premised on social epistemology rather than experimental psychology.

**Muhammad R. Damm** (University of Gothenburg)

*Boarding a Paper Boat: How Ambiguous Knowledge Makes Sense of a  
Vulnerable World in the Flood-Prone Cities in Indonesia*

During fieldworks or interviews, anthropologists often encounter informants who give vague, ambiguous, or even dubious accounts of certain matters. It is not uncommon to understand such unclear information as coming from vague memories or incomplete knowledge. As researchers, we then try to rectify this by triangulating—comparing it with data from other sources or data collected from different occasions. However, for our informants, such incomplete or even false knowledge sometimes goes beyond the true/false judgement, or the fact/fiction distinction. Such ambiguous knowledge is part of their way of worlding—their way of enacting a world that makes sense to them. Drawing some insights from literatures and my research on flooding and flood governance in Indonesia, this article discusses how the ambiguous knowledge that have become part of people's collective memory contributes to constructing a world in which they can comprehend their vulnerability due to recurring floods and government measures that bring other problems while trying to solve the flood issues. Memories of some infrastructure developments in the distant past still linger in their narratives when understanding recent floods. Some past incidents that have no direct connection with the current flood situation are often brought about despite having no role in explaining what just happened. Together with knowledge of more recent and relevant events, these ambiguous memories contribute not only to people's understanding of their condition of having to constantly deal with flooding, but more deeply, also to the way they build a world that while vulnerable, is meaningful to them.

**Panel 2: Beyond Words: The Role of Drawing in Ethnographic  
Research**

Thursday, 25th of April, 11.15-13.00, room **6-1023**

**Conveners:**

Emy Lindberg, Uppsala University (emy.lindberg@antro.uu.se)

Chakad Ojani, Uppsala University (chakad.ojani@antro.uu.se)

Drawing has long formed an essential, but less pronounced, part of the methodological toolkit of anthropology. It is, however, only recently that drawing and sketching have become an accepted mode of anthropological storytelling. Several publications have discussed drawing as an ethnographic method (e.g. Causey 2017; Ingold 2011; Taussig 2011), and a growing number of journal articles and monographs use cartooning as their main form of ethnographic representation (e.g. Sopranzetti et al. 2021; Waterston 2020). We invite papers that explore drawing both as a method for collecting empirical data and as a means to analyze and present research.

As a method, sketching can be used to capture processes and events that are not easily grasped in textual form. In addition, drawing can also be a means to process and explore one's experiences in the field in ways that writing might not allow. Given the potential of cartooning and sketching to unsettle conventional narrative structures, presenting our findings in graphic form, furthermore, offers alternative ways of engaging with publics and communicating anthropological knowledge in more accessible forms.

However, while indeed promising to challenge the linearity of standard academic writing, it is also worth asking what the differences between these two forms actually are. Are they to do with embodiment, semiotic potential, and thus their respective capacity to give a sense of "being there"? How do we integrate drawing as an aspect of the ethnographic toolkit? What are the strengths and weaknesses of drawing vis-à-vis other modes of ethnographic Representation?

**Presenters:**

**Simone de Boer & Hanna Wernersson** (University of Gothenburg)

*Graphic dialogues: imagining creative and collaborative ethnographies*

We use drawing both in our individual fieldwork and as a way to collaborate between us – a practice we have come to call 'cross ethnography'. In cross ethnography, we craft multi-layered interpretations and multilinear narrations by engaging with, and

interpreting, parts of each other's individual data through artful research practices. Drawing has become key. As renditions of a multimedia dialogue between us, the drawings have us re-view/see anew our respective material as the other draws it as she sees or imagines it. This process of drawing and redrawing helps us appreciate multiple perspectives of and on our research contexts. In this work, we have come to appreciate drawing as a multilevel tool for inquiry and (re)presentation. Drawings can illustrate written ethnography by visually communicating complexities of the field. In this case, both the process and product of drawing help us see deeper. On a different level, drawings can do their 'own' work. Here, drawing engages us in a generative ethnographic process, that is, an open-ended engagement with the field through an exploration and analysis of the unseen, not-(yet)-known, or the imagined. We find that it is more comfortable to engage with drawing on the first level, to create illustrations of what we 'know'. In contrast, the second level drawing challenges us to delineate and come to understand what we do not know; it is a way of thinking. Drawing in this sense necessitates that we free ourselves of academic conventions of producing argumentative output and instead stick to open-endedness; to drawings as surfaces that have not been completely filled in.

**Mostafa Hosseini** (University of Gothenburg)

*Toward a Creative and Imaginative Research: Collage as a Method of Inquiry*

Art-based research (ABR) is a broad methodological paradigm defined as the systematic use of artistic and creative expression to explore, understand, and represent human experiences. It is rooted in the philosophical assumption that art and creativity communicate and generate meaning, togetherness, engagement, and empathy and is vital for research. As part of my PhD project, I conducted a series of workshops in an art studio where I created a space for the participants to express themselves freely and honestly, as well as to connect with others who shared common yet diverse experiences of migration to Sweden. Together, we shared our stories of life, diversity, and differences and created collages, both individually and collectively, related to different topics and our understanding of social phenomena and political concepts. In this presentation, I share my experiences using collage as a methodological tool for collecting empirical data. The primary focus of my presentation is not merely to provide a straightforward answer to all methodological aspects of working with collage, but rather to invite the audience into the mess and



non-linear logic of working with creative methods and its potential benefits to explore the diversity and depth of human life. I provide some methodological insights and thoughts from the participants' experiences of working with collage and, hopefully, broader inspiration for various ways of conducting qualitative research within the field of social work and beyond.

**Andrea Petitt** (Université de Liège & Uppsala University)

*Drawn to multispecies notions of power: an artful horseback ethnography of the 'energy bubble'*

Drawing on a one year multispecies and ethnographic field work on a working cattle ranch in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, as well as seven months amongst humans, horses and cattle in Sweden engaged in agriculture, sport or tourism inspired by the American West, this talk portrays drawing as a useful way for data collection, conceptualisation and dissemination of results. The drawing is here the concept, words illustrating it. This ethnographic story is told from horseback and from within the multispecies triad of the American West. On a good day, human and horse melt together through what has been termed 'feel' and the human experience is that there is no longer any space between them – physically, mentally, emotionally.... What of the horse's feelings we know little. That is, except for what transpires between bodies only separated by a cow-hide saddle. This multispecies triad meet on the vast summer range up in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. Human-horse teams, cow-calf pairs, the occasional bull. Space between humans, horses and cattle here is relational, elastic, and made up of meaning, shot through with power. Attending to the topology of multispecies relations we need to grasp what cowboys, ranchers and cowboying women in Colorado, as well as humans in Sweden engaged in horse practices inspired by the American West, talk about an 'energy' or 'bubble' around humans, horses and cattle. As a horseback ethnographer, I have felt it too. As a spatially sensory experience, is difficult to at once put it in to academically accepted formulations or even ordinary sentences, so draw and color these spaces. In this talk I theorize space as power to be negotiated between species. I paint a multispecies intersectionality where individuals of different species work towards 'valued projects' beyond the resistance of species structures. I rhyme, in a cowboy poetry way, the reason for which it is fruitful to explore space as power, as meaning and as the very fabric of multispecies encounters.

**Alisse Waterston** (City University of New York, John Jay College of Criminal Justice)

*Ways of Seeing Light in Dark Times with Graphic Ethnography*

In this presentation, I reflect on aspects of the extraordinary collaboration between Charlotte Corden (the artist) and me (the author-anthropologist) in the creation of *Light in Dark Times: The Human Search for Meaning*, a graphic book rooted in nonfiction and comprised of fictionalized encounters with writers, philosophers, activists and anthropologists. The collaboration and the published book bring together serious scholarship and contemporary aesthetics to present complex philosophical and political themes in a mixed media format. Reflecting on “ways of seeing” with words and image, I discuss the motivations behind creating the book, the goals set for it, and the questions I kept front and center as Charlotte and I developed this work of art, aesthetics, and anthropology. I select two particular images from the book to reflect upon and offer my interpretation of the images and their meanings as the artist converted my words and ideas into a way of seeing, perceiving, understanding, and illuminating beyond the text.

**Fred Lai** (London School of Economics)

*Intentionally left blank: Printmaking as fieldnote-taking on aging, dementia, and care for memory in China*

Words often fail to capture the lived experiences of dementia. It might be most felt by people with dementia who encountered lapses of memory and difficulties of narrating themselves. Meanwhile, fieldworkers struggling to document and understand the opacity of such illness experiences had to deal with similar predicaments – how to write fieldnotes of inconsistent speech, muddled dialogues, conjunctural temporalities, and phantoms of memories? How to make sense of the ‘blankness’ between the lines and among the personal histories of elders with dementia without reducing them to medical conditions only? This paper draws on my explorations of printmaking as fieldnote-taking during 22-month fieldwork on aging and dementia in China. The prints were mostly based on fieldwork scenes, quotes from informants, and my dual reflections (as both fieldworker and relative of persons with dementia myself) during a time of care crisis in the Covid-19 pandemic from 2021 to 2023. I will discuss how the processual, affective, and physical labour of engraving, a craft essentially about keeping and discarding things, may imitate the dialectics of

memory of remembering and forgetting. Rethinking (and redoing) the blank spaces between carved lines and the gap beyond words of elders with dementia may offer a new possibility of a non-representational depiction of aging and dementia experiences. The printing process in which words and images were reversed, mirrored, and retold, provides critical insights into the construction of ethnographic gaze, and further interrogates how words as irreconcilable presence (and absence) may be entangled with the care ethics/politics of memory in China.

### **Panel 3: New Directions in the Anthropology of/beyond Migration**

Wednesday, 24th of April, 11.15-13.00, 14.15-16.00, room **2-0076**

**Conveners:**

*Johan Lindquist, Stockholm University (Johan.Lindquist@socant.su.se )*

*Lisa Åkesson, University of Gothenburg (lisa.akesson@globalstudies.gu.se)*

**Discussant:** *Johan Lindquist*

The anthropology of migration is currently characterized by diverse attempts to reinvent itself—empirically, conceptually, and ethically. Having focused on themes such as migrant experience, governance, and integration, in recent years anthropology and cognate disciplines have become increasingly critical to received wisdom, turning away from the figure of migrant to the processes that organize migration, moving away from the methodological nationalism that has formed the basis for the category of integration, critically engaging with how the “migrant” itself is shaped as a category, considering how migration intersects with other forms of mobility such as tourism or pilgrimage, while raising new discussions concerning the ethics of field research and representation. This has, for instance, led to research focusing on the brokers that mediate migrant mobility, the logistics or infrastructure of migration and attention to the postmigrant condition, where migration has become an established normality, in which social forms of inclusion are intersected by complex understandings and practices of class, nationality and race. This panel welcomes that papers that are struggling to reconsider, reconceptualize, and find new methods for approaching themes that touch on the anthropology of migration.

**Session 1:** 24th of April, 11.15-13.00, room **2-0076**

**Presenters:**

**Yasmynn Chowdhury** (the University of Oxford)

*Improvising (in)visibilities: An ethnographic exploration of self-bricolage  
amongst Rohingya refugees*

Refugees are enmeshed in a vast sociomaterial assemblage of discourses, laws/policies, technologies, and practices (many emerging from legacies of improvisation), which seek to render their bodies knowable, legible, and thus governable, often under the banner of ostensible protection/care. Drawing on a meta-ethnographic analysis of narratives of Rohingya seeking refuge in the South, and preliminary findings from my ongoing doctoral fieldwork with resettled Rohingya in the North, this paper explores how this community of refugees engages authorized forms of knowability/legibility produced within such assemblages, through various improvisatory enactments through which their bodies become iteratively un/re-made. I consider three forms of improvisation emerging from this work: 1) Rohingya's adoption of alternative modalities of being-in-the-world and 'somatic modes of attention' to maintain perceptual invisibility/clandestinity in response to hypervisibility within intercorporeal spaces; 2) strategic exchanges of various forms of recognition (epistemic, administrative, sociopolitical/legal) – revealing makeshift identities/belongings in which discursive and moral categories such as 'Rohingya', 'refugee' and 'stateless' are tactically claimed or rejected; and 3) creation of alternative/novel forms of sociopolitical/legal visibility (such as the pursuit of an autonomous, community-based system of identity and recognition of members of the ethnic diaspora), in contestation of dominant systems of national identity. I briefly conclude with a consideration of how these creative forms of self-bricolage may, on one hand, allow the continuity of particular affective and epistemic harms while on the other, be generative of new, re-imagined possibilities for a more epistemically agential and caring/restorative future for Rohingya and other refugees.

**Johan Lindquist** (Stockholm University)

*Migrant Preparatory Training and the Shaping Circular Migration between Ethiopia  
and the Gulf States*

This paper deals with a critical dimension of the intensification and deepening of circular migration, namely the expansion of what we term “migrant preparatory training,” vocational education in the deployment of low-skilled documented international labor migrants from sending to receiving countries. Government-regulated training is part of an expanding migration infrastructure that prepares migrants for work abroad, while aiming to shape their aspirations and channel them into specific labor sectors in destination countries. Importantly, these training programs are becoming formalized through policy transfers from mature sending countries, most notably the Philippines, to countries such as Ethiopia, which is currently developing the most ambitious labor deployment program on the African continent. This paper takes the circulation and implementation of these training programs as an empirical entry-point for understanding how the recruitment, preparation, deployment and channeling of documented low-skilled labor migration is evolving through increasingly sophisticated means. This is of great relevance for understanding the future of labor migration across world, not least to Europe.

**Diana-Antonia Jeflea** (Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen)

*Improvising home – shapes of belonging sketched by Romanian diaspora-built businesses in Germany*

The Romanian diaspora has become the largest intra-EU migratory community in Germany by the end of 2023, according to DESTATIS (DESTATIS, 2023). Since Romania joined the European Union in 2007, many Romanians have left their country to pursue better opportunities abroad, either for a limited or an unlimited period. Many of these migrants cross borders multiple times per year in search of belonging, with most of these family reunification trips taking place around celebrations or holidays. However, during the time spent in their host countries, they have to renegotiate their identity and Romanianness while also struggling to integrate into the society they have landed in. A fluid sense of belonging (Marcu, 2020) involves not only taking steps to become part of the host society, such as learning the language, making friends, and interacting with authorities but also navigating the difficulties of daily life as a foreigner (Amit and Knowles, 2017) by improvising a home away from home. To achieve this, Romanian migrants in Germany often try to connect with the idealized homeland image by seeking Romanian products, services offered in Romanian, spiritual connections, and

traditional practices. These include businesses created by fellow Romanians abroad, such as grocery shops with diasporic-specific products, medical or psychological services offered in Romanian, orthodox churches with Romanian liturgy, Romanian or regional-specific restaurants and others. Through this research, I aim to explore how Romanianness can be created and improvised in diasporic communities with the help of mimetic businesses that remind them of their idealized motherland.

**Session 2:** 24th of April, 14.15-16.00, room **2-0076**

**Presenters:**

**Lisa Åkesson** (University of Gothenburg)

*Postmigration, class, race, and nationality at a globalised workplace in Sweden*

The postmigration condition refers to societies that are irreversibly structured by experiences of migration and will continue to be so. In the postmigration condition, social forms of inclusion are intersected by complex understandings and practices of class, race and nationality. This was evident during ethnographic fieldwork at BIPH, a global research and innovation company with its main sites in Sweden, the UK and the US. BIPH Sweden is highly diverse with staff from more than 60 countries, yet most people describe inclusion as unproblematic. This has to do with a striking homogeneity regarding education, lifestyle and bodily capital (fit and white). Yet, staff members who in terms of class and race do not fit into this homogenous picture sometimes voice concerns about their inclusion. Likewise, many employees express frustration with their inclusion in the global company world. Many spend most of their workday in digital meetings with colleagues and managers in the US and UK. At these meetings, staff at BIPH Sweden struggle with feelings of being dominated and unseen, and they strive to integrate while quietly challenging the dominance of the UK/US “natives”. They often share class and race with the UK/US “natives”, which means that cultural differences oftentimes are not noted by the “natives”, yet play a crucial role regarding styles of communication and management. However, employees at BIPH Sweden who are racialised in the Swedish context, sometimes play on multiple identities in the global company world and thereby work as bridge builders between different sites of the company. Thus, race and nationality play out differently at different levels of the globalised company.

**Rae Hackler** (University of Bristol)

*Is to be a migrant to be an anthropologist: Improvised Ethnographies and Everyday Methods of Hong Kongers in Bristol, UK*

Is being a migrant to be an anthropologist? Irrespective of lexicon and theoretical training, the methodology of participant observation is largely analogous. Using my thesis research among the Hong Kong diaspora in Bristol, UK, I explore the possibilities that arise when the supposed “other” of migration is reversed. Through community cafes, my collaborators explore not only their (migrant) identities and what ‘Hong Kongness’ means, but also what the ‘Britishness’ that surrounds them entails. Does this create a space of dual ethnography? Through their lived experience of everyday participant observation in British life, Hong Kong migrants create an ethnographic understanding of Britishness. Through field discussions about their lives in Hong Kong and Bristol and their experience of migration, collaborative ethnographies are generated. In my field site, Hong Kong migrants go beyond reflecting on their own identities and culture. They continuously position themselves within their new locality: in and around their witnessing of “Britishness.” This practice gives space for ‘improvised ethnographies’ – migrants who construct ontological categories, specialized terminologies and social theories through participant observation. The dominant ‘host’ culture – and colonial power over Hong Kong during most collaborator's childhoods – is othered by the migrants and how they frame their experiences. Our dialogue echoes anthropology: striving to understand and explain the ‘other’ that surrounds us. This paper asks the following questions: what does this repositioning mean in praxis? How might this deconstruct and challenge the researcher-researched relationship? And, for the study of migration, what could this paradigm shift mean for the field and knowledge-making?

**Helena Wulff** (Stockholm University)

*Speaking the truth to power: The role of opinion pieces in a postmigrant condition*

Writing about the public role of writers and intellectuals, Edward Said (2002: 25) noted that “the writer has taken on more and more of the intellectual’s adversarial attributes in such activities as speaking the truth to power, being a witness to persecution and suffering, supplying a dissenting voice on conflicts with authority.” Drawing on my research on migrant writing, ranging from fiction, short stories and

poetry to journalistic opinion pieces, in Sweden, this paper explores opinion pieces by writers with an international background. Some of them came to Sweden as children, others were born here to parents who emigrated. The writers identify as Swedish writers or for instance, Iranian-Swedish writers rather than “migrant” writers. Yet their writings tend to focus on experiences, events and circumstances related to migration and diversity. This is especially palpable in the beginning of their careers. With time and reputation, most of them move on to other topics but leave traces of migration or diversity issues in their literary work. By contrast, their opinion pieces almost always address migration and diversity. They write opinion pieces and political commentary, but also to some extent features and reviews in newspapers, magazines and on social media. Jonas Hassen Khemiri is the most prolific and prominent among them, and can be considered a public intellectual. Pooneh Rohi, and Marjaneh Bakhtiari also write journalism more or less regularly. At stake is thus whether these writings might be understood in the context of a “post-migrant condition.”

#### **Panel 4: Facing Precarity and Improvising Resilience in “Times of Crisis”**

Wednesday, 24th of April, 11.15-13.00, 14.15-16.00, room **2-0024**

Thursday, 25th of April, 09.15-11.00, room **6-1023**

##### **Conveners:**

*Sara Kauko, Lund University (sara.kauko@genus.lu.se)*

*Helle Rydstrom (corresponding), Lund University, ([helle.rydstrom@genus.lu.se](mailto:helle.rydstrom@genus.lu.se))*

**Panel Discussant :** *Simon Turner, Lund University*

We repeatedly hear that we are living in “times of crisis” as indicated by the countless narratives and images of the climate crisis, financial crises, pandemics, wars and conflicts among many others. As socio-economic inequalities shift in these “times of crisis”, people face various degrees of precarity while weathering under uneven and harsh conditions created by not only one but coexisting crises. Pervasive discourses and realities of crisis have fostered debates on resilience in anthropology and beyond. Resilience may be a means by which landscapes of



socio-economic and political precarity, as configured in times of crisis, can be navigated through day-to-day improvisations. That is, not only to navigate crises, but also recover from them and maybe even be renewed after having dealt with them. This panel asks (1): “In which ways do people live in ‘times of crisis’ in specific ethnographic contexts” and (2) “How do people maneuver through diverse crises by improvising individually or collectively?” The panel invites presenters to critically explore crisis and resilience to capture how these notions are related to one another and entangled with improvisations in theory and practice. The panel strives to shed light on the creative ways in which people imagine and realize strategies to mitigate, cope with, and maybe even pave out new avenues of potentialities in “times of crisis” shaped in various spaces including villages, cities, highland and lowland as well as coastal areas for those who stay put, are on the move, or stuck in-between places and hopes for change.

**Session 1:** 24th of April, 11.15-13.00, room **2-0024**

**Presenters:**

**Flora Mary Bartlett** (Linköping University) & **Lotten Gustafsson Reinius**  
(Stockholm University)

*Life with Forest Loss: Renewed Relations and Ritual Re-enchantments/  
Improvisations*

The rapid rate of forest loss by fires and deforestation is a global catastrophe. We recognize deforestation not just “over there” in international contexts but here in Sweden, where forestry is increasingly critiqued by ecologists, forest dwellers, and the EU and yet is critically understudied from a cultural perspective. We present a new research project (2024-2027) focussing on life with remnants of forest loss, asking how past crises unfold in the present and what the future holds for anthropogenic relations. How do people navigate the precarious aftermath of forest loss in complex entangled relations with nature? How do they use improvisation in their return to lost and changed landscapes? Building on a pilot study and past research, we present our preliminary thoughts on local processes of post-crises re-enchantment of forest relations from our two fieldsites: 1) life with toxic remnants of the herbicide hormoslyr in Swedish Sápmi, examining how locals navigate their return to precarious landscapes with a naked calendar to raise money for cancer charities, and 2) in slow recovery after the mega forest fires in postindustrial Mid

Sweden, where particular paths and sites have been curated as destinations for post-fire tourism as well as sites of ritual co-restoration of local memory. In dialogue with Miyazaki (2004) we approach instances of post crises ritual improvisation as restoration of hope. Further we understand these as attempted re-enchantments and restoration of more-than-human relations, including between humans, non-humans, objects, landscapes, absences and presences of spirits, and past and future generations.

**Yana Sanko** (Lund University)

*Who watches the refugees?: Improvisations of exile under overlapping surveillances*  
This paper is based on the fieldwork with Belarusian political refugees who sought asylum in Vilnius, Lithuania, following the outbreak of mass repressions in Belarus since 2020. Even after successfully leaving the country of origin, the refugee, being embedded into a complex social network on both sides of the border, continues to deal with various risks and threats of state violence. I show how my study participants made sense of and responded to being watched by different gazes with often contradictory disciplining projects behind each surveillance apparatus. The escape process happens in several dimensions simultaneously, as the refugee's body is moving physically in space, but they are also moving between spaces of different state bureaucracies, as well as through digital data systems. The awareness of being under surveillance or off the grid informed and necessitated particular forms of improvisation before, during, and after their illegal border crossings. The overlap of several patchy, or myopic, surveillances was seen by my study participants as both an opportunity and risk, calling for different improvised responses. Some of these responses show the joy and satisfaction people can get from the creative outsmarting of the observers.

**Sara Kauko** (Lund University)

*Middle-class resilience in the context of a multilayered crisis in Argentina*  
Once upon a time, Argentina was known for its robust middle classes. They stood out almost as an anomaly in Latin America's socioeconomic landscape marked by extreme inequalities. But especially since the 1990s, repeated financial busts have eroded this trademark and societal inequalities have grown. Since 2017, Argentina

has been engulfed in one of its worst-ever economic crises. The interannual inflation is forecasted to go above 250% this year and over 40% of Argentines are living in poverty. Today the country sits on the bottom of the GDP growth ranking among Latin American countries.

While the crisis touches virtually all sectors of the society, the ways to navigate and cope with it differ between socioeconomic classes. This paper focuses specifically on the middle classes and what could be conceptualized as middle-class Argentine resilience. It discusses the concrete practices by which people, who continue to deem themselves middle-class, take measures to manage the constantly increasing economic constraints. From 'burning the money' to hiding dollars, people resort to practices that are not only part of doing resilience but also, I argue, maintain socially shared understandings of middle-classness –even when the traditional economic markers of being middle-class are rapidly wearing away. As the entanglements of economic, political, and institutional crises constantly set new parameters for 'acceptable living standards', middle-class identities stubbornly persist. This paper explores how those identities are maintained through different resilience practices in a context of extreme economic hardship.

**Rares Mihai Jeflea** (Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen)

*Improvisation during COVID-19 pandemic. How Romanian public museums faced the unknown*

In times of great uncertainty, public cultural institutions could not remain undisturbed. The COVID-19 pandemic represented the most troublesome phenomenon that Romanian public museums have faced in recent years. This research aims to use improvisation and anticipation as forms of organisational resilience (Rerup, 2001) to understand how museums from Brasov and Bucharest adapted themselves to face the physical closure of their sites, significant decrease of funds, and a threat to the central scope of this kind of cultural institution, being accessible to considerable social groups. Improvisation as a central part of organisational resilience (Hadida et al., 2015) is in-depth researched, but I believe that examining the extent to which improvisation played a role in overcoming the structural crisis that the SARS-CoV-2 virus triggered is crucial in conceiving durable organisational strategies within Romanian institutional sphere. A fluid understanding of resilience could determine

the way in which museum's staff regard the urgency to tackle grounded institutional means to predict the unknown. Considering that public museums from all over the world perceived an urge to digitalise as many artefacts as possible when the pandemic started (Meng et al., 2023, Kist, 2020) it is meaningful to analyse the extent to which this happened in the Romanian context, acknowledging the fact that considerable digitalisation projects were not prevailing. Through this research I seek to explore how improvisation was conceptualised and implemented by curators and managers from public museums, referring to Brasov and Bucharest as cultural centres and how far this enduring effect has built on the organisational level.

**Session 2:** 24th of April, 14.15-16.00, room **2-0024**

**Presenters:**

**Susann Baez Ullberg** (Uppsala University) & **Diego Zenobi** (University of Buenos Aires)

*Dis/Connections in the Argentinean Inland: (Im)Mobility and Morality in times of Pandemic*

As disaster anthropologists, we are used to analyzing the social vulnerabilities produced when infrastructures are out of order due to a hazard, as is often the case in a flood, a storm or an earthquake. We also study infrastructural breakdown as disasters, such as dam breaks and power outages, and how people and institutions deal with such risks and events. Less studied as of yet are cases in which everyday infrastructures such as roads are deliberately disabled as part and parcel of a crisis management policy to prevent human mobility. By focusing on roads, we take stock of the recent anthropological interest in infrastructure as a vantage point from which to study the contemporary (Harvey et al. 2017; Hetherington 2019a; Larkin 2013). As a case in point, we take the 2020 lockdown in Argentina, zooming in on the border region between the Province of San Luis and the Province of Cordoba in the inland, basing our study on ethnographic online and onsite material from 2020 and 2021.

**Shen Qing** (Uppsala University)

*Playing through the neoliberal transition: laziness as queer improvisation among disadvantaged queer men in Shanghai*

The gay male retirees and the rural-urban younger gay migrants I spent time with in Shanghai describe laziness and indolence as common disposition in their community. I trace this “lazy homosexual” myth in two historical moments of the broader neoliberal transition in contemporary China. The first moment is late 1990s when massive layoffs in state-owned enterprises across the country made millions of industrial workers urban proletariat. The queer men I worked with, instead of heeding to neoliberal values of “self-development” to become striving subjects, forsake career success as a life goal and improvised a play-oriented living that helped them withstand the crisis. The second moment concerns recent years of economic stagnation and the crisis of president Xi Jinping’s trademark “Chinese Dream”. The rural gay migrants I spoke to eschewed precarious working condition which came with minimal pay and hopped between short-term jobs and recurrent unemployment. They spent a great amount of time loitering and playing at queer spots. I discuss laziness and the impulse to play in the disadvantaged queer community as queer disposition characterized by a readiness to act and improvise in response to the changing labor regime in transitional China.

**Helle Rydström** (Lund University)

*Improvising Resilience: Crises of Welfare and Masculinized Class Precarity in Industrializing Vietnam*

Only limited anthropological research has examined heavy industry both generally and in respect to Vietnam’s socialist-oriented market economy. This paper focuses on the Industrial Zones of northern Vietnam to consider the class divisions between men who come together in a masculinized workplace defined by technology, machinery, and innovation. Engaging with the anthropology of crisis and resilience, the paper explores the impact of socio-economic constraints encountered by blue-collar male workers and their families. Unfolding the precarity faced by shopfloor men as one welfare crisis gets entangled with the other to morph into an underpinning slow-burning crisis condition of daily life, the paper shows how the men perpetually are struggling to provide welfare for their children. Affluent white-collar male colleagues, such as engineers, on the other hand, can enjoy a range of healthcare and educational services offered by Vietnam’s semi-privatised welfare sector. While mustering resilience and improvising coping strategies to mitigate daily

life welfare crises, blue-collar male workers observe how the middle classes are thriving as social asymmetries are growing in rapidly transforming Vietnam.

**Session 3:** Thursday, 25th of April, 09.15-11.00, room **6-1023**

**Presenters:**

**Mirko Pasquini** (University of Gothenburg & Uppsala University)

*Infodemic Futures: Improvising Resilience within the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Italian Primary Care*

Infodemic, as too much information including false or misleading information, has been widely documented by journalists and commentators. It's long-term effects over health care organizations, however, remain understudied. In places like Italy, the COVID-19 infodemic prospered over the massive introduction of telemedicine, that expanded exponentially in the face of lockdowns and other drastic measures of social distancing.

During my fieldwork in 2021-2022, many General Practitioners (GPs) told me they bought new phones for work. They opened new WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram profiles. Social platforms have become a primary source of contact with patients and discussion with colleagues. GPs created new emails accounts and hired communication professionals to filter phone calls. But the ever-increasing number of requests for care still created an overburden of calls, emails and text messages. Such a tempest of information, whose management is widely improvised, ended up creating a backlash of mistrust. GPs are accused by multiple parties of having failed their gatekeeping role while practicing care by distance during the first and second wave of the COVID-19, with disastrous repercussion for patients' health and hospital overcrowding rates.

This paper explores the infodemic in the Italian primary care, asking: how do improvisation with technologies of communication create, inflate or delimit opportunities for infodemic to emerge in healthcare? And how does this impact on the possibility for trustworthy, equal relationships of care by distance? Addressing such questions, the paper illustrates the unfolding of the improvisation during the infodemic crisis as a motor of long-term healthcare system transformation.

**Charlotte Nørholm** (Aarhus University)

*From Crisis to Creativity: Planning and improvising schooling, play, and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Denmark*

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed everyday life for both children and adults, upending the familiar routines and rhythms of daily life. In Denmark, the onset of the pandemic led to a national lockdown, which closed educational institutions and necessitated a temporary transition to homeschooling and remote learning. The Danish primary schools were among the first institutions to reopen in the country, but the return to school life was marked by profound transformations and uncertainties for both school leadership, teachers, and children. Drawing on an ethnographic fieldwork in a Danish primary school during the first wave of the pandemic, we explore how children, teachers, and pedagogues navigated the challenges of pandemic school life through day-to-day planning and improvisations. We show that children and adults adapted to the crisis and found creative ways to make schooling, play, and learning possible within the confines of pandemic mitigation measures such as social distancing, face masks, and hand hygiene. Overall, we argue that the pandemic revealed facets of vulnerability and resilience within the Danish educational system, prompting a reassessment of our traditional understanding of what it means to do schooling, play, and learning both in- and outside times of crisis.

**Akinbode Fasakin** (Swedish Defence University)

*Between Vulnerability and Resilience: The Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Marginalized in the Informal Sector of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)*

This study investigates the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the marginalized in the informal economy in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA); focusing on Nigeria and Uganda. It offers an in-depth analysis of how the marginalized people suffered and survived from the pandemic in SSA. While the impacts of the pandemic have been a subject of inquiry, existing studies ignore the marginalized in the informal economy. Moreover, studies mostly depict the pandemic as having negative effects. Lastly, they make controversial claims on how to understand the pandemic's impacts on the marginalized in Africa's informal economy and transform their conditions. However, evidences suggest that the impacts of the pandemic are more complex than documented. While the pandemic resulted in severe hardship for certain workers, i.e.

food vendors and transporters, others such as content creators and tech start-ups blossomed during the pandemic, making the crisis an opportunity. Apart from studying extant documents on the development and security predicaments of Africa's marginalized workers, the study reviews archival materials, extant literature and statistics on the pandemic and its impacts in/on Africa. More data are gathered using ethnographic means and in-depth interviews of at least 50 marginalized persons and experts purposively selected in Nigeria and Uganda. Data collected are transcribed, coded, grouped, thematized and analyzed qualitatively. The study shows that the pandemic simultaneously exposes the vulnerability and resilience of the marginalized in Africa's informal economy.

**Sigrun Helmfrid** (Stockholm University) & **Pegdwendé Fulbert Zongo**  
(Université Joseph KI-ZERBO)

*Challenges and opportunities. Burkina Faso's female brewers adapt to changing circumstances*

In Burkina Faso the production and sale of millet beer continues to be an important source of income for women. While the consumption of industrially produced drinks conveys more status, particularly among the aspiring middle class, the local brew is more affordable and preferred by some for its taste and for the social framing of its consumption. Even though the trade in local beer is labelled "traditional" in the national context, the sector is not at all stagnant. As we show, brewers have since the 1980s changed their practices and made innovations in order to continue to attract clients and develop their business. Sometimes these initiatives have been in response to national politics, sometimes in response to local consequences of global processes, but always conditioned by local structures of status and power. The case material on which we draw has been collected in different parts of the country, rural as well as urban.



## **Panel 5: Prepared to improvise? Material anticipatory practices in the face of impending Catastrophe**

Friday, 26th of April, 11.15-13.00, 14.15–16.00, room **2-0024**

**Convener:** *Simon Turner, Lund University (simon.turner@soc.lu.se )*

The present seems to be full of signals of impending catastrophes. This could be climate collapse, another Russian invasion, or the return of Trump and the spread of fascism. Or it could be more local anxieties about typhoons in the Philippines, the return of war in Ethiopia or Eastern Congo, or economic crisis in Argentina. While catastrophes cannot be predicted, they may be anticipated, and such anticipation takes many shapes in the present. In this panel, we focus on the material objects that people engage with when they anticipate such catastrophic futures. We may explore the significance of the belongings that migrants bring on their journeys, or the foodstuffs, tools, radios, cash that preppers collect through sophisticated routines of hoarding. How do climate activists and ordinary citizens relate to material objects in the face of an impending climate crisis, and how do consumers rationalize their choices in relation to negative futures? How do residents in informal settlements prioritize their building materials in the face of impending eviction? This panel draws together diverse cases of such material anticipatory practices in order to explore how they relate to improvisation. What happens in the tension between the planned and the improvised relations to the future?

**Session 1:** 26th of April, 11.15-13.00, room **2-0024**

**Presenters:**

**Susanne Bregnbæk** (University of Copenhagen)

*The Cartier Watch: Anticipating (loveless) futures beyond the constraints of family reunification in the context of temporary protection in Denmark*

This paper zooms in on an expensive Cartier diamond watch, which was given as a gift from a husband, to his wife to mark their wedding anniversary in Denmark. The gift epitomizes the ambiguous emotional, economic and legal ties between the couple and serves as an entry point to understanding the relationship between marriage and interdependence for refugees with temporary residence permits in

Denmark. This paper tells the story from the point of view of the wife, Sara, an Iranian refugee, who is twice divorced and has sought freedom from patriarchal dominance in Iran, only to find herself unable to divorce her current husband on whose residence permit she depends. Research has pointed out that under the so-called Paradigms Shift Law, whereby all residence permits in Denmark have become temporary, women who have arrived in Denmark through family reunification are often unable to divorce their husbands since this would jeopardize their chances of maintaining their temporary protection as well as that of their children (Rytter et al. 2023, Liversage 2023:111). While the gift of the watch may have been the husband's attempt to show his love for her and to bind her to him, Sara on the other hand views the watch as both a magical bolstering of her identity and an economic asset that could contribute to her independence from him in the anticipated future. The Cartier watch can be seen as a prism to shed light on the fine balance between the existential, affectionate and the instrumental elements of marriage in the context of a hostile Danish welfare state.

**Ivana Maček** (Stockholm University)

*Materializing the Climate Change: The Case of Pacific Oysters on the West Coast of Sweden*

Climate change is considered by many to be an “impending catastrophe”, yet, people seem to seldom experience it as such in their everyday lives. However, the climate change can materialize itself in more or less dramatic ways, one of them being changing ecosystems, disappearance of “endemic species” and appearance of “invasive alien” ones. These more palpable changes can cause strong and contradictory sentiments, tied to an anticipation of a future that is hard to predict, and resulting in divergent and highly improvised material practices. The case in point here is the appearance of Pacific Oysters (*Magallana gigas*) on the Western shores of Sweden some 15 years ago. The newcomer molluscs that hitchhiked on warming sea currents from aquafarms in Europe, were met by a range of affects, from fear, hatred, and disgust, to hopelessness and powerlessness, but also curiosity and fascination. What were the anticipated futures behind these strong sentiments? And to which material practices did these anticipatory affects lead different actors? Was the improvised character of these practices related to the unpredictability and the slower pace, a different temporality, of climate changes? I will explore these

questions by discussing three ethnographic examples: the “cleansing campaigns” with aim to eradicate or at least control the Pacific Oysters; the researchers’ curiosity and entrepreneurs’ experimental innovations that aim at understanding and making use of them; and the local residents’ shifting affects and practices, from disgust to embracing the “invasive aliens” after a harsh winter that seemed to almost eradicate them.

**Christian Ritter** (Karlstad University)

*The Future of Parks: Climate Advocacy and Tree Care in Singapore*

This paper examines the future orientations and environmental care practices of climate advocates in Singapore. In 2020, Singapore’s National Parks Board launched the OneMillionTrees campaign, which seeks to enhance urban greening in the city-state. Exploring the entanglements between future orientations towards biodiverse landscapes and locative media technologies, the main aim of the research is to gain a better understanding of the shaping of expertise in transitioning into post-fossil societies. Urban trees are material objects shaped by multiple ways of doing. The urban greening movement incorporated locative media in its campaign, allowing residents to share photos, stories and geolocate information. Local nature lovers showcase their favorite trees, plants and animals on locative apps. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Singapore, the paper illuminates how ways of knowing about landscapes and the global climate crisis are negotiated among conservationists, residents and tree care professionals at events, on apps and in parks. While the researched communities of practice envision future environmental disasters, their main orientations towards urban futures include anticipation, expectation, speculation, potentiality, hope and destiny (Bryant & Knight, 2019). Future orientations manifest themselves in narratives about climate change scenarios that shape the present everyday life. Assessing future orientations illuminates the expertise cultures of landscape experts who cope with increased uncertainty about the future of urban greening while engaging in techniques of improvisation. Locating the design of multispecies landscapes within regimes of truth-making and practical ethics (e.g., Ong, 2005; Tsing, 2015), the ethnographic study reveals tactics for environmental repair and digital climate activism.

**Session 2:** 26th of April, 14.15–16.00, room **2-0024**

**Presenters:**

**Simon Turner** (Lund University)

*Doomsday Prepping as Improvisation through stuff*

Doomsday prepping can be understood as a means to address anxieties about future calamities that the state is perceived to be unable or unwilling to deal with on its own. It is an anticipatory practice that prepares for potentially disastrous futures. Preppers prepare to ‘bug out’ or “bug in,” which involves stocking up on various material goods that are meant to get them through the potential disaster by staying in place. They pull potential futures into the present, as they prepare to “move” into a radically different future – after the disaster. They are actively taking their futures into their own hands, reclaiming political subjectivity. In this paper, we focus on the obsession with material objects of preppers – from canned food over flashlights to multimillion bunkers. What roles do these objects play? Are they seen as ‘portkeys’ – magical objects that can move us to another future, beyond the disaster? Are a means to control an unruly future? And what is the relation between planning and improvising in such anticipatory practices? On the one hand, preppers are trying to be a step ahead by being prepared for the unknown. On the other hand, they constantly claim that they are preparing to improvise. Hence the focus also on lowtech objects and skills.

**Olga Engfelt** (Uppsala University, Åbo Akademi University)

*Improvisation in Narrative as a Form of Overcoming Trauma: Memories and Subjectivity in Diaries from 2022–2023*

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia has become the younger generation’s first trauma, giving rise to new narrative forms that can be characterized using Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of “the genre of becoming.” Among the genres dominating today’s literary field are poetry and diaries, where the spontaneous emotions of the subject take centre stage. The subjectivity prevalent in today’s diaries, where memories of recently experienced events have an improvisational and personal character, reflects a time reconstructed through the subject’s cultural references, associations, spontaneous dialogues, and impressions, collectively forming today’s narrative discourse. At the centre of my analysis are two diaries in which historical events are

portrayed in the light of the subject's intimate experiences: *Skrivet på revbenen* by the Finland-Swedish writer Sofia Parland and *Tagebuch vom Ende der Welt* (Diary from the End of the World) by the Russian author Natalja Kljutscharjowa (1980). The new times demand immediate reactions that are improvisations in themselves. Are there common mechanisms in this improvisation? What similarities exist in the reconstruction of the spirit of the times, where the processing of personal trauma coincides with a more detached view of the ongoing processes in society related to the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict? Let's take a closer look at the artistic devices that the narrative improvisations rely on and how these improvisations evolve into completed narrative forms.

**Cinthy Lana** (University of Gothenburg)

*From ashes to pixels: the fire at the National Museum of Brazil and the digital repatriation of cultural and natural history collections*

Departing from the fire at the National Museum of Brazil, the paper discusses the potentials, limitations and challenges for the development of a comprehensive, multi-institutional and international digital aggregator for cultural history collections worldwide. By evaluating previous projects of digital repatriation and taking initiatives in the natural history field as a comparison, the paper reviews with some of the ethical, theoretical and technological questions enmeshed in the process of making culturally sensitive information available online. One of the main challenges for the effective development of an aggregator of ethnographic collections however continues to be the quality of the data museums currently have on their collections. More advocacy and effective cooperation are needed for the development of discipline-specific informatics standards and to encourage museums to adopt and update collection data according to best practices. European museums have huge amounts of ethnographic collections that are still little studied and inaccessible to indigenous peoples in the Global South. A database aggregating information on ethnographic collections has the potential not only to increase accessibility to the collections, but also to inspire research on material culture in innovative ways, including from quantitative perspectives. Moreover, it can be mobilized by indigenous groups as a resource for various self-initiated projects of memory, cultural revitalization and policy development.

## **Panel 6: Whose ethics? Improvisation and vulnerability in fieldwork**

Friday, 26th of April, 11.15-13.00, 14.15–16.00, room **3-2028**

**Convener:** Sverker Finnström, Uppsala University ([Sverker.Finnstrom@antro.uu.se](mailto:Sverker.Finnstrom@antro.uu.se))

The historical legacy of openness, improvisation and serendipity in anthropology and ethnographic fieldwork is not easily reconciled with today's increased emphasis on formal ethical vetting procedures that are supposed to be finalised before the start of any research endeavour. For many anthropologists, research ethics is something that is unfolding and ideally sorted out uninterruptedly during participant observation, and it is a socially anchored ethics that cannot really be set in beforehand, outside the enactment of the actual research. As an intersubjective endeavour, participant observation is productive because of its openness and vulnerability, its contextuality really. And if ethnography is to be about the "native's point of view," as Malinowski famously suggested, inevitably it also comes to know the world from the standpoint of the fieldworker's social relations. This panel invites papers that address aspects of vulnerability, improvisation, rapport, trust and/or consent in ethnographic fieldwork and ethnographic writing.

**Session 1:** 26th of April, 11.15-13.00, room **3-2028**

**Presenters:**

**Alec Forss** (Uppsala University)

*Probing for Access: Reflections from Fieldwork in "Post-Conflict" Belfast*

How do we go about doing fieldwork including negotiating access and rapport in conflict-sensitive settings? What kinds of issues arise, both anticipated and unforeseen, and how do we navigate them? Is it possible to be impartial between conflicting sides and narratives? The "post-conflict" context of Belfast in Northern Ireland presents an interesting case by which to discuss such questions. Segregated by ethnonational identity, the researcher must decide where to situate oneself in the city, as well as whether to attempt a "double-sided" or "even-handed" ethnography that can entail negotiating access on two or more fronts. In so doing, the researcher's own identity, positionality, and emotions are also implicated, influencing how the field opens up or closes. Important to consider, too, is how the researcher

can get away from an ethnography seeking to represent “sides” and which instead illuminates different voices and experiences of conflict, peace, and co-existence that may challenge our understanding of the post-conflict “condition.” This also raises the question of how we can get beyond gatekeepers and other privileged informants? We also may not know in advance who we want or need to talk to. Here, too, one’s own research agenda may be eclipsed by the everyday realities of existence faced by one’s interlocutors. While a carefully designed research plan and ethical vetting can prepare one for the field, I argue that for early-career researchers in particular the field emerges as a result of the trials and tribulations of probing for access that precludes locking one’s approaches and methods into a pre-approved template. This presentation is based on fieldwork conducted in Belfast for my PhD in 2021-23, a period of increasing social and political tensions as a result of Brexit.

**Aliaksandra Shrubok** (Uppsala University)

*“Hyacinth is blooming, genocide is coming...”: studying human-plant relationship during catastrophic events.*

Conducting fieldwork in authoritarian regimes, especially when you do ethnography “at home”, aggravates the issues of validity and (ir)relevance of professional expertise and engagement, diverse forms of representations of one’s informants, and fraught and precarious practices of knowledge production. Reflexivity on one’s positionality within the unfolding calamity, its emotional contours and the tactics of ethical and intellectual coping becomes of utmost importance. At the same time, while the role of “emotional overlaps” (Feldman & Mandache 2019) — the moments of intimate closure and empathy between a researcher and their informants — seems to be recognized and analyzed, there is a lack of discussion of “emotional collapses” that both interfere with and inform research ethics and practice.

In the paper, I reflect on my fieldwork experiences of “emotional collapses” and show how the encounters with those who happened to be repulsive during external political developments, shaped the ethics and analytics of my study. I highlight the importance of reflexivity on one’s positionality and (ethnographically embedded) research ethics to problematize human experiences and present certain provocations for anthropological and political imagination.

**Sverker Finnström** (Uppsala University)

*The way of an anthropologist: On roadblocks, murder, and fieldwork in a Ugandan warzone.*

“The world is not directly given to us,” the philosopher Paul Feyerabend writes in *Against Method*, his classical manifesto. “Conscious involvements are not a handicap for the social scientist. Unconscious ones are always dangerous,” the anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker adds in *Stranger and Friend*, another classical book. In this paper I promote the intersubjective aspect of knowledge production and a socially anchored ethics that can unsettle the claim that some approaches to research, notably those originating from the so-called West, are ethically sound and produce universal knowledge; while others, notably the ones of the non-Western cultural others, produce only versions of life-earned wisdom. In re-examining two fieldwork situations from the participant observation I did at the height of civil war in Acholiland, northern Uganda, I exemplify how a participatory ethics enables the production of anthropological knowledge. A participatory ethics cannot really be set in beforehand, outside the enactment of the actual research, and it is productive exactly because of its openness and vulnerability, its contextuality really. An ethics set in beforehand, on the other hand, may actually reproduce ignorance and those very colonial epistemologies and methodologies that anthropology since long has struggled to transcend.

**Session 2:** 26th of April, 14.15–16.00, room **3-2028**

**Presenters:**

**Emma Rimpiläinen** (Uppsala University)

*Field dilemmas in the times of war*

Conducting fieldwork in a highly agonistic political atmosphere within a society that is hyper-aware of itself and its image abroad can be troublesome for not only research ethics, but also analytics. Ukraine and Russia have been such field sites in the aftermath of the war in Donbas, Eastern Ukraine. This war was accompanied by not only the burgeoning of Russian “hybrid warfare,” spreading disinformation in order to confuse and deflect, but also high levels of politicisation of certain identity issues in Ukraine. In such a conjuncture, the ethnographer’s task of speaking on behalf of others, who may not like the way we interpreted their words, is charged with anxiety



and the possibility of spoiling access and rapport. Moreover, the expectation for anthropologists to be champions for the people we research is challenged when working with people espousing disagreeable or violent views. Distinguishing between understanding and accepting is a difficult task, if informants behave in a belittling or even aggressive manner towards the ethnographer.

Furthermore, because war is an opportune environment for the dissemination of rumours and conspiracy theories, there may be an excess of analytical narratives circulating in the field site. Although arguably the task of analysis should be left to the researcher, considering how people understand the meaning of their own actions seems important for ethnography. It is, however, difficult not to get pulled into the analytically counterproductive exercise of debunking interlocutors' conspiracy theories. This paper will discuss the ethical, practical, and analytical implications of such field dilemmas.

**Arvid Lundberg** (Uppsala University)

*The Benefits of Involuntary Involvement*

Drawing on my research about Jordanian politics, this paper is a reflection on situations where the ethnographer becomes less of an observer and more of a participant in the political landscape under study. More precisely, I want to emphasize how situations where a researcher does not just observe but rather gets involved in a political system, often against his or her will, can help one see certain aspects of that system more clearly. In such situations, difficulties, mistrust, and even adversity do not represent a problem—they are instead relevant because they force the researcher to sort out similar problems as some of our informants are sorting out and to learn about the most effective way to do so. Relations of trust might be the best way to get access to a field, but thornier relations reveal more about its inner dynamics.

**Bengt G. Karlsson** (Stockholm University)

*To go or not to go: Parachute ethnography in Papua New Guinea*

In this paper I will discuss the ethical dilemmas of short-term fieldwork. When is long distance travel called for and what can possibly be gained by a few weeks in a place

not visited earlier? I will grapple with this in relation to a recent "parachuting in" to Mt. Hagen in Papua New Guinea, tracing the imperial geography of tea plantations.

## **Panel 7: Design Anthropology: Improvisations With and Against the Materialities of the World**

Thursday, 25th of April, 09.15-11.00, 11.15-13.00, room **3-2028**

**Convener:**

*Mahmoud Keshavarz, Uppsala University ([mahmoud.keshavarz@antro.uu.se](mailto:mahmoud.keshavarz@antro.uu.se))*

Design anthropology is on the rise. From advocating it as a “distinct way of knowing” to positioning it as a remedy towards pluriversality, or a necessary and urgent method within the current condition of digital capitalism. While practiced differently, design anthropology tends to be either understood as a methodological experimentation within anthropology or as a more engaged co-creation within designing. But what if design anthropology has the potential to be more than yet another academic experimentation for making anthropology more propositional, collaborative, and future-oriented; or saving designing from its individualistic and rationalized assumptions?

The discourse of design anthropology and its existence, like many interdisciplinary endeavors, rests upon the assumption that both design and anthropology lack qualities that can be enhanced by bringing them together. However, design and anthropology share many common grounds too: both have emerged from and shaped the durability of modernity as a universal project; both deals with the question of how things could be otherwise; both designing and anthropology are shaped by and generate particular imaginaries about the world and its inhabitants. Anthropology and design relate to and intervene in the world through constant improvisations of methods and theories in various situations.

This panel aims to focus on similarities between design and anthropology to offer a space for discussing how both practices, when operating together, delimit our imagination by pushing the boundaries of design anthropology beyond that of commercial, experimental and or participatory design rhetoric. Can the intersection

of designing and anthropology be thought as real-world improvisations, where and when knowing is only generated through improvisations with and against the materialities of the world?

**Session 1:** 25th of April, 09.15-11.00, room **3-2028**

**Presenters:**

**Maya Ober** (University of Bern)

*Happy Design and Unhappy Anthropology: exploring affective encounters and transformative possibilities*

Design is often perceived as a "happy" discipline characterized by its problem-solving, generative, and future-oriented approaches, while anthropology is often seen as critical, focusing on power dynamics and societal inequalities, positioning it as an "unhappy" field. Drawing upon my dual roles as an anthropologist and a designer, this paper explores the affective ties evoked by these disciplines, particularly through affect and feminist theory. Sara Ahmed's conceptualization of happiness is central here, emphasizing its ties to dominant societal norms and how hegemonic narratives regulate it. Following Ahmed's concepts, design can be viewed as a symbolic happy object and happy practice (2010), embodying "positive" affective qualities through its association with notions of creativity, progress, and innovation, thereby reinforcing existing power structures. Building on this premise, the paper analyzes how anthropology and design intersect and construct happiness and unhappiness, either reinforcing or challenging power dynamics. Drawing on auto-ethnographic material, I examine how affect — especially happiness and unhappiness— influences the construction and interaction of anthropology and design. I explore the possibilities that emerge from examining the affective dimensions of anthropology and design and their interrelations, aiming to imagine them otherwise. Lastly, I will theoretically explore the potentialities of the convergence of anthropology and design, discussing the transformative spaces they could offer. What possibilities does the affective encounter between anthropology and design open? If brought together, could design use anthropological unhappiness and anthropology designerly happiness to engender new possibilities? What paths could this convergence unveil for practices aimed at social transformation?

**Imad Gebrael** (Humboldt University of Berlin)

*Boys with Toys: Precarious Improvisations of Design (in) Anthropology*

Design and anthropology are experiencing a moment of mutual fascination: intense, lustful, and at times toxic. Several design researchers are assertively locating their work within anthropology while recent debates in anthropology argue for the diversification of ethnographic methods from the space of design under the umbrella term: multimodality. Multimodal anthropology claims to be multisensorial rather than text-based, performative rather than representational, and inventive rather than descriptive while it conceals a precarious engagement with neoliberal designerly ways of making, often without adopting histories of criticism stemming from design disciplines or including designers as researchers and educators; design is often welcome, but designers are not. In that light, this contribution negotiates a series of improvisations exploring the (im)possibilities of repositioning design research and praxis in closer proximity to anthropology, as bodies, materialities, and affordances migrate between the two fields often lacking adequate infrastructures for fair exchange. Joining the “Boys with Toys” anthropology club often comes at a hefty price. Weaving my current doctoral research undertaking with my teaching experiences in a liminal space between design and anthropology, I ask: How can we negotiate a repositioning of design and designers within anthropology? What are the potentials and limitations of multimodality as a hybrid space of research? And how can design researchers negotiate equitable research futures at times of multiple crises?

**Johanna Dahlin & Corinna Kruse** (Linköping University)

*The bricoleur and the engineer – two sides of the same coin?*

This paper takes notions of bricolage and the bricoleur as a point of departure to discuss improvisation as a concept and a skill. Bricolage underlines improvisation in the human endeavour, and of working with what you have, using the materials at hand. In anthropology, it has acquired a special meaning through the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss who used the concept to signify the process of mythological thought, expressing itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire which, even if extensive, is nevertheless limited. Lévi-Strauss contrasts bricolage and the bricoleur with the structured thought processes of the engineer, but in our paper we want to explore how bricolage can co-exist with engineering, structured thinking and fixed

methodologies. Based on our respective empirical work we will talk about crime scene technicians' alignment work and the inventor and inventing in terms of bricolage. Crime scene technicians assemble their repertoire of forensic knowledge and skills into fruitful approaches to crime scene work, aligning each individual (and different) crime scene with standard procedures. The inventor, exemplified by Soviet electronic music pioneer and physicist Lev Termen, can also be thought of as a bricoleur adapting to circumstances and resources at hand. Improvisation we will argue is a skill, which requires knowledge and structured thought to be useful and successful – in other words, the bricoleur and the engineer are not a contradiction but can be one and the same.

**Session 2:** 25th of April, 11.15-13.00, room **3-2028**

**Presenters:**

**Jacek Smolicki** (Uppsala University)

*(Counter-)Cartography of the Ear: From Auricular Healing to Biometric Recognition*

According to some historians, before Hitler finalized the non-aggression agreement with the Soviet Union—a pact that would come into effect 17 days after Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939—he sent his personal photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann, to Moscow with very specific instructions: to photograph Joseph Stalin's ears. These photographs were intended to help Hitler and his associates determine whether Stalin was Jewish. This task followed the German Nazis' deployment of anthropometrics as a method for categorizing ethnicities based on physical features, a system originally developed by Alphonse Bertillon, a French police officer at the end of the 19th century. Bertillon's broader work in this respect suggested that criminals could be identified by bodily features that deviated from the norm. According to this racial systematization, Jewish ears were believed to differ significantly from those of Aryans. Recently, the hype surrounding the potential of machine vision and machine learning technologies for tracking individuals through their voices and facial features has led some researchers and tech companies to explore human ears as a new focus for biometric data extraction and surveillance. They argue that ears, being less prone to change than other features, could offer unparalleled accuracy in identity verification. This instrumental use of ears as an interface to one's identity, contrasts radically with historical approaches that see the

ear in medicinal terms as a map of one's body. Auricular acupuncture is a prime example, where the ear is viewed as an intricate cartography that, when carefully stimulated at specific points, can facilitate healing in other parts of the body. This paper aims to draw an "incomplete ear cartography," exploring the diverse roles of this often-overlooked organ across various cultures, knowledge systems, and technological domains—as a medium, an interface, and a target. It will examine the ear's journey from an agent of empowerment and healing to a tool for dehumanization and control. Furthermore, the presentation will consider whether the ear, amidst these contrasting uses, might be seen as a site for improvisation and what such a view would imply both conceptually and practically.

**Maria Rogg** (Uppsala University)

*Existential ways of knowing. Biohacking design anthropology*

Through increased access to biosensing and biodata, algorithms and data imbue almost every aspect of our lives. Measurement, quantification and datafication have become hegemonic ways of knowing in what has been described as a metric culture (Ajana, 2018). Dataism, the idea that data is a source of supreme, unlimited knowledge (van Dijck, 2014) governs, through classification, a norm of the universal, rational, independent and able-bodied human subject (D'ignazio and Klein, 2023). This datafication of embodied identity reduces existence to discrete, measurable results, and exposes already marginalized groups to existential risks (Ajana, 2010). This particularly powerful integration between design and becoming poses a nexus between existence, culture and the material world which provides a promising terrain to probe how design anthropology, as a “different style of knowing” (Kilbourn, 2013), can serve to improvise respons(e)ably (Martin et al., 2015) to limit metric normativity and knowledge. By tracing how artistic biohacking practices flesh out sensuous ways of knowing and a situated, embodied existential ethics of care (Lagerkvist et al., 2022) this paper juxtaposes design anthropology as a facilitator for respons(e)ability; and as an existential way of knowing – part of embodied existence itself. Following Amanda Lagerkvist who advances limits as a privileged reality to trouble figurations of unboundedness (2022), biohacking is conceptualized as an existential practice that can limit the fabrication of dataism and safeguard the relational and vulnerable human body as our universal human condition despite its asymmetric co-implication in different power regimes.

**Ossian Nordgren** (Uppsala University)

*Towards a Radical Design Anthropology of Video Games*

Video-game designers take pride in shepherding the premier interactive digital medium of our time. Within this medium, dynamics of play, cooperation, competition, and improvisation thrive. However, the dominant mainstream of gaming often perpetuates hegemonic, colonialist, and hypermodern modes of relating to the world, alongside propagating violent and masculine interpersonal practices, explicitly cultivating addictive dark design patterns and adhering to capitalistic formulations of value. I will explore the potential of merging an anthropological understanding of improvisation with the more ridged design boundaries and capitalist modes of production inherent in established methods of making and re-making video-games. This presentation specifically examines the interrelationship between game-design and climate change, contemplating the possibility of a new radical game design framework. Such a paradigm would not only acknowledge climate urgency and the socio-material impacts of games but would also expand its imaginative horizons by drawing from the archive of human possibility found in the anthropological canon. Consequently, the framework permits alternative approaches, such as improvisation, into the core of the game-design repertoire. Adopting the corresponding paradigm could help break through the rhetorical, imaginative and ideological glass ceiling of sustainable development and green growth that persists within contemporary game-design. As well as to better allow game-designers to divulge into their improvisatory potential by turning a critical gaze towards the organizational status quo of games production and abolishing the restraints of current regimes. Thus, freeing the aesthetic and improvisatory ability of games as cultural artifacts, game-designers as artists and gamers as playful improvisers.

## **Panel 8: Social contracts of the everyday**

Wednesday, 24th of April, 14.15-16.00, room **22-0008**

### **Conveners:**

*Annika Björnsdotter Teppo, Uppsala University ([annika.teppo@antro.uu.se](mailto:annika.teppo@antro.uu.se))*

*Mats Utas, Uppsala University ([mats.utas@antro.uu.se](mailto:mats.utas@antro.uu.se))*

Thinking around the concept of social contract has for a long time been a foundation to much of political science, but until very recently less so in anthropology. The most prevalent idea of social contract has perceived it as an abstract, yet singular contract between citizen and state. According to this definition, the citizen gives away some of their sovereignty to the state. However, political anthropology perspectives underscore that a state is far from sovereign, and that any society has a number of centers to relate to, and equally a number of varied understandings of the correct social contract. We are in agreement with Burnyeat and Johansson's 2022 call for understanding social contract as a "sticky, alive concept, which travels and reappears in different guises, both hotly appropriated and enthusiastically refuted in different intellectual and lay contexts".

In this panel, we open up for papers looking at the multiple versions of social contracts in the daily lives of people, for example in the spheres of family or politics. We are interested in their effects whether they generate social norms, moral ideas, trust or conspiracy theories. We encourage ethnographic papers with focus on cases from all over the world, and call for emic understandings of the ways diverse and colliding social contracts, and their embedded value systems and practices generate behaviours, political consequences and improvisation.

### **Presenters:**

**Metzli S. Hernández Garcia** (Uppsala university)

*Following the Offset: Exploring Carbon Credit Markets in Argentina's Gran Chaco and the Quest to Preserve El Impenetrable Dry Forest*

When contemplating the sociological examination of markets and the role of improvisation within them, our attention frequently centers on informal economies. Nonetheless, every form of trading implies a complex web of interactions occurring in



various patterns of exchange relations. These interactions take place within the confines of social institutions that determine political, economic, and symbolic hierarchies. Through these institutions, markets serve as the connecting threads linking social classes, ethnic groups, and regions, into a larger system.

The concept of the market inherently allows for ambiguity, creating space for improvisation. While social institutions may establish boundaries, the negotiations within them hinge on the actors' capacity to navigate the intricate web connecting them. This entails seeking their best interests, whether by bending rules, pushing boundaries, or reaching agreements, all to the ever-changing rhythm of action, *interactions*, and responses within *human and non-human elements*.

The present investigation aims to delve into the intricacies of the Carbon Credit Market from this perspective, focusing on Argentina. Through this exploration, it seeks to illuminate the dynamic interplay among market regulations, stakeholder negotiations, and the evolving landscape of environmental policies.

The approach of improvisation becomes particularly compelling in the context of an unregulated market, where each actor endeavors to establish their own set of rules and ontology. Moreover, an additional layer of improvisation emerges, as it involves engaging with a commodity that lacks a material expression, such as carbon credits.

**Alexandre Wadih Raffoul** (University of Uppsala) & **Sheetal Sheena**

**Sookrajowa** (University of Mauritius)

*Improvising Ethnic Representation via Multi-Ethnic Parties: The Controversy about the Truth and Justice Commission in Mauritius*

By practicing tokenism, multi-ethnic parties can easily hide exclusion under the pretenses of inclusivity. The experience of Mauritius however suggests that this risk is not a fatality. In the aftermath of ethnic riots in 1999, the Creole minority in Mauritius managed to achieve some measure of substantive representation – notably through the establishment of a Truth and Justice Commission (TJC) tasked with examining the enduring effects of slavery. This study investigates how ethnic minorities attain political representation via multi-ethnic parties by mapping the controversy surrounding the TJC. Building on archival material and interview data, we follow the emergence of a Creole public, the day-to-day work of the Vert

fraternels (Green Party) to put the TJC project on the political agenda, and the various translations the project underwent to gather broad societal support. Far from a mechanistic outcome of electoral systems, the political representation of minorities emerges as the result of ongoing effort, improvisation, and relationship-building undertaken by a diversity of actors, both elected and unelected.

**Charlotta Widmark** (Uppsala University)

*From urban community to professional day-care center. The negotiation of communitarian authority, state relations, rights and obligations in a 30 years-perspective*

During the neoliberal reforms in Bolivia in the 1990s, the effects of “state withdrawal” on social relations and community formation were discussed, but in my experience, during the nineties people of poor urban zonas did not expect anything but repression and control from the state. Migrants had no contract with or relation to the state and, transformed instead rural ways of communitarian organization to create networks and institutions of their own to manage everyday needs of survival in the city. Members’ rights and obligations were severely controlled in order to maintain the communitarian authority. This paper, based on ethnographic examples, tells the story of the way a parents’ cooperative of migrants transformed from an urban community where reciprocal rights and obligations were regulated by communitarian authority in the 1990s towards a professional day-care centre in the 2020s in line with political developments that regulated citizens’ expectations and relations with the state. The paper will focus on the debates, conflicts and improvisations, social and cultural transformations that resulted from these negotiations.

**Arvid Lundberg** (Uppsala University)

*Reformulating the Social Contract: Political Authority and Economic Reforms in the New Jordan*

Jordan is a country famous for its stability, in a region plagued by military coups and civil wars. One key reason for this stability is the support that the country’s tribes, most importantly those that were nomadic when Jordan was founded, have lent the ruling regime. But the regime has concluded that the social contract that for decades made these tribes a pillar of the regime—patronage jobs and government influence in exchange for political loyalty—is economically unsustainable and a political

dead-end. Its promotion of a new model of economic and political development has been far from smooth sailing , however, but is running into popular opposition and other difficulties that make the model hard to implement. Taking this attempt to reformulate a social contract as the starting point, this paper examines different forms of relationship between ruler and ruled and what they reveal about regime resilience, political authority and the feasibility of economic reforms.

## **Panel 9: Master's students Panel: Thinking Through Improvisation: Anthropological Fieldwork and Practice**

Friday, 26th of April, 11.15-13.00, 14.15–16.00, room **2-2050**

### **Conveners:**

*Emma Bjork Myhre, Stockholm University (emma.betulaa@gmail.com )*

*Cecilia Anthamatten, Uppsala University ([cecilia.anthamatten.4615@student.uu.se](mailto:cecilia.anthamatten.4615@student.uu.se))*

The panel “Thinking through improvisation” unites MA students of social and cultural anthropology showcasing diverse fieldwork experiences worldwide. We explore improvisation in anthropology within unique social, cultural, and political contexts, covering, for instance, abortion rights, Qur’an burnings, urban identity dynamics, sexual economies, disaster risk, and methodological improvisation in food choices. Moreover, improvisation is characterized as a tool for performativity, collaboration, and spontaneity, that can be useful to approach different realities and current situations in their dynamic unfolding. This panel is an invitation to all who used methods for their research project, to explore the possible analogies between improvisation and anthropological practice. They are invited to present the authors, the theories, or the methods that have inspired their own fieldwork practice and thesis projects.

### **Session 1: 26th of April, 11.15-13.00, room **2-2050****

#### **Presenters:**

**Salome Berdzenishvili** (Uppsala University)

*System of Non-Identity and Non-Space: Exploration of Body Movement*

*Narratives in Contact Improvisation*

Contact improvisation is an experimental dance form that emerged in America in the 1970s as a countercultural social movement. This particular dance practice is cast as an open-ended, code-like encrypted exploration of body movements that are embodied through sensations, trust, and spontaneity.

This paper treats the subject of contact improvisation from an anthropological perspective, examining the ways the dancers encode identity, movement, and meaning, along with undertaking a reflexive approach regarding the fieldwork upon which the ethnography is based. A participant observation and Interviews were used to collect data about dancers' approaches towards contact improvisation as a communal movement, physical sensations, and the internal system of communication practiced in informal, open social settings (jams) in Uppsala, Sweden.

The categories generated in the analysis bring forth the discourse of the listening bodies and introspective knowledge that co-produce sensual chains of meanings and memories released through this sensorial practice. Essentially, this constitutes to the process of improvising identities while having a collective aim to move through space. Moving in this respect becomes a means to deconstruct a pre-given identity and give rise to improvisation as a point of departure regarding the meaning and sense-making of the space.

The conclusion can also be drawn that improvising self-formations as a collaborative phenomenon, engaged with the idea of habitus can emerge as an aspect of experimental research modality and further enrich the phenomenological and anthropological theorizing with regards to improvisation.

**Emma Björk Myhre** (Stockholm University)

*The Infrastructure of Abortion: Exploring Borders, Bodies, and Resistance in the American Midwest*

The reemergence of abortion as a focal point in political and public discourse in the United States, particularly in the lead-up to the 2024 presidential election, underscores its pivotal role in shaping socio-political landscapes. The 2022 overturning of *Roe v. Wade* decentralized abortion healthcare regulation to individual states, catalyzing a wave of bans and restrictions exacerbating existing barriers to

access, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities. This study delves into the intersections of borders, bodies, governmentality, and resistance, with a specific focus on the American Midwest, particularly Missouri and Illinois.

By exploring 'borders from below' and view mobility through a lens of 'feminist fugitivity', this study examines how diverse actors navigate, strategize, and cross borders in the pursuit of accessing or enabling abortion care, and how mobility is an exclusive activity as (some) bodies are treated differently by such borders. Ethnographic fieldwork conducted during the fall and winter of 2023/2024 has documented the multifaceted strategies employed, ranging from encrypted communications, hidden pick-up points, and local community making to innovative technological solutions facilitating access to abortion care.

The study identifies what I have come to call the "infrastructure of abortion," comprising individuals, grassroots activists, collectives, organizations, clinics, and networks. Through continuous adaptation, strategic planning, and creative improvisation, these actors work within the confines of abortion criminalization, precarious living conditions, and (feminist) fugitivity to navigate borders and safeguard access to abortion care. This paper highlights ethnographic examples illustrating the improvisational nature of this infrastructure, shedding light on the resilience and resourcefulness of those involved in enabling abortion care and bodily autonomy amidst legal, structural, and socio-political challenges.

**Alejandra del Rosario Vergara Vildósola** (Stockholm University)

*What is a property right even? Disaster Risk Reduction strategies in contexts of improvisational city making*

This presentation will be about informal settlements in Chile and their role in city making, which I describe as linked to improvisation, together with what ambiguous property rights and claims to ownership imply for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in said spaces. It will delve on some ethnographic experiences that I have had with campamentos and DRR. Specifically, in the campamento Un Nuevo Amanecer. By definition, campamentos are settlements that have been developed outside of the legal systems, and therefore do not follow land regulations, lack urban planning and are underprovided with services (Satterwaite et al. 2018). Campamentos in Chile are

also often located in areas that are highly exposed to socio-natural hazards such as landslides or wildfires, and are at risk of forceful eviction (Acuña, Valdivieso & Juzam 2021). Un Nuevo Amanecer was created when a mixture of Chilean and Haitian families seized the empty plot of land, that used to house the Lo Errázuriz Landfill, during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dastres et. al 2022). What makes Un Nuevo Amanecer special is its size, with some sources speculating that it might be the largest settlement in the whole Metropolitan Region (Centro UC Políticas Públicas & Déficit Cero 2022), and the fact that most of its residents have exchanged substantial sums of money with other non-owners of the land in order to “purchase” the plots in which they have self-built their homes with the aspiration - in most cases - of staying there permanently. This mercantile exercise comes with ambiguous property rights, and affords for a series of misunderstandings and gray areas that give way to improvisational practices of both DRR and city making that I will explore through ethnographic examples.

**Catrine Ljungström** (Stockholm University)

*Tirana's Improvisational Dynamics: Architecture, Time, and European Integration*

Tirana, the capital of Albania, has been shaped by empires and ideologies, creating their versions of the city and its future. Today, Albania is heading towards the EU, and Tirana has yet again become the stage to showcase the future. This urban development has led to towering skyscrapers and contemporary architectural developments. While the city's residents find themselves between past legacies and future aspirations, they have developed an ability to improvise and adapt to their evolving urban environment.

This dynamic interplay between architecture, time, and improvisation is particularly evident in Tirana's pursuit of European integration. Applying the concept of “speed and politics” by Paul Virilio, the city can be seen as accelerating urbanization and constructing new buildings, replacing the old ones. Speed becomes the hope for the future, and the faster the transformation happens, the easier it will be to access it. As a result, residents have had to come up with improvised strategies to navigate the changing urban environment and anticipate a future in the EU.

The improvisational agency of Tirana's inhabitants in response to architectural changes highlights the complex relationship between built environments, temporal experiences, and social practices. Tirana's unique historical context, situated at the crossroads of empires, informs its present-day aspirations of joining a new "empire" in the form of the EU.

Understanding the impact of architecture on physical spaces and temporalities is crucial to understanding the improvisational dynamics of everyday life. The challenges of urbanization and European integration underscore how architecture profoundly shapes the urban fabric and prompts improvisational responses from the city's inhabitants.

**Jakob R. Skielboe** (Lund University)

*Addressing the future of mental healthcare*

This paper reflects upon ongoing fieldwork conducted in Denmark within an innovation project in digital mental healthcare hoping to deliver better treatment for depression. The project, currently in its developing phase, consists of an array of both private and public actors with various incentives united through the aim of developing an unique personalised mental health service, driven by Artificial Intelligence. If realised, it might reconfigure expertise in the psy-disciplines—fields that from their conception have been exclusively human domains. Via privileged access I have encountered discourses of innovation, progress and futurity, permeating meticulously crafted applications and forms. Here, an amalgamation of experts collaborating across disciplinary boundaries are actively trying to perform a seamless infrastructure that mirrors promises of more-than-human precision and future prosperity. However, rapidly shifting agendas, unforeseen challenges and a race against time demands an adept ability to improvise. Furthermore, informants have expressed feelings of uncertainty about the future. Doing fieldwork in this environment means adapting to a fast paced research infrastructure, constantly subject to change, equally calling for improvisation on the part of the ethnographer.

Inspired by affect theory, I will conceptualise our contemporary present as one marked by a temporal experience of precarity and crisis adding scale to the fieldwork

in process. Albeit the high living standard in Scandinavia, people increasingly suffer from the affective disorder, depression. This creates a moral justification for the project mentioned above—fostering individual resilience—even if, I claim, it operates within the same paradigm that contributed to the illness in the first place.

**Session 2:** 26th of April, 14.15–16.00, room **2-2050**

**Presenters:**

**Aida Adem** (Uppsala University)

*Improvising the field*

A new democratization and reforming of government was called by the new Prime Minister of Ethiopia in 2018. Since then, tides of conflicts and civil unrest have continued as the political tension has been omnipresent and strongly felt. Even though Addis Ababa was far from being geographically inflicted during my stay, its life altering effect still ran deep. My participation in the field was not limited to praxis and verbal interactions. Due to the state of the nation the following social, political, and economic instability generated different structures of anxiety. Its dynamic process constructed imagined hardships as well as it shaped conditions and opportunities of actuality. This anxiety was constantly projected as well as it was collectively shared, and it became an anxiety I'd come to share. Projected onto me, and continued out of me, it lived through the vast everyday life experience of Addis Ababa. By this, it was not only a tool of ethnography, it became the field. It was to follow and wander for only to be ready to react, reflect and interact with what would come. Future aspirations of the imagined and of actuality momentarily lived in separating contrast, in complementary combinations, as well as it existed as one and the same. The moral projections of the future of the people that I spent time with was what made my location.

**Saad David P. Hillstedt-Asplund** (The Municipality of Hudiksvall, Kultur- och Fritidsförvaltningen)

*The negotiation and crafting of identity among transnational and/or transracial adult adoptees in Sweden*

My research stems from the concept of intersectionality between Swedish, adoption, and ethnic identity based on the adult adoptee's experiences in Sweden. The paper



aims to highlight the nuances and complexities among adoptees, by showcasing the uniqueness of the adoptee experience. Within my research, object elicitation, through sensory ethnography, auto-ethnographic practices, digital ethnography, and deep hanging out became important tools to understand in what way adoptees used materiality from their birth country and engaged with their environment to conjure meaning and to understand their identity. In the presentation, improvisation is addressed from the perspective of the adoptee as they negotiate and craft their identity in their new host country, not necessarily only with an improved life, but instead highlighting the complexities of the process.

**Amanda Palacios** (Uppsala University)

*Improvising, learning how to doublethink, and maintaining access to the field*

Experiences of improvisation in a field like Kigali, Rwanda guides me to think mainly about the strategies to gain [maintain] access to the field and to deal with suspiciousness. Improvising access to the field; a notion which for me took shape through my process of learning how to doublethink, Ivana Maček writes that to doublethink is “to be aware of lethal dangers and simultaneously ignore them” (Maček 2018, 242). For me; to be aware of mechanisms of surveillance and to simultaneously “play along”. To play along was a learning experience of following the cues of my constant companion and translator Jibril. To understand that surveillance and informers existed; learning that these things where not to be confronted head on, but instead cleverly managed through re-directing attention towards them.

“Will you be here tomorrow? I want to join you in the research”. With a friendly tone this might seem like a pleasant conversation; it wasn’t, before I could stop myself the word flew of my tongue, “Why?”. Peter looks at me with a smirk, he doesn’t answer. He doesn’t have to answer would be a more correct description. I instinctively regret the question; “when you are asking for a service you should not be asking those types of questions [i.e. asking why?]” the memory of this sentence uttered by one authority from 2022 sneaks into my consciousness. On the next day as Peter “joined me”, I composed my instinct to confront him, admittedly I first gave him a weak speech about research ethics to thereafter turn the attention to him. “So, James told me that you are in charge of the mutuelle?”. After having improvised an hour-long interview with Peter about his responsibilities as assistant to the local leader, about

imihigo, mutuelle and the reconstruction of Mpazi, he finally turns to me “okay, I will go now”.

My contribution to the Master’s students Panel at the conference would be to bring into discussion my experience of improvisation through doublethinking; learning how to doublethink, which I want to discuss in terms of the role of research broker providing cues and guidance.

**Rosanne Heijstek** (Uppsala University)

*The Sounds of Pain: An ethnography of musicians living with migraine in Uppsala*

Migraine is an extremely common and disabling disease, characterized by recurring episodes comprised of disturbances in sensation perception, intense head pain, nausea, and increased sensitivity to light and sound that can last from several hours to multiple days. Currently, there are no cures for the disease, no official social services that can help a person to manage living with it, and limited studies on its mechanisms or impact on a person’s life. For this master thesis project, I studied migraine from a medical anthropological perspective, focusing on the life experiences of student musicians between the age of 20 and 30 living with regularly returning migraines in Sweden. I aimed to connect the sufferers’ somatosensory experiences of migraine to their experiences regarding its perception in Swedish society, and relate these to anthropological phenomenological theories of embodiment, wellbeing and illness narrative. Rather than letting words alone define their pain encounters, I explored how my participants expressed themselves via music, theatre, and affects, through semi-structured interviews and a group workshop during which participants conveyed their experiences through improvised musical and theatrical expressions. In the presentation, I will discuss how they translated their pain, and show that a combination of these modes of communication can provide a more complete understanding of migraine experience.

**Sebastian Carlsson** (Lund University)

*From a Silk Cravat to a Patchwork Throw: Discussing Improvisation in the Field*

In response to the stereotypical imagery of traditional anthropological fieldwork, this paper reflects on the role of improvisation in the field. The question put forth for discussion is how improvisations in the field can contribute to a successful fieldwork experience. It is inspired by the evolving methodology of Gökçe Günel's patchwork ethnography where the intricate interplay of personal and professional responsibilities during fieldwork are in focus.

Günel's framework involves short-term, rigorous field visits and strives to reshape the dichotomy between "the field" and "home" in ethnographic research. In this paper, examples from the author's recent fieldwork in New Zealand will form the foundation for juxtaposing traditional fieldwork with real fieldwork challenges for contemporary anthropologists. The fieldwork in question was plagued by such issues as a lack of a gatekeeper, loss of access to the main location of interest, overnight changes in planning, sickness, panic attacks and numerous unsuccessful attempts at establishing new contacts. Conversely, it also incorporated successful improvisation, a reliable snowball effect that led to a satisfactory amount of data, and a field involvement that led to a state reminiscent of "going native".

This example of patchwork ethnography underscores the potential for anthropologists to reframe research practices, embrace disruptions, and expand the concept of theorising within and beyond the discipline. The study contributes to a more inclusive and reflexive anthropology that acknowledges the complexity of contemporary fieldwork dynamics and also builds upon the multi-sited realities that have become infused in modern anthropology for the past three decades.

**Rodrigo Thurler Nacif** (Lund University, Swedish Institute Scholarship for Global Professionals)

*The Guarani Cosmogeography in a Drawing: An Improvisation on the Concept of Space-Time*

Improvisations during fieldwork may result in unexpected transforming experiences, like a collective drawing of the whole universe. What was supposed to be a participative mental map of a Guarani community territory, like many others I

proposed before in Brazil, became one of them. Before we started, I suggested something different: they express their concepts of space and time through the map, and then I remembered some examples. We talked about the connection between heaven and earth and things like the first earth, Tenonde Porã, created by Nhamandu, which was flooded, the way Yvy Pyau, the second earth, will also end, and the Sun brother, Kuaray, traverses the celestial vault daily to reach his father's house. The celestial path is mirrored on earth in the Peabiru, which he and his father Nhanderu Papa walked in the past, and the Guarani follow that same sacred pathway now towards Yvy marã e'ỹ to reach the Aguyje, a state of completion. In the drawing, the beginning of time was represented by a void, and the Peabiru starts in the Araymã (winter/ ancient times), in the direction of Arapyau (summer/ new times). The ancient times included an extensive representation of Ka'aguy and Yyramõi, the sacred forest and ancient sea. In the cosmos, the old and new, the divine and telluric, coexist. The destruction of the world is represented by drawing the Portuguese invasion, their caravels, cannons, villages and after that, deforestation, mechanisation, big cities and pollution. The improvisation resulted in a unique instrument of knowledge.

## **Panel 10: Improvising bodies and their encounters beyond the human**

Thursday, 25th of April, 09.15-11.00, 11.15-13.00, room **2-2050**

**Convener:** *Claudia Merli, Uppsala University* ([claudia.merli@antro.uu.se](mailto:claudia.merli@antro.uu.se))

An anthropology beyond the human is in large part about learning to appreciate how the human is also the product of that which lies beyond human contexts (Kohn 2013). Human bodies are improvised through a complex interplay with technologies, non-human animals, other-than-human entities, and environmental features, challenging the notion of agency and the liminal spaces between different fields of anthropological inquiry, particularly those intersecting medical, environmental and political anthropology.

The panel brings together ethnographic studies and theoretical analyses of how individuals and communities confront the existential uncertainties of life transitions, crises, suffering, illness and negotiation of meaning in their encounters beyond the humans. The human body, as "the subject of culture" (Csordas 1990), is in constant flux and transformation. Central to this exploration is the role of practices, whether prescribed or improvised, spiritual or mediated, medical or technological, in shaping both individual experiences and collective identities. Multispecies ethnographies, perspectives focusing on more-than-human-sociality and co-species histories are starting points for exploring embodied forms of co-existence.

**Session 1:** 25th of April, 09.15-11.00, room **2-2050**

**Presenters:**

**Gabriel Ulrich Lennon** (Stockholm University)

*Improvisation with Life: Spectral Ecologies in Aotearoa*

Aotearoa New Zealand has been riven by environmental violence, having had colonialism progress in a uniquely deliberate and totalising ecological manner. This manifested in the imposition of pastoralism and a medley of Eurasian species tailored to create an 'empire of grass' in the South Pacific, which now dominates the landscape of the country at the expense of endemic ecologies and alternative socio-ecological understandings. Discussions of futures are now tinged by the spectres of this environmental history, whether they be seeking to ameliorate or

adapt it, as seen in the multitude of ambitious agrological and environmental projects presently advanced: from the rapid breeding of new more 'sustainable' herds and the cultivation of new strains of paddock flora, to mass-eradications of introduced pests, experiments in indigenous agro-ecologies, and the erection of ever-larger eco-sanctuaries, these legacies and the questions they provoke are pressing.

This paper will put forward the concept of *spectral ecologies* to expand on the temporal and affective dynamics in imaginaries in these projects around pastoralism and conservation in Aotearoa – two domains wherein socio-ecological contestation is fiercely played out. This is loosely discussed under the idea of *improvisations with life* as they are projects nested within ambiguities of loss and possibility and are experiments unfolding in relation to diverse, more-than-human life that exceeds and complicates these divergent projects of management. I primarily aim to advance these ideas through historical material as a mode of theoretical exploration before I begin ethnographic work in this context.

**Zlatana Knezevic** (Dalarna University)

*Beyond 'the war on vaccines' - An improvised approach to controversies and conflicts in the vaccination debate*

The essay draws on the shifting methodology in an ongoing multi-sited digital ethnography research project about vaccination-related social media forums. The research, which focuses on vaccine caution and vaccine confidence, was initially directed by 'following the conflict,' one of the strategies of following that George Marcus discusses in his methodology for multi-sited ethnography. However, over the course of time, and after improvisations related to access, positionality, the changing nature of digital content and context of interactions, the initial focus on 'the war on vaccines' shifted into a challenging of oversimplified ideas of oppositional stances, division, and 'conflict'.

What I refer to as 'following agreements within the conflict' helps to highlight how the forum members, regardless of their stance, can challenge debate divisions – such as scientific-unscientific, medical-anti-medical, research evidence-anecdotal evidence, and individual-public – while still adhering to medico-scientific discourses as zones of agreements. This enables a modest effort to put both vaccine caution and vaccine confidence on the map of

improvisations of health activism and the social movements more generally. In addition, it highlights the limits to liminality. In an adult-centric debate that silences young people's views on (child) vaccinations, I propose the strategy of 'following silences' as an additional form of agreement. Finally, I argue that a focus on agreements and silences in conflicts is in alignment with anthropological and post-structural research which commonly focuses on liminal zones and continuities and sheds light on complexities in a nuanced and 'thick' manner.

**Márcia Manhique** (Uppsala University)

*Improvised Bodies: pregnant embodiment and obstetric uncertainty*

Pregnancy is not an illness, but it is conceptualized as a complex, fluid and life changing medical condition (Neiterman, 2013; Han, 2018). During pregnancy, multiple domains of care are activated in an attempt to monitor and to predict adverse complications that may lead to pregnancy loss, perinatal infant death, or maternal death. Perinatal imaging technologies are the most commonly used strategies to justify reproductive medical interventions and claims about the beginning, end, and the quality of future life (Han, 2018). In practice, however, these technologies are not perfect tools. Their imperfections and unpredictability create opportunities for deviation and improvisation.

Inspired by the notion of pregnant embodiment as a characteristically personal, the most intimate and unique experience (Csordas, 1994; Neiterman, 2013; Han, Betsinger and Scott, 2018), this paper unpacks and problematizes women's embodied experiences of perinatal medical technologies in a context of obstetric uncertainty, suspicion, and chronic resource scarcity. It explores pregnant bodies beyond physicality and medicalisation. This paper provides elements for a discussion of how women enact pregnancy in and through their bodies, imagining and projecting the unborn as a person. The paper also examines women's initiatives as forms of resistance and counter-conduct to manage the uncertainties of life that characterize their pregnancy journeys. This will lead to an analysis of notions of being and becoming a woman.

**Eemi Nordström** (University of Helsinki)

*From “seeing-men” to mosquito-bitten men: encounters with insect materiality and glimpses of alternative natures in Enlightenment travel accounts*

Anthropologists and allied scholars have frequently pointed out how the sense of sight and visual metaphors dominate in western epistemologies. Much of the focus on visual perception over other senses is indebted to Enlightenment thought. According to Mary Louise Pratt (1992), Enlightenment naturalists who traveled the world collecting specimens and writing accounts of their travels often portrayed themselves as “seeing-men”: as idealized, detached observers bringing order to the chaos of nature with the power of their gaze. But sometimes the observers would become painfully aware of their own physical attachment and vulnerability towards the observed. Such is the case with mosquitoes in the travel accounts of Carl Linnaeus, Giuseppe Acerbi, and other Enlightenment naturalists. Close encounters with bloodsucking insects in Northern Europe and South America often resulted in spontaneous cosmological and theological contemplations over the place of humans in the natural order of things. While individual mosquitoes were straightforward to classify as Linnaean species, those appearing in swarms were infested with categorical ambiguity and affective intensity, evoking visions of mythical monsters, inter-species warfare, and life forms so numerous that they transformed into meteorological phenomena. Such encounters inspired some naturalists to pay closer attention to interactions between animals, people, and the landscape, or even to experiment with non-visual methods of studying nature. In sum, this paper demonstrates how encounters with mosquito materiality provided fertile ground for exploring alternative ways of thinking and studying human and more-than-human life.

**Session 2:** 25th of April, 11.15-13.00, room **2-2050**

**Presenters:**

**Emma Cyr** (Stockholm University)

*“A Recipe to Save the Sea”: Improvisation and The Anticipatory Politics of Eating an Invader in Sicily*

The recent arrival of a new marine species – the blue crab – in Sicily’s coastal waters concerns fishing communities and conservationists alike. Blue crabs,



labelled 'invasive species' as non-natives to the Mediterranean, have already become established both in northern Italy's Po River delta and in Tunisia's Gulf of Gabes. As blue crabs arrive in Sicily, their characterization as voracious and the stories of the damage they have caused to shellfish aquaculture and fishing nets in these places accompany them. What to do with a hungry species? The proposed solution transregionally – eat them – draws on blue crabs' reception elsewhere.

Based on preliminary fieldwork in Sicily, this paper explores the more-than-human improvisations of anticipating and responding to multispecies mobility. In particular, it examines the narratives of disaster that accompany blue crabs' movements and the anticipatory practices underlying the suggestion to transform a mobile species into commodity and food. While blue crabs arrive in Sicily already figured as monstrous and with the solution already identified, in the conditions of their actual arrival improvisation intersects with anticipation. Prior to fieldwork proper, this paper begins to theoretically think through discourses surrounding eating invasive species that raise questions surrounding the role of anticipation and improvisation in responding to species mobility and biodiversity changes.

**Joel Rodrigues** (Stockholm University)

*Potato and its anxieties in British India: Mastering a crop to improve the empire*

Potato was introduced to the Indian subcontinent by the Portuguese and widely encouraged by the British. The new crop changed farming practices and ushered a new shift towards cash crops. It gave rise to new dishes or substituted other tubers in older ones. Its colonial promotion was so ambitious that it penetrated even the orthodox castes.

However, this transformation was neither easy nor quick. It was marred with pests and storage problems from the start. These spurred anxieties and aspirations of colonial scientists and officers who viewed it integral to territorial expansion. Human ventures centred on making finding the right varieties, improvements to the seeds, altering cultivation practices, and improving storage facilities to ensure that the new

crop and its 'improved' varieties survives every stage of the farm-to-plate transitions in climates of the Indian subcontinent.

This article explores the possibilities of drawing a more-than-human ethnography from archival sources. It argues that despite the best scientific and human efforts, not all introduced species thrive in new environments. In addition, in the case of potato and British India, improvisation was a tool for war, conquest, rule, and administration. While the same pests still persists, potato cultivation and consumption in India has increased manifold.

**Matias Menalled (Uppsala University)**

*Human-water Relations, Drought Prediction and Climate Change in  
Agro-industrial Production of Wood and Rice in Esteros del Iberá, Corrientes,  
Argentina*

Esteros del Iberá is a vast waterscape in north-eastern Argentina, characterised by marshes, lagoons, rivers and grasslands with a great biodiversity. Wetland conservation is promoted by the national and provincial governments through nature reserves, by NGOs working to reintroduce endangered species, and by environmental activist movements pushing for a national wetlands law. Beyond the construction of the environment as something to be protected in its natural state, Esteros del Iberá also serves as a locus for development interventions and narratives. Water is a key element linked to productive activities such as ecotourism, cattle raising, hydroelectric production, rice and forestry agro-industry.

Rainfall deficits and above-average temperatures during 2019-2023 intertwined with human-environment interactions have led Esteros del Iberá to an unprecedented drought situation. In this context, climatic, meteorological and hydrological forecasts, used to anticipate future conditions, are at the same time shaping human-water relations. My doctoral research aims to understand how agro-industrial production of forestry and rice is affected by water predictions and, vice versa, how water is affected by human practices in two industrial zones located in Mercedes and Santa Rosa.

This presentation summarises the research proposal before starting the ethnographic fieldwork in Esteros del Iberá. Findings from a preliminary approach through online ethnography will help to present data on the context, interlocutors, climate change imaginaries and social implications of climate predictions around El Niño-La Niña.

# ROUNDTABLES

## **Roundtable 1: Improvising anthropology in precarious times**

Friday, 26th of April, 14.15–16.00, room **22-0008**

**Moderator:** *Ana Chiritoiu, Uppsala University ([ana.chiritoiu@antro.uu.se](mailto:ana.chiritoiu@antro.uu.se))*

Most anthropologists without permanent jobs – which is to say, most early- and mid-career anthropologists – would be hard pressed to explain to people outside their field how exactly their career differs from, say, a hobby. Indeed, the precarity we put up with, the risks we sometimes take, and the life decisions we make could at times seem more symptomatic of an addiction than of anything synonymous with a career, as most people tend to imagine it: stability, security, recognition, and a steady income, not to mention family life. Despite these red flags, we are seriously invested in what we do (perhaps even a bit too invested for our own good) and take it more seriously than anyone else takes us most of the time. Improvisation, along with hustling, have become by-words of forging an academic career in the social sciences – particularly those like anthropology, which deliver neither statistics, nor resolute talking points, but endless complexity and nuance. Our proposed roundtable explores these paradoxes. It is put together by a few early-ish career scholars with different, yet familiar experiences of academic precarization and improvising their way into the field. In our interventions, we discuss improvisation in academia through several lenses: labor – as in moving the goal posts of employability, flexibilization, exploitation, job security etc.; the projectification of academia; and how precarity and exhaustion kill imagination (at a time when you need it the most). After 15-minute presentations from the participants, in the second hour of the panel we engage with questions and comments from the audience.

### **Participants:**

Karin Ahlberg, Stockholm University

Carl Rommel, Uppsala University

## **Roundtable 2: Improvising and Crafting Funding Applications**

Friday, 26th of April, 11.15-13.00, room **22-0008**

**Conveners:**

*Helle Rydstrom, Lund University ([helle.rydstrom@genus.lu.se](mailto:helle.rydstrom@genus.lu.se))*

*Mats Utas (corresponding), Uppsala University ([mats.utas@antro.uu.se](mailto:mats.utas@antro.uu.se))*

Applying for external funding seems to be an inescapable condition of academic life. The path to obtain research funding, however, can be fraught with challenges. The application endeavor might turn into a tedious process, as the crafting of an application demands much energy, and focus as well as a spirit of improvisation and entrepreneurship. In addition, a well-functioning compass is needed when navigating the landscapes of calls, criteria, guidelines, instructions, deadlines, and so on. In this roundtable, participants are invited to share their research application experiences regardless of whether these might have been frustrating, good, very good or maybe even fantastic. Panel participants even are encouraged to reflect on the ways in which anthropologists may develop solid strategies for the securing of funding for novel and exciting anthropological studies informed by substantial ethnographic fieldwork conducted in close by or far away contexts.

**Participants:**

Anna Bohlin, University of Gothenburg

Carl Rommel, Uppsala University

Tomas Cole, Stockholm University

Johan Lindquist, Stockholm University

Molly Sundberg, Stockholm University

Nadia Lovell, Uppsala University

## Roundtable 3: Real Open Access and the Public Responsibility of the University

### Organisers:

*Sten Hagberg, Uppsala University. Editor-in-Chief of kritisk etnografi– Swedish Journal of Anthropology*

*Jörgen Hellman, University of Gothenburg. Editor-in-Chief of kritisk etnografi– Swedish Journal of Anthropology*

Over the last decades, debates on open access publishing have been important, as they highlight how public universities have handed over power and wealth to transnational corporations of publishers in a neoliberal world order. Increasingly, corporations adjust their business models, which have as a consequence that universities and research funders pay, once again, to get their publications available open access. The way discussions are taking shape are also quite confusing. The term “open access” that generally refers to principles and practices through which research outputs are distributed online, free of access charges or other barriers; have been “re-invented” into open-access journals that are characterised by funding models which rely on author fees or on public funding, subsidies and sponsorships.

This round-table is sponsored by *kritisk etnografi* – Swedish Journal of Anthropology, a real open access non-profit journal. *kritisk etnografi* aims to foster responsible scholarship with global scope, local relevance and public engagement.

We bring together scholars and professionals who actively develop alternatives to such “fee-driven” open-access journals. Instead, these participants work on non-profit and community-driven alternatives to commercial publishing – which are sometimes also called diamond open access. In this model of open access publishing, the researchers, the universities and other public institutions take back the power of production and distribution of scientific publications as a public good available to all. Another key aspect of this philosophy is the recognition of publishing as an integral part of the scientific process rather than a commodity to be monetized by an oligopoly of publishers.

Participants are invited to address the following questions: What are the lessons learned from promoting truly non-profit open access such publications? How are such publications assessed in research assessment processes? Which roles can the research community, or social movement take? We will invite each participant to make a brief statement drawing on his/her experiences, followed by a conversation amongst panellists, and with the audience.

**Participants (alphabetical order):** *Dr. Börje Dahrén, Uppsala University Librabry; Prof. Sten Hagberg, Uppsala Papers in Africa Studies; kritisk etnografi – Swedish Journal of Anthropology; Prof. Jörgen Hellman, kritisk etnografi – Swedish Journal of Anthropology; Prof. Annika Teppo, Nordic Journal of African Studies; and Prof. Paula Uimonen, Stockholm University Press.*