

Programme

7th MA Research Day



UNIVERSITÄT
LEIPZIG

Institute of Anthropology

Session 1

13:00-13:40: Marta Santos-Mariz

Laser Technology as Remedy for Women's Vulvovaginal Health:
A Case Study

13:40-14:20: Benedict Flett

Waldsterben in the Harz Mountains: Towards an ethnography
beyond the human

14:20-15:00: Liam Bowes

Interrupted Rhythm – The financing of non-profit organizations in
Germany and its impact on institutions and employees of the sector

20 Minute Break for Tea/Coffee

Session 2

15:20-16:00: Ann-Marie Wohlfarth

Involuntary Celibate: A Digital Ethnography about Homosocial
Conversations and Sense-Making Practices of Incels

16:00-16:40: Kai Müller

'Work is never just about work!': Analysing everyday life at a
research institute in Germany

16:40-17:20: Paola Kirchhof

MAKE FRIENDS NOT ART – The critical potential of
LUMBUNG for knowledge production and social transformation

When? 9. December 2022, 13-18h

Where? Schillerstr. 6, Room M104

Institute of Anthropology
Schillerstr. 6 | 04109 Leipzig
T 49 341 97-37220
F 49 341 97-37229

ethnologie@rz.uni-leipzig.de
www.grk.uni-leipzig.de/en/institute-of-anthropology



9. December 2022

**7th MA
Research
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Laser Technology as Remedy for Women's Vulvovaginal Health: A Case Study

Marta Santos-Mariz

The Magenta Room is a Sydney based, women's health clinic, specialising in the medical use of laser therapy for vulvovaginal symptoms associated with menopause. The apparatus used in this clinic is the *Mona Lisa Touch CO2 Laser System*; a remedial technology offering a non-surgical, non-hormonal treatment option for genitourinary syndrome of menopause (GSM): understood as a collection of symptoms caused by hypoestrogenic changes, commonly referred to as vulvovaginal atrophy. This treatment is especially pertinent for women who have had breast or gynaecologic cancers, and therefore are not viable recipients of traditional hormone replacement therapy. Over the last decade, innovations around laser therapeutics have grown in popularity, yet medical consensus began to wither in 2021 after a well-regarded clinical trial, conducted at the Prince of Wales Hospital in Sydney, concluded that the *Mona Lisa* is "no better than sham therapy". Consequently, the prospective endorsement of this emerging technology, by Australian medical communities and health insurance providers, appears to be slim. As a result, this remedial option is only accessible to those who independently inquire into different treatments, and who can afford the costly undertaking. This research is an ethnographic exploration into the experiences of women, both patients and practitioners, who have chosen to invest in the *Mona Lisa Touch CO2 Laser System* at The Magenta Room. The aim of this project is to better understand what motivates women to seek a health treatment which is scientifically contested. Through this study I endeavor to shed light on the under-researched medical category of women's health, as well as explore the relationship between the subjectivity of human experience in regards to medicine and healing, and the objectivity of scientific reason. This presentation delineates a working progress from the field, my current research status, and a reflection on the advantages and disadvantages of doing research at home.

Waldsterben in the Harz Mountains: Towards an ethnography beyond the human

Benedict Flett

Walking in the Harz Mountains today is a disconcerting experience. People now call the tracts the Harzer Silberwald, because, due to a conjunction of disturbances set in motion by climate change, the forest is dying. In the area designated, in one of the last acts of the East German government, as a national park, more than eighty percent of trees are dead. A highly anthropic landscape, the Harz is particularly susceptible to such dieback because 'scientific' forestry has transformed it over many centuries into a 'replication machine' - in large part to satiate the local mining and metallurgical industries. Engaging with multispecies ethnography, I embrace the notion that, although the Anthropocene only makes sense on a planetary scale, it must be approached through specific places. I envisage the overall project as contributing to a conversation between biological insights into the magic, the alien and the uncanniness of animal, plant and fungi life and anthropological engagement with magic and the uncanny. What ghosts and monsters, ancestors and gods inhabit the ruined landscapes of progress? The Harz are ripe for thinking with these kinds of questions because, on a conceptual level, they pull in opposing directions: as much as they bear stark witness to failed rationalisation projects, they are also unique in Germany for their association with witchcraft and black magic. If the spectre of climate breakdown is generally apprehended through extreme weather events, here it manifests according to a quite different tempo - slower and quieter. Even as foresters and conservationists wrangle over the appropriate response to the dieback, they are forced to contend with the fundamental unruliness of climate breakdown. In official outreach, the Harz is figured as a transition landscape, somewhere between blasted plantation and restored mountain wilderness. But, with the increasing likelihood of extreme 'compound events', such a vision of localised redemption is far from assured. In this way, the Anthropocene can be considered a kind of homecoming, a return to a world of unseen forces, of doubt.

Interrupted Rhythm – The financing of non-profit organizations in Germany and its impact on institutions and employees of the sector

Liam Bowes

Neoliberal developments in nation states' economies and their effect on different sectors and groups have long been a prime field of anthropological research. Some anthropologists have focused their work in this area on the situation and role of non-profit organizations (NPOs) and have argued that even though the label of "non-profit" or "non-governmental" provides the impression that these organizations are removed and independent from institutions such as the state, bureaucracy and economic influences, ethnographic descriptions show us a converse picture that display a paradoxical mix of liberalization and bureaucracy. But the situation of NPOs is hard to compare due to different national economies, varying legal situations, differing structures of social welfare and market regulations and in Germany, anthropological research on the non-profit sector and its entanglement with the state and economy is rare. My field research in a Leipzig NPO conducted between November 2021 and May 2022 aims to add this perspective and takes a closer look at the sector, displaying a micro-view. At this current state of research I argue that we find a similar situation to what researchers have described for NPOs in other European countries: The case study shows that the German NPO sector displays similar paradoxical entanglements with the state, economy and neoliberal developments. This imbroglio can be observed especially well in the way that the competitive but highly bureaucratic funding for a lot of NPOs functions, leading to a form of "interrupted rhythm" that defines the way NPOs carry out their activity as well as the observable effect on the circumstances of people employed at these organizations in the form of insecurity and working conditions.

Involuntary Celibate: A Digital Ethnography about Homosocial Conversations and Sense-Making Practices of Incels

Ann-Marie Wohlfarth

Incels are young adults, predominantly men, who have not been romantically involved or sexually active and consider themselves undesirable. Incels feel deficient, worthless, and inferior for being romantically and sexually inexperienced and convene in online communities (Incelosphere), sharing their experiences, their longing for intimacy and love, and to see their feelings validated and acknowledged by peers. Publicly, Incels are perceived to be resentful and extreme misogynists and the incelosphere is portrayed as a virtual space perpetuating and fostering misogyny. This negative connotation, the normative approach to investigate the phenomenon, and the portrayal of Incels as a homogenous online community that endorses hate speech and violence against women, resulted in the inductive and analytical approach to research Incels' modes of experiencing, the effects of sense-making and forms of (homo-)sociality that emerge in the 'incelosphere'. Based on four months of ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with young adults, who identify as Incel and/or relate to the experience, this thesis investigates how Incels narrate and theorize their experience. I combine the Foucauldian notions of discursive formations and power/knowledge and Sara Ahmed's phenomenological approach to emotion and affect as analytical tools to examine the recursive relationship between the discursive construction of a homosocial safe space and the verbalization of a negatively connotated life circumstance. I argue that Incels embrace their 'radical Otherness' and empower themselves by constructing a discursive safe space, utilising humour and hate as gatekeeping practices, and narrate their personal experience, especially negatively connotated emotions, through the power/knowledge formation of the Black Pill. By looking beyond gender-only explanations and focusing on emotion and affect, this thesis provides a nuanced and multi-dimensional account of Incels and their heterogenous online communities.

'Work is never just about work!': Analysing everyday life at a research institute in Germany.

Kai Müller

Who is a good academic? What are their concerns? How do they make sense of their work and their workplace? These are some of the questions that this (ongoing) research, at a research institute in a German city, addresses. Over the course of 5 months of fieldwork, I have had conversations (formal as well as informal) with people working at the research institute about their work, personal life, travel plans among other things. The aim of this research, which was (partially) abandoned soon after the project began, was to investigate the ideas and practices of wellbeing amongst people at the research institute. Initial days of the fieldwork were then spent in figuring out what my interlocutors were concerned with and interested in, individually and as a working group of academics in a unit at the institute. Through participant observation and semi-structured interviews, several themes like mobility (conferences, retreats, teaching etc.), scientific publications, workplace hierarchy, unstable job market, could be said to have come up often during conversations. To make sense of some of these themes academically, that can be abstracted from my ongoing fieldwork (which would be concluded in November), I'd like to use the platform of the research day to present and discuss my field notes.

MAKE FRIENDS NOT ART – The critical potential of LUMBUNG for knowledge production and social transformation

Paola Kirchhof

This project investigates how Lumbung, the curatorial concept for documenta fifteen developed by the Indonesian art collective ruangrupa, produces knowledge for social transformation through a reflexive and equal engagement with current debates in arts, academia and politics. The project aims to critically question the universal claim to validity of established western knowledge- and art production. In order to understand the power structures involved, I engage with postcolonial theories and the paradigm of commoning. I thus understand Lumbung as a power-reflexive approach, that questions existing hierarchies and proposes also-ways of working. Referring to the slogan 'documenta 15 - but Lumbung 1' I strive to elaborate on the question what stays after the 100 days of documenta exhibition in Kassel. Therefore, the project explores the artistic, cultural, and everyday practices, methodologies and ideas that are ground laying for and develop out of a collaborative art production. By focusing on the three ekosistems involved - Lumbung Indonesia, Lumbung Kassel and Lumbung interlocal - I ask what contribution Lumbung brings to the participating art collectives themselves and its potential for the postcolonial discourse on transformation within the arts and society in general. To achieve this, the project aims to engage within the Lumbung community during and after the exhibition period of documenta fifteen through participation. The research will therefore be conducted as a multi-site ethnography, with one research area in Kassel (Germany), another one on Java (Indonesia). I propose participant observation, semi structured and informal interviews as well as group discussions as ideal methodologies to achieve my objectives. Further I strive to integrate methodologies proposed by ruangrupa and other art collectives and reflect on their potential for the postcolonial discourse in anthropology. Altogether this project will help to understand to what extent a collaborative artistic praxis can produce and mediate knowledge and provide strategic tools for constituting local spaces and initiating global transformations as well as building solidarity-based networks.