

Abstracts for Panel 4: Caring for ocean creatures

Conveners

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Panel

abstract:

The ocean world is unknown to most humans. It is a world of wonders, but also of terrors. It is a world that affects all life on planet earth, with water being essential to all life. Hence, creating caring relations with the Ocean and its Creatures is of paramount importance for continuous human existence. With this understanding, this panel seeks to engage practices of care with creatures below the ocean surface. Inspired by the anthropology of oceans and water, political ecology, and more than human environments, it takes these creatures as the topic of study, in different underwater contexts. The panel invites papers that focus on ocean creatures, while engaging practices of care towards and with them. As has been shown in the literature on the topic, practices of care are never innocent and always come with a purpose, sometimes even entailing killing (cf. Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Sharp 2019; Scaramelli 2021). However, rather than just focusing on anthropogenic mistreatment of the ocean and its creatures, it is also important to recognize emerging practices of multispecies justice (cf. Chao, Boelender, Kirksey et al. 2022). This panel hopes to provide vivid ethnographic engagements with ocean creatures that can also inspire other forms of understandings and care. Thus, this panel ask questions such as: What do we need to know about Ocean Creatures to really care about them? How can practices of care take both human and nonhuman needs into consideration?

Number of total abstracts: 6

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[Abstract: Karin Ahlberg](#)

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Paper title: Fish matters. On the question of care and accountability for uncountable beings

Abstract

In *The Frames of War*, Judith Butler traces different processes through which human life counts, or ceases to count, morally or affectively: “An ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all.” This paper turns attention to framing and naming practices of fish along with other marine creatures, and asks: Can we extend care to creatures, make their lives count, if they in everyday language and in specialist discourses remain uncountable and unaccounted for? In everyday speech, the plural of fish – fish and fishes – often functions as an unaccountable noun (like water or sand), lumping together individual fish into an indistinguishable mass. In expert discourses, the dominating term “stock” reconfigures living individual beings into abstract populations or potential commodities (Telesca, 2017). Integral to caregiving is accountability – a commitment of ensuring the wellbeing of the being cared for. A prerequisite for accountability is countability: the singling of the individuals to be cared for. If our language fails to account for individual fish by turning fish into “abstract biowealth” (Telseca, 2017), what are the conditions – hopes – for making ourselves accountable for the lives of fish?

[Abstract: Ivana Maček](#)

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Paper title: Invading Invaders: Pacific Oysters and Rubber Glove Ethnography

Abstract:

Magallana gigas, also known as Pacific Oyster, has been classified as an invasive species in Sweden. This project started six years ago when I noted that the appearance of this relatively unimportant mollusc on the West Coast of Sweden caused extremely strong but also contradictory affects: from hate and wish to exterminate the species, to fascination and interest to understand better the effects of pacific oysters on the environment as well as their potential uses.

This presentation is based on fieldwork conducted on the West Coast of Sweden during the summer of 2022, with marine biologists and ecologists who are specialists on pacific oysters. As our boots crunched the oysters, and we picked up clusters of oysters and other marine species in order to count the oysters, our own invasiveness (for strictly scientific purposes) became more and more obvious. Further, my own presence was a sort of interruption of marine biologists scientific business as usual, albeit not only for the worse. Using Levinas’ ideas on human potential for genocide and the effects of close personal encounters, as well as taking inspiration from Bubandt et al. (2023), I use the concept and practice of “rubber glove ethnography” to discuss multispecies relationships and multidisciplinary methodology.

[Abstract: Rasmus Rodineliussen](#)

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Paper title: Care for Jellies, Care for Humans – a Microplastics Story

Abstract:

With this paper I tell a story about the human induced slow violence of microplastics on the ocean environment. The story, however, centers on the idea of *care*, in this case the care of humans when they seek to remove these microplastics. Here it is important to ask: who is cared for, and who pays the price for this care? Toward answering these questions, I begin by briefly outlining the way plastics have developed in human societies and how it started to move from homes into the environment. We will then follow the way water (and microplastics) travel from human homes to the ocean – via wastewater treatment plants – before looking into the situation in the marine world. Oceans of today are increasingly affected by human societies, and this has led to a situation wherein the jellyfish thrives. These ocean creatures have been around for a long time, they are older than the dinosaurs, but lately their numbers have increased drastically. This increase has started to become a nuisance for many humans as jellies interfere with human infrastructure and fisheries. Meanwhile, it has recently come to light that jellyfish bodies have properties that can be utilized by humans to catch microplastics. This has led to an initiative to create filters for wastewater treatment plants that will use jellyfish bodies to catch microplastics from the wastewater. Humans thus seek to provide care for the marine world through the removal of plastics, but in doing so they are (ab)using the bodies of jellies.

[Abstract: Björn Trägårdh](#)

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Paper title: Uncaring for Dagua: The exploitation of small-pelagic fish in Zanzibar

Abstract:

In this paper, I will present findings from my recent fieldwork amongst fishermen in Zanzibar City for my upcoming master's thesis. Due to overfished fish stocks, fishermen on the west coast of Zanzibar have, in the last decades, turned to night fishing for small pelagic fish. These fishes, locally known as dagaa, have become central in discussions on food security among the local population. Dagaa has also developed into a lucrative export product to the Democratic Republic of Congo, amongst others. But the dagaa is also food for the bigger fish. Overexploitation of dagaa could threaten the existence of bigger fish even further. Whilst younger fishermen I met engaged in fishing for income, family and career, older fishermen were worried since they perceived the dagaa species as already decreasing. Yet, both groups continued to fish dagaa. During moonless nights the horizon was lit up by hundreds of fishing boats lying side by side, hauling nets.

I would like to nuance aspects of uncaring for this small pelagic fish in the context of food scarcity, struggles for income and deficient authorities. In Zanzibar, I encountered what I understood as a change in local knowledge among fishermen. Something which I claim mirrors a tension between social and environmental sustainability that could be seen globally in the era of the Anthropocene.

