



Ecologies of Embodiment: Video Essays I

Csenge Kolozsvari, 3 Ecologies Institute, CA, csengekolozsvari@gmail.com

Anja Plonka, Independent Artist, CA, anja.plonka@gmail.com

Marko Stefanovic, Independent Artist, CA, marko.stefanovic@mail.ch

Rasmus Nordholt-Frieling, Independent Artist, CA, mail@rasmusnordholt.de

Jessica Marion Barr, Trent University, CA, jessicabarr@trentu.ca

Jenn Cole, Trent University, CA, jenncole@trentu.ca

LA Alfonso, Trent University, CA, lesteralfonso@trentu.ca

Alessandro Guglielmo, University of Milan La Statale, IT, alessandro.guglielmo@unimi.com

Csenge Kolozsvari, "Bodylandscapes I." (10:58). A proposition for remembering the ecological ways of belonging, a feeling into other ways of knowing, connecting into the vastness that surrounds us and moves across us, becoming-environment once again. // Anja Plonka, Marko Stefanovic, and Rasmus Nordholt-Frieling, "Breathing Gaia: Searching for Kinship Around Walensee" (8:28). The video essay creates a speculative-utopian body and existence of human and non-human. The body as an archive of traumatic inscriptions practices transformation as a being in resonance with Gaia. // Jessica Marion Barr, Jenn Cole, and LA Alfonso, "Our Bodies, These Lands: Practising Reciprocity" (6:03). As artist-researchers with embodied practices and relationships with lands and waters, we explore a unique part of Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg territory wherein "rockmills" or "kettles" offer spaces for our human selves to be held and surrounded by massive ancient rock beings. // Alessandro Guglielmo, "Wisdom and Trouble: Notes on Blood, Care, and Death in Multispecies Settings" (9:30). In this video essay, I employ my emplacement as a vegetarian anthropologist witnessing the killing of a non-human being to produce an understanding of more-than-human ecologies. I reflect on narratives of death, and the trouble of care and killing in multispecies settings.

Keywords: embodiment; somatic practices; more-than-human; topology; ecological thinking; Gaia; breath; trauma; research-creation; embodied land affirmation; reciprocity; multispecies ethnography; anthropology of food; killability



VIDEO ARTICLE

Available to view here: <https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.9822>.

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VIDEO ARTICLE TRANSCRIPT

[Please note: This is a transcript of a video article. Some metadata elements may appear more than once in the document, in order to be properly read and accessed by automated systems. The transcript can be used as a placeholder or reference when it is not possible to embed the actual video, which can be found by following the DOI.]

[0:10]



["Bodylandscapes I." by Csenge Kolozsvari]

Following the shapes of creases and plateaus, the softness of streams and the edges of solid structures; my experience of tracing the body through touch, doing bodywork as embodied research; immanent connection between feeling, sensing, and making sense through the tissue. Listen! To the sound of texture shifting! Grains falling! Cells opening! The fluttering transition between audible and tactile vibrations, murmuring ecologies! To the connective tissue dances, a topology that is cross-species!

The way human bodies are touched, moved, softly strongly.

Feeling the pulsations of these earth-bodies, they yearn to be felt also. Stepping threading with care. What kind of soil are you made of? Listen! Listen to the rhythm of their breathing. Plant times and planet times. Meeting the tissue of the world.

Land landing finding this new place after all these years spent in a new continent, a new terrain, a land both familiar and not yet knowable. Slowly learning the plants, the rivers, the bird songs, touching touch, tasting berries with my daughter who was born here, the forager. Touching the skin of this earth, shearing it with our feet – it takes time to build an affectionate relation.

Feeling, sensing, and making sense, listen, plant times and planet times, meeting the tissue of the world, touch touch, land landing, it takes time, meeting, meeting in the middle, it takes time, the skin of this earth.

[Throughout, repeating:]

Touch touch, touching touch, meeting, meeting in the middle, it takes time, feeling, sensing, and making sense, murmuring ecologies, softly strongly, plant times and planet times, meeting the tissue of the world, land landing, the skin of this earth.

Bodylandscapes I.

By Csenge Kolozsvari

Cinematography Lisa Graves

Editing Clark Ferguson

Music composition Christian Olsen

Voice over and writing Csenge Kolozsvari

Thank you to all participants:

Cynthia Alphonse

Marilyn Bronstein

Marie Duguay

Lisa Graves

Mariana Marcassa

Sarah Nesbitt

Duy Khoi Nguyen

Christian Olsen

Rachel Posner

embodiment

somatic practices

more-than-human

topology

ecological thinking

Bodylandscapes I. is a proposition for remembering the ecological ways of belonging, a feeling into other ways of knowing, connecting into the vastness that surrounds us and moves across us, becoming-environment once again.

Csenge Kolozsvari's interdisciplinary practice explores the body's potential as a membrane for being active between thought, movement and sound; a translucent and permeable substance that resonates both with the constantly changing surrounding and the conceiving forces within.

Myers, N. (2015) *Rendering Life Molecular: Models, Modelers, and Excitable Matter*. Durham: Duke UP

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1993) *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

Manning, E. (2013) *Always More than One: Individuation's Dance*. Durham: Duke UP

Clark, L. (1960s) *Relational Objects* and (1970–1980s) *Structuring of the Self*

[11:11]



[“Breathing Gaia” by Anja Plonka, Marko Stefanovic, and Rasmus Nordholt-Frieling]

BREATHING GAIA

SEARCHING FOR KINSHIP AROUND WALENSEE

He seized her against her will, put her on his golden chariot,
And drove away as she wept. She cried with a piercing voice,
calling upon her father [Zeus] [...],

But not one of the immortal ones, or of human mortals,
heard her voice. [*Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, lines 19–23]

Violence and trauma stripped you Persephone and me of the body and its voice. How can we find our specific language again? How can the vulva transform from a place of violence to a place of language? How can the bodies become related? How can they transform into a coexistence?

Searching for a speculative-utopian body and coexistence of human and non-human. Breathing into the physiology of Gaia and my body, exploring the regulatory capabilities of our bodies.

Through palate, larynx, pharyngeal muscles, swallowing reflex, cough reflex, vocal cords, inner ear, bronchi, intestine, liver, heart and kidneys as an “inner sensory landscape” [van der Kolk, 2015, p. 88] connected and regulated by the vagus nerve I breathe in resonance with Gaia.

Together let the cells tremble, breathe into the bodies, the nervous systems and the psoas muscles. What symbiotic connections do our shaking cells find? In Gaia as the burial site and birthplace of our multispecies entanglements, our bodies meld [cf. Haraway, 2018, p. 141].

The pelvises of fear, disgust, shame, hatred and revenge dissolve – in common birth to wind, sheep and tree as the inclusion of all in the same world” [Coccia, 2020, p. 43].

Our bodies as archives. Heat in the head, a tense jaw, a grasping left arm that won't let go, an aching shoulder, the burning vagina, anxious cheeks, a blocked neck, a sad nervous heart, tense muscles.

The breath as a connection of solidarity between our bodies writes in sympoietic [cf. Haraway 2018, p. 33] transformation, in networks of relationship, a sensitive and caring presence. We transform our bodies into millions of threads of care and mindfulness. Concealed within this spider-like web, joined-up thinking, is a utopia of non-violence. When I am interconnected and linked to people, animals and plants in their millions, I also hurt myself when I hurt others. This connection of non-violence shows itself in the metamorphosis. Like the tree transforms the atmosphere by his continuous photosynthesis, we too transform the world with our breath.

“If the world is unified by a common and universal breath, it is because breath is the originary essence of what the Greeks called logos, language, reason. [...] breath is the true logos of the world, its language, its word, the organ of its revelation.” [Coccia, 2020, p. 52]

How can my vulva breathe again and thereby speak? In the Homeric Hymn, Demeter meets the figure Iambe while searching for her abducted and raped daughter. This myth draws on various sources and also emerges in other regions of the world as Baubo, Bebt or Ishtar. Iambe/Baubo who “loosely based on the Spanish saying: El habla por en medio de las piernas, i.e. ‘She [sic.] speaks through the organs between her legs’ – her vulva” [Sanyal, 2009, p. 28] – was able to make Demeter laugh and dispel her sadness. The practice of revealing the vulva gave rise to various mystery cults like those of Thesmophoria or Eleusis. Here, in Demeter temples, the encounter with Baubo was reenacted. Although today we cannot know exactly what Baubo said through her vulva, it was a gesture and a visual speaking, perhaps a breathing through the vulva, which gave Demeter comfort and strength to make the earth fertile again [cf. Ibid., pp. 28 ff].

I reclaim my sacred place. Cunt as queen, kin and country [see Ibid., p. 13].

Anja Plonka

Somatic practices opened up the field of performative research for her and moved the body as an archive of traumatic inscriptions into her artistic works.

Marko Stefanovic, plant expert, 1. camera and consultancy
is fascinated by the signatures
of plants and the communication between them

Rasmus Nordholt-Frieling
sound and music
explores the potentials of sound and ecological thinking
in his theoretical and artistic work

Gaia, breath, trauma

The video essay creates a speculative-utopian body and existence of human and non-human. The body as an archive of traumatic inscriptions practices transformation as a being in resonance with Gaia.

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[18:48]



[“Our Bodies, These Lands” by Jessica Marion Barr, Jenn Cole, and LA Alfonso]

Squaknegossippi, “the river where trout are speared.”

This is the territory of the Michi Saagig Anishnaabeg, in Southern Ontario, connected to the Great Lakes watershed of Turtle Island. For millennia Anishnaabeg have been supported by this place and in reciprocal embodied relationship with rock, plant, animal, and water beings. As women whose Indigenous ancestors were from territories adjacent to this place (and whose non-Indigenous ancestors came from lands across the Atlantic Ocean), we have responsibilities and relations to waters and lands, which themselves

have tremendous agency. Our practice is a small and humble enacting of respectful continuation, of being in relationship, of coming to know and be known by this place.

This video essay is the (deliberately) partial documentation of our lived, ongoing creative praxis in a moment of enacting embodied reciprocity and relationship-building with the place we live in...

As artist-researchers with embodied practices and relationships with lands and waters, we explore sensitive, responsive, relational, embodied “land affirmation,” as inspired by Kanonhsyonne Janice C. Hill. With our own distinctive home territories and sets of relations, we arrive in a stunning place currently called Warsaw Caves Conservation Area, whose “rockmills” or “kettles” (hole formations in the limestone caused by the spinning of pieces of granite in the currents of glacial meltwater over time) and caves offer spaces for our human selves to be held and surrounded by massive ancient rock beings. Filmed during springtime by Squaknegossippi, “the river where trout are speared,” our interactions with each other and the land are layered with the presence of rainwater as well as the last remnants of melting winter ice, resonating across deep time with the Pleistocene epoch glaciations that formed the very bedrock of this place, with which we begin to affirm and connect in ways that perhaps communicate across and beyond linear time.

Our bodies, these lands: practising reciprocity

How do we feel our way into respectful, responsible, and reverent relations with this place and all of its beings, including the waters, rocks, soils, animals, and plants?

Jenn Cole (she/they), a mixed-ancestry Algonquin Anishinaabe-kwe and Assistant Professor in Indigenous Performance and Gender at Trent University, researches Indigenous Performance as it intersects with settler/Indigenous relations and reciprocal relationship to the land, especially at the site of the Kiji Sibi/Ottawa River in Algonquin Territory.

Jessica Marion Barr (she/her) is an Assistant Professor at Trent University and artist-researcher of Celtic, various European, and matrilineal Haudenosaunee ancestry whose interdisciplinary arts-based practice explores creative and collaborative approaches to issues around climate change, species decline, and social/ecological justice.

LA Alfonso (he/him) is a Ph.D. candidate in Cultural Studies at Trent University; a Philippine-born Canadian multidisciplinary artist known for his award-winning films *Twelve* and *Trying to Be Some Kind of Hero* exploring aspects of the Filipino diaspora, self, memory, (dis)placement, image in relation to words, media archive, and cinematic self-inscription.

Trent University is situated on the lands of the Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg, Williams Treaty and Treaty 20, Nogojiwanong/Peterborough, Ontario, Turtle Island (Canada)

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research-creation; embodied land affirmation; reciprocity

[24:53]



[“Wisdom and Trouble” by Alessandro Guglielmo]

Wisdom and Trouble

Notes on Blood, Care, and Death in Multispecies Settings

Alessandro Guglielmo

Università degli Studi di Milano

alessandro.guglielmo@unimi.it

Multispecies Ethnography; Anthropology of Food; Killability

Minturno, Southern Latium, Italy

Alessandro Guglielmo is a PhD student in Anthropology inquiring into food and pastoralism as a multispecies practice of nutrition, reproduction, and death surviving food industrialization.

In this video essay, I use my emplacement as a vegetarian anthropologist witnessing the killing of a non-human being to produce an understanding of more-than-human ecologies. I then reflect on death narratives, and the trouble of care and killing in multispecies settings.

Human participants signed an informed consent form, and have been anonymized accordingly. Before the killing I spent a few minutes in this barnyard, owned by some relatives, to accustom myself to such space and its inhabitants. If cautious at first, the chickens seemed to accept – or bear at least – my presence in their home. The second half of the video depicts drops of blood and a stained knife.

As I sit, surrounded by the hills of this countryside, chickens are calmly pecking between cut branches. The livelihood they enjoy here survives the mechanization of food production and multispecies care.

In the current biopolitics of food-intended life, it is becoming increasingly difficult, for chickens, to live and die like this. Flies, worms, semi-wild doves, and many others are also living, sleeping, and eating daily in this space. Life and death are greatly indeterminate here, as humans cannot make decisions about them with complete certainty.

Singh and Naisargi, 2015

cfr. Tsing, 2015, pp. 20

Today, death will visit this barnyard in the form of a knife and human hands. But death already visited it, just yesterday, carried by the mouth of a fox. She entered through some hole in the fences, killing five chickens and three ducks.

Some were taken away; others were left lying there, unclaimed by their killer. Some chickens escaped; one, fairly young but ill-walking, was left unscarred too. She is the same one who will be killed today, as her difficulty in walking and laying eggs seems to indicate that her time is soon to come and... it won't be pleasant – not for her, nor for humans.

I am currently putting under scrutiny my own ethical and political stance about killing animals, as I have been a vegetarian for the last eight years. In this period, I realized what Emily Yates-Doerr and Annemarie Mol write about meat – that it is

indeed not one, but multiple. Meat, in most cases, is prepared in ways that erase its former owners, alienating the killing and suffering required to grow and commodify such individuals.

Yates-Doerr and Mol, 2012

cfr. also Rose, 2011, pp. 21–22

As I am crafting an anthropological account of food as a multispecies practice, I cannot avoid talking about death – or better, of deaths. Be it animal or vegetal, each time someone eats, some other’s world has to subside. Eating is, by definition, an act of incorporation of another body, of transforming a body into the components of another body; what is more, eating serves the purpose of sustaining an organism itself present in the world to be food for other beings.

Eating is, by definition, an act of incorporation of another body, of transforming a body into the components of another body (Kass, 1994, p. 26); what is more, eating serves the purpose of sustaining an organism itself present in the world to be food for other beings (Plumwood, 2008, p. 324).

My own body has been long sustained by the companions hosted in this place: the great majority of the eggs and chicken I ever ate came from this very barnyard, and I have been eating eggs produced here also recently, some by the same chicken whose death I am going to witness today.

How many of her eggs have I eaten, how many of them are fueling my writing on her death, right now? All this writing is woven in webs of obligations and reciprocities. My sensitivity and my biological body are borrowed from these reciprocities: I owe them to these chickens too. And, I realize, I owe them to their death, and to their killers too.

Antonio, a man in his seventies, is her caretaker, and noticed her difficulty in walking and laying eggs. He will not perform the slaughter, saying that he has not “the heart” to do it — “but it needs to be done for this chicken”. He dug a hole just outside the barnyard; it will serve to facilitate the killing and collect the resulting waste. But the deed has to be performed by someone’s else expert hands.

Alessia, a middle-aged woman employed in the management of the household, is the right person. She has been working here for many years and knows everyone — human and nonhuman — as part of her job. She grabs the chicken, who seems to accept being held in human hands — maybe it’s because she is used to it, maybe it’s her condition that makes her unwilling to protest.

The body, once the head has been cut off, undergoes two or three spasms, and the blood flows in the hole while Alessia explains the technique she inherited from her parents and experience. Later, a big pot filled with boiling water is used to facilitate the plucking, the corpse is immersed in hot water, and it becomes easier to separate the feathers from the skin.

I am now witnessing the slow but steady transformation of a corpse into meat, of a subject into food. The shape of her body, the colour of her feathers, and her way of walking were all bodily features used moments ago to recognize who had to undergo this very process.

Grasseni, 2004

Now, these features are slowly disappearing, as wisps of feathers fall between the pot, our shoes, and the ground. *That* chicken is thus being transformed into just “chicken”. This process continues until the corpse is opened with a straight cut through the chest. But at this moment, something unexpected happens: a yellowish fluid pours out of the chest, flowing into the pot together with what looked like a broken egg.

In that instant, the mouth of my stomach clenches tightly and an ominous feeling pervades my arms and shoulders. It seemed like that corpse was releasing its pain with a silent scream, which still lingers with me today. Everyone is startled, and Antonio is too: something like this has never happened before, he says. This hefty, shared sensation re-enacts human multispecies care through the presence of a troublesome dead other.

Her body, amid its transformation into food, is instead transfigured into something in-between. It is a liminal, disturbing object, already not a proper individual but still incapable of becoming food. It’s a fleshy ghost, haunting that space, desperately asking for a narrative to be tamed and put to rest.

It is a liminal, disturbing object, already not a proper individual but still incapable of becoming food. It’s a fleshy ghost, haunting that space, desperately asking for a narrative to be tamed and put to rest.

“So that was the reason for her unease in walking and laying eggs”; “That’s why she survived the fox’s attack yesterday! She must have sensed this sickness”; “Good thing she is not suffering anymore”; “We should have done this earlier”.

A bitter sensation seems to haunt everybody, questioning the timing and necessity of that death, and its impossibility to produce food and feast. This death will bequeath nothing to humans.

Is this the time of ghosts — is this the time to mourn? My heart is shrinking, telling me so. But flies, ants, and microbes are all feasting. Water, blood, and meat are soaking the soil, winding minerals and far-reaching roots and fungi. Death, it seems, is a matter of feast.

Rose 2011, pp. 25, 28, 106

Haraway, 2008, p. 81

Plumwood, 2008

This is why one should not think about a singular “death” as death is never the same. We are ill-equipped to deal with such issues. We have trouble accounting for the deaths and killing required to sustain our livelihood, and we lack a capacity for crafting death narratives beyond monotheism and modernist atheism.

Multispecies care and killing are both a matter of responsibility (cfr. Rose, 2011), and a matter of who one makes killable, and why (cfr. Haraway, 2008, p. 80).

Multispecies care and killing are both a matter of responsibility and a matter of who one makes killable, and why. They are about that awkward silence following the understanding that this individual cannot fully become a corpse, as that corpse cannot fully become food.

They are about that awkward silence following the understanding that this individual cannot fully become a corpse, as that corpse cannot fully become food.

I still find the idea of ending a chicken’s life excruciating. But I also found both wisdom and trouble in the skilled and caring eye that understands one life must come to an end.

Not being capable of killing the animal you cared for, tells something about this intimacy in both life and death. Having to do so, tells even more. It tells about the distance between responsibility and objectification in multispecies caring and killing. It tells about those indeterminate relational spaces where food, care, and death are all dramatically nested, and no clear boundaries can be drawn.

cfr. Rose 2011, p. 145

It tells about those indeterminate relational spaces where food, care, and death are all dramatically nested, and no clear boundaries can be drawn.

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