

Key Debates in Environmental Anthropology

Date: 26–27 September 2016

Location: Rachel Carson Center, Munich, Germany

Conveners: Rebecca Hofmann (LMU Munich and PH Freiburg), Ursula Münster (Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society and LMU Munich), Carsten Wergin (University of Heidelberg and University of New South Wales, Sydney)

On 26 and 27 September 2016, the Rachel Carson Center hosted a workshop on **Key Debates in Environmental Anthropology**. The event brought together more than 40 environmental anthropologists, historians, geographers, sociologists and others from all over Europe, as well as current international RCC fellows to discuss about current issues in the broad field of environmental humanities. The workshop, generously supported by the RCC and the German Anthropological Association (GAA), served as the inaugural conference of the GAA's recently founded Environmental Anthropology Working Group.

After a short introduction by Christof Mauch (RCC) and co-convenor Ursula Münster (RCC), the workshop started in the evening of 26 September with an intriguing keynote address by Tom Griffiths (Australian National University) on “Fire and the Environmental Humanities: An Australian Perspective.” Highlighting the importance of fire, in particular forest fires, for the environmental history of the continent, the talk encouraged environmental scholars to be attentive to “ecological particularities” in the Anthropocene. Tom Griffiths also made a call to include communities into our historical and ethnographic research and to serve them with our scholarly insights.

On 27 September, the day started with a welcome address by co-conveners Rebecca Hofmann (LMU Munich and PH Freiburg) and Carsten Wergin (Heidelberg University), followed by a general round of introduction and a brainstorming session on important debates and standpoints in environmental anthropology and, more generally, the environmental humanities. During the second morning session on **TechnoNatureCultures**, Daniel Münster (Heidelberg University) started the discussion with a presentation on the relevance of science and technology studies for environmental scholarship and more specifically, for understanding agrarian environments and alternative agronomies. He called for bringing more ecological thinking (about symbiogenesis, cobecoming, coevolution) into the humanities and engaging with heterodox sciences in order to tell more-than-human or “multispecies stories.” The talk was followed by a lively discussion.

During the next session, Sandra Calkins (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology) summarized the most important contributions of the field of **Political Ecology** to environmental scholarship in her presentation. She argued that political ecology should remain normative and critical in times of the Anthropocene, where humans have become a geological force. The engaged discussion circled around how to “ecologize the political,” rather than “politicizing the ecological” (Latour 1998).

The third session of the day was dedicated to **Environmental Ontologies**, during which Arno Pascht (LMU, University of Cologne) addressed the contributions of the recent so-called ontological turn to environmental anthropology, and the environmental humanities more generally. He presented three basic perspectives of “ontological cartography”: naturalism (Western) as one ontology among others (Descola); recursive ethnography, i.e., the relations between things and

humans (De Castro); and ecological phenomenology, i.e., science inspired by animistic ontologies (Ingold). The talk was followed by a lively debate about the dangers (othering, neocolonialism) and possibilities (accepting radical alterity) of the ontological turn.

The day ended with a short summary by the conveners and an open discussion about future collaborations and events that will strengthen the network of scholars in the interdisciplinary field of environmental anthropology and the environmental humanities more generally, in Germany and beyond.