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Conference of the German Anthropological Association

Call for Workshops for the GAA Conference at the University of Bremen, 27 to 30 September 2021

Worlds. Zones. Atmospheres.
Seismographies of the Anthropocene

The GAA conference venue represents all this year's topics. The Hanseatic city of Bremen, Germany's second largest deep-sea port with its maritime history embodies the rise and paradoxes of global trade and the history of colonialism. It was from here that German overseas trade began to take off in the 16th century, with external relations with other societies usually being understood in terms of the conquest of nature and people. These intertwining histories and the linkages between former ethnology, commerce and natural history are still manifest today in Bremen's *Overseas Museum*. At the end of the 19th century, Bremen and Bremerhaven developed into the central hub of German and European immigration to North America. Seeking connections overseas and developing trade relations has long gone hand-in-hand with the free circulation of people, goods and microbes; with European seizures, misappropriations and exploitation. Today, the once wealthy city of Bremen is a diverse, socially divided and post-colonial urban hub, which has to contend with the myriad effects of globalization (such as climate change, mass migration or pandemics), in a similar manner to other large cities around the world. In an earlier age it was the Bremen Town Musicians who were drawn here in search of something better than death, and to make a living out of precarious circumstances. Just what it takes to create worlds worth living in, how they can be brought to life atmospherically and the types of new zones and borders currently being established – these and similar questions are what the Bremen conference was designed to address.

Globalization is an ever-present part of Bremen life, with a high proportion of city dwellers living in precarious circumstances and landscapes devastated by the world of late industrial capitalism and economic decay. In concrete terms globalization results in global dependencies and inequalities at a grass-roots level, where a long history of entanglements is clearly visible. Besides the striking differences between rich and poor, Bremen has also become a symbol of hope and solidarity, as in the fairy tale of the Town Musicians where the animals are the ones to discover a cure for the underlying social malaise. Here the animals transform a world of precarious and threatening life circumstances, and turn Bremen into a beacon of hope; by coming together and acting with collective wisdom they ultimately discover a safe haven and sense of home and

belonging. As a coastal city with its aquatic infrastructure, Bremen is especially susceptible to climate change and sea level rise in very specific ways. Rethinking the Anthropocene from a Bremen perspective means asking the question as to what worlds inhabitants find and invent at a grass-roots level, and how these blueprints for living then manifest and undergo change.

The starting point is a critical confrontation with the concept of the Anthropocene itself, which defines the contemporary world as a contaminated epoch. The Anthropocene marks the beginning of an era in which humanity has become a destructive force of geological proportions, while at the same time seeing itself both compelled to and capable of taking the destiny of the planet into its own hands. The Anthropocene raises questions as to the multiplicity of worlds on one planet and creates an awareness of habitable and increasingly uninhabitable zones. The broad and controversy-ridden debate surrounding the actual chronological start of the Anthropocene and the analytical content of the concept, together with its underlying assumptions, makes it all the more evident that any notion of 'one world' which we supposedly inhabit collectively is at best problematic. Colonialism and capitalism, the Industrial Revolution or technological devastations such as A-bomb tests have unleashed catastrophes and shocks all around the world, including fears of mass extinction and ongoing climate and environmental disasters. Forced exile and migration, climate change and exploitation, pandemics and inequalities have all intensified and become ever more prominent as typical Anthropocene phenomena, while at the same time giving rise to novel and reconfigured assemblages of human and non-human actors. Exploring this diversity is one of the principal tasks of Social and Cultural Anthropology, which is not so much focussed on the future of 'One World', but rather on the complexity and diversity of newly emerging entanglements and assemblages – or the emergence of a multiplicity of worlds, atmospheres and zones.

Within Social and Cultural Anthropology, critical engagement with the concept of the Anthropocene is seen above all in novel epistemological and ontological perspectives that promote new awareness of the devastations taking place on our planet and the interdependence of all life forms. The Bremen Conference aims to bring to light and further develop the contributions of Social and Cultural Anthropology to debates on *anthropos* / human beings as an inherent part of all nature-cultures in both their centrality and misalignments, as well as their relationships with other living beings. It deals with the upheavals that capitalism has wrought all around the world and raises questions as to how individuals are able settle in these ruins, what survival techniques they develop, and the types of new living environments and cosmologies they design in order to cope with change. Other, 'more-than-human' connections emerge in precarious living environments, while situations of scarcity or struggle for limited resources develop into extended new forms of political engagement and a concomitant massive redefinition of the political sphere *per se.* Social and cultural anthropologists focus on diversity and on the strategies that enable
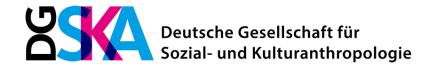
people to survive, while describing how human and non-human actors create entirely new worlds or re-appropriate existing ones - shaping and changing them affectively, or revitalising them in very specific ways. The focus is less on reducing complexity, but rather on the diversity of the 'more-than-human' connections that inform ethnographic realities. Anthropological research takes place in contact zones and documents (with near seismographic accuracy) how moods and life feelings - or local, on-site atmospheres – undergo change or resist dominant influences. As a subject area occupying a key cross-disciplinary *niche*, anthropology is faced with the task of incorporating such processes as *worlding* and *world-making* in the fabric of existing infrastructures and ongoing relationships with other life forms into the complex description and analysis of the Anthropocene.

Against this backdrop, conference participants are invited to document the upheavals of the new geological age through ethnographic contributions exhibiting a seismographic accuracy. Seismography, which is a scientific method for recording ground vibrations, serves as a metaphor that aims to bring to light elusive, 'underground' or repressed connections and movements. In the Anthropocene, Social and Cultural Anthropology is called upon to extend its sensors to animate and inanimate matter and thus to act 'seismographically'. At the same time, the goal is to develop new forms of exchange and collaboration with people and things that are 'more than human'. Through the ethnographic study of crisis-ridden and precarious aspects of existence, we come face-to-face with the fundamental insecurity of our own mode of being. Participatory and cooperative field research methods bear witness to the insecurity we experience when encountering others and to a modified way of perceiving that no longer primarily seeks to capture the world as a whole, but to record myriad experiences and views of constantly shifting worlds caught in a process of ongoing seismic change.

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We hereby cordially invite all members of the GAA as well as the working and regional groups to submit proposals, thematic ideas and overarching questions for the three main discussion formats of the GAA meeting in Bremen (by 15.9.2020).

    A. Thematic workshops with a maximum of 2 time windows of 90 minutes each (4 speakers per time window; maximum 8 speakers, 2 moderators)

    B. Round-tables on controversial questions and debates - with a maximum of 1 time slot of 90 minutes each, and a maximum of 7 (preferably international) guest speakers and 2 moderators.

    C. Labs in which experimental discussion formats are to be tested. This includes thematically innovative 'lateral thinking' as well as projects that break new ground methodologically and didactically. As for workshops, 1 or a maximum

of 2 time slots of 90 minutes each will be available, offered by a maximum of 2 moderators or organizers.

All proposals should be outlined in a description of max. 2,000 characters (including spaces), together with a meaningful title and contact details of the submitter. When requesting a round-table, please explain why the topic or discussion goal is specifically suited to this format. In the case of lab proposals, the application also needs to include a description of time-planning, as well as the overall participatory or collaborative design.

The deadline for submitting workshop, round-table and lab proposals is 15.9.2020. Please send all proposals to the following email address:

Tagung2021@dgska.de

To ensure that all workshop sessions, labs and round-tables can be attended by a sufficient number of participants, the conference organizers reserve the right to limit the total number of workshops, labs and round-tables. In addition, the 'two-role rule' applies with regard to lectures, workshop, lab and round-table organization, and the
capacity of panellist / speaker: Each conference participant can only take on tasks in a maximum of two separate categories (i.e. lecture, speaker, workshop, lab or round-table organization, discussant and as a moderator). Dual functions in the same category are excluded.