Nottingham Contemporary

Mon 28 Jun
7-8.30pm

Astrida Neimanis

Transcript

SPEAKERS
Daniel Cordle, Astrida Neimanis

Daniel Cordle 00:00:03

Good evening everyone, and welcome to Nottingham Contemporary, where, albeit, by the medium of the screen, for this evening's free Care for the Stranded event. It's lovely to have you here. My name is Daniel Cordle, and I'm an Associate Professor in English and American literature at Nottingham Trent University. Tonight's event, a talk by Astrida Neimanis, is brought to you by the Critical Poetics Research Group at Nottingham Trent University in partnership with Nottingham Contemporary, the Curated and Created at NTU Cultural Programme, and Metronome. The Critical Poetics Research Group provides a platform for exploring the role of creative and critical writing in promoting cross-cultural conversation and driving social change. And this year we've launched our first ever international summer school. In this, its inaugural year, the summer school is delivered care of a group of international artists, writers, and thinkers whose work addresses current and pressing issues of care and caring. Issues that seem more pressing than ever perhaps, in the context of the pandemic. And some of you might've heard Michael Rosen talk about care in the time of COVID in the first of the series. Featuring public events like this, workshops, performances, and readings, our programme has been carefully curated to discover how writing, art, criticism, or a combination of these can help us attend to manifold, interconnected and collective care responsibilities. Tonight, we're privileged and delighted to welcome Astrida Neimanis, who is going to talk to us on the subject of care for the stranded. Astrida is a cultural theorist working at the intersection of feminism and environmental change. Her research focuses on bodies, water, and weather, and how they might help us reimagine justice, care, responsibility, and relation, in the time of climate catastrophe. I highly recommend her most recent book, *Bodies of Water: Post-human Feminist Phenomenology*. It's one of those books that makes you think differently about the world. It calls for humans to examine

Talk

our relationships to oceans, watersheds, and other aquatic life forms, from the perspective of our own primarily watery bodies, and our ecological poetic and political connections to other bodies of water. Astrida's work is thrilling in its interdisciplinarity and a model of what's innovative interdisciplinary research can achieve. It includes collaborations with artists, writers, scientists, makers, educational institutions, and communities. Her work has recently been featured at the Shanghai, Riga, and Lofoten Biennales. Astrida is currently Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair in Feminist Environmental Humanities at the university of British Columbia, Okanogan on the unceded Syilx and Okanogan lands in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada. I'll be returning later for a discussion with Astrida. You're also invited to take part in the conversation. Please post questions in the YouTube chat bar during and after the talk and there'll be forwarded to me. I'll try to include as many as possible. First though, it's now my great pleasure to hand over to Astrida for a talk on care for the stranded.

Astrida Neimanis 00:03:20

Thanks so much, Dan. It is my great pleasure to be here with you this morning as it is for me here. I'd like to begin by acknowledging that I am speaking to you today from the unceded lands of the Syilx Okanogan people. And I would like to pay my respects to their elders and give my sincere thanks for maintaining these beautiful lands and waters where I now have the great fortune to live. So, the work that I'm going to present today is brand new. I'm a little bit nervous, I will admit. It's having its first proper foray into the world. I'm just going to share my screen now so that I can tell you a little bit about the work and where it comes from. So, it is part of a pilot project that I've been undertaking with artists, Patty Chang in LA, pathologist, wildlife pathologist, Aleksija Neimanis in Sweden and myself. The project is called Learning Endings and it's funded by the Ho Foundation from Hong Kong. And so, we've been doing a pilot for the last few months together. I also, before I begin, want to acknowledge a few of the people who've been involved in this research, and in fact completely have played a very strong role in it. So, Research Associate Sue Reid, Research Associate Dr. Jamie Wang, Research Associate Tara Nicholson, and also, I want to give my gratitude to the people we've spoken to at the Aquatic Animal Research Lab, particularly Dr. Brian Kot and his team in Hong Kong. And to also my thanks to SVA, or the National Veterinary Institute of Sweden. The talk that I am going to give has emerged from this research. It wouldn't have been possible without my conversations and interactions with

these people and the places they're from. So, I really need to acknowledge that, but I also want to underline that the presentation today is my own formulation. It comes from the place from which I know things as a non-scientist and non-artist, but as a writer, a feminist theorist, a sister of one of the principle researchers and so on. So, while Patty Aleksija and I have discussed the general themes of this talk, and I think we're all roughly on the same page, my co-researchers may not see or say things in exactly the way I'm presenting them here today. So, I'm just going to give you a quick overview of the, oops, sorry there, of the talk's structure. So, as I mentioned, the title of the talk is Care for the Stranded. I'm going to be delivering it in seven parts. So, you can tell what I'm coming up to the end, but I'm not going to be sharing any more slides. So, it will be mostly my face that you're looking at. Prologue 12th of May, 2021, 3:02 AM PST. Little girl. When the meeting starts, we'll let people know you're waiting. You are running your hand smoothly along the skin, moving from the head down the animal. You are feeling for net marks. Both of these are bycatch female found in the beginning of March, line mark around the head on the leading edge of the dorsal fin, on the leading edge of the fluke wrapped around the fluke. Not emaciated, possibly poor condition. All teeth are erupted, very little ware, if any. Animals from the same year whether similarly, similar size robustness, nutritional condition, et cetera. The animals themselves rings on the teeth of the weather. No other abnormalities, fingers pressing into flints to side belly. I do a lot of necropsy by field. Traffic is waking up outside. I could see the faint sparkle of the Big Dipper. Okay. Okay. Okay, May, 3:46 AM. Scoring the blubber, stacking it up, someone is taking it from the table, now I'm with you. I've got some mammary, I'm at the mammary gland. It looks pretty inactive. I try to express milk, but there was nothing there. There's a little bit of haemorrhage base of the skull back of the neck likely when the animal was caught in the neck, in the nets and was struggling. This animal is still a little bit frozen. Remove the hypaxial muscle, now I'm going to open the abdomen carefully. It is a little girl with immature ovaries, which I'm going to remove. They're completely inactive. Okay, here we go. 4:07 AM. I'm using a new scalpel. You probably can't see me here. I'm just out of the fields of vision. I'm slicing through the pancreas, no parasites. I'm removing the tongue, and trachea, lungs, and heart, just popping up the epiglottitis so I can remove the rest of this, the lung and the heart underneath it. Just looking at the heart, looking for a heart defect in this instance in the form of a connection. No, there was no connection here. That's good, there's nothing wrong here. The tongue and the larynx. I'm removing the whole package, the uterus, the

ovaries, and the bladder underneath. There's a piece of muscle here. Underneath is the thyroid. I'd just like to take a little look at it. Nothing is the full perspective, just fragments. 4:51 AM, the thyroid is unremarkable. Examine the respiratory tract. First, I need to wash my hands. My daughter's calling. Hello? Yeah. Yup. Yup. Jette bra! Hej hej. The museum also wants a piece of the lung. I wish I could rinse off the table here. It's all a little too much. Okay, liver. It's actually really beautiful. Firm texture, colour, as it should be. The birds outside getting louder insistent, the body is open like a mouth, teeth pointing out. It's almost completely light, 5:17 AM. Eye lenses, 5:51 AM. We're getting closer to the end here. I'm removing the lower jaw so I can get at the ear bones. Again, I still don't have a good technique. I'm learning as I go. It's such a beautiful organ. Diagnosis by catch. No other overt pathology. That's it, and the table looks clean. That's it for today and for me, 6:23 AM. (water burbles) Part one, introduction. When death is All Around. We live in a time of almost unfathomable loss, and we are called to respond. We are called to respond to that which we cannot fully understand, and we are called to understand why and how we are called. These words begin an essay by anthropologists and field philosopher, Deborah Bird Rose, written almost a decade ago called, «In the Shadow of All This Death.» Rose was a leading figure in the fields of environmental humanities and intellectual project, explicitly interested in how ethics values, aesthetics and poetics shape and are shaped by human relations with the more than human world. Deb's later work in particular was interested in questions of death and extinction and how these phenomena reshape worlds. Debbie died a handful of years ago, too early from cancer. Lately I find myself returning to this work. There is so much death around us. This presents not only as the death of individual beings, but also as the end of species, the end of ways of life, the end of possibilities, the end of relations. In the words of ocean justice scholar, Sue Reid, these ends are also leavings, what leaves and what is left behind. As Deborah Rose suggested, even though death must be an important part of life, death is sometimes not only death, but double death. In this sixth-grade extinction, which cannot be understood as separate from structures of capitalism, colonialism, militarism heteropatriarchy, and other implicated forms of violence. Not only do individuals die, but they're entanglements in other beings, ways of life dies too. Patterns of embodied connection wither and shrink. Double death in Rose's words, quote, «Breaks the partnership between life and death, setting up an amplification of death so that the balance between life and death is overrun.» Although double death is certainly also caught in the oceans' currents, double death at sea is mostly

occurring beyond our fields of vision. For those creatures and relations that comprise the ocean, life is seriously stressed. Warming temperatures, rising acidification, overfishing, plastic, acoustic, and fossil fuel pollution over and unsustainable fishing and other resource extraction, all of this changing what the ocean is, how it moves, and of what it is composed. Don't get me wrong, the ocean will certainly outlive us all, but that ocean maybe unrecognisable. Among the beings that animate the oceans are cetaceans, whales, dolphins, porpoises, which like you and me, breath air, give birth to live young and take considerable time preparing those young for life on their own. Cetaceans are highly intelligent with complex forms of sociality. Although their ancestors were once land-dwelling mammals some four million years ago, those animals forsook terrestiality for a more watery existence. Now they are not only in the ocean, but of it. As you will no doubt know, many cetacean species are under serious threat. Although some made an admirable comeback after the decimation caused by large-scale whaling industries in former centuries, they are now imperilled anew by noise, hunger, garbage, traffic, and heat. How are we to respond? As Debbie Bird Rose notes, quote, «We will be shaping our understandings as we shape our responses. And we will increasingly understand that our responses are offerings into the unknowable.» For ocean death and extinction though, this unknowability is philosophical, but also material. Our capacity to witness is strained both practically and imaginatively because cetaceans are creatures that dwell in habitats into which we humans can travel only temporarily, their demise happens out of sight. We notice mostly in the negative if at all. So again, how are we to respond. This talk draws on pilot project research I've undertaken with artists, Patty Chang, and wildlife pathologist Aleksija Neimanis, alongside our collaborators, Jamie Wang, Sue Reid, Tara Nicholson, and a number of scientists and activists who have generously given their time to speak to us or allowed us to observe their work, for example, at Ocean Park and the Aquatic Animal Lab in Hong Kong, under the leadership of Dr. Brian Kot and at the National Veterinary Institute, Sweden, where Aleksija leads a marine mammal disease surveillance programme. When cetaceans die, they will sometimes strand on our shores, on the frayed edges of the watery habitat they have made home for thousands of millennia. These stranded animals will take their leave among terrestrials, who will be called on to respond. Some humans trained in the Western scientific practise of necropsy, that is the post-mortem examination of an animal in order to try to understand its death, are then afforded a rare opportunity for a kind of intimacy with these animals. This talk is about this

practise as a complex form of care and as one kind of response. This relates not only to the work of science under conditions of climate catastrophe, but also more broadly to how we understand relations of life and death. What might we learn from citations about endings at a time when so many beings are stranded far from the times, places, or conditions that they have come to know as home? what can we, the living, give back? Part two. Who Cares? Science as a form of care. Western science has some things to answer for. Fallacies of objectivity, excessive extraction, fraught intimacies with colonialism and capitalism and other charges animate calls for accountability. Yet those of us committed to feminist, anti-racist, decolonial and queer ways of approaching environmental urgencies can find ourselves in a tight spot in advancing these critiques. We need to question these premises, but we also recognise the urgent value of much of this scientific research. This tension is even more palpable in a so-called post-truth era, where critique can be easily conflated with denials of all kinds, propped up by an absurdist knowledge scape, where to say something, anything, loudly and brazenly enough can apparently make it true. So, this presents us a bit of a baby and bath water problem. No science is innocent or value free of that, we can all be sure, but where does that leave us? It leaves me for one, curious, a curiosity that I brought to this project that I've been working on for the past six months with Aleksija and Patty. As a practice-based project, we did not start with the research question per se, but rather with a shared interest in ocean ecologies, representation, and feeling. We also articulated a shared commitment from the beginning to resist the instrumentalization of one another. The artist and the writer weren't there to do science communication, but nor was the scientist there to be the object of an art project. What could we genuinely learn from one another? After extensive conversation, we settled on some experiments alongside more extensive research and interviews with aquatic animal pathologists and biologists. At the heart of our pilot project was the observation of live-streamed porpoise necropsies conducted by Aleksija in her lab in Uppsala, Sweden, and watched by Patty and me from our respective homes in North America. Here today, I want to transmit to you some of what has been transmitted to me in this process. These transmissions are both literal in terms of some of the details that travelled through fibre optic cables snaking along the bottom of the ocean to be burped out through my 13-inch laptop screen and slow dripped through my headset into my ears. But these transmissions are also imaginative in terms of the concerns and questions that this work has opened up. So, let's begin again in the necropsy room. 12:48

AM. Liver unremarkable, no parasites. Stomachs, only four stomachs opened. Mostly empty, except three to five meals, digestive slurry, fish, eye lenses, and a digested fish vertebral column. In oesophagus, no parasites. Stomachs to museum, intestines unopened to microplastics study. Kidneys, unremarkable spleen, unremarkable adrenals, possibly mildly atrophic cortex, histo, bladder small unremarkable, small amount of urine. Reprotract, no sperm in cervix. Repetition, precision, patience. A necropsy can take half a workday or longer, which does not include the preparatory labours nor the distribution and disposal of the remains. About three hours into the first live stream, I write in my notes, «I don't think there is anything I do that requires this many hours of uninterrupted attention to something or someone else.» We talk a lot about the importance of protocol. Three slices, one dorsal, 18, one lateral, 17, one ventral, 21, two dorsal, 17, two lateral, 17, two ventral, 23, just a sec, three dorsal, 16, three lateral, 17, three ventral, 17, four dorsal 19, four lateral 15, and there's nothing, 3:33 AM. To an outsider, the practise could appear coldly surgical, but we learn from you and others that it is a deeply sensual affair. I go a lot by feel to tell where I'm supposed to be cutting, you tell us. Other scientists we speak to talk about the smell. «You can tell which species you will be attending to by the scent in the room when you enter,» one tells us. Another mentions how in comparison to porpoises and seals, the whale she sampled, smelled very different. Darker was the word she used. In one of our meetings. Jamie commented on this descriptor, understanding the word choice, darker, to be an index of the deep-water home that the whale had carried with it to shore on the inside in its death. All of the scientists we talk to repeat the importance of staying attuned to the animal as a question of respect. When I hesitatingly asked you about adopting an objectifying stance toward the animal, you were taken aback and annoyed. «I don't do this for me,» he said. Everything that a body accumulates needs to be accounted for. We do this for the animal. This is for the animal and the ones that came before, and the ones that come after. So, words are tricky. We later spoke about the possibility of untethering objectification from mastery. Part three, witnessing necropsy. It might just be autolyzed lover collect a piece of formalin in formalin, but I'm not convinced. If I'm able to see any mammary tissue microscopically milk produced or not, everything is so rotten, it might be an exercise in futility. Don't know what else I can do because the rest of the uterus is missing. Opening here, everything has been washed away. Scraped the cervix, but it's the wrong time of year. The diameter of the, I don't know if you can see this, the diameter of the uterus of the cervix indicates she's been pregnant before.

So yeah, external bits of bitten off. The whole thing has been contaminated, but I'll do it just to say I did. Okay. Okay. There's nothing more I can do here. As always Patty and I are watching through the portals of our laptops. We are hovering in the corner of your screen, which we know is placed on a small trolley with wheels that attends you as you attend to this animal, thousands of miles away from us. Because of time differences for Patty and me, it's the middle of the night. This rented townhouse I'm in is dark and quiet. As you proceed through your protocols, the birds outside are getting louder. Soon the traffic does too and all of a sudden, the sky is lit up. My kids come downstairs for breakfast. Although this animal was already severely decomposed with many parts of it already scavenged, the necropsy went ahead anyways. «There's nothing more I can do,» you said. «But I'll do it just to say that I did.» During these sessions, five in total, over the past five months, you recite a basic running commentary out loud. At first, Patty and I asked a lot of questions, but now we're mostly silent. I keep myself awake by taking freeform notes, usually 20 or more pages per session. I don't quite know why, but it feels urgent to write everything down. This ambit soon gives way to an aching wrist. It is impossible to hold it all. Any photography or recordings of the necropsy room or the animal are not permitted. But sometimes I pick up my phone to take photos or capture screenshots of things going on in the periphery. This night, Twitter is buzzing with the aftermath of the Derek Chauvin trial verdict. My mom sends a note across WhatsApp, the moaning, a snap snowfall in Ontario that claims her nascent, Magnolia blooms. I watch Patty watching you. Her hair is glossy black. Her facial expressions and index of what is happening on the table. I often get absorbed in the rhythm of my own notetaking. Focused on your voice, my head stays down for two or three minutes sometimes, and I'm surprised to look back up at the screen and find the stainless-steel table mostly empty. The animal components already removed, a blue gloved hand hosing it down. These animals are so elusive. Your voice is still steady methodically working your way through your notes. Porpoise previously frozen, parts of body female adult cannot determine body condition. Severely autolyzed sitting in the fridge so long, suspected by catch, but undetermined. 2:21 AM. Debra Rose writes that, «In living with the dying of others,» quote, «We bear the burden of witness. In one sense, simply to be alive is to bear witness, she writes, «By virtue of one's own embodied life to the others who came before. But more than that,» writes Rose, «The ethical burden is a question of how we inhabit the deck zone. How we call out, how we refuse to abandon others.» During the necropsy of the porpoise, I name

little girl in my notes, I write, «I'm thinking about Alison Whittaker committed to sitting through all of those inquests of decks in custody, tweeting out the details to the rest of the world partly just to be sure that someone sits through to witness and report on what was said.» My notes go on. «Of course, this is not the same thing,» I write. «These lives are not equivalent, but they are both lives still.» I thought about this a lot since taking those notes. Alison Whittaker is the Gomeroi poet and legal scholar whose work I came to know while living in Australia. Whittaker has analysed and written on the close to 500 deaths of Aboriginal people in custody in Australia in the last 30 years, at least as many as have been recorded as such. She has since deleted her Twitter account, so I can't quote her precisely on this point. My memory has to serve as proxy. But I recall her tweets dotted through my timeline, noting both the mundane and more newsworthy details of the inquests. She was not passing judgement on which parts were more important or less. The objective was transmission as a form of witness. Reading back now over Whittaker's other published accounts of deaths and custody, I pay attention to the attention she pays to the families of the deceased. The can of people like David Dungay Jr. Ms. Du, Aunty Tanya Day, Joyce Clarke, and many others besides. Whittaker writes about McKayla and Nikita, sisters of Danny Whitten, a man who died in police custody in 2015. During the February, 2021 inquest, the sisters told the press, quote, «It has been helpful to understand more about what happened to Danny, but it has caused anger and sadness too. We have learned that so much more care could have been offered to our Danny boy while he was in prison.» Whittaker also reports how when Kylie, Danny Whitten's mother, approached her son to touch his face, to curl up beside him and sing him to sleep when the decision was made to withdraw life support. Quote, «She was physically stopped by corrective services staff who told her that touching Danny was tampering with evidence in the property of corrective services. Her care and love for Danny was treated as a transgression on carceral process,» writes Whittaker. Last week I travelled to the coast of British Columbia's lower mainland to a place called Boundary Bay. This is where a number of grey whales have stranded in recent years. Although no noticeable trace of these strandings remains, I know, and I know these aren't the same animals nor even the same species. I nonetheless wanted to stand on the edge of the water and read the scripts of the necropsies that you had conducted over the last months to the ocean, hoping my words might drop through the tiny waves to find some relative tympanic bulla in the deep. It was an awkward and ambiguous experiment. Against this vortex of death, Deb Bird Rose asks, «What does one have to

offer?» This project returns to thinking and learning about deaths in custody from another perspective. In her book called «Dying From Improvement,» Canadian scholars, Sherene Razack notes that settler societies, quote, «Have a profound investment in 'disappearing Indians.' The process of making a people disappear is not only one of elimination, but a process that involves marking materially and symbolically their bodies as not up to the challenge of modern life,» writes Razack. This is the critique that many decolonial scholars refer to as dead already representations. Why am I telling you this? I know this risks being just another damage story, but I am trying to pull out the aperture. I need to make these stories about the structures and the systems that remain unmarked and unnamed at too many of these inquests. A death is diminished when it is treated as inevitable, when the conditions for living imposed by a settler society makes surviving too difficult. Like Razack, Whittaker also indicts pathology as a way to avoid accountability, quote, «Disguising violence as disadvantage or doom.» Poor health, poor habits, mental illness, risky lifestyle, all these become alibis for massive historical ongoing violence turned back on the individual. Paying attention, taking note can be one way to refuse this alibi, to refuse the making normal of the ways in which we got here. Double death rights rose also doubles back to claim us too. Even when the dead are not our kin, we are tangled in the ecologies that made their life and their death, even if only by proxy. Witnessing must be for the sake of the dead, but it is also for what comes next. Witnessing as a kind of response is thus entangled and strangely reciprocal. What you give and what you get within a weave of life, whose frayed fabrics further unravelling we want to stay. This cannot be the only response to the violence that masks itself as inevitable, but it is one response. I also think about the poet, Hanif Abdurraqib, who describes the act of shared witnessing, witnessing alongside others and perhaps as proxies for others not there as a way to be less alone in the immensity of feeling, and this feels important too. Part four, gut feelings. Inside of the main stomach, like a gourd, I'm going backwards because it's falling apart, 3:36 AM. As part of the pilot project Jamie asked the scientist she interviewed about the emotional or affective dimensions of the work. One of them barely hesitated in their response. When you look at their stomach contents, she said, it brings you back to the mundane life of the animal. You can often see what they were doing, where they were swimming right before death. I go over my notes from the first necropsy I watched. It was nighttime for me, but mid-afternoon for you. Your daughter called you on your cell phone. «I can't talk right now,» you told her, «I'm doing a necropsy.» You carefully checked the organs of the

porpoise for parasites. You made notes. This was a juvenile male, good nutritional condition. Not yet weaned, the animal's stomach still contained its mother's milk. For almost all mammals, the stomach shares and embodied geography with the Naval. Linguistically and anatomically, the belly is both where food is primarily digested, but also where we feel things intuitively and intensely. Even in our atomized Western corporeal grammars, the gut is now understood to have something like a brain. We call it the enteric nervous system, strongly connected to emotions and anxiety. 95% of human serotonin is located in the stomach. Like humans, cetaceans have belly buttons, the vestigial index of their connection to a parent's umbilical cord. To consider the word belly button is an invitation to think about mammalian attachment to others through our Naval centre. A gut fastening, if you will, or a naval knot. In the opening chapter of Rebecca Giggs' new book, «Fathoms: The World in the Whale,» Giggs describes a sperm whale washed up dead on the Spanish coastline with an entire greenhouse in its stomach. The structures interior inside the whale's interior included tarps, hose pipes, ropes, flowerpots, a spray canister, bits of synthetic burlap. Later in a chapter called kitsch interior, Giggs travels into the belly of the whale in more detail punctuating the chapters, this chapters pages with shorthand accounts of stranded animals and their stomach contents. Grey Whale, Puget Sound 2010: tracksuit pants, golf balls, pairs of surgical gloves. Twenty plastic bags, small towels, unidentified decayed plastic sheeting. Sperm whales, four stranded together, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany, 2016: 13-meter-long fishing net, pieces of a plastic bucket, a car engine cover. Cuvier's beaked whale, Bergen, Norway, 2017: 2 metres long filmy sheet, shopping bags, a Walkers crisp packet. Sperm whale, Isle of Harris, Scotland, 2019: A 100 kilogramme litter ball containing knotted synthetic netting, packaging tape, plastic drinking cups. Rough-toothed dolphin, Fort Meyers Beach, Florida, 2019: two plastic bags, one shredded balloon. Sperm whales, two, Northern California, 2008: branded cord, bait nets, gill nets, shrimp and trawl nets, adding up to 97 kilogrammes and 134 nets in total. Bryde's whale, Cairns Australia, 2000: six square metres of plastic, several disposable lighters. Cuvier's beaked whale, France, 1999: 378 kilogramme of individual inorganic items, which, apparently, was a record. This is, of course, a partial list. No representation can hold everything. Like the debris, this plastic imaginary can only ever be fragmentary parts standing in for a whole that is difficult to see. Part of our research includes trying to find out more about necropsies performed on endlings, the last known animal of a species. Sue finds an article about a 38-foot-long whale that was found

stranded and dead in 2019 in the Florida Everglades. The necropsy found a rigid, shard of plastic 2 1/2 inches long that had sliced the insides of the whale. This was understood to be the cause of death, as it prevented the animal from being able to nourish itself. Quote, «The whale was thin and had no other infections or pathogens that could be attributed to its death,» NOAA scientist Patricia Rosel writes. Besides the plastic, «Its stomach was empty.» Rice's whale, this whale, was only recently determined to be its own species. Until earlier this year, they were thought to be the same species as Bryde's whales, another endangered baleen whale of the Atlantic and Pacific. But Rice's whales stay in the Gulf of Mexico, feed in deeper water and physically differ from Bryde's whales in some small but important ways. Many were killed by the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf a decade ago, and only 30-50 animals remain. Those still hanging on are threatened by ship strikes, oil spills, growing deployment of deep-penetration seismic blasts used to look for oil and gas deposits, or a piece of debris no longer than my thumb. Through the portal of the stomach, the whole world. Part five, How to Grieve in Cetacean Time. The dead are still waiting for us to catch up, we lag beholden to other times, and other measures That's how, perhaps a bit melodramatically, I began my notes of the first necropsy, the one I've named good nutritional condition. We were supposed to start at 2 am, but there were many unanticipated things on your end. We were livestreaming for the first time, and because of COVID, the regular number of helping hands weren't around. The necropsy finally got going 45 minutes or an hour later. Four hours after that, we were done. The time gets folded up and tucked into the night, feeling the next day like either a dream, or something very long ago. You tell us about the strange temporalities of the work, the manic rush to get things ready that falls into the meditative slowness of being with the animal on the table. During one of the necropsies, you confess, I had a hectic day. I'm quiet now because I am enjoying just being with the animal. The three of us have a standing Friday morning meeting or Friday afternoon in Sweden. And although these meetings have been going on for months, none of us can ever remember what time they're at. «When are we meeting again?» One of us texts our WhatsApp group. We can never keep it straight. Cetacean time becomes our emergent shorthand for the way time keeps wrinkling and stretching, folding in or slipping away. When we first started thinking about what we might do together, one of the concepts we kept circling back to was suspension, water as a material manifestation of time neither regressing nor progressing along linear storylines, but just holding. In another team meeting, we talk about the freezer as a key technology of

cetacean time. One of the pathologists that Jamie talked to describe the importance of freezers, necropsy of the stranded is enabled by the proximity, availability, size, and quality of freezers. Freezers seem to be a technology of suspension, and by extension, one of the modalities of cetacean time. April 21, 2021, everything just sort of falls apart. 3:20 AM, late, late! Time messing with me again, I thought it was 4. I hear my 15-year-old awake upstairs, my insomniac fellow traveller. 4:37 AM, I check my Insta and see that Madi commented on something 6 minutes ago. I remember that she's narcoleptic and I feel a weird sympathy across this city. 5:54 am, the sky is lighter, the camera is pointed, sun rising to the west, though this ageing star too will be lagging behind the coming day. In my transcript of one of the first necropsies I find reference to a moment where your hand is resting on the back of the porpoise. Before you begin each necropsy, Patty has asked you to take a photo of yourself with your hand on the animal. Your hand has to be gloved for obvious reasons, but there is something about this ritual that tugs it out of the typical scientific procedure. It's excessive, I suppose. You don't need to do it. But as the series of necropsies rolls on through the spring, you tell us about what you have come to call your freezer time. No one else is there, but you and the animal. This time is suspended between that frenetic rush of getting things set up, and the more methodical slowness of the necropsy itself. In preparing for our talk at the Maine North Atlantic Institute, you show me an old photo you found of yourself, back in the Bay of Fundy from the 1990s, when you were doing porpoise rescues with the Research Station there. You are sitting in the boat, a rescued porpoise quickly brought aboard before it could be safely returned to waters outside of the herring weir nets. Your hand rests on the back of its grey body. Deborah Bird Rose has also written about what she calls, quote, «Multispecies knots of ethical time.» This is when sequential time or the ongoingness of an animal in the form of intergenerational kinships intersects with simultaneous time, or the coexistence of an animal with all of the other non-kin species with which it is entangled for the purpose of nourishment in its lifetime. Rose theorises extinction as a snipping of these knots. But if the freezer is a technology of cetacean time, it is also a habitat for the tying of a multispecies knot, the kind that we insist on tying, even, and especially, when death is all around us. Part six, Who Cares, take two. Caring for Science, Caring for Scientists Who cares about these animals who are washed up on our terrestrial shores, away from their own kin? Given the state of our planet's oceans, care here requires a commitment to these animals' lives, and to their ongoingness. Care requires a refusal to see them as already

dead, or their deaths as individuals and species as inevitable. We have come to understand a central question of our project as this, might science, and the scientific practise of necropsy, its unconventional intimacy, its slow protocol of attentiveness that insists on staying with cetacean time and its strange suspensions, might this also be understood as this kind of care? This is not an obvious or necessarily simple proposition. I personally am swim in all kinds of tensions, of instrumentalisation, objectification, theoretical abstraction, dangerous analogy, all of this chafing against the desire for beautiful poetry and a satisfying ending. Just pay attention, I have to keep reminding myself. Instead of truth, go for honesty. In one of the necropsies, you lay your hand on the part of little girl's skin that has not yet been removed. You are holding the animal, but the animal's body is also supporting you. Literally, I mean. This is just the material fact of the situation. The animal's body supports your hand, because it is no longer supported by the buoyancy of the sea, and succumbing to terrestrial gravity, whether in life or death, it is now stranded on your table beneath your hand. Holding is complicated, and multivalent. We keep learning in the project that nothing can hold everything. We begin to understand that this kind of care requires not only the narrowing of the aperture in order to see the animal in granular detail, but also the capacity for a concomitant pulling out, to see the worlds that the animal holds and is held by or not. These worlds are mostly a tangled mess, but nor are they already dead. But as Patty also asked in one of our last meetings, who cares for the scientist? While I know that Western science has a thing or two to answer for, we are also now watching as all around us science is co-opted for political gain, capitalist growth, or worse, ignored or denied altogether. Under such circumstances, what support can we extend to science and scientists, in their extension of care to the stranded? Might art, Patty suggested, be a form of care? And part seven, care for the stranded Some years ago, I read Yasmin Gunaratnam's work on diasporic dying, where she describes migrants in the UK cared for in their deaths by proxy kin, far away from the places they considered home. This year, listening to stories of patients dying in COVID wards connected to their families and lovers only by webcam and iPad, if at all, brought me back to Yasmin's work, and the networks of support she details in the context of different kinds of strandings. In fact, it seems that stranding too is all around us. Where I live now the remains of almost 1,000 bodies of children have recently been discovered in unmarked graves on the sites of former residential schools, where Indigenous children were sent after being forcibly removed from their homes. The circumstances of all of these children's

deaths may not yet be known, but we know they died away from their families, who were prevented from caring for them even in their death. Offshore detention in Australia, or boats from Africa prevented from landing in Europe, there are too many others seeking refuge in the world but finding no safe harbour, in the shadow of all this death, indeed. There is violence in comparison when it does not hone our capacity for attention, blunting it instead. But for me to invoke these other strandings alongside one another, is not to level them, but to draw them into relation, all of them asking us, how will we respond? How will we care for the stranded? 11 June 2021, this animal is A2021 05343. Wild animal found dead, previously frozen whole body. A male. I write in my notes, strangely with each session these seem more like individual beings, not Less. The stomach is full. It's jam-packed full of food Means it fed just before it died, otherwise in good condition, in good health, robust, healthy, lots of fluid in the lungs. 4:38 AM. I notice how you lay your hand on the only piece of skin still intact on the animal. I think we're ready, you say. 5:29 AM.

Daniel Cordle 00:53:25

Thank you very much, Astrida, for such a rich and full and intellectually stimulating talk that has provoked so many kinds of questions for me. I want to invite again people watching on YouTube that if you've got questions and comments, please put them in the feed and they'll be forwarded to me, and I'll put them to Astrida. You talked about witnessing a loss in care, and I wondered if you could start with the idea of care and with the role of witnessing in care. I wondered if you could say a bit more about that, I was struck by your description of the person performing the necropsy, witnessing death, and then you and Patty witnessing the witnessing as tokens. If you could expand on that idea of witnessing and care.

Astrida Neimanis 00:54:15

Yeah, thanks so much. I actually find this like a really difficult question, partly because I think witnessing has become, how to say this, kind of a fashionable word in critical theory. And I'm really like hesitant to just kind of simply pull it in and like have it serve as like a shorthand for all kinds of ideas or profound thoughts, of course, in its emergence. As I think a critical concept witness has been attached to all sorts of horrendous events and I, myself as a theorist, I am concerned with theory that is invoked to dampen things as opposed to amplify them or get us to see them in a new way. So, I even have to admit to a

little bit of hesitance choosing that word. But nonetheless, as I mentioned, this project so far has been entirely practise driven. Like any of the theory that I've invoked or concepts I've invoked in this talk, has come after. Like we didn't have them in advance. So when I read through my notes and when Patty and Aleksija and I sort of speak about what we're doing, and we debriefed, and we talked to Jamie, and we talked to Sue, and we talked to Brian, like what comes out, what sort of filters down through that and sediments is that this is a kind of form of witnessing, And I wish I had better synonym to sort of, that could reanimate that word and not have it have that sort of dead-end sound. But particularly having to do this project in COVID conditions, which was not the original intention, originally, we were going to be in proximal, you know, bodily distance to one another. And we weren't sure how it would happen, but there would be some travel and some other kinds of connection. Doing all of this through the portal of our machines also sort of changed the way we understood it. And it became this kind of constant layering of witnessing that sort of quite like interested us what it means for Aleksija to be performing a necropsy and then Patty and I witnessing that through a transmission, and then also like seeing ourselves in the corner of the transmission and then replaying it for other collaborators witnessing it again. And I was quite interested in this repetition. (indistinct) What does that mean? I mean, I'll let you ask more before I ramble on more.

Daniel Cordle 00:57:01

Well, Astrida, you talked about repetition. I was struck that you said that actually these creatures became more individual the more you witnessed these events, rather than what one might expect, I guess, which is that you become inured to it that it becomes, I hesitate to say this because witnessing kind of another remove again through your talk, these things. It feels that there is a sort of an element of intimacy, and of privilege, and of transgressing a boundary somehow of this kind of moment of absolute intimacy, which is then laid bare on the kind of the slab to the table. But there's yeah, it struck me that there was going beyond your reservations, I suppose, about witnessing as one of those words that we just use very kind of easily as a replacement for really thinking about what's going on. That actually that kind of, the movement between notes, between reflections, between different connections and I was really struck by that the richness of the connections between witnesses of deaths in custody to citations and so on.

Astrida Neimanis 00:58:19

Well, if I could go back to the point about repetition, I think that's super interesting. And like, perhaps instead of witnessing, I would call it giving attention, you know, and sort of giving attention to what is in front of you. And in my younger years, I was very enamoured by the work of Shil Dulles I don't really use Dulles too much anymore, but one concept that I think Dulles describes better than anyone else I've read is difference in repetition. And that concept I think really informs the way I now understand repetition, that in order for something to repeat, it is always becoming different in some way. Like that is just like the only way something can repeat, is to in some way become different. And so, this kind of iterative quality, not as perhaps a dilution, which one might suspect, but as another opportunity to pay attention and to give attention differently, you know. And I think this also relates to the specificity of cetaceans as marine mammals who's so many of whose deaths we will never see and never be privy to. The disappearing animal, the animal out of view was another theme that came up consistently in our work. So, it's like this is one of the only things we can give, right? But to give attention to the animal, but then to also retransmit it somehow always holding on to that tension of not diluting it and not just turning it into another story. The practise of spending time, like these hours and hours and hours of doing this, was another signal to me that this is what this is about, right? It's giving one's time and one's attention in an excessive way. Like I don't have to do this, yet to do that is a certain kind of giving as well.

Daniel Cordle 01:00:18

Is there something particular about doing this giving, this paying attention in a 21st century moment when we are in the middle of a climate crisis, when we're thinking about endings in particular ways? And of course, human cultures have thought about endings all through the ages, but there seems something particularly pressing about the current one and the horror of a future where there might be no more witnessing, I suppose, or even.

Astrida Neimanis 01:00:48

Yeah, I think for sure there is a thinker whose name is, Bayo Akomolafe, who has this line that says, «Things are so urgent, we have to slow down» And I think this, this sort of idea of time is also something that we didn't start with, but through the practical experimentation and the sort of pilot work practical,

practice-based work, that's what came out. And Aleksija talking about how things before, trying to squish in the necropsy between others that need the lab and other competing pressures, but then there have this quality of time changes entirely, and it allows for a certain kind of relationship that is not possible in this sort of frenetic moment of things. So, I'm really, you know, of course I agree, yes, this has always been an issue, but right now, particular with digital communications and with so many things on all of our plates, and multitasking, and home-schooling, and working, and this and getting in your 20 minutes of aerobic exercise from your lockdown or whatever it is, right? So, like what kind of gift is it to actually slow down to yourself, but also to the worlds for whom you have to care and in which you are entangled?

Daniel Cordle 01:02:07

Yes, and to see the richness of that entanglement. I've got lots more questions, but some are coming in. So, I'm going to pass them over for other people. There's one from Rupes Kregin who writes as an artist, and he says, «I'm curious how we as an artist, artistic community might care for the stranded.» And then raises the question of perhaps by raising awareness. But I wanted, if you could perhaps talk about, yes, that idea of how an artistic community might care or perhaps about how Patty's responded to your project as an artist.

Astrida Neimanis 01:02:39

Right. I don't want to speak for Patty, but this question that I just posed in the talk that Patty offered to is I suppose, would be my response. Like what if caring for the scientist and the science is what the artists can do to support or what art can do, right? So, in a way this whole project, I would say, is one kind of provision of care or extension of care, this project, this pilot project we're doing, will become something else. Like we're just in the research stage now, but hopefully this will become a larger artwork or a variety of different kinds of works. But I think that question is really about the role of art, right? The role of art and climate catastrophe and the role of art in these times of urgency. And I'm sure many people in the audience don't need me to say this, but it's very clear that while we need science and while we need all kinds of science, Western science, other kinds of knowledge, having the facts has not been enough to motivate us bipedal terrestrial beings to change our behaviours. We need something that makes us feel and feel intensely and feel this need to

change. And that is art, right? That is what art can do. So, I think that is a kind of care, but this one that is part of this kind of onion laird, proxy entanglement between different things that are cared for in different ways, but as kind of part of the whole world.

Daniel Cordle 01:04:22

That's a wonderful answer, yes. I think it also resonates with some of the attacks on the humanities at the moment as well, and the role of the humanities in a kind of healthy culture and what the humanities might bring and not just in a sense kind of secondary, kind of caring in a kind of loosely described way, but in the very kind of detailed and complex ways that you describe.

Astrida Neimanis 01:04:51

Yeah. If I can just quickly just add to that quick in our little threesome, Patty, Aleksija and I, we've talked about sort of sometimes art and like the kind of work that I do, writing or humanities work as being able to sort of look sideways at things, right? Like, so you see the facts and the situation and the, you know, what it is we have to deal with, but through the arts and humanities, we can make those connections that you mentioned already that I was making in my talk. We can look sideways and see how these things are not just atomized situations but connected to this much broader 'cause an effect and trickling, that creates the sort of thing that we're addressing.

Daniel Cordle 01:05:33

And I know you can't, yeah, you can't answer for Aleksija, but have you got a sense that Aleksija's practise or thoughts have changed as a result, because it must be unusual to do that sort of work whilst being observed while maybe narrating what you're doing in a way that you wouldn't otherwise do?

Astrida Neimanis 01:05:50

Yeah, I think she might be listening so apologies if I'm going to misspeak my dear sister. Well, yeah. Like Patty and I and Aleksija have talked about that quite a lot. And one of the things we did at the beginning of the project that frankly COVID allowed us to do in this sort of need to slow down allowed us to do, is we spent a whole weekend on and off Zoom across our various time zones, sort of giving workshops to each other about what it is we do

and sort of where it is we come from in our own practise. And really trying to understand, like, how do I ask questions? How do I do research? What are the frames I use? And over this project, I think all of us have probably been a bit sceptical, or a bit cynical, or a bit concerned of being misrepresented, or being asked to do something, which isn't the way that we feel committed to in our own practise. But I know that, I mean, Aleksija has said that one of the things that this project has given her is like a different understanding of the work that she does as a form of care, right? And if anyone wants to hear more about that, we gave a talk a couple of weeks ago together with the MNAI the Main North Atlantic Institute. And that's on YouTube if anyone wants to Google it and they can hear Aleksija speaking for herself about the sort of (indistinct).

Daniel Cordle 01:07:11

Indeed, I'm sure we really do. There's some other questions that have come in. So, I'll resist the lots I've got written in my notes, but May Live says, «You mentioned that citation human deaths are not equivalent and that you're not aiming to level them. I'd love to hear more on your thinking around facing these beings into relation and whether you had concerns about this, given the past comparisons of marginalised peoples to non-human beings.».

Astrida Neimanis 01:07:36

Yeah, absolutely, right? That is the worry. And it's like every time I think that connection, it is like a red danger sign in my head, right? Because there is such a brutal violence in analogy. This is, you know, a dog is like A. It's completely, you know, as the person who asked the question mentioned it has such a problematic history, but then the question I ask is then where does that leave us when we want to be able to start to understand systems of capitalism, colonialism, white supremacy, hetero patriarchy and misogyny, and species privilege and violence against the environment as connected, right? None of these systems are separate from each other. They are alibis for one another, they feed off each other, they draw power from one another. So, we have to find a way of being able to speak about what connects the violences across these different systems. And I think as a theorist, as sort of as a critical thinker and a writer, I think that there are frameworks that can help us see how things are connected when we talk about things like stranding. So, let's just take the topic of this talk. What does it mean to be stranded? What does it mean to die apart from your kin, apart from your family and not have

the opportunity to be cared for in the way that you should by those who are kin? And we have to find a language to speak about this. And again, maybe that's where art comes in, and maybe that's where more different modes of writing come in, right? So, I don't want to dismiss that question. I think, yes, that is a danger, and I want to keep being challenged on that changer. And if I am doing it in a way that does level, I want to know that and I want to be called out on that, because my objective is to find moments of connection where the movement in the talk is that we can look at the specificity and the singularity of each being, human or non, but then also pull the aperture back out to understand the systems and structures that have created the conditions that have led to that death and that those systems and structures are certainly connected.

Daniel Cordle 01:10:08

I think you talk about the word 'we' as one of the most fraught words in English language in your book, «Bodies of Water,» and it strikes me that that's actually the case on one hand, the sort of we, is about drawing common ground with people. And on the other hand, this is that dangerous then speaking as an eye within that we and sort of speaking for others.

Astrida Neimanis 01:10:26

No. Absolutely. And I'll just quickly plug in there that that's why one of the reasons why I think feminist work is so well-prepared to sort, not all feminist work, some feminist work, is particularly well-prepared to deal with this question because we've spent decades trying to figure out this, we. It doesn't mean we have a right answer, but we understand it's frothiness, its tensions, the violences it can do, but also the need for, or the desire, at least, for some kind of connection and solidarity.

Daniel Cordle 01:10:57

Yeah. So Haurith Knits asks, «Can you elaborate more about paying attention and double death?» So, if you could elaborate on idea of the double death.

Astrida Neimanis 01:11:07

Sure, so double death is a term of by Deborah Bird Rose, Deborah Bird Rose is an anthropologist and environmental humanities scholar. She's sadly no longer with us. She has a couple of articles about double death. One of the

articles I refer to is called «Multi-Species Knots of Ethical Time,» the other one is called, I think, «In the Shadow of All this Death.» In both of those and in other places, Deb describes a double death as both the death of the individual, but also when something dies, when someone dies, also what dies are all of the relations and connections that they are part of, right? And perhaps in a more balanced rhythm of life and death, those things can be sort of like a dropped stitch. It can be picked up and it's the weave continues, but in the face of extinction, then those knots of the life of the animal, but then its relations of which it's part of become snipped. And that's what she calls double death. And I guess what I'm trying to think in this talk a little bit is how perhaps, although I'm not going to argue that that snip is certainly happening, that still in death there is an opportunity to pick up a stitch, right? And that care that we give to the stranded and the dead can still be a tying of an ethical knot.

Daniel Cordle 01:12:35

Thank you very much. Yes, I think that's really interesting. Hearing you speak reminded me of the psychiatrist, Robert Lifton, who talking about another kind of extinction 50 or 60 years ago, sort of talked about the kind of prospect of a future human extinction. Talked about the difficulty of thinking about it, because there's a sort of threat to our symbolic immortality that we're used to be kind of, we know about mortality, but we assume that people carry on or that there is some continuation, and the difficulty of dealing with the snipping of those threads and where we might step in and as you say, pick up the stitches and make those connections again. Related a little bit to that, Sarah has written an asks, «I was struck by your reference to the hand resting on the body of the animal. It invites questions of both tenderness, but also prohibition. What should and shouldn't we touch and what is the relation of touch and care? It also makes me think of Heidegger and his argument that the hand is what makes us human and Derrida's rejoinder regarding the monstrosity of the human hand.» And she throws in there also something about kind of care for your collaborators. So, I guess this is not a question really, is about that sense of touch, and transgression, and all those different loaded meanings of the words touch.

Astrida Neimanis 01:14:03

Absolutely. Again, you know, like sort of on purpose, we did not start with

those theories, right? It was about starting, you know, some of which I'm familiar with in Heidegger, thankfully not. (laughs) Or maybe I read it a long time ago. I don't recall what Heidegger says about touch. But sure, Derrida and others too, right? So again, it was a question of like observing that gesture, talking about it, Aleksija describing. Describing like how Patty's invitation to, you know, before you start each necropsy, could you just take a photo of your hand on the animal? That would be really great. That's what Patty asked Aleksija to do, and she did that, and then we talked about that. And I think particularly in these Zoom times, we are starting to learn about all kinds of forms of intimacy, right? So, in ways that we can have intimacy through these kinds of transmissions as well, but for me as a scholar of embodiment I'm really interested in body to body connections. And so, I think what we were trying to do there too, was like hold onto some dimension of that and see what it could come to mean. Is it a transgression? Probably, in some ways. Is it a connection? Absolutely. For me what was quite interesting was in order to touch the animal, like, as I mentioned in the talk, the animal is literally supporting the hands, right? So, sort of just paying attention to the material, like sort of with an artist's sort of method, paying attention to the materiality of what is there, you see, wait. Like, yes, the scientist is supporting the animal. The animal is supporting the scientists. The animal is supported by the table. It needs to be supported by the table because it's no longer buoyant in the water because it's dead. Like you pay attention to the facticity and then the feeling, right? So, what does that evoke? I'm not really answering the question, Sarah, I'm sorry. But I think all of those theories can be a swim here and we can apply them and pull-out things to amplify dimensions of that. But for us, in this case, in this project, and in these conversations, the touch became a moment of stillness, a moment of reflection, a moment of connection, and a moment of intimacy that was interesting because, again, sorry, Aleksija, if I'm speaking for you, but I don't think Alexia had overtly noticed before. But once she was asked to pay attention to it, it became illuminated as those things. And also looking back on some of the work she'd done before, she had noticed that that was something that she does without really thinking about it. So more and more to say there more to think, but I think I'll stop. I'll stop there. Yeah. Yeah, normally it's a team for sure. I think small and, again, she'd be better prepared to answer this, but I think with COVID the teams are by necessity smaller, or at least there are fewer people in the lab because of limits to how many people can be in the necromancy room. The touching gesture often took place alone in the backroom freezer before then she took the animal out for the necropsy.

And then in the necropsy, she'd usually be assisted by a biologist or by, you know, she was often training people when we were watching the live streams, things like that. And then sometimes the necrop, not a necropsy, but like a sampling of an animal who's perhaps stranded has to happen in the field. A full necropsy wouldn't be possible obviously, but because the animal cannot be somehow brought to a lab, either it's too big or it's too unwieldy, something like that. During the research, there was a whale that had been stranded off the coast of Sweden and one of Aleksija's colleagues went to see about the possibility of bringing it in. But, unfortunately the only thing that could happen was him sampling in the field.

Daniel Cordle 01:18:11

Do you see, see your work or kind of collectively that the work that you're doing as a kind of re-embodiment of whale? It struck me that the whales are our go-to symbolic species, and I found very, very moving to this, the litany of the stuff that we've put into whales, the bodies and that sense of them as individuals I suppose.

Astrida Neimanis 01:18:42

Yeah

Daniel Cordle 01:18:42

'Cause the resorts of other creatures you could choose aren't there.

Astrida Neimanis 01:18:44

Yeah, sure. I mean, interestingly, like we think about whales, most of the, or if not all of the necropsies we wash were porpoises. So, you know a type of citation that is perhaps less glamorous than the old whale. But nonetheless that's kind of why it was quite interesting to think and work with the porpoises. But you're right, of course. The whale has so much symbolic truck. And has been written about so much and is this like symbol in so many ways. So, in ways that like makes me hesitant to sort of, again, showcase the whale, why aren't we talking about, I don't know, something else, but there's also, I think, a value in remembering certain aspects of whale bodiedness the fact that they were evolutionarily terrestrial animals. I think just thinking about whales helps us understand, evolutionary time, if not deep time in a sort of way. Like this question, what comes next? I don't mean it as a hypothetical one. I think

it's a question we're always asking ourselves and we understand whales as relatively close kin to us in sort of morphological ways, imaginatively at least. That can evoke a kind of imaginary that I think is quite powerful and not just as these sort of romanticised creatures of the deep, but thinking really the hard questions drawing on Rebecca Giggs' work, and those litanies of stomach contents of whales that have washed up in the last decade or two, drawing on the work of so many other scholars who are thinking about sound pollution in the water and what that does to whales. Thinking about the potential effects of deep-sea mining and how that is going to affect benthic communities, Sue Reid is writing about that right now. There are so many ways in which thinking with the whale also, or the citation forces us to drop the romantic vision of the ocean and of the sea, and really confront all of our dumped desires that-

Daniel Cordle 01:20:48

Yeah. And I suppose they essentially say there are sorts of bridging species through whom we might think about other non-human animals as well, I guess, you know, non-human others. (indistinct) I was rereading Melville's «Moby Dick» about a year ago. And I've forgotten how full, of course, I mean, it's full of bodies of whales they're whaling but a different kind of cutting up of flesh. But again, a sort of expansive vision, I suppose, where the whales become more than, of course it is, immensely symbolic, but they become more than symbolic. And there's one more question that's coming from Jack and then I guess we ought to sadly to move towards the end of the conversation, just because of pressures of time, but Jack writes, «You speak of necropsy as a practise of care, but how much should we care for and through our own bodies after death? Did the project make you reflect on whether it was more ethical to be buried or cremated and did it prompt any reflections on organ donation, an act of care after death?»

Astrida Neimanis 01:22:03

Oh, that's such a good question, Jack. I mean, I'm embarrassed to say no. I mean, it didn't particularly prompt me to think about what will happen to my own body, but I mean, of course, what this project has done is like reminded us all, like involved in the project, about how poorly Western cultures deal with death, right? Like how poorly equipped we generally are, I'm talking in generalisations, and the need, particularly in this time, to think about death more squarely and in all of the ways, you know, practically ecologically,

scientifically, spiritually, absolutely, right? And stop trying to pretend it's not happening, or doesn't happen, or will happen somewhere over there and away from us. So certainly, I think, you know, I've been drawn to reading more and more literature, both of the scholarly kind and sort of more poetic or creative nonfiction literature, or fiction literature about having to deal with death. And so that's partly where then the connections to other kinds of deaths and strandings, of course, comes in. And I do want to say it was Jamie, our Research Associate, Jamie Wang, who after doing one of the interviews with the scientists, posed the question to Aleksija and Patty and I like I've just been thinking what does it mean to die so far away from your kin in your home? And that, you know, Jamie asking us that question after she spoke to one of the scientists sort of prompted this deeper reflection on stranding more broadly.

Daniel Cordle 01:23:56

Yeah, and we live in a time of strandings of various kinds sort of witnessing things that are at a distance and how that can kind of very acutely kind of give us a sense of touch and of what we can no longer touch again. Are you able to tell us where the project's going and are you all going to speak together at some point, or write something together, or produce an art show together, or a mixture of things?

Astrida Neimanis 01:24:23

Hopefully the last. The idea of the pilot project was to work towards... Well, a commission, but a competition, right? So, we don't know whether or not that will go ahead yet, but we hope to find a number of venues and avenues for continuing this work. And because we are all from different disciplines, we're hoping that we can speak to all of those places, both writing things for a more general public or for a scientific public about the collaboration, writing to a more scholarly humanities, public, and then also producing artwork. So, stay tuned. We don't yet have concrete answers to any of those things. There's nothing like imminently coming up, but I'll let the world know one way or the other, when and if they do.

Daniel Cordle 01:25:10

That sounds tremendously exciting and I'm sure we'll be enriched by the outcomes of this project and think more broadly about the idea of care. So, thank you so much for your time and for your thoughtful comments to all the

questions that came in. So, I'm sorry that we have to turn the conversation here because of time pressures, but tonight's events continue. Our fantastic line-up of free public events taking place every evening this week, featuring an illustrious line-up of speakers, including Marion Coutts, Raymond Antrobus, Bhanu Kapil, Nat Raha, and Maggie Nelson. Please see our website at www.criticalpoetics.co.uk/summer for full details. We'd like to thank again our partners, Nottingham Contemporary, Curated and Curated at NTU, and Metronome. Technical support for this event has been kindly provided by Nottingham Contemporary. The books related to the series are available via Five Leaves Bookshop, Nottingham's leading independent bookseller. To find out more, please see the details in the event description on YouTube. UK residents are entitled to a 15% discount on selected titles. It only remains for me to thank you all for coming and for your questions. And of course, to thank Astrida for such a rich and stimulating talk. Thank you very much and good night.

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