

Introduction

Enchanted Ecologies and Ethics of Care

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Abstract This special issue takes its point of departure in political philosopher Jane Bennett's concept of enchantment and her discussion of how moods of enchantment may inform an ethics of care. The contributions aim to rethink the concept of enchantment and unfold what an ethic of care may look like in times of ecological crises. The introduction outlines Bennett's conceptual groundwork and its reception and discusses its continued analytical purchase for understanding the unsettling moods and contradictory affects produced by colonialism and ecological change. Building on recent anthropological contributions to the ethics of care, the authors propose to broaden the way in which we think about ethical doings so they also come to involve unsettling affects, various subjectivities, and more dynamic ecological relations.

Keywords enchantment, attachment, ethics of care, ecologies, nonhuman relations

wo decades ago Jane Bennett pointed to how "the mood of enchantment may be valuable to ethical life." In *The Enchantment of Modern Life* Bennett reflected on the ethical relevance of human moods and sensibilities, merging the classical conception of enchantment as being "struck and shaken by the extraordinary" with more everyday experiences of "moments of joy" in encounters with "human and nonhuman, natural and artifactual" bodies. Reworking Max Weber's vision of the modern world as a disenchanted "iron cage" from a more positive, but not naive, perspective, Bennett has been part of a larger postmillennial, scholarly debate about enchantment and re-enchantment spanning across art, religion, and technology studies, and concerns for institutions, education, infrastructures, and nature management.

- 1. Bennett, Enchantment, 3 (emphasis added).
- 2. Bennett, Enchantment, 4, 114.
- 3. Bennett, Vibrant Matter; Bennett, Influx and Efflux; Jenkins, "Disenchantment"; Holloway, "Enchanted Spaces"; Elkins and Morgan, Re-enchantment; Landy and Saler, "Introduction"; Suddaby, Ganzin, and Minkus, "Craft"; Dyer, "Inspiration"; Monbiot, Feral; Jørgensen, Recovering Lost Species.

The contributors in this special issue are anthropologists with a shared interest in ecology, a concept that Bennett later characterized as "the study or story (logos) of the place where we live (oikos) or better, the place that we live."4 By thinking of ecology in the plural and by broadening the partaking "we" to also include nonhuman beings, this issue explores the operative may of Bennett's assertion: if and how enchantment of the world translates into ecological responsibilities and modes of care. This collection of articles demonstrates the multiple ways that enchantment and ethics intersect by telling stories from a salmon farm and the Nordic Arctic, the Danish beaches, the US-Mexico border zone, and farmlands and forests in Patagonia and Amazonia as well as the Canadian boreal forest. They are emplaced stories about modes of thinking, healing, and inhabiting contested landscapes, about growing and harvesting food as well as nature conservation and the implicated modes of colonization and control. Enchantment ranges from Bennett's joyous relations over contradictory affective attachments to the ethical guidance provided by the psychedelic and the collection of articles demonstrates how enchantment also involves unsettling relations. Thinking with different places and their human and nonhuman inhabitants, this special issue aims to ecologize the way we think about ethical doing. To ecologize our ethics implies the inclusion of nonhuman beings in the "we" considered to be acting ethically as well as an attention to different affective styles that may contest any straightforward alignment of enchantment and care.5

Modernity and Its Enchantments

Anthropology shares with the sociology of religion its beginnings in an acute awareness of the human condition in an increasingly disenchanted, modernized world. More than a century ago, Weber cast the modern condition as based on bureaucratic rationality, secularization, and victorious capitalism.⁶ And in this light, anthropologists turned to the supposedly irrational and enchanted non-modern societies to understand practices of enchantment.⁷ Subsequent generations of scholars of religion recontextualized the theory of secularization in light of processes of globalization, the spread of technology, and the acceleration of social life writ large.⁸ A decade before the publication of Bennett's *The Enchantment of Modern Life* the orientation shifted, and anthropologists became increasingly engaged in studies at home, which led to, among other things, a questioning about whether the Western world had ever been modern.⁹ Concurrently, studies

- 4. Bennett, "Force of Things," 365.
- 5. Latour, "To Modernize or to Ecologize?" See also Kohn, this issue: "Grasping the magnitude and urgency of this task poses a radical challenge, demanding that we develop the conceptual equipment—the ideas and methods—to 'ecologize' our ethics."
 - 6. Weber, Protestant Ethic, 180, 181.
 - 7. Kuper, Invention of Primitive Society.
- 8. Casanova, Public Religion in the Modern World; Bauman, Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity; Rosa, Resonance.
 - 9. Latour, We Have Never Been Modern.

across the social sciences and humanities became concerned with overcoming modern binaries, not only of the traditional and the modern but also of the religious and the secular, the natural and the cultural. 10

In *The Enchantment of Modern Life* Bennett disentangled the concept of enchantment from its romanticist inheritances by avoiding nature as the most obvious place to start looking for enchantment. In doing so she relocated the classical, nature-romantic understanding of enchantment as being "spellbound" and "struck and shaken by the extraordinary" in the great outdoors to more mundane experiences of "the marvelous erupting amid the everyday." She explored "deep" and "joyful attachment" in commercial, literary, electronic, and bureaucratic settings. ¹¹ Broadening the scope of enchantment, Bennett described human experiences of fullness, plenitude, and liveliness associated with wonder and "energetic love of the world" while keeping in mind the uncanny and disruptive qualities involved in any "intense engagement with the world." ¹²

When approaching the intersection between the power to enchant and ethical life, Bennett argued, much in line with later anthropological debates on ordinary ethics, an analysis of ethics inevitably requires an awareness of both abstract moral codes and the cultivated, embodied sensibilities of everyday life.¹³ She mobilized aesthetic, political, and affective potentials of forms of enchantment that "can aid in the project of cultivating a stance of presumptive generosity (i.e., of rendering oneself more open to the surprise of other selves and bodies and more willing and able to enter into productive assemblages with them)."¹⁴ Importantly for the contributors to this special issue, Bennett also carved out an analytics that leaves ample room for ethnographically informed discussions of concrete, lived ecologies with multiple expressions of ethical practices.

In this issue we bring the discussion about enchantment and ethics of care into conversation with nature—in its many different versions of human and nonhuman collectives—through the concept of ecologies. We do so mindful of other conversations in the wake of *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, and responses to *Vibrant Matter*, in which Bennett moved from a focus on the human experience of enchantment and its ethical effects to the "thing-power" and the "affective catalyst" that exists in nonhuman bodies. The decentering of human agency is unavoidable in seeking to ecologize ethical doing and rethinking enchantment, a notion to which scholars continue to return with critical enthusiasm. Where some have questioned what Weber meant by the idea of a secular self and society and by disenchantment in the first place, others, in direct conversation with Bennett, have discussed the limits and potential in the

- 10. Ingold, Perception of the Environment; Descola, "Constructing Natures"; Hastrup, "Nature."
- 11. Bennett, Enchantment, 4–5, 8.
- 12. Bennett, Enchantment, 10, 111.
- 13. Bennett, Enchantment, 29; Lambek, Introduction; Faubion, Anthropology of Ethics.
- 14. Bennett, Enchantment, 131.
- 15. Bennett, Vibrant Matter, preface.
- 16. Woodyer and Geoghegan, "(Re)enchanting Geographies."

way Bennett challenges the "ontological privileging of 'the human." Bennett's idea of enchantment has also been critiqued for expanding imperiously and for a tendency "to displace political considerations by invoking new ethical responsibilities and sensibilities." While opening new analytical avenues into unruly, mundane, and fragile materialities such as roads, recent concerns have pointed to an exclusion of many types of inert materials or non-appealing creatures owing to the focus on positive vitalities. Similar to Bennett's own errand in Vibrant Matter, the attention to "specific momentary immobilizing encounters" in The Enchantment of Modern Life has been described as "too dramatic to explore the complexity between people and things."

Reading the book in hindsight, we see value in how Bennett's notions of thing-power and vibrant matter break with ideas of human stewardship and with understandings of the environment as an exterior relation. In a similar vein notions of entanglement, ontogenesis, and inter-species sociality as well as attention to collectivities and even domestication have paved the way for a more decentered perception of human agency and for greater attention to how ethical commitments arise from—and as an effect of—dynamic ecological relations.²¹

Even though lack of ability to address global warming, abrupt decline in biodiversity, soil depletion, and new zoonotic diseases might be taken as signs that ecological care and commitment are uncommon orientations toward nature, the authors in this issue have taken the opportunity to rethink forms of enchantment exactly on these premises. The destructive tendencies of things, social hierarchies, and human forgetfulness are not written out of the stories, whether the articles take us to the colonial frontiers or lacunas of semi-domesticated land. Despite the pertinent, unsettling ethos our explorations of experiences of living on a damaged planet also show that new forms of enchantment, novel attachments, and new possibilities of theorizing care are being fostered.

Ethics of Care-In This Issue, and Beyond

The nature of human connectedness to other beings has been of pronounced analytical interest in multispecies anthropology, in studies of cosmology, in the ontological turn in anthropology, and in science and technology studies (STS).²² We suggest that this interest can illuminate how care may link to forms of enchantment across various worlds.

- 17. Taylor, *Secular Age*; Levine, Introduction; Robbins, "Enchantment? No, Thank You"; Lyons, "Disenchantment/Re-enchanment"; Khan, "Agency, Nature and Emergent Properties," 42.
- 18. Robbins, "Enchantment? No, Thank You"; Lemke, "Alternative Model of Politics?," 33; see also Lien (this issue).
- 19. Harvey and Knox, "Enchantments of Infrastructure"; Ginn, "Light or Dark Political Ecologies"; Ginn, "Sticky Lives."
 - 20. Ramsay, "Refracted Enchantment," 198.
- 21. Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*; Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*; Ingold, "Toward an Ecology of Materials"; Krøijer, "The Non-relational Forest"; Lien, *Becoming Salmon*; Tsing, "More-than-Human Sociality"; Tsing et al., *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*.
- 22. Candea, "I Fell in Love"; Fausto, "Feasting on People"; Haraway, *When Species Meet*; Kirksey and Helmreich, "Multispecies Ethnography"; Krøijer, "Slow Rupture"; Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*.

In Matters of Care, STS scholar María Puig de la Bellacasa calls for a "speculative exploration of the significance of care for thinking and living in more-than-human worlds." She seeks to rethink the notion of care by embedding it within the mundane doings of maintenance and repair that sustain everyday life. As in Bennett's work, Puig de la Bellacasa's notion of ethical obligation shifts meaning from a commitment arising out of a moral code to a commitment embedded in aesthetic-affective styles and "ethical doings." 24

Puig de la Bellacasa takes her inspiration, as we do, from the much-quoted definition of care given by Joan Tronto: care, according to her, comprises "everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible."25 Caring in this sense is, then, a mode of being that assumes responsibility in order to engage in the concrete work of maintenance. In Puig de la Bellacasa's rendering this is much more than taking a moral stance—it involves "affective, ethical and hands-on agencies" with practical consequences, sometimes disturbing commonsense ideas about what it means to live well.26 It entails a disposition to "care for" rather than merely to "care about."²⁷ The distinction is important for our exploration of the relationship between ethics of care and enchantment because it nuances the spectrum between detached attention, acts of being attentive to others, and caring for others. Puig de la Bellacasa takes this attention beyond modern humanist boundaries by seeking to analytically decenter the human being and speculate about an ethic emerging from mutual care. Inspired by Puig de la Bellacasa's call for discerning ways to continue and repair "our world," Eduardo Kohn, in this issue suggests an understanding of this world as a living forest full of ethical concerns. Anand Pandian's contribution shows how wonder remains in the lifeways of the monarch butterfly in its crossing of the border separating the United States and Mexico despite the politics of migration.

In 1996 Gisli Pálsson outlined three metaphors for the relationships of human beings to nature: occidentalism (a colonial attitude of domination), paternalism (a protective and controlling care), and communalism, which he described as a form of "caring for" based on a mutuality that rejects any neat separation between subject and object, nature and culture.²⁸ Care can involve features across this spectrum of domination and protection, continuity and discontinuity. In this volume the articles by Marianne E. Lien and Piergiorgio Di Giminiani describe concrete expressions of interspecies mutuality and more protective and controlling forms of care in modes of domestication, conservation projects, and Indigenous peoples' modes of inhabiting their landscape. Attention and care can be both suffocating and paternalistic, intimate, and communal, but as Cecilie

- 23. Puig de la Bellacasa, Matters of Care, 1.
- 24. Puig de la Bellacasa, Matters of Care, 22.
- 25. Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 103.
- 26. Puig de la Bellacasa, Matters of Care, 4.
- 27. Tronto, "Ethic of Care," 252.
- 28. Pálsson, "Human-Environmental Relations," 74.

Rubow argues in her article, drawing on James Faubion's notion of the anethical, some ecologies may also, momentarily, prompt an absence of social and ethical obligations.²⁹

Enchantment should in other words not be equated with care, just as Michelle Murphy cautions against equating care with any positive feelings, even love. She calls for a politics of unsettling care that strives to stir up and put into motion hegemonic arrangements, unsettling what it means, for example, to live well.³⁰ Deborah Bird Rose and Thom van Dooren have also probed into the unsettling sides of enchantments by examining the blind spots of love by looking at human relations to the unloved, disregarded, unseen, and neglected others—all those who do not capture the imagination or who are targeted for extermination.³¹ In this volume this attention is documented by Marianne E. Lien, who characterizes the treacherous nature of enchantment in salmon farming and points to the importance of legal and regulatory measures for ensuring proper attention and care.

Beings that coevolve can appear to each other in many ways: as parasites, as prey, and as resources. In such contexts an ecological ethics in Mick Smith's terms rests on a "fellow feeling" within a community of beings.32 This involves practicing the arts of inclusion but does not decry death per se.33 Rather, it "banishes the mode of human thought that would hold that there is a category of others whose deaths can be ethically disregarded."34 Moreover, the trouble with proper care and attentiveness for others also comes to the fore in societies with other theories of the person or those that may think with ecologies of multiple selves. In the work by Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, for example, prey is described as able to become angry, turn their back on the hunter, and refuse to give itself up if it is treated badly. In this context it is considered important to hunt and kill an animal "with care." This brings us back to the question of mutuality, which, unlike abstract feelings of love and fellowship, as Janelle Marie Baker shows us in her contribution, involves tending to protocols of respect and reciprocity. In the boreal forest in Canada, correctly performed ethical doings can thus illuminate the magic of plants. This renders enchantment one form ethical commitment can take when recognizing nature's own agency.

Back to Ecologies

This brings our exploration of enchantment and care back to the concept of ecologies. Where the concept of enchantment has previously been anchored in the nature

- 29. Faubion, Anthropology of Ethics.
- 30. Murphy, "Unsettling Care."
- 31. Bird Rose and van Dooren, Introduction.
- 32. Smith, "Dis(appearance)," 27-28.
- 33. Tsing, "Arts of Inclusion," 5.
- 34. Tsing, "Arts of Inclusion," 4.
- 35. Kopenawa and Albert, Falling Sky, 140-41.

romanticist tradition and has cast nature either as a site of the sublime or as tied to ideas of the settler-colonial frontier,³⁶ it gains new relevance by being brought into conversation with the concept of ecologies. Without disentangling human and nonhuman beings or reifying a distinction between nature and culture, ecologies heighten the attention to how enchantment may emerge through coexistence and mutual modes of care, in interspecies commitment or by way of an ethical guidance provided by forests or monarch butterflies. At the same time, the articles in this issue inquire about the limits of enchantment and when human and nonhuman relations become challenged: When do we stop taking care? And when are certain wonders unwanted, dangerous, or problematic?

The question about dynamic ecologies, and how to give another being "a good death," is at stake in John Law's writing on care in the context of the outbreak of footand-mouth disease in England.37 From within the farming industry, the article reinforces what Annemarie Mol has suggested in a health-care context, namely, that the logic of care is a question of tinkering with materialities, relations, and other beings.38 Law shows how caring in agro-industry becomes contingent and contextual, writing: "Care, here, is about responding, but not responding too much. It is about being there, about sensitivity, and yet it is also about distance. It is about self-protection. Learning how to balance empathy and distance is part of a professional training."39 The killing of the livestock, which is conducted en masse, becomes dramatic and traumatic owing to the unusual circumstances, full of messy materiality and different, coexisting objects of care: the animal, the farmer, the veterinarian, and the people contracted to slaughter the animals. This goes together with a care for the bigger picture: the concern for a neighboring farmer's life work, the economic interests of the meat industry, and the British export balance. All are connected and bundled together in dynamic ecologies, which also involve the stories about how to care.

In sum, in this special issue we consider enchantment and care to involve a choreography of multiple, overlapping practices, which involve difficult choices, various subjectivities, regulations, instruments, materials and technologies, sensibilities, and stories. In such ecologies, ethics is a doing, it is trouble, and never a human-only matter.
Stories of ecologies evoke an openness to new and other ways of being a "we" and to
how ethical commitment exists in dynamic and changing relationships. The aim of
thinking with ecologies is not to make the multiple natures disappear or to collapse
the distinction between nature and culture in all instances, but to render visible the
emergence and enactments of ecologies as open-ended dynamic relations or temporary
wholes. Such ecologies might be described as magical, a refuge, a resource sink, or selves

^{36.} Cronon, "Trouble with Wilderness."

^{37.} Law, "Care and Killing," 5.

^{38.} Mol, Logic of Care.

^{39.} Law, "Care and Killing," 64.

holding rights, but they never attain the stability and wholeness formerly associated with ecological systems. Instead, as the articles in this collection illustrate, ecologies take form through acts of tinkering, controversies, experiments, lawsuits, cultivation of respect and responsiveness, through patronage or by observing protocols of mutuality.

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