

Wednesday Seminars

LECTURE SERIES IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

03.12.2025 | 5 p.m. | @ Übungsraum IKSA | NIG, 4th floor

Anna Harris (Maastricht University)
A sensory study of hospital matter



Anna Harris is a writer, anthropologist, doctor and maker. She holds a Chair as Professor of Anthropology and Medicine at Maastricht University, at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS). Her ethnographic fieldwork focuses on medical practices and other crafts. Her research and teaching concerns themes such as sensorality, materiality, learning, embodiment and medical technoscience. She recently finished an ERC Starting Grant funded project called Making Clinical Sense which looked at the role of technologies in medical education. She currently leads an ERC Consolidator Grant funded project on creativity in hospitals and clinical waste called The Upcycled Clinic.

In this talk I will discuss a new sensory ethnographic project in the context of the hospital. In this talk I will focus on the sensory potential of materials in hospitals. Hospitals are currently seen as notes of clinical waste, using excessive single-use plastics and disposables, generating mountains of rubbish. Inside hospitals however, people work with materials in many different ways. They might find new uses of objects for example rather than throw them away. They might tinker and repair objects to keep them from discard. We don't know much about these repurposing practices because they are often "off-protocol". In this talk I will introduce our ethnographic approach to studying upcycled materials in hospitals in different parts of the world and share preliminary observations. Our team consists of anthropologists, geographers, design researchers and STS scholars. I will share some of our creative methods for doing research together, drawing on previous team ethnography projects, including experimenting with open datasets of material improvisations. I will also connect the talk to the sensory ethnography course that will also run the same week for the PhD students.



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