

*If you think you're too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito.*

- The Dalai Lama

# Corporeal encounters in the academia

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**THE PROCESS OF DOING ACADEMIC** research involves a range of encounters, both with human and non-human beings and things. As discussed in the introduction, these encounters are inevitably corporeal, and thereby, they bring about various ethical moments and struggles to be lived with; corporeality and proximity are the very condition that shapes the way we orient and respond to others. In what follows, we ponder what this condition means in the everyday academic praxis. With the help of short stories and written sketches produced by the academics working at the University of Lapland, we exemplify how corporeal encounters – ‘sticky’ encounters in our case – play a role in different phases of doing research: from the idea generation to the practice of doing fieldwork and writing. In doing so, these stories also illustrate how corporeal ethics is closely linked to epistemological issues – shaping what is and can be known. When we acknowledge the fact that ethics is grounded in our embodied locations and the other bodies surrounding us – instead of being a mere calculation of our minds – we should perhaps start thinking of epistemology in the same way. Likewise, knowing is embodied, situated and often proximate, if not even intimate.

These written sketches are the outcome of a creative writing workshop tutored by professor David Carlin at the Ranua Zoo as part of the faculty research seminar. They are followed by concluding thoughts from Anu Valtonen, as she reflects on beginning a new research project.

## ON THE BEAUTY AND HORROR OF SLEEPLESSNESS

Pälvi Rantala

A woman sits on a sofa. Partly lying, partly sitting. She is watching the city lights.

It’s always a woman.

It’s always a sofa, or bed, or kitchen table and chair.

It’s always the city lights, the sun rising, the tired eyes, the tiredness behind the eyes, in your heart.

It's the heart, the tired heart you're thinking about. The book you're reading. It's the book the woman on the sofa is trying to read.

It's the tired concentration, knowing, noticing the next day's duties, feeling the tiredness behind the eyes. Tiredness is dark blue, it's black. It's in contrast to the light of the sun. The light hurts.

Desperate, she knows a new day has started, although the day before it never ended. Where is the line between the days if you don't sleep? How can you measure time, days, nights, evenings? What is a morning?

A woman is lying in bed. Her pyjamas are sweaty. They smell bad. The smell of sleeplessness, you cannot describe it. It's the smell of caravan parks, summer mornings, wooden cottages, motorhomes.

The smell reminds you of the feeling of losing something. Losing another day. Losing life. The sleeplessness lives inside you, it's like cancer. It's eating you, it's using your body for its own purposes.

It's faceless.

Sometimes you can fight it. Sometimes you can use it for your own purposes. Reading, writing. Cleaning. Your own time, sitting in the kitchen, baking, sitting on the sofa, watching the city, the village where everyone else is asleep.

Then you are open. Open to the world. Open to the pain in your body. There is no border between the world and yourself.

When you are totally open, the sleeplessness – this cancer-like faceless thing – is free to come, free to go.

It's horrible.

It's painful.

It's beautiful.

It's yours, it's all yours.

**Pälvi Rantala** works as a senior lecturer of qualitative research methods at the University of Lapland, Rovaniemi. Her current research interests are in the field of socio-cultural sleep studies, especially sleeplessness, and in creative writing.

## WHAT IS DOCUMENTARY IN NATURE REPRESENTATIONS...?

Kristiina Koskinen

My image of nature documentaries is clear: the camera sliding slowly upwards along the majestic trees, classical music and a low male voice explaining how nature is.

When I was younger, I thought nature documentaries were boring. I used to think they would be very useful to watch, but I simply never watched them – despite the fact that I have a

Master's degree in Forest Sciences. After the birth of my children, the world filled with worries and I find them comforting. When there is too much uncertainty during the week, I watch *Avara luonto*<sup>5</sup> with my sons on Saturday evening.

At the same time, it worries me that my older son is fascinated by them. Among my close friends and colleagues, many of the men find nature documentaries profoundly interesting – but none of the women do. In nature documentaries, the female role to identify with tends to be Mother Nature – and most of the time, I don't feel like Mother Nature. So, with whom am I supposed to identify?

Our ideas of nature go far beyond biological facts, and the way it affects us is strong, but we're very blind to the sources and paths of influence. The social constructedness of the concept of nature struck me years ago already when I was working in an environmental NGO, participating in environmental debates and simultaneously doing my media studies.

Similarly, the ability of nature to provoke emotions struck me during those times. Once I took part in a bird conservation conference with almost 500 participants. During the event, we heard presentations from environmentalists and built networks for protection campaigns. The great majority of the participants were men (again).

When the conference started, two Polish bird conservation activists gave a PowerPoint presentation with close-ups of different species of birds, playing Josh Groban's *You Raise Me Up* in the background. Many of the pictures were not very good, and the music was extremely melodramatic, but what we experienced was a surprise: hundreds of people not knowing each other were wiping away tears from their eyes. Lesson: when it comes to nature, you need very little cinematics to affect people.

**Kristiina Koskinen** is working with her PhD on nature documentaries at the University of Lapland, Faculty of Art and Design. Her background is in forest ecology and audiovisual media studies.

## ESSAY Θ FROM EMBODIMENT

### Sandra Wallenius-Korkalo

A scene: me writing, sitting in an uncomfortable chair. They are all uncomfortable for me, I have yet to find a chair that would fit me, support my frame, let my feet rest on the ground without leaving an empty space behind my back, pressure behind my knees or thighs – ok, rambling – it's me writing, cold hands, stiff shoulders, tired feet, but writing. I am winning it.

Another scene: me in Suviseurat. I have borrowed my sister's baby, her pram is big and heavy. My mother is wearing deep red nail polish and black earrings (made from recycled rubber – bicycle tires, I suppose). I tell her to take the earrings off. Or no, actually I ask her if she really wants to wear them – which is the same as telling her to take them off. I am walking alone (!) with the baby (in the pram), and with so many people around me. There is no way I belong. I am an outsider, a tourist, a pretender! But I *could* belong. I can hear the sermons from the loudspeakers. Everything is at once calm and chaotic, noisy and serene. People. Little

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<sup>5</sup> *Avara luonto* is a Finnish nature documentary series, which has aired on Yle TV1 since 1984 ([https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avara\\_luonto](https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avara_luonto)).

children, older children, siblings, cousins, parents, and grandparents are all living their Suvi-seurat. Like an ecosystem of its own. I am amazed that I rarely bump into anybody – with my borrowed too big a pram, as I drag it around without any experience. They do not say “sorry”, “excuse me”. They just give way, not making a scene of it. I am overwhelmed by this world that I am supposed to be studying and of which I feel I know nothing. Still, I know something with my body that I did not know before. How one *moves* when there is structure and flow, a common understanding, and so, so many of “us”.

A theatre stage, a seated audience. Inside and outside. Duality. Am I thinking this wrong? How can I be in when I am not? In what ways am I already mixed up with my research? Is it really about borders or boundaries – or even about their crossings – or could it be something else? What is shared and how to translate it? To whom and what? Oh no. More questions again.

**Sandra Wallenius-Korkalo** is a junior researcher at the University of Lapland, Faculty of Social Sciences. She has worked in the intersections of cultural and political studies. In her upcoming PhD thesis, she studies body politics in the representations of Laestadianism, a Lutheran revivalist movement, known for its conservative values and large families. Related to her study, she reflects a visit to Suvi-seurat, an annual Laestadian summer service and the largest spiritual event in the Nordic countries.

## ENCOUNTERS WITH MOSQUITOES

Anu Valtonen

I am sitting on the terrace of my summer cottage after sauna. My relaxed and warm body is steaming slightly. I feel happy, sitting in the silence and looking at the utmost beautiful sunset. Then they arrive. I first hear the sound – *buzzzz* – and soon I feel how one mosquito searches for the blood vessel in my left arm and starts to suck blood, then another, and another. I feel them on my back, neck, hair, toes, eyes, ears, everywhere. I try to wrap the towel more tightly around my body, keep waving my arms, slapping them, even though I know that it is just useless. They will win in any case. Killing them does not help. All that I get is a bloody skin that was so clean a minute ago. It is my own blood, I pause to think, and then enter the cottage. I don't want to use the repellents. I have a great variety of them, but they are mostly for guests. To me, the guests' complaints about the mosquitoes are more annoying than the mosquitoes themselves. Oh, mosquitoes. Better just get used to living with them, even though you do not like nor care for them.

This embodied – and life-long – experience of mosquitoes oriented me to reading human-animal literature which proliferated everywhere, including organisation and tourism studies. The literature concerned with horses, elephants, reindeers, whales, monkeys, dogs, cats, birds, lions, tigers, fishes, moose, bears, cows, pigs and many others that could be thought of either as cute, rare, charismatic or otherwise useful for humans. No social-scientific study on mosquitoes. Well, there were a few studies that explored the disease-carrying mosquitoes, but no studies on the non-dangerous ones that we have in Finland. This aroused my curiosity. If mosquitoes kill people, they are a matter of concern for social scientists, but if people kill mosquitoes, no one cares. Why, then, is killing other animals such a big debate within the

human-animal studies? For instance, why are there so many ethical accounts of the practice of hunting or of catch and release fishing? Why is it that even though I live in Lapland in the area where a barrage of mosquitoes surrounds me during the summer season, and where I hear endless talks and jokes about mosquitoes throughout the year, I do not come across a single study on mosquitoes? Yet, mosquitoes arguably have a considerable impact on the flow of tourists and money and the everyday social life of people living in Lapland.

To me, the academic practice of silencing mosquitoes is an ethical act in itself. Why some, and only some, animals are included in studies involving human-animal relations and ethical issues? Which animals are considered worthy of being studied? It seems that the academic narratives of animals replicate the popular cultural storytelling: those furry, cute, large or tiny animals with big eyes that we encounter in Disney stories are the ones we meet in academic studies as well. The animals inscribed with mythical powers by cultural tales, such as bears and wolves, are a subject of academic concern as well. Charismatic animals, not the ones we commonly hate, are accorded a role in the academic texts.

This struggle inspired me to develop a novel research problem. Focusing on mosquitoes would help me enrich the debate on animal ethics. Taking the viewpoint of animals that are Othered and constantly skated over in the academic world despite their ubiquitous presence in everyday life, provides an epistemically fruitful stance for questioning the very scope of ethics. What is excluded, why, and with what consequences? Furthermore, mosquitoes do help me to decenter the human. Mosquitoes (female ones) live on sucking the blood of any mammal body. It could be my body, that of a dog or that of a cow. To mosquitoes, we are all just hosts with a body and the blood. Brains play no role. In the end, the sticky encounter was a happy encounter. Thanks for the mosquitoes.

**Anu Valtonen** is a professor of cultural economy at the University of Lapland, Rovaniemi. She is currently interested in the debate on the Anthropocene. She scrutinises the problematic relations between culture, nature and economy from the feminist new materialist and post-humanist perspectives. The on-going study on mosquitoes is part of this wider project.

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