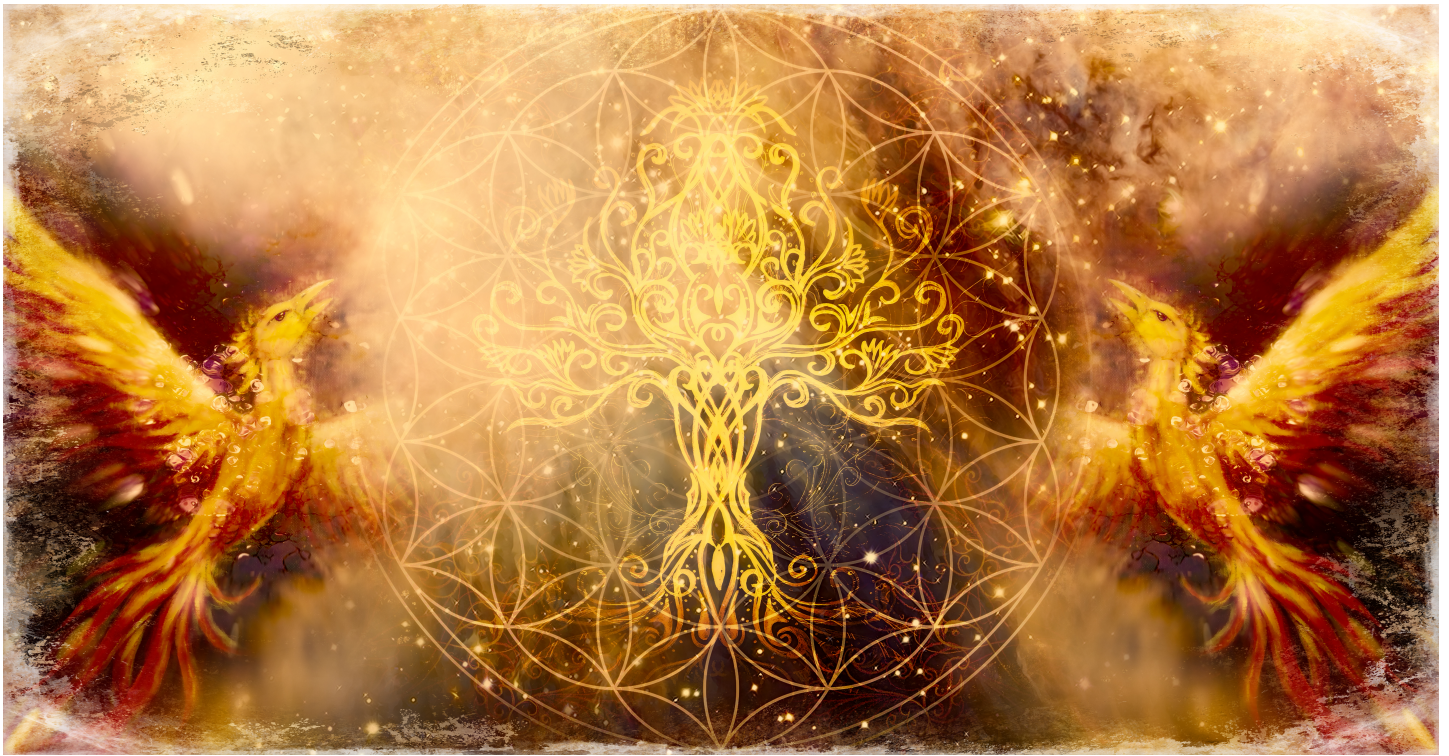




ASSOCIATION FOR THE
ANTHROPOLOGY OF
CONSCIOUSNESS



Death and Transformation

Association for the Anthropology of Consciousness

A Division of the American Anthropological Association

34th Annual Conference

Chrysalis Inn & Spa

Bellingham, WA

Thursday, April 27th

Thursday Morning

- 9:30 – 10:30 Coffee and Refreshments: Registration Opens
- 10:30 – 11:00 Opening Ceremony and President's Welcome
- 11:00 – 12:45 **Panel: Medical Precarity and Social Death**
Lance Tulloch: Necropower and Biopower in Human Trafficking and Modern-Day Slavery
Hannah Wiech: Reflections on Death and Dying in the Medical Industrial Complex
Kathleen Young: Staring into the abyss and bringing the dead and damaged to life in the classroom; twenty-five years of student reflection on witness narrative.
LC "Spike" Osadchuk: Grief, Loss, and Coping with Isolation: Perspectives of Disabled People During COVID-19
- 12:45 – 2:00 *Lunch Break (on your own)*

Thursday Afternoon

- 2:00 – 3:45 **Panel: Legacies of the Living and the Dying**
Marlaine Figueroa Gray: How attending to legacy can transform care for people facing serious illness
Sean Hinton: Death of the Spirit; Androids, Zombies, Culture and AI
Laurel Washburn: Gone Astral (virtual talk)
- 3:45 – 4:00 Break
- 4:30 – 5:30 **Keynote Panel: Transformative Hospice Care: Care in the last phase of life during the pandemic and beyond.**
Whatcom Hospice Foundation
Shawn Fincher: sfincher2@peacehealth.org
Gurpreet Dhillon: gdhillon@peacehealth.org
Jodi Newcomer
Shelley Rice: srice31@peacehealth.org

Friday, April 28th



Friday Morning

9:30 – 10:00 Coffee and Refreshments, Registration

10:00 – 11:30 **Panel: Landscapes of Sacred Ecologies**

Delaney Mitchell: Living and Dying in Glaciated Landscapes (Virtual Talk)

Devyn Nixon: Defending the Mystery

Paula Saravia: “The Huilliche is water:” Engaging environmental precarity and death in Chiloé

Jennifer Syvertsen: Death and emotion amidst an overdose crisis

11:30 – 1:00 *Lunch Break (on your own)*

Friday Afternoon

1:00 – 4:30 **Workshop: Transforming through Soul Collage**

Colleen Haggerty: An experiential process of embodying transformation, get to know one of your Inner Transformers (limit 20 people, please sign up in advance)

7:45 pm **Fairhaven Lore and Gore Tour**

Meet at the Fairhaven Village Green behind Village Books (1207 10th St, Bellingham, WA 98225.)

Saturday, April 29th



Saturday Morning

9:30 – 10:00 Coffee and Refreshments; Registration

10:00 – 11:30 **Panel: Transformative Esoterica**

Mark Shekoyan: Inner Alchemy, Immortality, and Apotheosis: Esoteric Perspectives on Overcoming Death

Scott Teitsworth: Krishna in the Sky with Diamonds

Christine VanPool: A Comparison of Two Methods for Interactions Among the Living and the Dead

11:30 – 1:00 *Lunch Break (on your own)*

Saturday Afternoon

1:00 – 2:20 **Roundtable: From Social Death to Social Transformation**

Discussants: Roxana Pardo Garcia, Melina Juarez Perez, and Nicole Torres

2:20 – 2:30 Break

2:30 – 5:00 **Events: Arts in the Afternoon**

Tiffany-Ashton Gatsby: Exploring the Intersection of Art and Research: An Interactive Embodied Art Workshop on Hospitalization, Near-Death, and Grief, 2:30 – 4:00 pm

Richard Choquette: When Death Sold Records: Simon and Garfunkel's Sounds of Silence 4:00 – 5:00 pm

5:30 – 7:30 **Closing Reception on the Terrace** (light beverages and hors d'oeuvres)

2023 Theme: Death and Transformation

The Program Committee for *the Association for the Anthropology of Consciousness* invited members and their collaborators to investigate how we engage with communities concerning death, dying, and transformation. We chose this theme to reflect upon the individual and collective experiences with death (in all its forms) and the experience of transformation. The theme of *Death and Transformation* points to the context and social climate in which we currently live: many of us – if not all of us – are seeing many of our lifeways and habits dissolve and metamorphosing into forms that are unexpected, unanticipated, and difficult to ascertain. As anthropologists and consciousness researchers, we understand that we need to provide containers for each other so that we may be of support to each other during such a collective liminal time. Therefore, we invited presenters to reflect and engage with subjects related to death, dying, near-death experiences, death-care, ancestral healing, transformation, and ecological collapse. We consider this conference an opportunity to build networks for collective engagement, restorative practices, healing, and reconciliation.

Poster, Workshop, and Presentation Abstracts

Exploring the Intersection of Art and Research: An Interactive Embodied Art Workshop on Hospitalization, Near-Death, and Grief (Workshop)

Tiffany-Ashton Gatsby

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This unique, socially engaged art workshop offers a transformative exploration of hospitalization, grief, and near-death or end-of-life experiences through personal reflection, artistic response, and sensorial exercises aimed at exploring hospital settings and sounds. Gain new perspectives on your research or personal experiences and explore the intersection of art and research in understanding these complex themes. Paper and drawing materials provided.

When Death Sold Records: Simon and Garfunkel's Sounds of Silence

Richard Choquette

RICHOQ@MINDSPRING.COM

There was a time when themes concerning death were accepted as poetic and poignant rather than morbid. This musical presentation highlights some of Paul Simon's writing on the Sounds of Silence album.

From Social Death to Social Transformation (Roundtable)

Roxana Pardo Garcia, roxana@laroxay.com

Melina Juarez Perez, juarezm2@wwu.edu

Nicole Torres, torresn5@wwu.edu

While marginalized and disenfranchised peoples are relegated to various forms of social and literal death within the context of late-capitalism in the United States, this roundtable discussion will focus on how marginalized peoples and those left for dead may transform their status into situations and positions that celebrate life, community, and purpose. Our experiences may be demonstrative of what the scholar Gerald Vizenor describes as forms of "survivance" in spite of imperialist necropolitical practices. We come to this roundtable through the perspectives of grassroots community work, labor and organizing within academia, and from the counseling/mental health profession.

How attending to legacy can transform care for people facing serious illness

Marlaine Figueroa Gray

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People think with and through time, considering their personhood in the past, the present, and the future. Though the body will face a certain end, people often consider how their legacy will continue beyond death. When facing serious illness, thoughts about legacy become more salient, and some people take action to influence how they will be remembered, and the impact they will have on others. This presentation examines how people facing serious illness consider their legacy as they make choices about medical treatments. We investigate how legacy is defined, how conceptions of legacy influence personhood, and what treatment choices are impacted by legacy considerations via a scoping review of empirical and gray literature. We examine legacy goals in the context of palliative medicine's mandate to support quality of life. How does attending to legacy goals, which are located in the future, after death, transform conceptions of quality of life in the present? We also ask: what kind of labor does legacy work, and maintaining memory, require, and of whom? What are the obligations of legacy, and the limits of those obligations? What does legacy supportive care look like? Does it facilitate a positive dying experience, and a good death? We ask readers to consider how attending to legacy has the potential to transform conceptions of what good care for the seriously ill might be, what a good death might entail.

Transforming through Soul Collage (Workshop)

Colleen Haggerty

haggertyrobinson@msn.com

This workshop is an experiential process of embodying transformation; get to know one of your InnerTransformers

Death of the Spirit; Androids, Zombies, Culture and AI

Sean Hinton

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This short presentation will explore the meaning of spirit in an age of AI. The implication for the broader culture and future culture. What are the implication of AI on how we view consciousness and other minds will be previewed.

Living and Dying in Glaciated Landscapes (Virtual Talk)

Delaney Mitchell

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Two small, geographically isolated communities in the circumpolar Arctic emerge as important sites in the anthropology of death: Brevig Mission, in Western Alaska and Spitsbergen Island, in Norway's Svalbard archipelago. The Arctic is a region paradoxically marked by the permanence of its material form. As that form rapidly melts away, these sites remain linked in and beyond impending ecological collapse. The legacy of colonial relations endures. Indeed, Brevig Mission, Sitaisaq or Sinauraq in Inupiaq, bears the name of Norwegian pastor Tollef Brevig. The legacy of a peculiar series of events concerning mass death and group burial also endures in these once-frozen-but-rapidly-melting sites. The genocidal relationship between colonial

settlements and communicable disease is well-established, though Brevig Mission provides a particularly stark and devastating example. In November of 1918, the influenza pandemic reached Brevig Mission, killing 72 out of 80 residents during a 5-day period. One month earlier across the Arctic Ocean, seven young men took a fateful voyage north of Norway for new jobs in Svalbard's coal mines; they all contracted fatal cases of influenza. The seven young men destined for Svalbard and the 72 deceased residents of Brevig Mission were, respectively, buried together in mass graves, interred beneath the permafrost of these glaciated landscapes. They were, however, not left to lie. In the late nineties and early aughts, longstanding efforts by separate groups of scientists to locate and excavate residual pathogens of the 1918 flu virus from human corpses were realized, projects that sought to gather anticipatory defenses for future outbreaks. This intervention considers the ways in which scientific investments in futurism – especially efforts to prolong life and prevent death – can serve as an alibi for violating the deceased, as well as the broader political and cultural questions which accompany living and dying in this Arctic epoch.

Defending the Mystery

Devyn Nixon

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In my ancestral tradition of storytelling and time bending and starts and ends with song. In this storytelling, I weave dreams and death, a good death, grief processing, slow death through racialized capitalism and relationships with the ancestors.

Grief, Loss, and Coping with Isolation: Perspectives of Disabled People during COVID-19

L.C. "Spike" Osadchuk

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Disabled individuals have emotional, psychological, and physical needs that can be hard to meet during times of social isolation, physical distancing, natural disasters, and emergencies. To examine and learn more about the broader scope of this community's beneficial supportive care practices when coping with isolation, loss, and grief, this research project partnered with the broader United States-based disability community via a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach. The research tools used were based on the researcher's own life as a single disabled, chronically ill, immune-compromised person. Findings support broader themes of greater inclusion among non-disabled populations, providing opportunities to be purposefully needed within society, and greater support from communities to continue to endure isolation due to the largely inaccessible infrastructure that exists in our societies today.

"The Huilliche is water:" Engaging environmental precarity and death in Chiloé

Paula Saravia

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Among Mapuche Huilliche peoples in Northern Patagonia, Huesa Kutran is an idiom associated with a painful emotion that connects heart and mind, describing feelings of intense anguish and deep sadness that could lead to death. It is linked with experiences of abandonment, anxiety, and suffering among humans and more-than-human beings. Social and environmental disasters (both "natural" and anthropogenic) can trigger huesa kutran.

I examine the framing of death and grief among Mapuche-Huilliche indigenous peoples after one of the most devastating environmental disasters in the last decade: the 2016 toxic red tide. Based on in-depth interviews

and discourse analysis, I discuss the connections between ecological and existential struggles and political engagements that are significant collective responses to intersecting vulnerabilities that took these communities to the edge.

Indigenous communities in this region have denounced the state's neglect, identifying their territory as a zone of sacrifice. These areas are usually described as places where the social fabric and mistrust limit collective political action. However, the Mapuche-Huilliche response to the synergistic events shows high political engagements that include participation and leadership of indigenous women even among artisanal fishermen, whose unions have traditionally been led by men. The social movement "Defendamos Chiloé" (Let's defend Chiloé) and the 2018 election of Emilia Nuyado Ancapichún as the first Mapuche-Huilliche representative are examples of these active political engagements.

I contrast the narratives of grief and death shared by the Huilliche with the existing research that describe a progression from eco-grief to eco-anxiety, and solastalgia, proposing the term environmental precarity to understand the complexities of everyday engagements with maximized vulnerabilities that takes the form of narratives and embodied experiences of life and death.

Inner Alchemy, Immortality, and Apotheosis: Esoteric Perspectives on Overcoming Death

Mark Shekoyan

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During my dissertation research on Taiwan in 1996-97 I spent time with members of the "Compassion Society" (Tzu Hui T'ang) that worshiped the Queen Mother of the West (Xi Wang Mu) seen in Taoist mythology as the patron of the alchemical process of attaining "Immortality."

In Taoist practice the cultivation of the Golden Elixir (Jindan) also called inner alchemy (Neidan) is thought to lead to Immortality, a state in which the normal death mortals are subject to is overcome. The process of "Cheng Hsien" or becoming an immortal is a multistage process of self-cultivation involving the strengthening, purification, refinement, and integration of one's "3 Treasures" or (Jing) body essence, (Qi) energy, and (Shen) consciousness.

In discussing Taoist theory, and interviews with my informants, I will present the Taoist concept of Death, and Immortality and what a process for overcoming the normal human condition might entail.

Furthermore, I will provide a comparative perspective of this process from the Tantric Siddha tradition and the Western Occult tradition of Thelema. This comparative perspective will demonstrate different cultural approaches to overcoming the human condition based on self-discipline oriented toward human perfection and apotheosis.

Death and emotion amidst an overdose crisis

Jennifer Syvertsen

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Across the United States, more than 932,000 individuals have died from a drug overdose since 1999, rendering it a leading cause of injury-related death. This staggering number of premature deaths has drawn considerable attention as a public health issue. However, the potentially transformative experience of surviving an

overdose, the stress of responding to an overdose, and grief of losing a loved one remain undertheorized in terms of their collective emotional impact on our society. What tools does anthropology offer to think through the emotional dimensions of mass death? This question is particularly fraught given the pervasive social stigma against people who use drugs as underserving of compassion. I hope to participate in this conference to critically reflect on death and near-death experiences in the context of the overdose crisis as a way to imagine creative new forms of healing through art and community-engaged public scholarship.

Krishna in the Sky with Diamonds

Scott Teitsworth

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In its eleventh chapter, the Bhagavad Gita contains one of the most vivid descriptions of a confrontation with death in all the ancient literature, very likely initiated by a ceremonial psychedelic experience. Facing death is transformative however it occurs, so subsequent puritanical attitudes have suppressed the original context, converting it to a mere theophany. Having had several analogous experiences myself, in addition to being deeply instructed in the Gita's philosophy of Yoga, I have elucidated it from a psychedelic standpoint. One of my major findings was that the use of soma as a climax of spiritual instruction was common in the Vedic and post-Vedic eras. Its record in the Gita is fascinating and instructive, being essentially a guide to optimal use of soma for bypassing normal inhibitions. The psychedelic soma is shown to be an essential part of a complete spiritual transformation, a technique for making the written teachings come to life.

As Robert Oppenheimer witnessed the first atomic explosion, he famously quoted verse 32: "Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds."

I'm a lifelong student of Indian philosophy and psychology, in a lineage of scientifically- and philosophically-minded teachers. My book, *Krishna in the Sky with Diamonds*, is a detailed commentary on the Bhagavad Gita's chapter XI. I will read out the verses and decode some of the symbols, which refer to recognizable aspects of mind. It remains an excellent template for a successful excursion into hyperspace.

Necropower and Biopower in Human Trafficking and Modern-Day Slavery

Lance Tulloch

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Human Trafficking is one of the most widespread illicit economic activities globally. This is due in part to the global "race to the bottom" which characterizes the way in which international capitalism seeks to drive down costs to increase profit. This combination allows for the illicit market of slave labor to blend with licit markets producing goods and providing services globally. This process has necropolitical and biopolitical dimensions, both acting on the macrolevel of international business and crime while simultaneously acting on the microlevel of individuals: traffickers, the trafficked, and consumers. This literature review places the human trafficking paradigms found in *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking* into conversation with the theoretical lenses of biopower and necropower. In doing so, biopower and necropower work to nuance the ways in which human trafficking is conceptualized, as they reveal themselves within the behaviors which cause or contextualize the process(es) of human trafficking and modern-day slavery.

A Comparison of Two Methods for Interactions Among the Living and the Dead

Christine VanPool (Coauthored with Laura Lee and Kimberly Clark Sharp)

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Cross-cultural analysis indicates that at least some humans interact with the dead in most, and perhaps all, cultures. Two ways in which this occurs are near-death experiences (NDEs) and sound induction for trance-based altered states of consciousness (ASC). Previous research indicates that NDEs are cross-culturally common, perhaps even universal, but the specific characteristics likely vary based on culture. Our analysis of NDEs uses information gathered from ethnographic accounts and by the Seattle International Association for Near-Death Studies (Seattle IANDS). Our analysis that focuses on ASC initiated using sound induction (i.e., drum or rattle) uses information gathered by the Cuyamungue Institute, which is the home of Ritual Body Postures (RBP), a method of ecstatic trance, pioneered by Felicitas Goodman. We compare the reported experiences associated with each method of contact, and find there are commonalities (e.g., the feeling of falling through a vortex, entoptic imagery) as well as differences (e.g., NDEs typically include known dead whereas trance-based ASC often includes unnamed/indeterminate ancestors). Further, ethnographic analyses indicate that Native American death journeys from the Eastern Woodland and Plains groups are strikingly different from Euro-American NDEs. We suggest that systematic comparisons of these sorts of spirit encounters can provide details useful for identifying neurological and cultural factors that influence each type of experience, as well as insights into the sorts of spirits (and their motives) that people encounter.

The Interaction of Trance, Posture, and Tobacco in the Casas Grandes Shamanic Tradition (Poster Presentation)

Todd VanPool

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We describe how Casas Grandes Medio period (AD 1200 to 1450) shamanic practices of the North American Southwest used tobacco shamanism, a ritual stance called the Tennessee Diviner (TD) posture, and cultural expectations to generate trance experiences of soul flight and divination. We introduce a conceptual model that holds that specific trance experiences are the emergent result of human minds interacting with additional factors including entheogens, cultural expectations, physiological states, postures/movement, and sound/stimulation. Experimental and ethnographic evidence indicates initiating trance with either tobacco intoxication or the TD posture accompanied with a rapidly beating drum or rattle corresponds with perceptions of soul flight, transformation, and divination/information acquisition. Both have similar results but pairing them together as they were during the Medio period likely helped ensure the culturally desired trance experiences. This practice of mutually reinforcing factors was likely part of tobacco-based shamanism found in other New World cultures as well. We suggest our general model can be applied to other contexts to examine how various aspects of trance induction interact to produce the cultural patterns (and resulting cosmological and spiritual frameworks) anthropologists have documented in other cultures.

Gone Astral (Virtual Talk)

Laurel Washburn

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Legacy: “something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past” -Websters Dictionary

So much of our socialized perspective on legacy is tied to biology; Father to son, mother to daughter, ancestor to closest of kin. But what about those ties beyond socially appointed or genetic inheritance? Those of us who were overlooked or abandoned by those we were supposed to have inherited from?

Many say that legacy can be the reputation you leave behind. I would like to take that statement further; legacy is the memory you imprint on those you leave behind. Legacy is the ability to instill in others, so much of one's personal labors, that their reasoning and behavior reflects the individual departed.

Responsibility and legacy go hand in hand. As we live our day to day lives, we are sowing the seeds and cultivating the legacy we will one day give. What is the substance of our final gift? And to whom do we leave this gift in order for it to continue on?

Keynote Panel: Transformative Hospice Care: Care in the Last Phase of Life During the Pandemic and Beyond Whatcom Hospice Foundation

Shawn Fincher, Executive Director

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Jodi Newcomer, RN Whatcom Hospice Program Director

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Shelley Rice, PeaceHealth MD System Lead Hospice Services and Medical Director of Whatcom Hospice

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Reflections on Death and Dying in the Medical Industrial Complex

Hannah Wiech

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Caring for the critically ill and dying in a hospital setting presents many unique challenges to the humanity of caregivers, patients and their families.

This paper seeks to explore secondary trauma associated with the artificial prolongation of life through intensive medical interventions in a critical care setting. The constant witnessing of tragedy, combined with the need to perform at high levels of cognitive and physical function creates an environment that is very damaging to the human psyche.

This paper will also touch upon causative factors for prolonged suffering of critically ill hospitalized patients, including lack of death planning, poor communication about prognoses between providers, patients, and their families, and general cultural barriers to a dignified death.

The brutality of a critical care environment causes a loss of humanity for all those caught in the maws of the medical industrial complex. There is a need for deep examination of the cultural norms, values, and the motivations behind these damaging engagements with death that are the norm in our society.

Staring into the abyss and bringing the dead and damaged to life in the classroom; twenty-five years of student reflection on witness narrative.

Kathleen Young

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In this paper, based on twenty-five years of teaching college classes on genocide, atrocities, trauma, and death and dying, I reflect on student engagement with incomprehensible magnitude of human cruelty, frailty, and resilience. Scores of students have read first person narratives from Holocaust and genocide survivors, child soldiers, raped and traumatized victims, and those with PTSD and secondary trauma. Through low stakes writing and discussion students participated actively in the survivor's process of bearing witness and become narrating subjects themselves. Pain, trauma, existential threats to existence, and the inevitability of death can be difficult to articulate, resisting language at times. De-briefing created ways to process the trauma embodied in the narratives of real people, some dead now, some alive, making the subjects real and processual, not bounded in time. Does it prepare students to think critically about the use of hegemonic structures that inculcate violence/and or trauma by situating the subject in front of them? Key findings from decades of listening to students who have listened to narrators from the abyss are summarized in this presentation.

The Association for the Anthropology of Consciousness

2023 Program Committee

John Baker, President

Sean Bruna

Richard Choquette

Julie Raymond-Yakoubian

Nicole Torres

The Association for the Anthropology of Consciousness is an interdisciplinary association of anthropologists, psychologists, mythologists, archaeologists, sociologists, and like-minded scholar-practitioners united by a common interest in the study of consciousness from an anthropological perspective. Our research topics range from the cross-cultural study of consciousness as understood within and through various cultural traditions (including the shamanic, yogic, and magical), to contemporary studies of depth psychology, neuroplasticity, human potential, ecopsychology, and human/technological interaction.

Website: <https://ac.americananthro.org/>

First Friday Events are free and open to the public!

Upcoming First Friday Events (online, First Friday of most months, 12 Noon Pacific Time, 3:00 Eastern)

Register at: aocgeneral@gmail.com to receive the Zoom link.

- 5/5: Lisa Gezon:
Psychedelic Renaissance? What's the Buzz?
- 9/8 Hillary Webb:
The Consciousness Program at Goddard College
(Second Friday due to Labor Day weekend)
- 10/6: Reed A. Morrison:

Psychedelic Research Through the Lens of Ritual Initiation

- 12/1: Maria Teresa Fiumerodo
Tarantismo in Italy



Thank you for joining us – we hope to see you at our next event!