



International Symposium  
**ELEMENTAL PATHWAYS THROUGH NATURE:  
BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRISM  
AND ECOCENTRISM**

Koper, 15-16 June 2026

PROGRAMME AND ABSTRACTS



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KOPER 2026

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**ELEMENTAL PATHWAYS THROUGH NATURE: BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRISM  
AND ECOCENTRISM**  
**Programme and Abstracts**

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## ABOUT THE SYMPOSIUM

The renewed philosophical attention to the elements marks one of the most significant transformations within contemporary environmental thought. Across environmental philosophy, ecocriticism, phenomenology, and posthuman studies, the elemental has progressively emerged not merely as a thematic concern, but as a distinct mode of inquiry capable of reconfiguring the very conditions of thought. Air, water, earth, and fire are no longer approached simply as symbolic residues inherited from cosmological traditions, nor merely as material resources subjected to technological management. Rather, they increasingly appear as dynamic fields of relation through which embodiment, imagination, temporality, affectivity, and ecological coexistence may be reconsidered. This broader “elemental shift” has opened a space in which philosophy is once again compelled to confront the irreducible materiality of existence without collapsing it into reductive naturalism or technocratic environmentalism.

At stake in this turn toward the elements is also a critique of the conceptual abstractions that have long structured modern ecological discourse. The elemental perspective foregrounds immersion, exposure, porosity, and interdependence before the constitution of isolated subjects or self-contained systems. In doing so, it challenges the inherited separation between human beings and world, while simultaneously resisting the temptation to dissolve all distinctions into undifferentiated holism. The elements situate themselves beyond the status of stable (and thus passive) ontological categories; they designate processes, thresholds, and atmospheres through which living beings encounter reality and become transformed by it. Precisely for this reason, the elemental question has become increasingly central within debates concerning climate, embodiment, environmental imagination, ecological grief, and the fragility of shared worlds.

Yet the philosophical relevance of the elemental should not imply a new orthodoxy for environmental thinking. On the contrary, its importance lies in its capacity to carve out new space for philosophical reflection. Because the elemental is fundamentally a philosophical object, it does not direct reflection toward a single ideological conclusion, but instead generates new possibilities for thought beyond already crystallized positions. In this sense, the elemental approach may offer a productive pathway for rethinking — and perhaps over-

coming — the classical opposition between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism/biocentrism. Rather than simply reversing hierarchies between humanity and nature, elemental philosophy seeks to interrogate the very frameworks within which such oppositions emerge. Likewise, it provides an opportunity to move beyond the often unproductive impasses generated by debates between environmental schools and intellectual factions, including the long-standing tensions between “social” and “deep” ecologies. The elemental does not erase political, ethical, or metaphysical differences, but relocates them within a more originary horizon of coexistence, vulnerability, and material participation.

Within this emerging international context, ZRS Koper is steadily strengthening its role as a centre for the development of elemental philosophy and environmental humanities. Building upon its already consolidated reputation as a leading site for philosophical research on air, atmosphere, and the philosophy of breathing, the Centre is now extending this trajectory toward a broader exploration of elemental thought in its ecological, ethical, anthropological, and spiritual dimensions. The symposium *Elemental Pathways Through Nature: Beyond Anthropocentrism and Ecocentrism* represents a significant moment within this development, bringing together scholars working across philosophy, theology, environmental humanities, and ecological imagination in order to articulate new conceptual paths for thinking nature, embodiment, and coexistence in an age of planetary uncertainty.

*Pier Francesco Corvino and Lenart Škof*



## **SYMPOSIUM ORGANISED BY**

Science and Research Centre Koper, Institute for  
Philosophical and Religious Studies, Slovenia



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# PROGRAMME

**International Symposium**

**ELEMENTAL PATHWAYS THROUGH NATURE:  
BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRISM AND ECOCENTRISM**

Koper, 15–16 June 2026

ZRS Koper Centre for Humanities

**MONDAY, 15 June 2026**

**ELEMENTAL FRAMEWORKS**

**10.00**

**Opening Remarks**

**Prof Dr Lenart Škof**, Head of Institute for Philosophical and Religious Studies at Science and Research Centre Koper (ZRS Koper)

**Dr Pier Francesco Corvino**, Research Associate, Institute for Philosophical and Religious Studies at Science and Research Centre Koper (ZRS Koper)

**MORNING SESSION: ELEMENTAL THEOLOGY**

**10.30–11.00**

**Sigríður Guðmarsdóttir**

*“Whatsoever Passeth Through the Paths of the Seas”:  
Blue Theology in the Arctic*

**11.00–11.30**

**Michael Marder**

*Mystical Fire in the Medieval Kabbalist Tradition: Effacement, Exile, Ethics*

**11.30–12.00**

**Aksel Johan Lund**

*Doing Theology in the Chthulucene: A Kenotic Theology of Entanglement*

**12.00–14.00**

Lunch Break

**AFTERNOON SESSION: ELEMENTAL PHILOSOPHY**

**14.00–14.30**

**David Macauley**

*Wild Beauty and the Elemental World*

**14.30–15.00**

**Lenart Škof**

*An Ethics of Deep Immanence*

**15.00–15.30**

**Pier Francesco Corvino**

*From Subtle Bodies to Temperament: On Elemental Transfiguration*

**15.30–16.00**

**Marjolein Oele**

*Grasping Elemental Loss in Times of Climate Change: From Infinitesimal Changes to Affective and Cognitive Disorientation*

**16.00–16.30**

Coffee Break

**16.30–18.00**

Keynote Lecture

**David Abram**

*On the Spherical Shape of Time*

**19.00**

**Dinner and Cultural Programme**

**TUESDAY, 16 June 2026**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ENCOUNTERS**

**MORNING SESSION: ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINATIONS**

**10.00–11.00**

Plenary Lecture

**Serenella Iovino**

*Thinking Arks: Animals and the Origins of Human Imagination*

**11.00–11.30**

Coffee Break

**11.30–12.00**

**Alberto Parisi**

*Cultivating Beauty: Sakura and the Metamorphosis of Culture*

**12.00–12.30**

**Giovanbattista Tusa**

*Indestructible Relations: Notes on Elemental Politics*

**12.30–14.30**

Lunch Break

**AFTERNOON SESSION: ELEMENTAL WISDOM**

**14.30–15.00**

**Cirila Toplak**

*“Living through” the Elements*

**15.00–15.30**

**Maja Bjelica & Petri Berndtson**

*Experiencing the Elements: Salt-working as Environmental Wisdom*

**15.30–16.00**

Coffee Break

**16.00–17.00**

Distinguished Artist Lecture

**Marko Pogačnik**

*Intelligence of Nature and its Elemental Beings*

**17.00**

**Lenart Škof**

**Pier Francesco Corvino**

Concluding Remarks





# ABSTRACTS



# ELEMENTAL THEOLOGY





## **“WHATSOEVER PASSETH THROUGH THE PATHS OF THE SEAS”: BLUE THEOLOGY IN THE ARCTIC**

**Sigríður GUÐMARSDÓTTIR**  
*University of Iceland*

“The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.” (Psalm 8.8)

The temperature is rising in the Arctic because of climate change, and as a result the Greenland inland ice is melting at alarming speed. The Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) brings warm water from the tropics to northern seas, which in turn helps to keep the European climate mild. If the AMOC stream breaks down, it could severely impact European climate. In November 2025 Iceland declared the potential threat of the breakdown of AMOC a national risk. There is growing ecotheological research of desert climate, dry lands and the freshwater crisis (Gruchy 2010; M. H. Ferris 2014; Zenner 2018; Kim 2025). The rising of the seas is also a significant topic in theological research, especially from coastal communities such as in the Pacific, Indian and the Caribbean Sea (Havea 2011b; Maggang 2023; Murad et al. 2023). If the ecotheological literature on the rising seas and the drying land is budding, studies on the great melt in circumpolar regions has been expanding at a slower pace.

Humanities have begun to turn their attention more to the blue spaces of the ocean and the freshwater and explore the human relationship to water in various forms and biomes. In “hydrohumanities”, Kim De Wolff and Rina C. Faletti trace new discourses on water that have been emerging that focus on the interconnections between power, humans, more-than-humans and water. Other attempts to name interdisciplinary webs of water relations include the term “blue humanities” favored by Steve Mentz and Stacy Alaimo, “hydrofeminism” by Astrida Neimanis, and “critical ocean studies” coined by Elizabeth DeLoughrey. Bringing the ocean and the coast to the fore blue humanities are interested in all types of water from vapor to saltwater to ice and how these bodies have been expressed academically.

This paper explores the relationship between endangered water spaces and humans during the present climate crisis. The father of modern oceanography Matthew Maury is said to have been inspired by Psalm 8.8, when he sought to understand the ocean currents in 1852. He was looking for “the paths of the seas” through which the ocean creatures pass through according to the Psalmist. With the help of blue theology and blue humanities the paper has a special focus on the pathfinding in the seas, that is the ocean currents.

*Keywords:* Arctic; Blue theology; Blue humanities; Hydrohumanities.

**Sigríður Guðmarsdóttir** is a Full professor of practical theology at the University of Iceland. She works with constructive, philosophical and practical theologies and her current research interests are in ecotheology, decolonial and indigenous theology. She is currently working on a monograph on blue theology in the Arctic as well as co-editing a volume on Arctic Christianity, both which are scheduled for publication in 2027. She is the author of *Tillich and the Abyss: Foundations, Feminism and Theology of Praxis* by Palgrave Macmillan (2016) and has coedited the book *Trading Justice for Peace? Reframing reconciliation in TRC processes in South Africa, Canada and Nordic countries*, published by AOSIS (2021).

## MYSTICAL FIRE IN THE MEDIEVAL KABBALIST TRADITION: EFFACEMENT, EXILE, ETHICS

Michael MARDER

*Ikerbasque: Basque Foundation of Science and  
Department of Philosophy, University of the Basque Country, Vitoria-Gasteiz*

I sketch out the pyrological cosmology of the Zohar, focusing on the “spark of impenetrable darkness” (*buzina d’qardinuta*) as the paradoxical origin of creation. Contrary to classical theological and philosophical understandings of fire as the union of light and heat, the Zohar situates the beginning of the cosmos in a dark, concealed spark emerging from the “head of infinity” (*ein sof*). The primordial flash does not initially illuminate; rather, it signifies contraction (*tsimtsum*), divine self-limitation, and exile. Creation unfolds as a dynamic process of concealment and disclosure, wherein light continually clothes itself in further layers of luminosity.

I further explore two major implications of the kabbalist model of fire. First, creation is ongoing: the world is perpetually reconstituted through renewed flashes of divine fire. Second, cosmogony is intrinsically exilic. Light is estranged from itself, dwelling in concealment, and this cosmic exile parallels historical Jewish exile. The dispersion of sparks mirrors diaspora, while the righteous—conceived as “remnants” (*širayim*)—sustain the world through ethical self-effacement.

Ultimately, the Zohar’s vision presents an ontology of remnants, rooted in ethics: light withdraws, leaving behind generative traces that sustain the cosmos and its history. Fire becomes the medium of ethical existence, mystical knowledge, and ecological interdependence. The world endures through a twofold support—divine withdrawal from above and righteous self-effacement below—rendering exile not merely a historical condition, but the very horizon of being.

*Keywords:* Zohar; Kabbalah; Divine exile; Mystical cosmology; Sefirot.

**Michael Marder** is IKERBASQUE Research Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of the Basque Country (UPV-EHU), Vitoria-Gasteiz. His most recent books include *The Phoenix Complex* (2023), *Time Is a Plant* (2023), with Edward S. Casey, *Plants in Place* (2024), *Eco-Freud* (2025), *Metamorphoses Reimagined* (2025), with Anais Tondeur, *Fiori di fuoco* (2025), and *Of Joints and Other Articulations* (2026). More information at [michaelmarder.org](http://michaelmarder.org).



## DOING THEOLOGY IN THE CHTHULUCENE: A KENOTIC THEOLOGY OF ENTANGLEMENT

**Aksel Johan LUND**

*VID Stavanger*

Contemporary Christian ecotheologies and animal theologies often take as their point of departure a resistance towards the anthropocentric assumptions that have historically shaped much of Christian theology. These theologies aim to expose and critique the ways in which human exceptionalism permeates the Christian faith. Yet even the most critical of these theologies remain oriented towards the human as the interpretive, ontological, and epistemological horizon of theology. The human being is both problem and solution, judge and jury, centre and measure. In this paper, I argue that this tension points to a deeper problem than mere anthropocentrism: how does one do theology beyond frameworks of human centrality?

Drawing on the works of posthuman philosopher Donna Haraway, particularly her proposal of the Chthulucene as an alternative to the Anthropocene and Capitalocene, I explore how theological reflection can be oriented towards an ontology of entanglement. Haraway's Chthulucene brings attention to the entangled reality of ecology, highlighting interdependence as multispecies, material, affective, and embodied. At the same time, she maintains human culpability in ecological evils, without collapsing into exceptionalism or narrative centrality. The Chthulucene in this way poses a significant challenge to Christian theology, especially its tendency towards mastery, escapism, or appeals to divine intervention.

In critical juxtaposition with this framework, I propose a kenotic theological posture, rooted in the Christological motif of kenosis (self-emptying, Phil. 2:7). Kenosis is interpreted not primarily in its classical form, as a metaphysical claim about divine action, but rather as a methodological orientation for doing theology under ecological crisis-conditions. This way of understanding kenosis reads it as a voluntary descent into creaturely vulnerability, finitude, and entanglement – one that refuses theological centrality and affirms divine participation in the suffering and materiality of the more-than-human creation.

Rather than attempting to resolve the tension between Christian theology and posthuman ecological thought, I argue that deliberately holding them in open tension is both ethically and theologically productive. The kenotic posture tempers the risk of despair or fatalism that comes with Chthulucene thinking, and Chthulucene thinking destabilises theology's tendency towards transcendence and escapism. This critical juxtaposition produces a way of doing theology that is entangled in creaturely vulnerability, situated in the messy compost of multispecies life – a theology that, in Haraway's terms, stays with the trouble, rather than seeking ways to overcome it.

*Keywords:* Ecotheology; Chthulucene; Kenosis; Entanglement; Posthumanism.

**Aksel Joan Lund** is a PhD Research Fellow at VID Specialized University, Stavanger, Norway. An ordained minister in the Church of Norway, his doctoral research explores the intersection of liturgical theology and ecotheology. His research interests include animal theology, posthuman theology, constructive theology, postcolonial perspectives on liturgy, and clergy activism.

# ELEMENTAL PHILOSOPHY





## WILD BEAUTY AND THE ELEMENTAL WORLD

David MACAULEY

*Penn State University*

*Explorers of desert and ice may be said to be half in love  
with piercing beauty and half in love with death. —Yi-Fu Tuan*

*Nature was here something savage and awful,  
though beautiful. —Thoreau on his climb of Mt. Ktaddn*

Journeying through remote wilderness and off-the-map outposts over a span of seven years, Jay Griffiths has explored the complex beauty of the natural world with noteworthy attentiveness, exuberance, and courage, seeking “the will of the wild” and the ways it appears in “elemental vitality, in savage grace.” Organizing her travels around the fourfold of wild earth, wild air, wild fire, wild water—which she splays open in order to add wild ice—Griffiths fraternizes with cannibals; confabulates with gypsies, learns from Amazonian shamans, and wanders the outback with Australian Aborigines. She lies naked, cold and vulnerable in the Arctic snow, hunts magnificent ocean whale, hikes through the heat and desert sands, descends into the darkness of the sea, and disappears into the airy majestic heights of the mountains.

Griffiths observes, “What is wild cannot be bought or sold, borrowed or copied. It is. Unmistakable, unforgettable, unshakable, elemental as earth and ice, water, fire and air, a quintessence.” Taking inspiration from these ventures, I plan to focus on and investigate the confluence of the elemental, wildness, and beauty, particularly the aesthetic aspects of their intersection.

To gain a better sense of wild and elemental beauty—in contrast to its more domesticated forms—and perhaps even to access “wild being” (Merleau-Ponty’s *l’être sauvage*) and “wild thought” (Lévi-Strauss’ *la pensée sauvage*), I will draw on examples and share photographs of the elemental world, including deserts (fire) and polar (ice) regions, capricious winds (air), jungles and forests with great biodiversity (earth), the unfathomable sea (water) as well as craggy trees, untamed animals, extreme weather, recalcitrant weeds, natural predation, and unusual insects.

I will also turn to Continental philosophers and American naturalists for guidance. Through the writings of Thoreau, for example, we can discover aesthetic and ecological forms of elemental walking governed by earth, air, fire, and water. The poet and environmentalist Gary Snyder points, too, to a thread winding through notions of “the good,” “the wild,” and “the sacred” when they are expressed in the elemental land. It is my contention that we can reasonably add “the beautiful” to this ecological quilt of ideas and phenomena.

Beauty, however, is a bit like a wild animal: it can rarely be pinned down, captured, or fully possessed; it eludes our grasping hands and acquisitive hearts. It disappears on its own timetable like a lover vanishing impetuously around the corner into the late afternoon shadows or, at times, like a well-dressed body lowered into the cemetery soil. Beauty almost seems to be an interloper from another realm or, at least, to suggest worlds hidden deeply within ordinary experience, like Russian dolls nested inside one another. In its more wild and elemental forms, it exhibits an odd or extraordinary quality, a trait that deviates from the norm and the terrain of the familiar. In this regard, I will suggest that, despite their separation within philosophical discourse and literary history, notions of the beautiful and the sublime need to be recoupled with one another to account fully for the powerful elemental force they exercise upon our senses, imaginations, and bodies.

How are instances of wild and elemental beauty distinguished from or related to the feral, the terrible, the exotic, the savage, or the abject? How are they best appreciated or understood without at the same time domesticating or extinguishing them? And are we *weeding out the wild* from our elemental encounters and aesthetic experiences? If so, what are the implications for life in the Anthropocene, where the precarious presence of beauty might not only serve as solace in troubled times but actively solicit a meaningful response to our complex ecological challenges?

*Keywords:* Elemental; Beauty; Wild; Sublime; Domestication; Walking.

**David Macauley** is Academy Professor and Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Environmental Studies at Penn State University. He has taught at Oberlin College, Emerson College, and New York University and was a Mellon Fellow at the University

of Pennsylvania. Macauley is the author of *Elemental Philosophy: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water as Environmental Ideas*; editor of *Minding Nature: The Philosophers of Ecology*; co-editor of *The Seasons: Philosophical, Literary, and Environmental Perspectives*; and co-editor of *The Wisdom of Trees: Thinking Through Arboreality*. He has published articles on ethics, aesthetics, politics, Greek philosophy, and Continental thought. Macauley is completing a new book entitled *Walking the Animate Earth: Philosophical and Environmental Foot Notes*; putting together a collection of philosophical parables and myths called *Re-storying Wisdom*; and working on a book project entitled *Discovering Beauty in Dark Times*. He lives in Eureka, California where he bikes, writes, and competes in long distance races.



## AN ETHICS OF DEEP IMMANENCE

**Lenart ŠKOF**

*ZRS Koper*

This presentation is based on my current project in philosophical agapeology. It is an attempt to synthesize the respiratory turn in philosophy as outlined by my recent works (such as *God in Post-Christianity*) with the cosmic and elemental *presence* as found in the Slovenian 'indigenous' religion of *Staroverstvo* ('Nature Worshippers'). Against the backdrop of more Christocentric phenomenologies of J.-L. Marion, M. Henry and J.-L. Chrétien in the French theological turn, my aim is to outline an ethics of deep immanence, based on touch, breath, and the heart as ethical organs within the horizontally understood transcendence of nature. A new ethics, as presented in our lecture, opens a possibility of understanding of the body as an ecosystem of gestures – with deep compassion and love being the key marks on the path of our newly proposed phenomenology of love. The elementality of breath and the rhythm of the heart and its resonance inaugurate a new possibility of a biocentric ethics where bodies conspire, intertwine and resonate ethically through newly acquired deep sensibility (Feuerbach) and respiratory turn in phenomenology (Škof). Finally, it is with non-human animals and other sentient beings, that the newly proposed ethics wishes to correlate ethically and establish a new, mysterious yet natural bond of love.

*Keywords:* Breath; Heart; Elements; Agapeology; Natural Worshippers; Love; Interiority; Non-human animals.

**Lenart Škof** is professor of philosophy and religious studies, Head of the Institute for Philosophical and Religious Studies at the Science and Research Centre (Koper, Slovenia) and Dean of Faculty ISH at the Alma Mater Europaea University (Ljubljana, Slovenia). He is a member of European Academy of Sciences and Arts (EASA, Salzburg) and president of Slovenian Society for Comparative Religion. He recently co-edited *Marian Reflections on War and Peace: Trauma, Mourning, and Justice in Ukraine and Beyond* (Routledge, 2025), *Shame, Gender Violence and Ethics: Terrors of Injustice* (Lexington Books, 2021), and *Atmospheres of Breathing* (New York: SUNY Press, 2018). Škof is an author of several books, among them *God in Post-Christianity*:



*An Elemental Philosophical Theology* (SUNY Press, 2024), *Antigone's Sisters: On the Matrix of Love* (SUNY Press, 2021) and *Breath of Proximity: Intersubjectivity, Ethics and Peace* (Springer, 2015). He is editor-in-chief of "Routledge Critical Perspectives on Breath and Breathing" series (with Magdalena Górska) and his main research interests are in respiratory philosophy, new elemental philosophy, and philosophical theology.

## FROM SUBTLE BODIES TO TEMPERAMENT: ON ELEMENTAL TRANSFIGURATION

**Pier Francesco CORVINO**

*ZRS Koper*

Over the past two decades, elemental philosophy has marked an “elemental shift” in environmental thought. By returning to nature through its elements – generally understood in an Empedoclean sense as air, water, fire, and earth – this shift has sought to bypass several deadlocks of the environmental debate and to reanimate its conceptual terrain. One of its most decisive fault lines concerns the status of the human within an elemental framework: whether the human is dissolved into impersonal processes or retains a specific, though non-dominant, significance.

Beyond more radical positions that tend to erase human specificity, the main current – if any – of elemental philosophy continues to ascribe relevance to the human, whether as a locus of symbolic relation to the elemental or as an ethical articulation of elemental agency. Across these approaches, there is, however, broad agreement that a certain gap – of metaphysical or socio-cultural nature – has emerged between human existence and the elemental level of reality, and that elemental philosophy is tasked with addressing this separation.

In recent works, I have suggested that this gap can be explained through an intrinsic, supra-theoretical structure within human nature itself: a structural “enclosure” of the elemental, which can be designated by the term temperament. Of course, temperament is not understood here in its contemporary psychological sense, but in its archaic, Empedoclean–Galenic meaning, as the particular configuration of the four elements within the human being.

In support of this hypothesis, this paper retrieves some antecedents for this “enclosing” structure, investigating the iridescent and often chaotic tradition of “subtle ontologies”, i.e. theories of “elemental”, “astral”, “pneumatic”, or generically spiritual bodies. Rather than reviving them doctrinally, these ontologies will be investigated archeologically as attempts to articulate a mediating stratum in which the elemental is neither denied nor left uncontained.

The aims are threefold: first, to show how this tradition challenges pre-suppositions underlying the alleged “artificial separation” between humanity and elemental reality; second, to demonstrate how certain strands of this lineage – mainly that of Paracelsian-Böhmian Christian theosophy – seek not to spiritualize the corporeal but to corporealize the spiritual, locating transfiguration within the world rather than beyond it; and third, to argue that remnants of this tradition persist in the concept of temperament as its conceptual precipitate. The paper concludes by outlining some ethical implications of this elemental genealogy.

*Keywords:* Temperament; Subtle bodies; Swabian Theosophy; Elementality.

**Pier Francesco Corvino** is a ERA Fellow at the Science and Research Centre in Koper and Visiting Lecturer at Alma Mater Europaea University in Ljubljana. His research focuses on Romantic *Naturphilosophie*, 19th-century Danish philosophy, and Environmental Philosophy. He holds a PhD in History of philosophy from the University of Trieste. He is the author of *Henrich Steffens. Filosofo della natura* (Mauna, 2022) and has published extensively in Italian and international journals. He recently translated into Italian Lenart Škof's *Breath of Proximity* (Springer, 2015), published as *Filosofia del respiro* (Castelvecchi, 2025).

## **GRASPING ELEMENTAL LOSS IN TIMES OF CLIMATE CHANGE: FROM INFINITESIMAL CHANGES TO AFFECTIVE AND COGNITIVE DISORIENTATION**

**Marjolein OELE**  
*Radboud University*

This presentation builds upon the central tenets of my recent monograph *Beyond Elemental Loss: Shifting Constellations of Water, Fire, Air, and Earth* (SUNY, 2025). I argue that anthropogenic climate change is showing that the elements are not only ecological constellations but are also social-historical constellations subject to change. Tracing insights from the Pre-socratics, I maintain there is value in following the traditional understanding of the elements as synthetic crystallization points of our material world and to thinking of the elements in terms of four distinct and yet interconnected ways: water, fire, air, and earth. Additionally, I use insights from a wide range of contemporary continental thinkers (e.g. Sallis, Sloterdijk and Irigaray), to define the elemental as an ecological constellation entailing and enabling the ontogenesis of a heterogeneity of organic and inorganic beings, arguing that this constellation is subject to diachronic flux and open to synchronic interaction and co-creation.

The elemental has undergone gradual and infinitesimal changes, due to human interference, which have been mostly invisible to human perception until now. However, these gradual changes have had a profound impact on the way the world presents itself now, as is visible in massive species extinction and climate disasters (e.g., massive flooding, extreme droughts, etc.). These kinds of radical and drastic environmental changes are not the main subject of my argument; however, I argue that these kinds of changes can, ultimately, be understood against the backdrop of incremental changes to the flux space of the elemental.

Understanding this backdrop does not renounce the need to undertake climate actions or other climate initiatives but redirects our focus toward the broader interface within which we live, and the abilities we, as humans, have to intervene and change our habitus within the elemental. Thus, contemporary climate crises can be understood as consequences of changes to

the conditions of the possibility of social-ecological co-emergence, i.e. shifts of the elemental ontogenetic constellation. And it is due to our inability to relate to this current social-ecological presentation of the world with our usual cognitive or affective habitus that we find ourselves suffering from feelings of loss and disorientation.

In addition to discussing elemental loss, I aim to discuss this question: how can we adapt and sharpen humanity's cognitive and affective habitus, and carve out future sustainable trajectories, in light of current and oncoming climate upheaval? And: how can elemental loss inform theorization of eco-affects such as eco-anxiety and eco-grief? *Keywords:* liminality, rhythm, intersubjectivity, meaningful silence, in-between

*Keywords:* Elements; Loss; Ecological-social constellation; Affect; Climate change.

**Marjolein Oele** is Professor of Philosophy of the Humanities at Radboud University. Her research interweaves Ancient Philosophy, Continental Philosophy and Environmental Philosophy. She is the author of *Beyond Elemental Loss: Shifting Constellations of Water, Fire, Air, and Earth* (SUNY, 2025) and *E-Co-Affectivity: Exploring Pathos at Life's Material Interfaces* (SUNY, 2020); she is the co-editor of *Ontologies of Nature: Continental Perspectives and Environmental Reorientations* (Springer, 2017). Her articles have been published in a range of journals, including *Ancient Philosophy*, *Comparative & Continental Philosophy*, *Configurations*, *Environmental Philosophy*, *Philosophy Today*, and *Research in Phenomenology*. She is coordinator of the Radboud Research Group Environmental Humanities and the Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Environmental Philosophy*.

# KEYNOTE LECTURE

## ON THE SPHERICAL SHAPE OF TIME

**David ABRAM**  
*University of Oxford*

Contemporary, conventional understandings of time tacitly underwrite our collective inability to perceive the dynamic creativity that abounds within the enfolding terrain. When time and space are considered as entirely separable dimensions – when time is assumed to be a rectilinear dimension neatly distinguishable from the spatial field that sensorially surrounds us – then the material world comes to seem an inert and inanimate plenum, a clutch of resources passively waiting to be extracted and deployed for purely human purposes. Similarly, the fleshly human body comes to be felt as a determinate, mechanical structure clearly separable from the cognizing intelligence that rides around within its skull. And Earth itself is soon conceived as a listless mass of rock upon which life just happens to situate itself and proliferate.

Yet time – experientially considered – is hardly rectilinear and uniform. Time, rather, is an upsurge: the continuous creation of the uncanny and unexpected. Phenomenologically considered – considered, that is, from the experiential perspective of the sensate human animal – time is creativity itself. Time is the ongoing genesis of unforeseeable possibilities, the power of metamorphosis pulsing steadily through the material world. It is the shaping pulse of the planet itself, giving rise to the polymorphic and ever-shifting complexity of the sensitive and multiply-sentient biosphere. Every raven swerving and squawking overhead, every spider spinning its silken lattice between the branches of an old oak, every crusted lichen radiating across an upthrust slab of granite, every blade of grass bending and twisting in the gusts of a gathering storm, enacts an open-ended and improvisational sentience as it dreams its way through the world. Each has its own rhythm; each is enacting time in its own way.

A remarkable array of traditional, indigenous worldviews lack any separate, autonomous notion of time that can be readily distinguished from that

culture's understanding of enfolding space. Despite the outrageous multiplicity and divergence between traditional aboriginal lifeways, indigenous animism may usefully be understood as a principled reluctance to distinguish time from space – indeed, as a refusal to conceptually sever the dynamism of change from the elemental expanse that sensorially surrounds us. For such place-based, oral traditions, every point in space has its dynamism, every material presence bodies forth its own creativity.

A resonant ecological wisdom informs such old-ways understandings of time as utterly integral to space, and of space as utterly integral to time. With an eye toward a place-based, bioregional plurality of cultures on the far side of civilizational collapse, this talk will sketch several facets of a strange new-old theory of time – one that returns us to our direct, creaturely experience, although it remains unnoticed and unsuspected by civilization at large.

*Keywords:* Spherical temporality; Phenomenology; Animism; Creativity; Interdependence.

**David Abram**, cultural ecologist and geophilosopher, is the author of *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, and *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*. Described as “revolutionary” by the *Los Angeles Times*, as “daring” and “truly original” by the journal *Science*, David’s work engages the ecological depths of sensory experience, exploring the ways in which perception, language, and imagination inform the relation between the human animal and the animate earth. Dr. Abram was the first contemporary philosopher to advocate for a reappraisal of indigenous “animism” as a complexly nuanced and uniquely sophisticated worldview – a dynamic reassessment now underway in many disciplines. In his first book, David coined the phrase “the more-than-human world” in order to speak of nature as a realm that thoroughly *includes* humankind (with all our culture and technology) yet also necessarily *exceeds* humankind; the phrase has now been taken up worldwide within the broad movement for ecological sanity. Co-founder and director of the *Alliance for Wild Ethics (AWE)*, David has held the international Arne Naess Chair in Global Justice and Ecology at the University of Oslo, and was recently the Senior Visiting Scholar in Ecology and Natural Philosophy at Harvard University. Currently a Visiting Scholar in Geography at the University of Oxford, Dr. Abram has been the recipient of numerous awards, including Rockefeller and Watson fellowships and the international Lannan Literary Award for Nonfiction. He makes his home in the high desert of northern New Mexico.





# ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINATIONS





## PLENARY LECTURE

### THINKING ARKS: ANIMALS AND THE ORIGINS OF HUMAN IMAGINATION

**Serenella IOVINO**

*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

What does it mean to think with animals—and what happens to thought when animals disappear?

This lecture traces the emergence of human imagination through long-standing encounters with animal life. Drawing on evolutionary anthropology and cognitive theory, it argues that imagination did not arise as an abstract faculty, but as an embodied practice shaped by tracking, hunting, and observing nonhuman beings. For millennia, animals functioned as cognitive partners, training perception, enabling projection, and fostering forms of inference that became internalized as images, memory, and narrative. From Paleolithic cave art to myth and storytelling, animals appear not merely as objects of representation but as active agents in the making of human mental worlds. The lecture then considers the long-term consequences of a historical shift in which animals gradually ceased to be interlocutors and became resources—an ecological and cognitive fracture that continues into the present. In this light, the enduring motif of the ark can be read not only as a story of survival, but as a response to loss: an attempt to preserve, within narrative and imagination, a more-than-human world that is increasingly at risk. Rethinking imagination as a multispecies process thus reveals what is at stake today—not only biodiversity, but the conditions that have shaped human thought itself.

*Keywords:* Imagination; Animals; Cognition; Multispecies; Extinction.

**Serenella Iovino** is the James Gordon Hanes Distinguished Professor in Humanities at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A philosopher by training, she is the author or editor of twelve volumes and over 200 essays and articles, and has

contributed to the development of the environmental humanities through her work on ecocritical theory, environmental justice, human–animal studies, and landscape ethics. Her publications include *Material Ecocriticism* and *Environmental Humanities* (with Serpil Oppermann), *Italy and the Environmental Humanities* (with Enrico Cesaretti and Elena Past), and *Ecocriticism and Italy*, recipient of the MLA Prize for Italian Studies and the AAIS Book Prize. Among her books in Italian are *Paesaggio civile* (2022), awarded a special mention at the Premio Mazzotti–Gambrinus; *Gli animali di Calvino* (2023), an expanded Italian edition of her Cambridge Element *Italo Calvino's Animals*, winner of the National Prize for Science Communication (Section: Humanities) and the Green Book Award; and *Ecologia letteraria* (2006; new expanded edition 2025). She writes for *la Repubblica* and co-edits Cambridge's *Elements in Environmental Humanities* series. In 2025, she received the “Seres Puentes” Award from the Humanities for the Environment North American Observatory, under UNESCO patronage, for her lifelong contribution to the environmental humanities.

## CULTIVATING BEAUTY: SAKURA AND THE METAMORPHOSIS OF CULTURE

**Alberto PARISI**

*Kobe University, ZRS Koper*

Recent posthuman thought has sought to rethink the relationship between humans and the nonhuman by foregrounding technology and animal life. Yet an alternative starting point lies in the human relation to plants, a relation that can be shown also to be, from the outset, technical: agriculture names not merely a set of practices, but a fundamental mode of transformation through which humans and plants co-constitute one another. This paper pushes this argument forward by examining this transformation through the paradigm of *sakura* (cherry blossoms) in Japanese culture. This paper pushes this argument forward by examining this transformation through the paradigm of *sakura* (cherry blossoms) in Japanese culture. While this phenomenon might superficially be interpreted as the very negation of agriculture—given that many of the *sakura* widely found in Japan today, such as the well-known *Prunus × yedoensis* ('Somei-yoshino'), are artificially propagated clones cultivated almost exclusively for aesthetic purposes, producing at most marginal or non-edible fruit—this perspective allows us to reinterpret them in a radically different way. If the relationship with plants is, through agriculture, always already technical—always already a metamorphosis acting in both directions—then *sakura* do not represent an abandonment of agriculture in favor of a higher spiritual realm. Rather, they exemplify the extension of agriculture to the entire cosmos, demonstrating that agriculture reaches into culture itself: into flowers and into everything those flowers can become, from paintings and textiles to poetry.

*Keywords:* Posthumanism; Technology; Agriculture; Metamorphosis; Plants; Japanese culture.

**Alberto Parisi** is Specially Appointed Assistant Professor at the Kobe Institute for Atmospheric Studies (KOIAS) of the Graduate School of Humanities of Kobe University, Japan, as well as a researcher at the Institute for Philosophical and Religious

Studies of the Science and Research Centre Koper, Slovenia. He received his PhD in Comparative Literature from Harvard University with a dissertation titled “The Intention of the Spirit: Breath, Air, and Voice in Modern European Poetry and Philosophy” and soon to be published by Routledge. His research lies at the intersection of comparative philosophy and literature, focusing on the history of ideas of breath, air, and atmosphere in poetry and philosophy across European and Japanese traditions.

## **INDESTRUCTIBLE RELATIONS: NOTES ON ELEMENTAL POLITICS**

**Giovanbattista TUSA**  
*Universidade Nova de Lisboa*

This paper proposes rethinking the elemental as a relational field through which world, perception, and ecological transformation emerge together. Rather than treating the elements as substances or symbolic archetypes, it approaches them as modes of articulation that precede individuation and structure the conditions under which beings appear. In contrast to atomistic inheritances that begin from discrete givens – whether corpuscles, perceptual “data,” or minimal appearances – the elemental names a pre-objectal milieu in which visibility and sensibility take form. Drawing on late Merleau-Ponty, sensation is understood not as an act directed toward already constituted objects but as a power arising within an indeterminate field where perceiver and perceived are co-constituted. What remains fundamental, therefore, is not an indestructible subject but an indestructible relation, disclosed in the transitions through which appearances replace and transform one another.

From this perspective, the notion of an elemental past becomes central. This past does not function as a chronological origin located behind the present; rather, it designates a dimension that has never been fully present yet continues to structure experience. Geological, atmospheric, and organic processes intersect with lived perception, producing a temporality that cannot be reduced to either subjective memory or objective history. The elemental past thus names a layer of sedimentation through which world continually reconfigures itself, carrying forward traces that shape present modes of appearing and inhabiting.

If ecological crises are expressions of shifts within elemental relations rather than isolated disruptions, then political engagement cannot be limited to managing discrete objects or events; it must attend to the underlying configurations that shape modes of inhabitation, collective affect, and technological mediation – relational constellations in which organic and inorganic processes, lived experience, and socio-political transformation intersect. Rather than grounding politics in nostalgia for lost stability or in the

promise of total control, an elemental perspective foregrounds adaptation within instability. In this sense, the elemental offers not a return to premodern cosmology but a framework for rethinking coexistence in a planetary situation where material processes, perceptual structures, and political decisions are inseparable.

*Keywords:* Atmospheric politics; Elemental relationality; Processual ecology; Planetary phenomenology.

**Giovanbattista Tusa** is a philosopher affiliated with the Nova Institute of Philosophy in Lisbon, where he has coordinated the X-CENTRIC FUTURES research seminar on philosophy, art, and climate change. His most recent publications include *Terra Cosmica: Traces of Georealism* (Tenement Press, Bristol and London 2024), *Ecocosmismo: Terrae Incognitae da Filosofia* (Cultura e Barbarie, Florianopolis 2024), *Ciò che rimane del futuro* (Mimesis, Milan 2024) and *The End*, co-authored with Alain Badiou (Polity Press, Cambridge 2019), which has been translated into French, Portuguese, Spanish and Italian. Tusa is the co-director (with Michael Marder) of the Political Theory and Contemporary Philosophy series at Bloomsbury.



# ELEMENTAL WISDOM





## **“LIVING THROUGH” THE ELEMENTS**

**Cirila TOPLAK**

*University of Ljubljana*

In recent ecological thought, abstracted natural elements — air, water, earth, and fire — have increasingly been granted forms of subjectivity and agency, with some states institutionalising the convergence of posthumanist theory and Indigenous ontologies in the legal personhood of concrete natural entities. Yet these attempts at the subjectivisation of nature may reproduce the very anthropocentrism they seek to overcome. Drawing on lived encounters with elemental forces — the flooding torrent, the wind-felled tree, the solstice bonfire — and employing genealogical and phenomenological methods, this paper questions whether the subjectivisation of the elements constitutes a genuine decentering of the human or rather a discursive colonisation of the nonhuman. In dialogue with theorists such as Foucault, Haraway, and Bennett, I argue that attributing subjectivity to the elements is not a recognition of their agency but a form of Foucauldian subjectivation: a continuation of the human impulse to render the world intelligible through familiar categories of intention and relation.

Instead, I propose a practice of “living through” nature, grounded in an ethics of asymmetrical coexistence — an orientation that resists the projection of relationality onto what remains fundamentally unintelligible. To live through nature is to acknowledge that nature is not other to us, nor addressable by us, but the medium through which all life — including our own — unfolds. Ontologically, it names the condition of being itself: nature is not what we encounter but what we are. Existentially, it marks our exposure to elemental processes of creation and decay, with no prospect of recognition or reciprocity. Phenomenologically, our experience of time, space, texture, and affect emerges through nature’s materiality. Spiritually, there is no separation to be overcome: to live is already to participate in the immanent fabric of the real, composed not of fixed objects but of events and processes. And epistemologically, the very act of conceiving “nature” imposes distortion — a reflexive abstraction through which humans estrange themselves from their condition of being-nature. “Living through” nature resists both anthropocentric mastery and biocentric moralisation, suggesting that the most radical

humility lies not in representing or relating to the elemental world, but in enduring its opacity without mediation, while remaining attuned to its unfathomable and constitutive force.

*Keywords:* Elementality; Living through nature; Post-relational ethics; Foucauldian subjectivation; Ecological humility; Phenomenology of the non-human.

**Cirila Toplak** is a Full Professor of Political Science and Scientific Councillor at the University of Ljubljana's Faculty of Social Sciences. She earned her PhD in International Relations from the Sorbonne University in Paris and has been engaged in teaching and research at the University of Ljubljana since 2001. She is the author or co-author of 13 scientific monographs, 24 peer-reviewed journal articles, and 27 chapters in scholarly volumes. Since 2016, her research has focused on alternative political practices and local cultural traditions. Her most recent work in this area is the monograph *"Our Faith": Nature Worship of Primorska* (2023). Professor Toplak is also a land steward, an animal welfare activist and a published poet.

## EXPERIENCING THE ELEMENTS: SALT-WORKING AS ENVIRONMENTAL WISDOM

Maja BJELICA & Petri BERNDTSON

*ZRS Koper*

Gaston Bachelard brings the forgotten classical elements of earth, water, air and fire back to philosophy in the 1930s and 1940s by writing at least one book dedicated to each of these elements. The elements are not at all what science, for example, chemistry says of them, but something experiential, phenomenological, imaginative, psychological and poetic as they inspire us to live, dream, imagine and think in new ways. This means that, in Bachelard's view, each element, if we learn to listen to its intimate dreaming within us, can inspire and guide us to develop totally different ideals, passions, beliefs, psychologies, aesthetics, ethics, poetics, and philosophies. The elements are the roots and sources of our experiential world and environment. They are as conditions of possibility constantly bestowing elemental meaning to each and every thought, act and gesture within our lifeworld.

Inspired by Bachelard's phenomenologically oriented elemental poetics we allow the four elements to guide us in researching salt-working as environmental wisdom, that springs out of the relationship that appears in the processes of salt-working among humans and other beings or entities or the environment, the saltworks, in general. One of the methods we use is the phenomenological reduction, *epoché*, that opens up the experience-centred approach or attitude of "standing in wonder before the world" (Maurice Merleau-Ponty). The *epoché* we use in approaching salt-working is the elemental reduction – a return to the elemental world. The complexity of the relationality between us, "salt-workers", and the environment, the saltworks, is engaged-with through experience and practice, especially in sensual perception of the environment (David Macauley).

This presentation is therefore an elucidation on our attempt to (re)establish an elemental ecophenomenology of the elements as present in salt-working with inquiring into: modes of experiencing the elements, their influence on the relationality of the saltworks, and experiencing salt as the result of the

interplay among the four elements, which through concentration are crystallised through and as salt.

*Keywords:* Salt-working; Experiential environmental wisdom; Elemental cohabitation; Ecophenomenology; Gaston Bachelard.

**Maja Bjelica** is a Research Associate at the ZRS Koper Institute for Philosophical and Religious Studies since 2019, conducting research in the fields of ethics (ethics of listening, ethics of hospitality), environmental humanities (ecoethnography of salt-working, elemental philosophy), anthropology of religion (Alevi studies), and philosophy of music (musicking, community music). As principal investigator of the research project “Grain of Salt, Crystallising Cohabitation: Salt-making as Experiential Environmental Wisdom” (ARIS J6-50196) she focuses on revealing salt-working as an activity springing from the cohabitation between the human and nature, the individual, the community and the environment, the subject and the life-world, always being porously connected with each other.

**Petri Berndtson** is a Research Associate at the ZRS Koper Institute for Philosophical and Religious Studies. Previously he has been a Lecturer at the Lahti University of Applied Sciences (Finland) and Visiting Lecturer at the Trondheim Academy of Fine Art (Norway). His main research interests and expertise lie in the experiential phenomenon of breathing, phenomenology (especially Merleau-Ponty), embodiment, elemental poetics (Bachelard), and contemplative studies. He is the author of *Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing: The Respiratory Primacy of Being* (Routledge, 2023) and the co-editor of *Atmospheres of Breathing* (SUNY Press, 2018). He is a member of the research project “Grain of Salt, Crystallising Cohabitation: Salt-making as Experiential Environmental Wisdom” (ARIS J6-50196).

## DISTINGUISHED ARTIST LECTURE







## INTELLIGENCE OF NATURE AND ITS ELEMENTAL BEINGS

**Marko POGAČNIK**

At the moment when artificial intelligence tries to exert its dominance over human culture, there is a need to stress that on our planet there exists an elemental intelligence of nature and the Earth that is more holistic, creative, and loving than the most sophisticated machines. The lecture offers an overview of the organism composing the elemental world of nature, its beings and their functions according to the author's own experience during his field work in different rural and urban environments. To complement the mental understanding of the elemental world of nature, possibilities of perception related to the world of elemental beings and their corresponding places will also be discussed, including presentation of several examples of perception exercises. Following that, the relationship between human and elemental consciousness will be the theme, as well as the relationship between the human self and the function of the elemental beings within the human body. The lecture will conclude with a series of Gaia Touch body exercises to take place within the ambience of the conference.

*Keywords:* Intelligence of nature; Elemental beings; Perception; Human body; Exercises.

**Marko Pogačnik** (born 1944 in Kranj, Slovenia) is an artist and author, and was designated UNESCO Artist for Peace from 2016 to 2024. He is best known as co-founder of the avant-garde OHO movement (1965–1970), which played a significant role in the development of conceptual and land art in the former Yugoslav space. He currently lives with his family in Šempas, Slovenia. His work brings together art, ecology, and spirituality, with a particular focus on the relationship between human beings and the living Earth. Among his major publications in English are *Elemental Beings and Nature Spirits* (Inner Traditions, 2005), *Dancing with the Earth Changes* (Lindisfarne, 2011), *Creating Gaia Culture* (Clairview, 2021), *Always in the Beginning* (VITAAA, 2024), and *The Love Sphere of the Earth* (Lindisfarne, 2025). His work has also appeared widely in German, including *Quantensprung der Erde* (AT Verlag, 2010), *Wandlungstanz der Erde* (Neue Erde Verlag, 2019), and *Elementarwesen und Feenwelten* (Neue Erde Verlag, 2025), as well as in Slovene, with titles such as *Ustvariti kulturo Gaje* (Primus, 2022) and *Elementarna bitja in vili in svetovi* (Založba VITAAA, 2025).







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