

2024 ATGENDER CONFERENCE

Session: Imagining Multispecies Ecologies through Feminist Perspectives

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Affective atmospheres of care and exclusion in urban gardens: the complexities of human and more-than-human encounters

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Abstract

Practices of care, whether personal or collective, intertwine with relational encounters and intersectional power dynamics in place. These practices can contribute to creating affective atmospheres that influence not only individuals' physical and psychological states but also the (un)caring practices enacted in spaces. From a feminist lens, I explore different affective atmospheres embedded in urban gardens in Aotearoa New Zealand, and how they inform practices of care and exclusion. Acknowledging the risks of social reproduction from the employment of volunteers' unpaid workforce by neoliberal strategies of governance, I focus on how their engagement with these initiatives was informed by their willingness to improve others' life quality, resulting in extended care for people and the environment. However, since affective encounters are embedded with power relations, I also shed light on ways that dominant structures influence practices of care. While volunteers resist the system, to a certain extent they also enact dynamics of othering towards different beings, breaking with idyllic notions of affect. Supported by feminist and more-than-representational frameworks, I delve into the complexity, potentials and ambiguities of the affective exchanges and the bodily interactions with the gardens. Therefore, I argue that – while affective atmospheres can influence spatial practices ranging from inclusive to exclusive – they can be fertile spatial arrangements to make a difference in challenging binary categories and foster feminist projects of belonging based on ecologies of care.

Keywords: feminist geographies, more-than-human geographies, multispecies solidarity, affective atmospheres, embodied methods, ethics of care

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