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HealthXCross Newsletter <healthxcross@dem.unive.it>

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Rispondi a: HealthXCross Newsletter <reply-febb1d797d65037f-4126_HTML-295907188-100018752-1@dem.unive.it>

A: marta.scaglioni@unive.it



HealthXCross 4/2025



WHAT WE HAVE DONE

HealthXCross has entered its third year!

In Autumn 2024, we had the pleasure of hosting [Kriti Sharma](#) as a visiting scholar. Kriti is a microbial ecologist and philosopher at the [University of California Santa Cruz](#). During her stay, Kriti shared her critical and poetic vision of science through individual and collective meetings. She also took part in many of our events. Her transdisciplinary approach exemplifies the kind of boundary-crossing intellectual work that HealthXCross aims to foster. In her first monograph, "Interdependence: Biology and Beyond" (2015), Sharma offered a compelling alternative to the popular view that interdependence simply means independent things interacting. Instead, she systematically demonstrated how all things come into being only in a system of dependence on others. More recently, she co-authored "Relationality: An Emergent Politics of Life Beyond the Human" (2024), with Arturo Escobar and Michal Osterweil. This work argues that at the root of contemporary crises lies the assumption of dualism, or the fundamental separateness of things. Through seminars and workshops, Sharma guided our team through critical analyses of non-relational living and explorations of how relationality is embodied in transformative decolonial scientific practices, expanding and enriching our conceptual toolkit for reimagining health beyond anthropocentric frameworks.



In the same period, we also hosted [Serina Tarkhanian](#), a Canadian-Armenian designer from the Oslo School of Architecture and Design as a visiting doctoral student. During her residency, Serina developed her work "Healing Earths", previously conceived in collaboration with [Corinne Aivazian](#). This project examines the complex biocultural significance of Armenian bole—an iron-rich clay with documented antimicrobial properties that has been used in Armenian traditional medicine for centuries. The material carries multiple layers of meaning, functioning simultaneously as medicine, cultural heritage, and embodied memory within Armenian communities whose relationships to land and knowledge have been profoundly disrupted through historical trauma. Tarkhanian's research carefully navigates the charged epistemic terrain where traditional ecological knowledge intersects with displacement narratives, avoiding both romanticization of "ancient wisdom" and the extractive logic that would reduce cultural practices to pharmacological compounds. In Venice, Serina collaborated with the [Department of Molecular Sciences and Nanosystems](#), in particular with [Sabrina Tamburini](#) and [Michela Falqui](#), to carry out laboratory research using both wet cultivation techniques and metagenomics. She also engaged in dialogue with the whole HealthXCross team, attending our meetings and focusing in particular on the relationship between Indigenous medicine and Western science, design research and scientific research. Her stay was also made possible thanks to the collaboration of the [Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa](#), which hosted her in its Artist Residency at [Palazzo Carminati](#). Her residency and work was supervised by our team member [Valeria Burgio](#), and was presented to the public on the 4th December at [Palazzetto Tito - Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa](#), and discussed with Kriti Sharma, [Anicka Yi](#) and [Armin Linke](#).



WELCOMES

In September 2024 our team welcomed [Eleonora Nigro](#), a scientific illustrator and live event illustrator based in Copenhagen, Denmark. She contributes to HealthXCross' research through her expertise in Computational Microbiology and her passion for science, visual communication, and storytelling. With a background in Biotechnology and Quantitative and Computational Biology from the University of Insubria (Italy) and the University of Trento (Italy), respectively, she started her career as a researcher. She studied the microbiome, initially across various hosts such as termites, water, and both human and non-human primates and then in relation to human diets and metabolism at the Novo Nordisk Center for Basic Metabolic Research. While being a researcher – and throughout her life – Eleonora has always been drawing, a passion she is bringing to HXC' meetings. Through a collaboration with Eleonora, we are exploring how visual communication plays a key role in making science accessible to everyone.

ORGANIZED EVENTS AND OUR GUESTS

04/11/2024

"Politics of collaboration in STS"

Workshop with [Sabina Leonelli](#) ([Technical University of Munich](#)) and [Stefano Canali](#) ([Politecnico di Milano](#)) on the politics of interdisciplinarity and on the ethnographic practices within STS studies. HealthXCross team had a fruitful discussion on the epistemological and practical challenges encountered in the field, arising from the very nature of HXC' research: working with scientists from other disciplines, co-authoring scientific papers, working in sensitive contexts, and contributing to create a

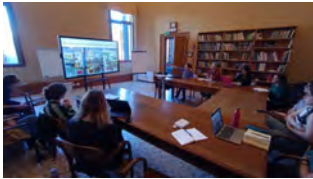
collaborative, reciprocal research approach with our informants and colleagues.



04/11/2024

["Engaged Empirical Inquiry in the Age of AI: The Question of Research Environment"](#)

Seminar by Sabina Leonelli (Technical University of Munich) on the new epistemologies opened up by data-intensive, AI-fuelled empirical research. The philosopher has interrogated new ways of doing research in relation to the openness of data, the public engagement of science, the imperatives of sustainability, democratic exchange, and transdisciplinarity. Sabina has framed this new way of doing research beyond national borders, keeping an eye on how to do science across a wide variety of research sites around the world.



30/10/2024

"From Anti-incineration Activism to 'Sustainable Living': Some Reflections on Forms of Environmentalism in Contemporary China"

[Anna Lora-Wainwright](#) (University of Oxford)

Chair: Roberta Raffaetà, Discussant: Mankei Tam.

This talk draws on two decades of research on various aspects of environmental activism and focuses especially on ongoing collaborative work with Thomas Johnson and Katherine Yuet Wong in Hangzhou. Given the steady tightening on civil society in the past decade, forms of subtle and everyday activism are taking on a special significance. During the talk, Anna elaborated the concept of "prefigurative politics" to make sense of these forms of action—ranging from buying food in bulk/refill shops and collecting recyclables to establishing and promoting field-to-table vegetarian restaurants in rural and peri-urban sites—and the hopes and aspirations of those who embrace them. These actions embody efforts to reclaim agency and articulate subjectivity and care between private and public spheres while questioning the binary between "everyday environmentalism" and contentious collective action.

Between November and December HealthXCross has organized [a workshop series named "Dialogues Across Microbiology, Art & Anthropology"](#), a series of dialogues, lectures, and panel discussions that explored the entangled relationships between microbial life, scientific practice, and transdisciplinary ecological thought. By convening microbiologists, philosophers, artists, and designers in sustained dialogue, the program has advanced new frameworks for conceptualizing health, resilience, and environmental crisis.



15/11/2024

[Bio-geo Interdependence](#)

A discussion between Kriti Sharma (University of California Santa Cruz, HealthXCross visiting fellow) and [Donato Giovannelli](#) (University of Naples Federico II, ERC CoEvo).

Chair: Roberta Raffaetà, Discussant: the HealthXCross team.

Through a dialogue between Giovannelli's research on extremophiles, deep-sea microorganisms, and Sharma's philosophical investigations into scientific practice, this session has explored how microbial life at the intersection of biology and geology transforms our understanding of planetary relationships and challenges traditional boundaries between living and non-living systems. The conversation has probed fundamental questions about biological-geological co-evolution and its implications for environmental change.

20/11/2024

[The Classification of Living Systems – Bridging Knowledge Systems for Ecological Democracy](#)

Lecture by Maud Quinzin - Postdoctoral Consultant at the World Maritime University (WMU) of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), a specialized agency of the United Nations, Malmö, Sweden.

Chair: Roberta Raffaetà, Discussant: Kriti Sharma.

Quinzin's talk has examined how integrating Indigenous knowledge systems with mainstream scientific approaches opens perspectives on resilience across living systems. Her research, spanning from microbiomes to ecosystems, challenges dominant scientific classifications while exploring alternative frameworks that promote ecological democracy. Through dialogues with Indigenous communities and interdisciplinary collaborations, her work develops new approaches to understanding health and environmental justice that bridges different knowledge traditions.



25/11/2024

[When Microbes Speak, What Do They Say? On the Poetics of Scientific Practice](#)

Lecture by Kriti Sharma.

Chair: Roberta Raffaetà, Discussant: Shaul Bassi.

In her talk, Sharma discussed 'science' as a complex institution that entails various practices: reading scientific literature, designing experiments, observing, and writing contributions (among others). Sharma explores how scientific practices—from experimental design to observation—are inherently artistic, requiring sensitivity to beauty, imagination, and craft. Drawing from her decade-long research on diverse microbial contexts, from deep-sea sediments to seagrass ecosystems, she develops a poetic approach to scientific practice that reveals new ways of understanding life beyond conventional interpretations, suggesting alternative possibilities for experiencing and describing human-microbial relationships.



04/12/2024

[Microcosms as Worldmaking: Reimagining Planetary Ecology in the Age of Interdisciplinary Praxis](#)

Open Workshop with Serina Tarkhanian, Kriti Sharma, Anicka Yi and Armin Linke.

Chairs: Valeria Burgio, Antonia Majaca, Roberta Raffaetà.

Discussant: Cristina Baldacci.

This interdisciplinary seminar, organized by the HealthXCross ERC research project in collaboration with NICHE Institute and Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, has explored ecology through diverse methodological lenses. Bringing together art-based researchers, scientists, and philosophers, the seminar has examined how methodologies across disciplines intertwine in novel forms of investigation and worldmaking. It has proposed examining microcosmic-planetary relationships while offering perspectives capable of redefining conceptions of health beyond anthropocentric views, without losing sight of the political epistemology of contemporary technoscience.



27/03/2025

Collective research methodologies in anthropology

[Cristina Grasseni](#), Professor of Anthropology at [Leiden University](#)

, joined us to discuss the methodology of collective projects.

Unlike life sciences, collective work is usually rare in anthropology, but large funding frameworks such as ERC are redefining approaches and methodologies. We think this is an open spot that requires more discussion and experimentation,

and Cristina helped us in that. Former David and Roberta Logie Fellow at Harvard's Radcliffe Institute, Grasseni's work bridges visual anthropology, food studies, and knowledge practices. Grasseni's recent ERC Consolidator grant "Food Citizens?" (2017-2024) compares models of collective food production and consumption across European cities, building on her earlier monographs "The Heritage Arena" and "Beyond Alternative Food Networks," which examine Alpine heritage cheese and solidarity economy networks. Her comparative ethnography of food networks in Italy and Massachusetts (supported by the Wenner-Gren Foundation) and her co-founding of CORESnet demonstrate her commitment to developing systematic research on alternative economic practices. Grasseni's interdisciplinary approach provides essential methodological tools for reimagining knowledge production and environmental relations outside extractive frameworks, offering valuable perspectives on collective responses to food insecurity and ecological crisis.



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

In January, [Valeria](#) and [Valentina](#) spent a week in the Giovannelli Lab at the Department of Microbiology of the University Federico II in Naples, where they had been last May with the entire HealthXCross group. On this occasion, they deepened their knowledge of the laboratory practices of this research group, observing scientists at work and interviewing them about methods and techniques for sampling, culturing and observing microbes. The lab is primarily concerned with "extremophiles", microbes living in extreme conditions (very high or very low temperatures; high salinity; high or low pH). These microbes are particularly interesting because they could be the origin of life on Earth and key to thinking about life forms that might exist on other planets. The scientists who volunteered to talk with Valentina and Valeria were very generous in explaining the workings of the machines in the lab and the progress of ongoing experiments, with all the frustrations and successes that entails. They were also fortunate to meet and talk with [Paul Falkowsky](#), a US oceanographer and author of pioneering studies on the origin of life and the role of microbes in reshaping Earth's geochemistry, who was in Naples for his work at the Anton Dohrn Station and was meeting Donato Giovannelli. Giovannelli's work on the co-evolution of biosphere and geosphere and their interdependence in generating planetary-scale processes also derives from his experience with Falkowsky at Rutgers University in the USA.

Pic: Winogradsky columns made by microbiology students in the Giovannelli Lab. Picture by Donato Giovannelli.

PUBLICATIONS

Raffaetà, R., Ferrari, L. (2025) [From gut feelings to data assets: ethnographic explorations of the gut's metabolic political economies](#). *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* (Springer Nature), 12, 1, 1-8.

Scaglioni, M. (2024) [Storia e significati della Nerezza nel Sud della Tunisia: per una nuova prospettiva](#). *Archivio Antropologico Mediterraneo*, 26:1, 1-19.

Ferrari, L., Raffaetà, R., Beltrame, L. (2024) [Capitalization and the production of value at the nexus of academia and industry: the case of a microbiome startup](#). *New Genetics and Society*, 43:1, 1-25.

Batisti, F., Raffaetà, R. (2024) [Scienza sradicata. Filosofia e antropologia alla prova dell'ampliamento della cognizione alle piante](#). *"Discipline Filosofiche"*, 2, 93-116.

INVITED EVENTS

21-22/05/2024 - "Microbes and their invisibilities"
Roberta Raffaetà at the symposium "Microbial Futures", Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies, Aarhus University, 21-22 May 2024.

4/10/2024 - "Microbes across humans, animals and more. The biopolitics of scale and species transitions in microbiome research". Roberta Raffaetà invited to the ["VetValues ERC Project"](#) kick-off meeting, Anthropology Department, [University of Amsterdam](#).

4/11/2024 - "Dalle ontologie alle politiche: pensare Latour all'incrocio tra post-verità, post-genomica e decolonizzazione della scienza". Roberta Raffaetà at the seminar "Forme e crisi dei saperi contemporanei a partire da Bruno Latour", [University of Turin](#).



EVENTS' PARTICIPATION

17/01/2025 - "Negozia la salute: collaborazioni scientifiche tra Nord e Sud globale e produzione di conoscenza sul microbioma umano in Africa". Participation by Marta Scaglioni in the fifth national seminar SIAM (Società Italiana di Antropologia Medica), University of Bologna, 16-18 January 2025.

25/10/2024 - "Financing phages in India: 'communist' viruses in antibiotic infrastructures". Participation by Victor Secco in the [FINPHARM project](#) closing conference ["Antibiotic Crises: A Global Ward Round"](#) at the [Geneva Graduate Institute, Switzerland](#).

03-04/12/2024 - "Snakes and Drains: Ritual Purity, Environmental Pollution, and Microbes in the Ganga". Participation by Victor Secco in the workshop ["Rivers, Sacred Values, and Environmental Attitudes"](#) at the [University of Lund, Sweden](#).

06/03/2025 - Eleonora Nigro's participation in the seminar ["Science Communication for Greater Research Impact"](#) organized by [Novo Nordisk Foundation](#), Copenhagen.

09/04/2025 - Marta Scaglioni and Victor Secco participated in [ASA \(Association of Social Anthropologists\)'s](#) conference ["Critical Junctions: Anthropology on the Move"](#), at the [University of](#)

[Birmingham](#).

Pic: *Eleonora at "Science Communication for Greater Research Impact"*.

UPCOMING EVENTS

We are entering an exceptionally rich period of intellectual exchange that promises to deepen our collective work at the intersections of health, technology, and critical environmental theory.

Distinguished Visitors Program:

[Stefan Helmreich](#) and [Heather Paxson](#) (March/April 2025). Stefan Helmreich, Professor of Anthropology, and Heather Paxson, William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Anthropology, both from [MIT](#), will visit as guests of the [NICHE \(The New Institute Centre for Environmental Humanities\)](#). Helmreich's influential work on how scientists conceptualize marine microbes in "Alien Ocean" and his explorations of waves as scientific, cultural, and political forms reconfigure our understanding of human-ocean relations. Paxson's groundbreaking research on artisanal cheese and "microbiopolitics" examines how cultural values and scientific knowledge co-produce regulatory frameworks around food safety and environmental health. Together, their scholarship on multispecies ethnography, microbial worlds, and the anthropology of life sciences provides crucial frameworks for rethinking biological citizenship and environmental governance. Their visit offers a rare opportunity to engage with two scholars whose work has fundamentally reshaped how we understand the entanglements between biopolitics, environmental knowledge, and more-than-human relations in the Anthropocene.

[Claas Kirchelle](#) (28-29 April, [INSERM/CERMES3](#))

Claas Kirchelle, Associate Research Professor at the French National Institute for Health and Medical Research (INSERM) based at the CERMES3 Unit in Paris, will join us for an open lecture titled "Of Humans and Microbes - Connecting the Histories of Microbial and Macrobial Life in the 20th and 21st Centuries." Kirchelle's multifaceted work explores the complex intersections of microbial science, pharmaceutical development, and public health governance. His current Wellcome Trust-funded project "Seeing like a Virus" fuses historical and biomedical approaches to investigate the laboratory networks, technologies, and microbial culture collections underpinning infectious disease surveillance. Kirchelle's innovative concept of "The Antibiocene" examines the history of antibiotic pollution, microbiological surveillance of sewage, and the environmental dimensions often neglected in One Health frameworks. His extensive public engagement work—including award-winning exhibitions like "Typhoidland" and expert testimony for the UK COVID-19 Inquiry—demonstrates his commitment to translating critical historical insights into contemporary policy discussions.

[Lucy Suchman](#) (April/May 2025, [Lancaster University](#)),

Professor Emerita of Anthropology of Science and Technology, will visit as a joint guest of the HealthXCross and [AI Models](#) ERC projects. Suchman's groundbreaking work spans critical AI studies, feminist STS, and human-computer interaction. Her visit will feature discussions on the denaturalization of data, labor and automation, feminist critiques of AI's representationalist turn, and relational intelligence. Her perspective on situated action and the social embeddedness of technology offers vital insights for those questioning contemporary AI paradigms, particularly the limitations of large language models. Suchman's pioneering

research at Xerox PARC and subsequent scholarship continues to provide essential frameworks for understanding the complex entanglements of humans, machines, and knowledge production.

OTHER UPCOMING EVENTS

In April, Victor will present a paper in the [Health, Environment, and Anthropology \(HEAT\)](#) conference at the [University of Durham](#).

In June, Victor, Valentina, and Valeria will convene panels and Marta will present a paper in the [10th STS Italia conference](#), at the Polytechnic University of Milan.

In June, MK and Marta will be presenting at the [Finnish Anthropological Society \(FAS\)](#) Biennial Conference at the [University of Helsinki](#).

HealthXCross asks: *how does health come to be reconfigured in a world entangled through microbial data?*

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Principal Investigator: [Roberta Raffaetà](#)

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[Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage \(DFBC\)](#)

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

Dorsoduro 3246, 30123

Venezia, Italy, IT