



Workshop: “From Alienation to Affinities”

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Keynotes: Prof. Dr. Gabriele Rippl and Dr. Sofie Behluli, University of Bern (Switzerland) and Dr. Andrew McCartan, University College Dublin (Ireland).

Call for Papers

Since the pandemic, alienation has been a topic of many names in academia and beyond - from “loneliness and anxiety epidemics” discussed in the news, to the uptick in conspiracy-driven communities online and offline. As the virtual and the physical worlds overlap and people are searching for a digital community more and more, there is an emerging sense of fragmentation that is haunting citizens of nation states. Coupled with the precarious state of the global economy, the need for strong social bonds becomes a pressing issue.

As physical meetings and communication are increasingly outsourced to digital spaces, they reshape how humans experience sociality and temporality within digital ecosystems, intensifying the demand for ‘digital well-being’ (see Vacanti et al.). However, the same avenues which may alienate may also give rise to new and improved community building. More and more people go online to find communities around shared interests and fears to combat feelings of isolation, powerlessness, and alienation (see Prescott et al.). Especially with the rise of streaming platforms, creators and watching participants are creating spaces of shared experience and empowerment in real time, which have the potential to spill over into the physical world – organizing protests, starting online (political) email campaigns, among other things. Thus, both digital and physical spaces can work as powerful tools for political activism and may strengthen social bonds rather than diminishing them. Moreover, digital forums and platforms create their own spaces which generate their own atmospheres through different parts of their architecture: from monetization structure, community chats and communication culture within a space, to the data which is shareable. These elements all contribute to the affective atmosphere of a digital space, just as an “assembling of bodies” opens up physical spaces in which shifting affects may resonate, including marginalization and social alienation (Anderson 80).

It seems pivotal then to look towards the potential for affinities in digital, physical, and hybrid spaces to explore the ways in which the merging of the physical and digital may create and strengthen collaborative bonds. Emerging concepts such as Jennifer Mason’s “socio-atmospherics” aim to shed light on exactly such in-between ways of being which bring the focus to affinities and how social bonds may be enhanced and propagated – between people and beyond the Anthropocene.



The concept also resonates with Anderson’s “affective atmospheres”, which capture both physical and virtual experiences that emerge “before and alongside the formation of subjectivity, across human and materialities, and in-between subject/object distinctions” (78). This new, tentative direction of research points toward affective practices as the key for timely ontological and epistemological research, emphasising the vibrant interconnectedness between human and more-than-human elements within spaces.

How can academic research facilitate the strengthening of human (and beyond-human) connection, and establish physical and digital networks of trust, empathy, and kinship? We want to know how such spaces are created and maintained, and how different academic fields can create synergies through shared research – and action. In the upcoming workshop “From Alienation to Affinity” we invite researchers from the humanities, social sciences, and beyond to contribute and share their research. The aim of the workshop is to go beyond theory and work toward an active, engaged, interdisciplinary, and experimental network of knowledge and collaboration across fields.

Presentations may include, but are not limited to, the following topics /questions:

How can narrative help overcome alienating affects, or mitigate them? What can digital spaces teach us about the intentional construction of welcoming spaces in the physical world? How can synergies of the digital and physical enhance affinity between humans – and beyond? And how can academic research shed a light on these tensions and give rise to actions which increase (beyond-)human affinities?

Please submit 500-word abstracts of your presentation and a 100-word author bio to alienationaffinities@gmail.com. Selected presentations may be considered for inclusion in a forthcoming peer-reviewed journal issue.

Deadline for applications: 14th December 2025.

The workshop will take place at the University of Tübingen, Germany on 20-22 March 2026.

Keywords: embodiment, alienation, affective spaces, post-humanism, new materialism, intersectionality, social networks, digital kinship, empowerment and organizing.



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