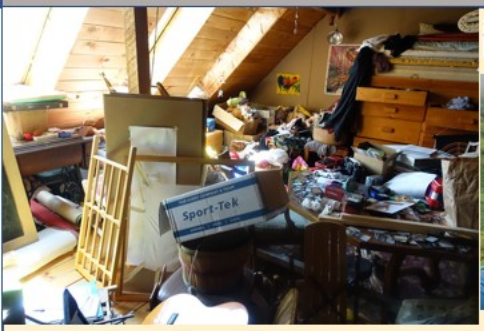
Prof Sasha Newell
(Université libre de Bruxelles)

Chair: Dr Tatsuma Padoan

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

On Semiotic Animacy: Domestic Accumulation and the More-than-Human Collectivities of Clutter



Taighde Éireann
Research Ireland





Wednesday 11 November 2026, 17.00-19.00, O'Rahilly Building, CACSSS Seminar Room, UCC – ALL WELCOME

In this paper I examine accumulation as a kind of vital force: piles of clutter grow of their own accord, against our own volition. Rather than study hoarding as a psychological disorder, I see it as an extreme symptom of a socioeconomic phase of capitalism – everywhere people are caught up in capitalist exchange households are experiencing a kind of material excess of valueless things that are nonetheless taxing to get rid of. I explore these accumulative lifeforms as semiotic processes, using the case of hoarding to develop a theory of semiotic animacy. The phenomenological experience of things as living beings is above all the product of the liveliness of signs, and masses of objects develop semiotic associations between themselves that take on the form of an extra-human collectivity. Clutter resembles the crowd, an uncontrollable social force greater than the sum of its parts.

Sasha Newell is Professor of Anthropology at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, in the Laboratoire d'Anthropologie des Mondes Contemporains.

Sens

CARPe
Centre for Arts Research and Practice

SENSA Lab*
MA Anthropology, Study of Religions Department
*SENSA Laboratory of Semiotics, Ethnosemiotics, Nonfictional Studies and Audiovisuality