



Special Focus: Buddhism in the Anthropocene

Affective Entanglements: Human-Nonhuman Relations in Buddhist Ecologies of Feeling

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This article reflects on key concepts in early South Asian Buddhism and their potential for creative dialogue with current concepts of research at the philosophical forefront of ecological thinking. It explores the role of *feelings*—that is, both bodily affects and culturally formed emotions—as crucial in negotiating the relations between humans and nonhumans and their environments. To this end, the concept of *affective entanglement* is proposed as a way of describing and analysing the condition of constitutive ecological linkage articulated through feelings and based in the fundamental interdependence of all phenomena in the world. Through careful analysis of a series of important early Buddhist Pali texts dealing with forested environments, this article explores how the early Buddhist teaching can challenge and enrich how we think of persons and bodies in relation to other beings and environments. Through a discussion of the powerful emotion of fear and the importance of vulnerability, the article develops thoughts on how Buddhist emotional practices as practices of care can inspire new approaches in today's times of escalating ecological crisis and acute vulnerability in coexisting and intersecting human and nonhuman pluriworlds.

Keywords: fear; forest; Pali; Jataka; care

“**A**nd how, oh monks, does a monk abide as one who observes the body in the body?” asks the Buddha, and continues: “Here, oh monks, a monk, gone to the forest, or gone to the root of a tree, or gone to an empty house, sits down having crossed his legs, having set his body upright, having readied his mindfulness as focused. Thus mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out.”¹

The above quote is taken from the *Satipaṭṭhānasutta* (MN 10²), the *Discourse on the Establishing of Mindfulness*. Along with its extended sibling the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhānasutta* (DN 22), this text is a quintessential guide to the meditative practice of early South Asian Buddhism as described in the collection of the Buddha's teachings collected in the *Sutta Piṭaka* (the *Basket of Discourses*) of the Pali canon. Both versions of the text open with a brief framing of where the instruction took place—in the market town (*nigama*) called Kammāsadhamma³, among the Kuru people. Following a short overview over the contents of the sutta, the successive meditations on the body (*kāya*), on feelings (*vedanā*), the mind (*citta*), and mental objects (*dhamma*), the text segues into the section quoted above, locating the practitioner in their environment. The rest of the sutta then concerns itself entirely with the choreography of varying stages and practices of meditation, seemingly underlining how the focus of much of early Buddhist doctrine rests squarely on the practicing individual. But there is more to explore here. This key guide to early Buddhist contemplative practice not only maps the foci of a meditation, but more fundamentally also locates the practitioner as a bodily presence in a physical environment. The first of its successive four stages, the observation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*), begins with a location of this body.

¹ All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

² I follow the ID system of Pali texts used at buddhanexus.net, where the source texts are free available.

³ Present day Kumashpur in Haryana, near Meerut. Popularised by Goenka's Vipassana meditation movement in the late 1990s.

Gone to the forest (*araññagato*), to the root of a tree (*rukkhamūlagato*), or to an empty house (*suññāgāragato*), the practitioner sits in proper meditative posture, their legs crossed, body upright, mind focused, breath controlled. We are thus led, through a passage directly appealing to the senses and to the physical reality of the body, to this first focus of meditation: the body (*kāya*) itself, as observed “in the body”, that is, in its physical materiality. The practitioner then observes their own and other bodies as they breathe, hold postures, in their actions, their impurity, their constitution, and finally, their decay and decomposition.⁴

As this brief passage illustrates, early Buddhist texts are often prominently concerned with the environments in which they are set. Such environments are far from incidental, and the texts go into particular details in locating their actors—human and nonhuman—within and in relation to them. It is on the nature of these environmental relations that I focus here. Though early Buddhism ultimately focuses on the practicing individual and their quest to overcome a worldly existence marked by suffering, I argue that, on the long way of reaching this goal, teaching and practice rely upon a particular way of relating to environments. Feelings, as I will show below, are key to these relations. In line with the way that early Buddhist teachings conceived of a person as an assemblage of transient constituents, there is no airtight inner space in which these feelings are locked. Instead, we find both the affective states of the body and the conceptualised emotions in the mind emerging from the experiential relations with other beings and environments. In what follows, I propose the concept of *affective entanglement* as a way of describing and analysing the condition of constitutive ecological linkage articulated through feelings and based in the interrelations between all phenomena in the world.

My argument about affective entanglement is two-pronged. Firstly, it is my contention that feelings are vital to understanding the way in which early Buddhist texts conceive of our relations to environments and nonhuman beings. Secondly, going further, I am confident that a conceptual exploration of these particular aspects of the teachings not only provides a necessary complement to the texts’ anthropocentrism, but can also inspire new ways of inhabiting our present. Affective entanglement, I argue, holds potential for overcoming the anthropocentrism at the root of our current condition of escalating environmental crises in the Anthropocene, by contributing to the enacting of more sustainable ecological relations that foreground feelings such as care. Making this argument, I am mindful of the fact that, in contrast to the efflorescence of ecological movements in Buddhist communities in the contemporary world, Buddhisms across their long and variegated histories have not been in and of themselves ecological, as Ian Harris (1991) and others have pointed out. At the same time, many other scholars have sought to recover potential ecological ethics from the frameworks of Theravāda and other schools of Buddhism (such as Batchelor and Brown 1992; Schmithausen 1997; Sahni 2009. See also Sirisena in this issue). My own focus in this article is less on the question of whether or not early Buddhism as a whole was or is amenable to ecological concerns, rather than on the more specific issue of how the texts conceive of the relation of humans to other beings and their environments, and how that might be of use today.

This article explores the centrality of feelings to the vital connection between persons, nonhuman beings, and their environments or life-worlds. The careful analysis of a series of important early Buddhist Pali texts grounds this conceptual reflection in early Buddhist philosophy. A discussion of the conception of the world as the world of experience prefaces my detailed exploration of the powerful feeling of fear in the forest. Based on this textual work, I explain how early Buddhist texts conceive of the human as open and relational assemblages, bringing the theory of the five *khandhas* and the senses into dialogue with contemporary

⁴ The successive observances are those of the body’s breathing (*ānāpāna*), its postures (*iriyāpatha*, “ways of comportment”, i.e., walking, standing, sitting, lying down), through clear comprehension (*sampajāna*) of bodily actions such as looking, wearing robes, eating, drinking, defecating, walking, and so on, by observing the body’s inherent repulsive impurities (*asucino*), its composition made up of the four elements (*dhatu*, or “primary/great elements” *mahābhūta*, earth [*pathavi*], water [*āpo*], fire [*tejo*], air [*vāyo*]), and finally, in the longest section of this part, the observance of the body in its varying states of decay and decomposition, as seen on cemeteries and charnel grounds (*sivathikā*).

concepts including entanglement and trans-corporeality, which stress the constituting interrelatedness of humans with other beings and environments. Building on this conceptual exploration, a further textual discussion will sketch how affective entanglements can inspire practices of care beyond the human.

In the face of the much-maligned anthropocentrism built into dominant readings of the Anthropocene (Morrison 2018; Yusoff 2018), this article looks for inspiration beyond Euro-American intellectual frames. On the other hand, however, I approach early Buddhist texts not in the sense of normative discourses on doctrinal “purity”, but as intellectual and conceptual resources that can inspire and help formulate new approaches to contemporary issues. My work with the texts is therefore two-pronged: I situate and historicise them as having been composed in their specific contexts in ancient India, while simultaneously agreeing with the Buddhist perspective that conceives of the texts as abidingly contemporaneous in their continuing ability to speak to aspects of our present realities. Following Wolfgang Iser’s (1970) classical proposition that texts develop their meanings only in their interaction with readers, I use this chance of a re-reading to tease out new aspects that previously may have only been latent in the texts. To this end, I draw on texts that remain central to Buddhist education and practice in monastic as well as lay contexts, but also on some that have received comparatively less attention. Crucially, however, I see this engagement as also challenging the persistence of Eurocentrism, especially in the field of theory, by drawing on rich and articulate thought worlds that are as generative of theory as the hegemonic epistemic domains of the Global North. The productive and perhaps surprising conceptual resonances I explore below may lend themselves, so I hope, to inspire new ways of thinking through current, and historical, ecological predicaments.

World and Experience

In her study on the constitution of the individual in early Buddhism, Sue Hamilton (1996: xxvi) stressed that, when the early texts speak of the world (*loka*) they often do not speak ontologically, but rather of the individual’s experience of the world, of what Yakupitiyage Karunadasa terms the “world of experience” or “phenomenal existence” (2019: 10, 17). The particularity of this definition of the world as world of experience in Buddhism is explained in the *Lokantagamasutta* (SN 35.116), the *Discourse on Traveling to the End of the World*. In it, the Buddha’s disciple Ānanda explains the specific meaning of “world” in this context: “With whatever in the world, oh monks, you perceive the world and make the world, that is called the world in the teaching of the Noble One.” This is followed by an explanation of the means through which the world is perceived and made: the six senses “in the world” (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind). The world that this teaching is concerned with, therefore, is perception and experience.

Similarly in the *Lokasutta* (SN 12.44), the *Discourse on the World*, the Buddha explains what he describes as the “origin of the world” (*lokassa samudayo*), which is again traced from each of the senses. Eye-consciousness (*cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ*), for example, arises from the eye and the forms (*rūpa*) it perceives, all three together making up contact (*phassa*). Contact in turn conditions feeling or affect (*vedanā*), which conditions craving (*taṇhā*), which conditions grasping (*upādāna*), which conditions existence (*bhava*), which conditions birth (*jāti*), which conditions old age and death (*jarāmaraṇaṃ*) giving rise to sorrow (*soka*), lamentation (*parideva*), suffering (*dukkha*), anguish (*domanassa*) and distress (*upāyāsa*). This, the Buddha explains, is the origin of the world. Likewise, the passing of the world (*lokassa atthaṅgamo*) occurs when the cessation of craving interrupts the above chain of conditions.

Returning to Hamilton, her contention is that “what appear to be ontological statements in fact metaphorically relate to the subjective experience of the individual”, but that we must not assume this “metaphorical use” of world to mean a denial of the existence of the “external world” (1996: xxvi–xxvii). Early Buddhist teachings therefore did not deny the existence of an external world, but as many scholars have

argued, their primary concern was on the inner world of the practicing individual. However, I argue that the way in which the texts present this experiential relationship between a person and their enviroing world is more intimate, fundamental, and bidirectional. Natural and semi-artificial environments (such as forests, parks, and gardens) were not only the landscapes in which early Buddhists conducted their lives, but are also ubiquitous in the texts (Bloom 1972: 117; see also Schmithausen 1991a; Dhammika 2015; Le Duc 2017). The Theravāda Pali canon persistently describes humans, including the Buddha and his disciples, in particularly close engagements with diverse natural environments and nonhuman beings. Though early Buddhists ultimately set their sights on leaving the world behind, the way in which humans relate to environments is of central concern in the broad and temporally protracted space of practice working towards this ultimate goal. Paying attention to the role of feelings allows us to investigate how the texts conceive of the experiential realities of the body, its senses, and its interactions with other bodies and materialities. Furthermore, as I will explore below, it is these concerns that, I believe, can offer new impulses for human, nonhuman, and ecological concerns of the present.

Fear in the Wild Forest

Across the Buddhist literature, natural environments come in various forms, and their differences are crucial. Not all forests, for example, are the same. The word *vana*, as in the *Venuvana* and *Jetavana* groves, denotes a forest or grove close to human civilisation and typically bearing marks of cultivation or park-like design. Often, as in the two cases, they contained a monastery (*vihāra*) and were the locations where the Buddha taught many of his sermons. As Johan Elverskog (2020) argued, early Buddhism was highly urban, depending on donations, daily alms, and patronage from local centres of commerce and political power large enough to support the growing community of monks and nuns. At the same time, the doctrine of renunciation cultivated a narrative of detachment that built on existing South Asian ascetic traditions. Here, high value is put on the unwelcoming wilderness, thick jungle, and remote forest away from the obligations of family and social groups. We have already encountered this in the opening quote from the *Satipaṭṭhānasutta*, which locates the practitioner sitting down for meditation in just such environments—gone to the forest, to the root of a tree, or to an empty house. Often, such environments are not the *vana*, but the *arañña*, and they can have the form of forests or jungles, but also shrubland or desert. While often translated as forest, just like *vana*, the term *arañña* describes natural environments that are particularly remote from the human presence, making them ideal for meditative practice in solitude. However, the *arañña* is also potentially dangerous. It is habitat to wild animals and unpredictable supernatural beings. In contrast to the *vana* as forest, one can get dangerously lost in such wilderness, and not only physically.

This brings me to an interesting key text that spells out the importance of feelings in religious practice and what I theorise as affective entanglement below. It appears in the pages of the *Journal of the Maha-Bodhi Society*, a periodical that was (and is) the primary mouthpiece of the *Maha Bodhi Society of India*, published since 1892 and edited by the Anagarika Dharmapala until his passing in 1933. The *Journal* was disseminated globally, connecting in both its readers and contributors a network of Buddhists spanning from South to East Asia, North America, and to Europe (for an overview see Seelawimala 2014). In the issue of November 1900, one of only a few issues uncharacteristically bearing not a photograph of the Mahabodhi temple but one of the Bodhi tree on its cover, a short article titled “Spiritual Fearlessness” recapitulates the contents of the a particular Pali sutta of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, in which “the Buddha, addressing the Brahman Jānussoni, describes his experience as Bodhisattwa, before He had attained to omniscience, how He had lived in the wilderness alone, surrounded by all sorts of the most terrific influences.”⁵

⁵ “Spiritual Fearlessness,” *Journal of the Maha-Bodhi Society* Vol. 9, 7 (November 1900): 64.

The text is the *Bhayabheravasutta* (MN 4), *The Discourse on Fear and Terror*. In it, the Buddha and the Brahman Janussonin speak at length about meditative practice in places defined as dwellings in wildernesses and forests (*araññavanapatthāni*). Janussonin tells the Buddha about the severe problems he encounters with contemplative practice in the forest: “Indeed hard to endure, oh Gotama, are dwellings in wild forests, remote lodgings. Solitude is hard to do, loneliness is hard to enjoy. The forests, I think, plunder the mind of a monk who is not holding on to concentration.” Here we find a great contrast to the brief environmental exposition of the *Satipaṭṭhānasutta*. We are once again taken to a wild forest, an *arañña*, to remote “bed and chair” (*senāsana*). As the text’s commentary attributed to the fifth-century commentator Buddhaghosa⁶ explains, such forest dwellings (*vanapatthāni*) are beyond the edge (*panta*) of the monk’s (or nun’s) social cosmos. Having left or gone beyond the village rim, they are places where one does not meet other people, where there is no ploughing and no sowing—hence: away from civilisation and from cultivated landscapes. In such a location the ideal of solitude—*paviveka*, the physical, as the commentary paraphrases, isolation of the body (*kāyaviveka*)—is hard to perform (*dukkara*). Furthermore, in being alone, all by oneself (*ekatta*), there is no joy (*sukha*) to be found, it is hard to enjoy (*durabhirama*) (Buddhagosācariya 1922: 81:112). And finally, the distraught petitioner describes to the Buddha a special kind of mental calamity that occurs under such adverse conditions: the forests plunder the mind of the unprepared. As the commentary details, the forests, by [their] alarming manifold sounds of grass, leaves, wild animals and so on, disturb or upset (*vikkhipanti*) the mind, causing the practitioner to, so to speak, lose it. No wonder, then, that dwelling in the wild forests can therefore be hard to endure (*durabhisambhava*).⁷

And how does the Buddha answer? He affirms, “indeed, so it is” (*evametam*), repeats the listed difficulties, and explains that earlier when he was still an unawakened Bodhisattva, the same thought had occurred to him. He then launches into a long and repetitive elaboration on the various factors that make a person unfit for forest dwelling, such as impure conduct, ill will, sloth, doubt, or self-praise.⁸ Many of these are states of feeling or emotional dispositions towards the self, others, or religious practice. Crucially, however, they all lead to the same result in this wilderness or remote forest: they summon bad or improper fear and terror (*akusalam bhayabheravaṃ avhāyanti*).

The Buddha then describes how he resolved this fear and terror. First, he realised that he did not share any of the negative qualities listed above, meaning that he follows right conduct. Then, he made up his mind to consciously seek out fear-inducing places, and at night no less. Such places, in the dark, shrines in parks, forests, and at trees, inspire awe or dread (*bhīṃsanaka*) and make one’s hair stand on end (*salomahaṃsa*). And surely, he would get to see the fear and terror there. No sooner said than done, the Buddha recounts his experience of the actual nights. Staying in such frightful places at night, animals of the forest appeared—deer, or a peacock making a twig fall—or the wind would stir dead leaves. And in this state he asked himself: “Now is this the fear and terror that arrive?” But he further realises that there is no need to wait and hope for fear to

⁶ The commentary titled *Bhayabheravasuttavaṇṇanā* (Explanation of the Bhayabheravasutta) is part of the *Papañcasūdanī* commentary on the *Majjhima Nikāya*. I rely on the text of the Pali Text Society, edited by James Haughton Woods and Damodar Dharmananda Kosambi (Buddhagosācariya 1922). For a detailed analysis and translation of the sutta and its commentary, see also the recent PhD dissertation by Sraman (2018).

⁷ The variously prefixed verbal root—*dur-abhi-sam-bhū*—implies both difficulty of endurance as well as remoteness in the sense of something that is hard to reach or attain. (Rhys Davids and Stede 2004: 71).

⁸ Namely brahmans who are 1) unpurified in their bodily activities (*aparissuddhakāyakkammantā*), in their verbal activities (*aparissuddhavacikkammantā*), in their mental activities (*aparissuddhamanokammantā*), or in their livelihood (*aparissuddhājīvā*); 2) who are greedy and highly infatuated with sensual pleasures (*abhiññālu kāmesu tibbasārāgā*); 3) who have malevolent thoughts and who have minds of bad intentions (*byāpannacittā paduṭṭhamanasankappā*); 4) who are possessed by sloth and drowsiness (*thinamiddhapariyuṭṭhitā*); 5) whose thoughts are disturbed and agitated (*uddhatā avūpasantacittā*); 6) who are uncertain and doubting (*kañkhī vicikicchī*); 7) who are exalting themselves and disparaging others (*attukkaṃsakā paravambhī*); 8) who tend toward being terrified and afraid (*chambhī bhīrukajātikā*); 9) who are desiring gains, reverence and fame (*lābhasakkārasilokaṃ nikāmayamānā*); 10) who are indolent and lacking in vigour (*kusīta hīnavīriyā*); 11) who are forgetful in mindfulness and inattentive (*muṭṭhassatī asampajānā*); 12) who are uncomposed, their thoughts wandering (*asamāhitā vibbhantacittā*); 13) who are without insight, deaf and dumb (*duppāññā eḷamūgā*).

come (*bhayapaṭikañkhī viharati*), it now becomes possible to expel fear and terror (*bhayabheravaṃ paṭivineti*) in whichever state (walking, standing, sitting, and so on) they appear, by not breaking one's stride or changing one's pose but remaining in the very state one is overcome by fear in, until that very fear is conquered. Thus finally having recovered the proper bodily and mental state—persistence, clear mindfulness, a calm body and a focused mind, as we know from the *Satipaṭṭhānasutta*—the Buddha can turn the wild forest into a place of realisation, going through the four stages of meditation (*jhāna*) and attaining the states of meditative insight.

What does all this tell us? Previous scholarship has examined various roles that fear has played in early Buddhism. Torkel Brekke (1999) argued that the invocation of fear constituted a central instrument in early Buddhist missionary activity. Giuliano Giustarini (2012), on the other hand, focused on fear as a response to danger and the attainment of fearlessness, primarily by the Buddha. Both authors stress that fear in Buddhism plays a “paradoxical” or “contradictory” role, in that it is both something to be overcome while simultaneously acting as a key motivating factor for religious practice. As Bronwyn Finnigan recently argued (2021), finally, what the previous authors posited as a paradox may not be contradictory at all, if we understand fear primarily in relation to dangers that are real for the unenlightened but cease to pose threats to the enlightened Buddha (such as wild animals). While I find these perspectives convincing, my focus here is different, in that I am more interested in how the text(s) speak(s) to the practitioners. While the Buddha was certainly seen to have dwelled in a state of fearlessness in the absence of any danger, the same was not true for monks on the long path of practice, to whom these texts are addressed and for whom both fears and dangers in wilderness environments were real.

The kind of fear that we find described in the *Bhayabheravasutta*, however, turns out to not be primarily tied to an object. It is less a fear of the wild forest or things and creatures found therein, but rather an atmosphere of dread in environments culturally coded as potentially dangerous—i.e., the wilderness, the dark forest, the night. Such environments can “plunder the mind” of a monk and, in so doing, elicit strong bodily reactions that we still associate with fear today, such as our hair standing on end. As the sutta explains, it is the very bodily exposure to such environments that elicits these feelings. But the repeated references to the mind and to the mental constitution of the practitioner in the forest also suggest that this fear and terror are primarily in our heads. As the Buddha's wording on his triumph over fear indicates, the ultimate outcome here (in contrast to other instances) is not a shielding from fear or its total absence (*abhaya*), but a literal “leading away” or expelling (*paṭivineti*) of fear that is premised on the previous fully embodied experience of the feeling within the environment. The experience of fear in particular environments, then, constitutes in and of itself an act of becoming that is central to meditative practice. This is why fear, in this case, is not primarily the fear of a concrete object or danger. In fact, when the Buddha describes the actual nights spent in fear-inducing places, the animals he encounters are particularly tame (deer, peacock) and typically associated with cultivated parks or gardens. Without slipping back into a dualism of mind versus body or discounting the power of mental fears, what the text here powerfully shows is the affective entanglement between environments such as the wild forest and a person seen as an entity composed of various interacting and open parts, an assemblage of *khandhas*. It is to this that I now turn.

Assemblage, Contact, and Affective Entanglement

A “wild” forest, as the previous section has explored, can elicit powerful feelings such as fear and terror, manifesting viscerally in the body and with the power to “plunder” the mind. More generally, our environments, whether built or grown, purportedly natural, artificial, or anything in between, shape how we feel and how we act. An extensive body of work in disciplines including history, sociology, and anthropology has explored how the spaces, architectures, objects, flora and fauna, and the hosts of other actors that make

up our environments, shape our feelings and how we relate to them emotionally.⁹ Such approaches tend to see emotions as “human artifacts that are deeply embedded in culture” and therefore “open to historical change”, as the historian of emotion Ute Frevert (2021) contends. While this view does not neglect the embodied and visceral side of emotions, the body itself as well as its practices and interpretations is seen as always already shaped by the influence of culture. Scholars of affect and phenomenology, on the other hand, have foregrounded the ways in which environments are charged with affective atmospheres, moods, or energies, which impact us through our bodily presence in immediate and pre-conscious ways (Böhme 2016; Schmitz 2016). Even though my argument in this article features a strong component of affect, I view classical affect theory’s focus on the “autonomy of affect” (Massumi 1995) as reductive and ill-equipped to deal with the cultural and historical variability of human feelings.¹⁰ As the previous section exemplified, we need to pay close attention to how exactly bodies, environments, and their interactions were conceived.

Furthermore, studying emotions in early South Asian Buddhism has to contend with the often unabashedly Eurocentric theoretical concepts used in the study of emotions, as Margrit Pernau (2021) has critiqued. This requires re-examining fundamental analytical concepts and categories in dialogue with vernacular epistemologies, including the idea of the self, the location and constitution of feelings, or what functions these perform. At the same time, certain concepts necessarily remain restricted to the level of analysis. Though early Buddhism has a concept that delineates feelings in the sense of bodily affects (*vedanā*), for example, mentally constituted and culturally coded phenomena such as fear (*bhaya*) or compassion (*karuṇā*) do not fall into a vernacular category directly translatable to the analytical concept of emotion or feeling. How, then, did early Buddhists conceive of a person and the role of feelings in relation to environments? In his analysis of solitude (*viveka*) in Aśvaghōṣa’s *Saundarananda* (2nd century CE), Roy Tzohar has shown how emotions in Buddhism are not limited to a “subjective inner space” and activated by outside stimuli, but are instead “already ways of experientially inhabiting the world, in which the subject and the world are, phenomenologically speaking inextricably tangled” (2021: 280). The story of the conversion of handsome Nanda (the Buddha’s half-brother) illustrates how feelings such as solitude are forms of practice that have a direct impact on the practitioner’s environment (Tzohar 2021: 294). And as Tzohar, Maria Heim, and Ram-Prasad Chakravarthi contend, the same holds true more generally for emotions in classical Indian philosophies, where “emotions appear primarily as perceptual modes (of the natural world in particular), thereby creating an emotional ‘space’ in which the subject and the external world are, phenomenologically speaking, inextricably bound together” (Tzohar 2021: 2).

Early Buddhist philosophy sees the figure of the human construed very differently from the figure of the sovereign individual of European Enlightenment philosophy. Instead of a bounded individual, the doctrine of the five *khandhas* conceives of a person as an assemblage. Five different material and immaterial aggregates or “heaps” constitute this assemblage: *rūpa* (materiality or form), *vedanā* (feeling/affect), *sañña* (perception), *saṅkhāra* (mental formations), and *viññāna* (consciousness).¹¹ This is central to the Buddhist negation of an inherent self (*anattā*). A person is nothing more than a collection of heaps, or, with Fernand Braudel, a “set of sets” (DeLanda 2018: 14). However, as I discussed above, we need to keep in mind that when the texts speak of the five aggregates as worldly phenomena, or “a world in the world” as Hamilton (Hamilton 1996: xxvii) translates the expression *loke lokadhammo*, this refers to the world of experience ultimately to be transcended. The same text, the *Discourse of the Flower (Pupphasutta)*, summarises poetically: just as a lotus grows in the water but then rises above it with no drop clinging to it, so too did the Buddha grow up in the world but dwells having

⁹ On space, architecture, and emotions, see Pernau (2014) and Gammerl (2015); on animals and emotions Bourke (2020); on objects and emotions Downes, Holloway, and Randles (2018); on environments and emotions Weik von Mossner (2017).

¹⁰ For an exhaustive treatment of the main analytical and methodological shortcomings hardwired into classical affect theory, see Leys (2017).

¹¹ As enumerated in the *Khandhasutta* (SN 22:48) and several parallel instances.

overcome it (*lokaṃ abhibhuyya viharati*), unstained by the world (*anupalitto lokenā*).¹² Clearly, early Buddhists had their sights set beyond the world. However, just as the lotus needs water to grow, so do humans need to go through this world of experience. To ultimately be “unbesmeared” (*anupalitta*) by it, the world needs to be overcome. This overcoming, and its verbal root *abhi-bhū* as literally “over-becoming”, points to feeling when we remember that the *Bhayabheravasutta* uses the same root and prefix in construing its experiential environmental relation: wild forests are “hard to endure”—*durabhisambhava*. The world of suffering or the terrifying forest are endured and overcome, as learned above, not by the absence of feeling but through the very experience thereof.

The theory of the five *khandhas* stresses a person’s fundamental embeddedness in the world. The four mental aggregates arise out of their contact with materiality, the first *khandha* constituted from the four primary elements.¹³ This contact is mediated through the six senses.¹⁴ Buddhist conceptions of sensory function, much like in other South Asian philosophical traditions, markedly differ from dominant European views of the senses as unidirectional receivers of sensory information. Instead, the senses are understood as constituted in relations between internal and external “sense bases” (*āyatana*) pairing sense organs with their objects.¹⁵ This relation is described as a direct contact (*sam-/phassa*, literally: touching) of both sides, also paraphrased in the commentaries as a “coming together” or “meeting” (*samosaraṇa*) (Hamilton 1996: 17). Contact brings us back to the role of feelings, as an exceptional passage in the *Titthāyatana-sutta* (The Discourse of Sectarian Views, AN 3.61) lays out. In the text, the Buddha folds an ontogenic description into his statement of the Four Noble Truths, going through successive developmental stages to arrive at the centrality of feeling in his teaching:

From the six elements¹⁶, oh monks, follows the appearance of an embryo. After [its] descent, there is name and form; with name and form as condition, there are the six sense bases; with the six sense bases as condition, there is contact; with contact as condition, there is feeling. Now indeed, it is for one who is feeling, oh monks, that I declare ‘this is suffering’, that I declare ‘this is the origin of suffering’, that I declare ‘this is the cessation of suffering’, that I declare ‘this is the way leading to the cessation of suffering’.¹⁷

As the passage states, the six senses as relational sense bases are premised on name and form (*nāmarūpa*), that is, the cumulative mental and physical constituents of the (experiential) world or of a being (as the assemblage of the five aggregates). The senses, in turn, are what enables direct contact, and from direct contact then follows feeling or affect (*vedanā*). We have already encountered *vedanā* above as the second of the five *khandhas*, which points to the fact that, in early Buddhist teaching, the experiential world and the person as assemblage are not in a linear relation, but deeply entangled, constituting one another. This model of sensation—a Buddhist *aisthesis*—constitutes what I call an *affective entanglement* between persons and their environments. In contrast to the model of senses as merely receivers of input, “entanglement” stresses a two-way interaction with the world, conducted through the direct “touch” (*phassa*) of sensory contact, which is conditioned by *vedanā*, feeling. As the Buddha declares in the text, the state of feeling based on direct sensory engagement with the world is a prerequisite for his teaching—it is for those that are currently in the process of feeling (as the present participle *vediyamāna* makes clear) that he proclaims the Four Noble Truths. Affective entanglement and the practicing body’s openness or vulnerability to the world are thus fundamental to Buddhist practice.

¹² SN 22:94.

¹³ As explained in detail in the *Mahāpuṇṇamasutta* (The Longer Discourse on the Full Moon Night, MN 109).

¹⁴ They are *cakkhu* (eye: seeing), *sota* (ear: hearing), *ghāna* (nose: smell), *jivhā* (tongue: taste), *kāya* (body: touch), and *mano* (mind).

¹⁵ See for example the *Chachakkasutta* (The Discourse of the Six Sextets, MN 148).

¹⁶ That is, the four “great elements” listed in footnote 4 along with space (*ākāsa*) and consciousness (*viññāna*).

¹⁷ I thank Prabhath Sirisena for alerting me to this passage.

I follow Karen Barad (2003, 2006) in my use of the concept of entanglement to describe the possibility of two entities to be in such close correlation as to constitute an entangled state (as in quantum physics), that is, a single comprehensive system or phenomenon. In Barad's language, "relata do not preexist relations; rather, relata-within-phenomena emerge through specific intra-actions" (2003: 815). In this view, the interaction between an individual and their environment, conducted through the senses as described above, constitutes not an interaction between discrete and separate entities, but an "intra-action" between parts of a larger phenomenon. The theory of the *khandhas* seems to resonate with this view—the concept of an individual is an artificial "agential cut", in Barad's terms, that separates one aggregate phenomenon from its inherent connections to other aggregate phenomena (Barad 2006: 140). Effecting this cut is agentiality or, in Buddhist language, causation. Humans and other beings conduct themselves as individual entities and thereby are causative of their (perceived) individuality. This reflects the important critique of entanglement recently voiced by Eva Haifa Giraud (2019): every entanglement comes with its own exclusions and the agents or entities that enforce them. But our shared constitutional grounding in the world and its experience in the relation of entanglement conducted through the senses belies the neat separation of the "agential cut" that separates subjects and objects. Furthermore, any such contact is conditioned by feeling, thus constituting the affective entanglement I propose. Similarly to Heim, Ram-Prasad, and Tzohar, my analytical concept of feeling extends to cover both the momentary affective responses (*vedanā*) as well as the semantically stabilised emotions in consciousness (*viññāna*) that arise out of and structure our contact with the world, based in affective entanglement.

This does not preclude radical alterity. I have already mentioned the early Buddhist teachings' focus on the world as it was experienced by humans (Hamilton 1996: xxv). Sonam Kachru, too, has recently described this for later South Asian Buddhism. In the cosmology of the 4th/5th-century Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu, different kinds of embodiment determine radically different forms of mindedness as well as life-worlds, showing among other ways in our differing affective responses to the objects we interact with (Kachru 2021: 113). I would like to bridge here to Stacy Alaimo's concept of *trans-corporeality*. Alaimo coined this term in order to express the physical, embodied ways "in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world" (Alaimo 2010: 2). Her work describes the concrete ways in which the human, as a fundamentally relational and conditioned formation, as an assemblage of aggregates, is open to and interpenetrated by the world. Such affective entanglement with our environments, rooted through the physical openness and material co-constitution of our bodies, does not mean abandoning but shifting our view on subjectivity. Mapping our constitutive material and other interconnections with the world across porous and shifting boundaries means abandoning an anthropocentric notion of bounded individuals, but it does not mean that everything is thrown together indiscriminately. What it does entail is a re-location of our bodily selves in the resulting more complex cartographies of our environmental entanglements.

What does all this mean in practice? We have already encountered in the exposition on the *Satipaṭṭhānasutta* how the text explicitly links meditation to the embodied relations with certain kinds of environments such as wild forests (*arañña*) and the roots of trees (*rukhamūla*). As the instructions from the opening of the *sutta* make clear, the generation of mental states such as mindfulness (*sati*) are inextricably tied to bodily practices—to specific ways of sitting, breathing, walking, and so on. This resonates with Monique Scheer's praxeological perspective on emotions. Seen in this way, "emotions arise as thoughts of the body, as elements of the body's knowledge and memory, as its appraisal of a situation" (2012: 206). Her concept of "emotional practices" thus argues that states of feelings are not epiphenomena or after-effects of people's actions, "but *are* themselves a form of practice", executed by a "knowing body" (Scheer 2012: 220).

Building on this approach, what I am pursuing here is how a kind of ecological relationality of bodies and their practices as affectively entangled with the world is explored in early Buddhist literature and in the practices it describes. The range of practices of being in the forest that we have encountered in the *Satipaṭṭhānasutta* and in the *Bhayabheravasutta*, which include walking, standing, sitting, and meditating, thus also entail emotional practices. They cover a broad spectrum of potential affective charges, from drowsiness to pride to fear to mindfulness, but more importantly the lesson of the texts is that they need to be acted through, to be cultivated, sustained, and refined. This includes, as the Buddha explains near the end of the latter text, reflecting on the arrival of fear, which is the necessary precondition for its mastery. In a sense, therefore, the *Bhayabheravasutta* is not only, or maybe not even primarily, a text about “Spiritual Fearlessness”, as the article in the *Journal of the Maha-Bodhi Society* had suggested. To a large extent, it is a text that is specifically about situations in which feelings of fear are central to Buddhist practice. However, instead of teaching a conquering of fear that might ultimately reinstate an individual who conquers, the text teaches the use of fear as an act of becoming. By positioning a person towards the experience of an emotion, the sutta operates through the embeddedness of and mutual influence between the practitioner and their environment. Premised on the human affective entanglement to environments and to the nonhuman, the experience of fear thus becomes an emotional practice actively sought out and engaged in.

Vulnerability and Care

The fear and terror we have encountered above powerfully exemplify a person’s essential vulnerability to the world. The assemblage of bodily and mental constituents that make up a person is fundamentally vulnerable, that is: open, to contact and influence from beyond its purported borders—borders that reveal themselves as porous at best, created in the very relationality of the assemblage to an endless multiplicity of others. Suffering (*dukkha*) is central to Buddhist doctrines: together with impermanence (*anicca*) and the doctrine of no-self (*anatta*), suffering is one of the three characteristics of all existence (*tilakkhaṇa*).¹⁸ Beyond this doctrinal diagnosis that suffering is endemic to existence in the world, the vulnerability encoded into the porous nature of personhood forms the basis for religious practices and religious belonging. Being-in-the-world therefore means, in the later words of Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (1967: 1), being in the “mire of saṃsāra” (*saṃsārapaṇka*), a literal swamp that is “hard to traverse” or to get out of (*duruttara*) without the help of the Buddha’s teachings.¹⁹ Our material environments stick to us like the mud of a swamp, inundating our embodied selves while we struggle with their traversal. While we have seen that the ultimate aim is to rise above the world as an untainted lotus rises above the water, this very struggle in the world is the Buddhist practice on the long road towards that final goal. Likewise fear and vulnerability, as I have explored above, can act as paths to agency. The forest, more localised than the world-encompassing swamp, is a crucial environment in this regard. As we have seen, the forest is not just as an ideal(ised) location for mindful meditation, but just as importantly also an environment that can elicit fear and terror. These feelings are themselves important to a contemplative practice based on affective entanglement, a practice that may turn the vulnerability to suffering, as this section will explore, into a form of care.

Here, I draw on a text from the large collection of the *Jātakas*, the tales of the Buddha’s previous lives, to further explore instances of trans-corporeality in forested encounters grounded in affective entanglement. In my discussion of suttas above, I have shown that, while early Buddhism ultimately sought to transcend the world, feelings based in affective entanglements beyond the human play vital roles in the teachings aiming at this final goal. Without these embodied emotional practices, there is no meditation and no progress on the

¹⁸ As the *Dhammapada* (KN:Dhp:277–79) explains: “*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccāti [...] sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhāti [...] sabbe dhamma anattāti*”. “‘All formations are impermanent’ [...] ‘All formations are [involved in] suffering’ [...] ‘All things are without self’”.

¹⁹ As Steve Mentz (2013: 199) has argued in ecological terms: “For a brown ecologist, swamp contains the world.”

spiritual path. The *Jātakas*, on the other hand, have different foci. Much like fables in other literary traditions, they serve as moments of moral teaching and very often focus on nonhuman actors including animals, spirits, and plants (Ohnuma 2017; Shaw 2019). The world that we encounter in these stories is definitely not confined inside a human head, nor to the human world alone. Instead, we find a “pluriverse” (Escobar 2020) of many intersecting worlds in which humans, animals, spirits, or trees encounter one another, endowed with intellect and emotions. Feelings, based in affective entanglement, are fundamental to these multispecies interactions.

As Tzohar has described for solitude, feeling is a bidirectional engagement with the world, entangling both person and environment in a relation that transforms both. As we have seen, early Buddhist texts depict humans in complex environmental relations. Capabilities to act, to influence, or to imbue with meaning appear not as solely human possessions, but are qualities that emerge within ecologies of relations. We can thus see that early Buddhist texts contain strata and contextual conditions that qualify the anthropocentrism often attributed to this literature. I have argued at the outset of this article that exploring early Buddhist texts as conceptual reservoirs can inspire new ways of thinking about our multi-species ecological relations beyond anthropocentrism today. In particular, I have already delineated resonances with current concepts such as entanglement and trans-corporeality. The importance of relationality in these texts, furthermore, echoes contemporary perspectives on what is grouped under “general ecology”, which understands relations not as second-order effects established between separate entities, but as constitutive origins (Hörl 2017; Barad 2006).

In this last textual discussion, I return to forest environments in order to explore the possibility of trans-corporal care extending beyond the human. As we have already seen above, we need to be attentive to the specific kinds of forests that we encounter in the texts. The same is true for the very constituents of these forests, which brings me to the importance and ambiguous roles of trees in early Buddhism. As scholars such as Lambert Schmithausen (Schmithausen 1991b, 1991c) or Ellison Banks Findly (2002) have explored in detail, plants and trees occupied a liminal or “borderline” position. Though they are not generally considered sentient beings, we nevertheless find instances pointing at least to a partial consideration of living beings in the plant world. Trees especially appear agential in the texts—they lower their branches to help the Buddha or his mother, bear witness to his enlightenment, or grieve upon his passing. First and foremost among them is the Bodhi tree, the *āsvattha* or *ficus religiosa* descendants of which are worshipped in Bodh Gaya or Anuradhapura today, and I explore particular relations to this tree elsewhere (Schröer forthcoming). Second perhaps in importance are the *śāla* trees (*shorea robusta*). It was one such tree that lowered a branch to sustain queen Māyā when she gave birth to the Buddha, and we encounter others of the same species again and again across the literary and archaeological landscape of South Asian Buddhism. Sometimes they appear to act all on their own, as in the case of the birth story or the twin *śāla* trees under which the Buddha passed into *parinirvāṇa*. In other cases, however, they host tree deities (*rukkhadevatā*), perhaps connecting to non-Buddhist beliefs current at the time. We find many such instances among the *Jātaka* tales, at least twenty-four of which narrate how the Buddha himself was previously reborn as a tree deity.

One of these is the *Bhaddasālajātaka*, the *Tale of the Auspicious Sāl Tree* (Ja 465).²⁰ The text describes a particularly majestic and auspicious (*bhadda*) *śāla* tree, said to be sixty thousand years of age, worshipped by villagers and city-dwellers and the royal family, a true “king of the forest” (*vanaspati*). The tree stands in the royal park of the king Brahmadatta of Varanasi, and the king has sent his builders to cut it down in order to turn it into a mighty pillar that all by itself could hold up his palace, thereby outdoing other kings. The carpenters/architects (*vaḍḍhaki*) then pay homage to the tree, garland it with flowers, planning to cut it down after seven days.

²⁰ I rely on Fausböll’s edition of the Pāli text (Fausböll 1887: 7:144–57; translated in Rouse 1901: 7:91–98). The translation remains, unless otherwise stated, my own.

They do so specifically in order for any residing deities to leave the tree. And indeed, there is such a deity living in the tree (*rukkhe nibbattadevatā*)—the Buddha in his previous incarnation, as we learn at the parable’s end. Listening to the builders speak of their intentions to cut down the mighty *śāla*, the tree deity grows concerned not so much about its own dwelling (*vimāna*), but about the future of the young trees surrounding it, as the dwellings of its kinfolk and children (*ñātidevatā*). Entangling his own life with the destruction of his dwelling, the deity thinks out loud: “Verily, my own destruction does not afflict me as much as that of my relations, therefore I must work to save their lives.” Body and dwelling, tree and deity, appear as one. No sooner said than done, the deity next appears in all its splendour and radiance, weeping besides the king’s pillow at night. The waking king is terrified (*bhītasita*) and asks the deity “[...] why do you cry, whence come your fears?”²¹ To this, the deity replies that it is famous all across the king’s lands, worshipped and ancient and never harmed in the search for construction materials. The king, however, holds fast to his plan of turning the tree into a single pillar to support a palace, suggesting the deity might go on living there instead. But his words don’t convince, and the deity answers, in Rouse’s (1901: 7:98) lyrical translation: “Since thou art bent to tear my body from me, cut me small, And cut me piecemeal limb from limb, O King, or not at all. / Cut first the top, the middle next, then last the root of me: And if thou cut me so, O King, death will not painful be.” The bewildered king then asks why the deity should wish such a painful death, to which his visitor answers that only thus could his kin be saved, who would be crushed if the tree should fall as one. Such selfless compassion, such care for others, sways the king’s decision. Having decided to abandon his plan after all, he reassures the deity that there is nothing left to fear.

As we can see, the *Bhaddasāla-jātaka* exemplifies a different kind of trans-corporeality in its tale. The Buddha, a human, appears in his previous incarnation as a deity, which lives ambiguously *in* and *as* the titular *śāla* tree, functioning at once as dwelling (*vimāna*) and as body (*śarīra*). While the deity as a *rukkhadevatā* (tree deity) is not an uncommon appearance, the implication for the tree is much more interesting: through the metonymic slide between dwelling and body, it is “mindful matter”, in Val Plumwood’s (2009: 123–24) words, and a living actor. The repeated appearance of fear (as *bhīta* or *bhaya*) harks back to the feelings we encountered in the *Bhaya-bheravasutta*. The *Bhaddasāla-jātaka*, too, centres on vulnerability and exposure to the world as the basis for relationality. Instead of the solitary practitioner engaged in meditation, however, we encounter a more worldly setting revolving around the king’s desire for grandeur. Ultimately, it is in the text’s multispecies interactions that its moral lesson lies. The encounter of king and tree/deity moves through a string of powerful feelings—at the sight of the crying deity, the king is “overcome by terror” (Rouse 1901: 7:97). The lyrical back and forth of their conversation is then marked by the king’s incredulity at the deity’s seemingly gruesome request for dismemberment. It is only once the unselfish care at the root of the request is revealed, exemplifying the Bodhisatta ethic of the Buddha on his long path to enlightenment, that the king changes his mind.

As a parable, the *Jātaka* and the dramatic arc of its narrative constitute a lesson in ethical conduct. Like the previous text, it too shows its actors embedded in relational ecologies based on affective entanglement. But it goes further than that. In contrast to the examples from the suttas, the parable shows a world in which relations and interactions extend far beyond the human domain, extending to the realm of deities as well as to trees as living beings. The narrations of the Buddha’s previous lives all serve as stories of exemplary behaviour, illustrating the path of the ethical ideal of the Bodhisatta (Appleton 2010; Adam 2018). As Pragati Sahnī (2009) has argued, the virtue ethics of early Buddhism are not only perhaps the most suitable within the body of Theravāda teaching to answer concerns of environmental ethics, but their uniqueness stems from their inseparability from the totality of the Buddhist teaching. In this concrete instance, I would argue,

²¹ “[...] *kena ty-assūni, kuto taṃ bhayam āgatan ti.*” (Fausböll 1887: 7:154)

the *Jātaka* text is not only a lesson in selflessness and sacrifice, but can also be read as an invitation for aspirants to imagine themselves, like the Buddha, as sharing the body of a tree, majestic and ancient, worried for its younglings and dreading destruction at the hands of humans. Describing such an acute position of vulnerability, the parable teaches a doubled care: the tree deity's care for its kin, and the king's care for unexpected nonhuman other. Both of these practices are premised on the affective entanglements that connect the *Jātaka*'s actors in and with their environments.

Conclusion

Human life worlds in the twenty-first century are very different from the *lokas* we find in early Buddhist texts. Interlaced and interacting sets of climate crises and global biosystem degradations fuel old and new “environmental anxieties” (Beattie 2011), just as the COVID-19 pandemic has once more reminded humans around the world of the power of nonhuman biotic and abiotic agents. Nevertheless, as explored above, such long-overdue humbling of human exceptionalism is also at the very core of the Buddhist teaching. Theories such as the five *khandhas* challenge the prevailing notion of sovereign individual and reconceive the human instead as a relational assemblage. Integral to this reframing of the human is an understanding of the senses as inherently relational, weaving together mind and world through an understanding of perception and experience as inherently interactive and generative. We construe the world, and the world construes us. The dimension of feeling arising from our friction, our “touch” (*phassa*), with the world, conditions this relationality. Feeling thus always already exceeds the boundaries of whatever vestiges of the idea of the individual we may carry.

The material ecocritic Serpil Oppermann has recently argued that “if we reformulate the Anthropos figure as an earthbound being ultimately inseparable from other species and the environment, we can better understand and care for all multi-species relations to prevent an unlivable future” (2023: 9). My textual discussions has explored how powerful feelings, even and especially terrifying feelings, which are experienced through our affective entanglements, hold the potential for opening productive paths of practice. In a messy, transient, and highly affective pluriverse of diverse experiential life worlds, furthermore, the Buddhist teachings can inspire us to more empathy and active care. As Oppermann continues, new “ecological visions and solutions” hold the potential for positive emotions including hope (Oppermann 2023: 10–11). For him, that hope is a human feeling, even if it emerges from taking into account the nonhuman. The *Bhaddasālajātaka* can inspire us to push our care further, if we are open to an emotionality that exceeds the human and recognise that we share our affective entanglements with nonhuman beings, perhaps even trees. Understanding and experiencing our relational interconnectedness can propel us to generate empathy and care that reach into our interspecies entanglements within environments that are, today, critically endangered by the hubris of human exceptionalism and the anthropogenic destruction it wreaks.

Were early Buddhists posthumanists *avant la lettre*? Given the abundancy of claims to ancient history that are made for nationalistic and identitarian purposes today, such argumentation is deeply fraught with political and ethical controversy. However, thinking through our current predicaments in dialogue with older and specifically with non-Euro-American philosophies helps us re-interrogate the conceptual vocabularies we hold and the epistemic traditions we stand in today. Much scholarship of the Anthropocene or the “posthuman convergence” (Braidotti 2019) is firmly rooted in the present, departing as it does from the conditions of societies and environments around the world that are found to be in unprecedented change and crisis right now. Critiques of global capitalism, toxic pollution, environmental destruction, and species extinction are integral to such projects (Alaimo 2016). Often, this means that they are formulated using a theoretical vocabulary that is largely Eurocentric or Euro-American, based on critiques and innovations of

traditions of thought such as humanism, the paradigms of scientism, or the Enlightenment, as Kathleen D. Morrison (2018) and others have critiqued. But, as a growing chorus of voices reminds us, other modes of thought and action are possible. In Arturo Escobar's words, "another possible is possible" (2020: 1).

In this article, I have approached early Buddhist texts as epistemic resources that can inspire new ways of thinking through the issues we face today. Early Buddhism, as others have pointed out, was not inherently concerned with ecological issues. However, as long as the question remains whether the tradition as a whole was "green" or not, the debate remains trapped in an argumentation that freezes it in time. While my approach has sought to remain true to the texts as historical sources, I see the "irreverence" of mining them for conceptual resonances with the present as a concrete and productive way out of the debilitating conundrum over the tradition's evaluation. My focus has been on the Buddhist conception of the human as an assembled, open, and relational being. In this view, feelings and emotional practices play central roles in how humans interact and are connected with other beings and environments. I have proposed the concept of *affective entanglement* to describe the underlying basic condition of relationality and mutual influence found in early South Asian Buddhist literature. Feelings can act as powerful ecological conduits. None of them are universal—each affective entanglement is constituted depending on the unique experiential reality of a pluriverse of life-worlds as *loka/locus*. The conversation between non-Western epistemic resources such as the early Buddhist tradition and the critical diagnosis of our planetary conditions in the Anthropocene therefore drives home the fact that there can be no "God's-eye" view from nowhere, as Donna Haraway (1988) already remarked long ago. Instead, we need to attune our human perspective to the vibrant copresence of the diversity of life encountered in pluriversal but intersecting worlds of experience. We find ourselves in the Anthropocene not (just) as an epoch, but as immersed in the world, wading through the mire of *samsāra* and braving the terrifying forest, affectively entangled and trans-corporeally constituted.

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