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**Cumulus : Hoarding, Hosting, Hospitality**

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## *Cumulus* : A Preface

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# Cumulus

## A Preface

THIS SPECIAL issue is the result of a workshop organised by the two co-editors and held at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London and St John's College in Cambridge, on 28-30 June 2017. The workshop carried the same name as this collection: *Cumulus. Hoarding, Hosting, Hospitality*. Our aim was to explore further the limits and usefulness of the concept of hospitality, which had in recent years become a voguish keyword in anthropology (threatening to replace the Maussian gift), and yet been subject to little analytical scrutiny; but also to map out a number of conceptual terms with family resemblances that paralleled or even challenged the notion of hospitality (e.g., hosting) as a relationship determined by two paired subjects, a host and a guest, the latter most often conceived as a stranger. *Cumulus* was an apt designation that we thought would evoke a number of issues, such as *the accumulation and aggregation of people and things, humans and non-humans*, normally contained – though not exhausted – by the category of «hospitality» (Giovanni Da Col, this issue). With these goals in mind, we invited an international ensemble of prominent anthropologists who have been working on these topics in geographical regions ranging from the Amazon to Tibet, from the Us to China, from South-East Asia to Eurasia, and from the Middle East to Mongolia and Japan.

The key questions put to our colleagues at the workshop (and now to you, our readers) are: 1) how might Inner and East Asia serve as fecund generators of anthropological theory, much as Africa, Amazonia and Melanesia previously did in the history of the discipline?; 2) in what ways do Inner

and East Asian regions constitute a «cultural zone» unified by shared cultural logics surrounding ideas of hoarding/storing, hosting and hospitality?; and 3) what broader theoretical implications and conundrums can emerge from this new cluster of conceptual and theoretical approaches (*e.g.*, in the manner of «the gift», «(structural) relations», «personhood», «Zomia», «perspectivism», «ontology»)?

As a testament to the excitement that they felt with regard to the intellectual promise of this collective enterprise, all participants were willing to fund their own travel to join the workshop. We secured some extra funding from the Centre for Ethnographic Theory (Department of Anthropology and Sociology, SOAS), HAU – Society for Ethnographic Theory, and St John's College (Cambridge) to cover accommodation and meals for the participants during the event. The workshop took place at two different venues. The first two days (28-29 June) were spent at SOAS, while the final day (30 June) was held at St John's College. Beside the intellectual feast constituted by the papers themselves, there was much heightened liveliness generated by the competitive hosting between the two co-organisers (since a workshop on hosting and hospitality would not do without some self-referential good hosting!). The workshop ended on a high note with a sumptuous banquet in the Parsons Room of St John's College.

The original workshop participants included Giovanni Da Col (SOAS), Adam Yuet Chau (Cambridge), Stephan Feuchtwang (London School of Economics), David Sneath (Cambridge), Luiz Costa (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro), Caroline Humphrey (Cambridge), Holly High (Sydney), David Wengrow (University College London), Andrew Shryock (Michigan), Alexander Newell (Université libre de Bruxelles), Fabio Gygi (SOAS), Angela Zito (NYU), and Rachel Douglas-Jones (IT University of Copenhagen). Maurice Bloch kindly acted as discussant throughout the workshop and offered some brilliant concluding remarks, while the archaeologist Michael Rowlands (UCL) served as an observer and sharp commentator.

The articles in this special issue are all much revised versions of the papers presented at the workshop, as a result of the heated and synergetic debates. Thanks to the *L'Homme* reviewers' conscientious and detailed comments, many of the articles went through further rounds of revision or even, in some cases, radical re-writing. We are grateful to all workshop participants for their contributions to advancing this important discussion in contemporary anthropology. The *Cumulus* project before you is only a small but vital part of a larger conversation, and we invite all of our colleagues in anthropology as well as other related disciplines to join, and deepen, our thought experiment. We wish to thank the Department of Anthropology and Sociology of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, and

St John's College, Cambridge, for their generous financial and personnel support. Adam Yuet Chau wishes to add a personal note in appreciation of the support of Professor Sir Chris Dobson (1949-2019), who, as Master of St John's College (2007-2019), was a consummate host.

Last but certainly not least, we wish to extend our sincerest gratitude to *L'Homme* for hosting our special issue, and to Caterina Guenzi for her indefatigable efforts and patience in shepherding this project to its fruition. We are also grateful to Dominic Horsfall and Michelle Beckett for copy-editing the texts in English. May this inexhaustible magical hoard be discovered by many, and for many years to come.

Adam Yuet Chau & Giovanni Da Col,  
co-editors of this special issue