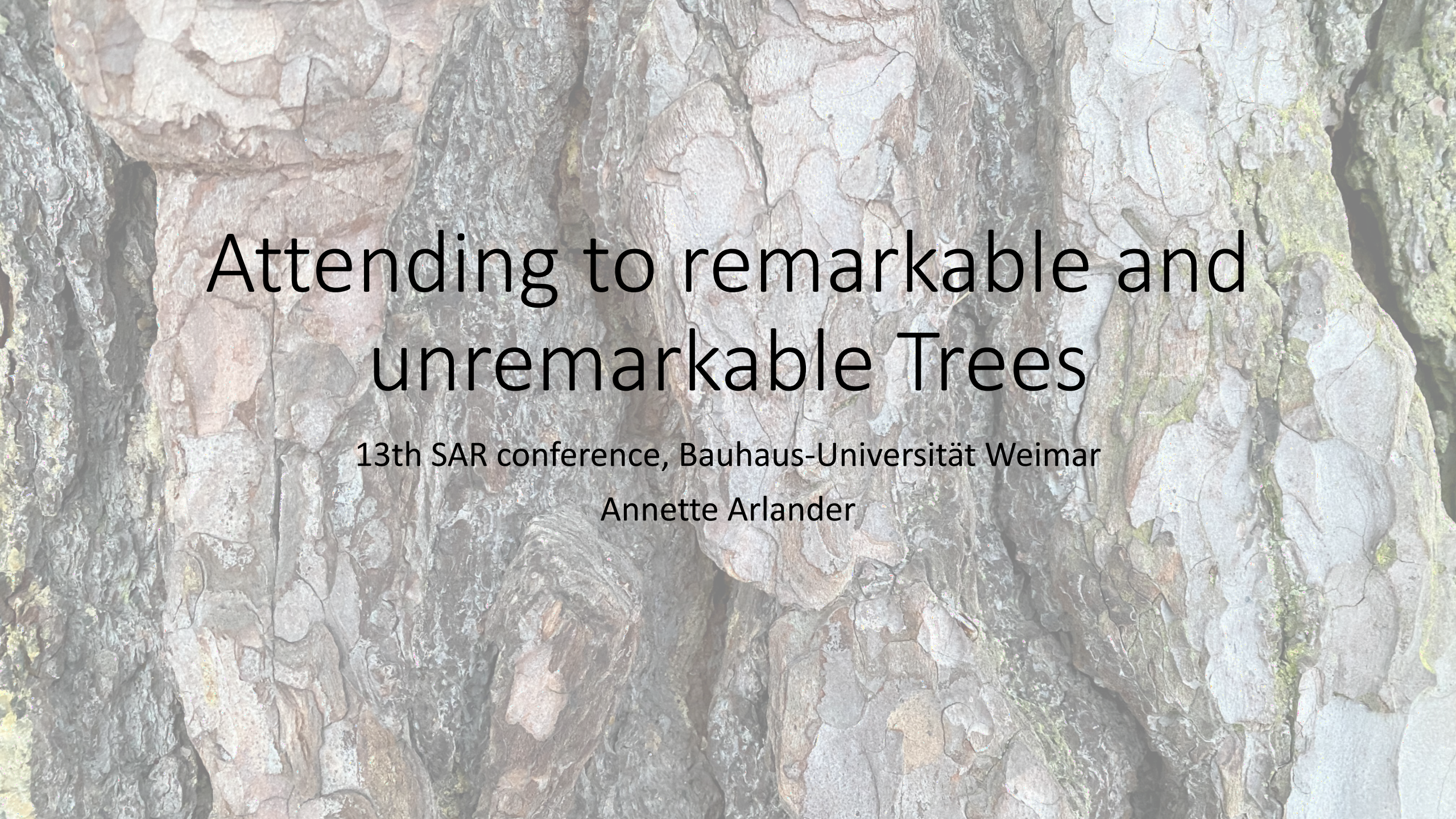


Attending to remarkable and unremarkable Trees

13th SAR conference, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar

Annette Arlander

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What times are these, when
A conversation about trees is almost a crime
Because it entails a silence about so many misdeeds!

(Bertolt Brecht 1939)

https://www.lyrikline.org/de/gedichte/die-nachgeborenen-740

Structure

- Short introduction and presentation
- Individual assignment to find a tree, attend to it in your manner and ‘document’ the encounter
- Meeting together, sharing experiences and ‘documents’

Examples and material on the RC
https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1323410/1699767

Attending, mending or blending?

This workshop takes as its starting point the artistic research project Meetings with Remarkable and Unremarkable Trees in order to focus attention on trees in the immediate vicinity.

Besides trying to **mend** our broken relationship to other beings that we share this world with and constantly **blend** with in trans-corporeal (Alaimo 2010) exchanges, these exercises in **attending** to trees or encounters with trees can be used as a creative tool to assist concentration and focus as well as a sense of embodied connection with the ‘environment’.

Background

Meetings with Remarkable and Unremarkable Trees (2020-2021)

Project blog https://meetingswithtrees.com

Project archive

https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/761327

Meetings with trees
https://www.instagram.com/meetings_with_trees/

Remarkable and unremarkable?

The project is in its title referring to the photographic work of Thomas Pakenham *Meetings with Remarkable Trees* (1996), who in turn plays with the title of a book by Gurdjeff, *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (in English 1963).

This project is forming a counterpoint to them, by questioning what is remarkable and what is unremarkable, while focusing on individual trees. The medium in this project is not photography, but rather performance for video and recorded voice.

Some trees are remarkable by age, size, location, stories etc. while other trees can become remarkable by visiting them repeatedly or attending to them in some manner

Attending?

Attending here in the sense of paying attention, in other cases also serving, helping, taking care of…

In the project I have experimented with creating a relationship by spending time with a tree or visiting the tree repeatedly

- breathing, listening, performing for camera with trees
- practicing the two-legged tree pose of yoga or the tree pose from tai-chi chuan with trees
- writing letters to trees by the trees, or recording talking to trees
- What other modes of attending to trees could we explore?

Context?

The fields of critical plant studies and environmental post-humanities, the philosophical study of plant thinking and the scientific debates regarding plant intelligence are obvious contexts (although not necessarily welcoming practical artistic exploration).

More about context in

Meetings with Remarkable and Unremarkable Trees in Johannesburg with Environs (ARA, Wits University 2020)

https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/761327/35/1606

Performing and Thinking with Trees (Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki 2022, forthcoming)

Artistic tradition?

Developed in the border zone between performance art, environmental art and digital video or media art, the project is in some sense lacking a proper home base to contend with and to expand.

Why is the human body there to attract attention from the trees?

Where is the exploration of new technology and biological processes?

What is the critical focus, the analytic disclosure, the intellectual paradox pointed at?

Thus I would like to ask:

What artistic tradition, field or discipline should this practice actually connect to?

What artistic forerunners should it reference?

And what consequences would those choices have on the further development of the project?

Examples of possible references

- People writing letters to trees with email adresses in Melbourne

https://amp.abc.net.au/article/10468964

- Public project collecting letters to trees by city of Vancouver
- https://www.cityofvancouver.us/publicworks/page/letters-trees
- Chelsea Steinauer-Scudder, practice of befriending a tree https://emergencemagazine.org/practice/befriending-a-tree/
- Katie Holten writing in trees, drawing a tree alphabet https://medium.com/@amybradywrites/how-to-write-in-trees-4e2b1b2f2db3

Current development

Three-lingual project

Pondering with Pines – Miettii Mäntyjen kanssa – Funderar med furor

- focus on pine trees (rather than trees in general)
- focus on pondering (rather than performing in general)
- Talking recorded on site (rather than writing, and recording later)

Core questions so far:

- what does it mean to ponder with pines?
- how can it best be undertaken?

Ongoing:

- Blog https://ponderingwithpines.wordpress.com
- Archive of videos, texts and ‘ponderings’ (field notes) on the RC https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1323410/1589526
- ’Daily’ Pines on Tumblr https://www.tumblr.com/blog/ponderingwithpines
- Bark images on Flickr https://www.flickr.com/photos/155751054@N03/
- Podcast *Talking with Trees* on Soundcloud https://soundcloud.com/user-90370389/sets/talking-with-trees-pine

Assignment

- Go to a tree that seems inviting to you
- Attend to the tree in the manner you feel appropriate
- Represent the encounter in some manner
- Share something of your experience with the rest of us on returning

Notes and Observations

Please send documents or suggestions for references to

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