

Working with the Vegetal II

A one-day seminar on working with vegetation **29 November** 2018 10 am at Stockholm University of the Arts Research Centre, Linnégatan 87.

Abstracts and bios

1. Jerry Määttä: **A presentation of *Speculative Vegetation: Plants in Science Fiction***

Plants have played key roles in science fiction novels, graphic novels, and film: John Wyndham's triffids, the sentient and telepathic flora in Ursula K. Le Guin's "Vaster than Empires and More Slow," the gene-hacked crops of Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*, the invasive trees and mechaflowers of Warren Ellis's *Trees*, and the galactic greenhouses of *Silent Running* represent just a few. Plants surround us, sustain us, pique our imaginations, and inhabit our metaphors—and yet in some ways they remain opaque. As Randy Laist writes in *Plants and Literature* (2013): "Plants seem to inhabit a time-sense, a life cycle, a desire structure, and a morphology that is so utterly alien that it is easy and even tempting to deny their status as animate organisms" (12). The scope of their alienation is as broad as their biodiversity. And yet, literary reflections of plant-life are driven, as are many threads of science fictional inquiry, by the concerns of today.

Speculative Vegetation: Plants in Science Fiction, the first-ever volume on plants (and fungi) in science fiction, allows us to speculate further on what—or who—plant life may be while exploring how we understand ourselves in relation to the mute (?) sentient (?) world of flora. Both collectively and individually, these original essays argue that plant-life in SF is transforming our attitudes toward morality, politics, economics, and cultural life at large, questioning and shifting many traditional parameters. They ask how plant-based characters or foci shift our understandings of institutions, nations, borders, and boundaries, erecting—and dismantling—new visions of utopian and dystopian futures.

Speculative Vegetation is edited by Katherine E. Bishop (Miyazaki International College, Japan), David Higgins (Inver Hills College, USA), and Jerry Määttä (Uppsala University, Sweden), and will hopefully be published in 2019.

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Short bio:

Jerry Määttä is Associate Professor at the Department of Literature, Uppsala University, Sweden, and specialises in sociology of literature. Since his dissertation on the launch and reception of modern science fiction in Sweden in the 1950s and 1960s, he has mostly published on literary prizes and awards, and apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives in Anglophone film and literature since the 1950s. He is currently writing a study on the history, functions, and impact of the August Prize, the most important Swedish literary prize

(apart from the Nobel Prize in Literature), and co-editing a collection on plants in science fiction (with Katherine E. Bishop and David Higgins).

2. Thomas Laurien: Lily Martagon – a protagonist in a shimmering multispecies story, and a point of departure for a bio junta pre-enactment

Abstract: Lily Martagon, the geographically most spread lily on the planet, has caught human beings' attention for millennia. In an ongoing and durational artistic research project, Lily Martagon and its entanglement has once again enchanted a human being, who in response has created the Scarlet Lily Beetle Sanctuary. This sanctuary is a factual/fictional site in Småland, managed by Chief Ranger and Cheerleader Thomas Laurien. In this research project Lily Martagon and the Scarlet Lily Beetle Sanctuary are active in two ways:

1) Artistic researcher Thomas Laurien has created a persona who is doing daily chores and discoveries at the Scarlet Lily Beetle Sanctuary. This will result in a video essay and visual and material outcome intended for a future exhibition.

2) A particular and situated multispecies story entailing Lily Martagon, is together with the concept shimmer (Deborah Bird Rose) used as a method to encourage other human beings to identify and engage with their own shimmering and situated multispecies entanglements. I name this storytelling practice bio junta, and I understand and propose it as a pre-enactment of a collective grassroots movement fostering an ethics of care and re-enchantment of the world that we share. In the seminar presentation I intend to share experiences and work-in-progress outcomes from both parts of this ongoing project.

Key words: Lily Martagon, shimmer, entanglement, pre-enactment, multispecies storytelling, bio junta

Bio:

I've got an artistic and practice based PhD in Design, and I am a Designer MFA and a Senior Lecturer at HDK – Academy of Design and Crafts at the Gothenburg University. Apart from working with the above mentioned project I am one of the initiators of the new network "Design and Posthumanism". I am also an active member of the network GU-CAS -Critical Animal Studies in the Anthropocene, at Gothenburg University, as well as a member of GGBC - Gothenburg Global Biodiversity Center.

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3. Christine Fentz / Secret Hotel (DK): **BEING GRASS + a symposium presentation**

A short invitation to being grass together (an exercise lasting appr. 10 min), followed by a presentation about the symposium **EARTHBOUND – The Multispecies Paradigm Shift**, which Secret Hotel organized in collaboration with various other entities late September.

EARTHBOUND had three main characters: Animals, microorganisms and landscapes, and we of course also looked at postcolonial aspects. We tried out different formats for knowledge sharing, having artists and sts-researchers meet, and staged the whole symposium as one long performing arts event. Lectures on busses, horses, dogs, singing soil, hanging trees, loads of bales of straw and food of local produce. We hope to be able to create an

EARTHBOUND symposium 2020 with some residencies between artists and researchers taking place before. And we are open for new collaborations in this area!

Christine Fentz

MA in Dramaturgy from University of Aarhus, during the 90'ies learning alongside German free group Theater Fusion. She works as a performing artist, director and dramaturge (mostly for choreographers). Artistic Director of Secret Hotel (creating participatory work in relation to the life world). Fentz' artistic research is related to spirituality/animism, interactions with the land, and multispecies – a lot of the inspiration has come from her engagement with pre-Christian Nordic cosmology, as well as many travels to Tuva, in Centralasian Siberia. She has also done a lot of cultural political work in Denmark.

4. Janna Holmstedt: Plant communication and sonification in artistic practices, an overview.

Plants have since the 1960s occurred in artistic installations and interventions as sound producing entities, and artists have claimed to use more or less scientific methods for making the plants "sing". What kind of activity is traced through these methods, and what kind of relations are weaved or revealed in the process of sonifying the (secret) life of plants?

Bio:

Janna Holmstedt has an artistic and practice-based PhD in Fine Arts and is affiliated researcher at the Posthumanities Hub (KTH and LiU). She works transdisciplinarily with various media and contexts, ranging between installation, sonic fiction, writing, and performance with a particular interest in listening and storying. Holmstedt's research focuses on how sound and listening, in a visually dominated culture, could mediate new relationships with the more-than-human. She explores entangled issues such as multispecies relations, interspecies communication, and the intra-action of bodies, environs and technology.

In her doctoral dissertation, *Are You Ready for a Wet Live-In? Explorations into Listening* (2017), Holmstedt departs from the archival material of American neurophysiologist John C. Lilly, who conducted controversial scientific experiments with dolphins, as well as on himself. In the 1950s and 1960s, Lilly and his research collaborators attempted to teach dolphins to speak English and recorded the results on tape. If dolphins were companion species through whom anthropocentric word(l)ings could be unlearned and restored in her doctoral work, Holmstedt turns to soil and *Zea mays* in her current collaborative art project "Anthropomorphic Interfaces" (with support from the Swedish Arts Council). Here she explores if and how anthropomorphism can be used critically and strategically in an artistic practice. The work is situated in an urban allotment in the south of Stockholm, and involves film, sound, soil, installations, and the growing of *Zea mays* (corn).

<https://posthumanities.net>

<http://www.jannaholmstedt.com/>

5. Malin Lobell: The way a plant shares itself with us

I want to share with you some aspects of plants and my work; past and be-coming. Through the titles, *I have a plan(t) to We are the plan(ts)*, I hope to give examples of being with plants.

Bio:

Central for **Malin Lobell**'s poetic, conceptual and critical approach is the participatory perspective, human's relation to nature and the importance of plants. "I'm interested in different aspects of green. Plants as food, material, remediators and intelligent beings that we both serve and use. I often work in participatory projects. And the participatory perspective I think is very important when it comes to environmental issues. I also believe in collaboration and sharing knowledge between disciplines". Malin Lobell is educated at Valand School of Fine Arts in Gothenburg, Sweden. Also visible in her artistic practice today is her studies as a Gardener and Graphic Designer. Malin Lobell is living in Stockholm and Kåsberga, Skåne.

6. Robin Jonsson: "About a tree"

I work with temporal sound-installations in which I hide transducers on the trunk of a tree. This makes the tree into a resonance-box and the pre-recorded sounds are played inside the trunk of the tree. The audience is led out into the forest and they are invited to listen to the piece with their ears on the actual trunk. The sounds being played are a mix of pre-recorded sounds from the same forest as well as a fictional presence of the tree remembering its very long life, inspired by its actual location, relationships to other trees, likely events etcetera. Some information is based on the book "The Hidden Life of Trees" by Peter Wohlleben in which Wohlleben explains the complex slow behavior of trees in human and social terms.

Bio:

Robin Jonsson is a choreographer and sound-artist. He's been creating and touring dance-productions since 2006, in Europe and the world. He was based in Brussels from 2004 to 2015 where he studied at the well-known dance school P.A.R.T.S, led by Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, leader of the dance-company ROSAS. He is currently based in Stockholm.

7. Elsa Kosmack Vaara and Ksenija Komazec: Re-imagining food production through facilitated conversations

Human soil relations is a design study where we will position ourselves in a future scenario where climate change has resulted in changing conditions for food production through large-scale agriculture and therefore also the food supply of our cities. Failing crops due to storms, floods, drought, unstable temperature and damage are some consequences climate change may imply. There will be an urgent need to rethink food production and to prepare for supplementing industrial food production. The study will map out and expand upon existing decentralized communities. Throughout the study, we work with practitioners of decentralized food production and citizens that have a well-developed human-soil relationship. We investigate this relationship as a central tool for discussion, future scenarios and environmental impact assessments. The goal of the study is to explore how to design the conditions for a stronger connection between the origin of the food production and

citizen consumption and thus create reflection and knowledge about sustainability in relation to food. Based on collaboration, the study results in the shaping of scenarios and a creative conversation series focusing on the city's future food supply.

The main objective of the project is to explore alternatives to large-scale food supply. The project contributes through a multidisciplinary approach to utilizing the knowledge of communities, citizens and stakeholders for better adaptation to climate change. The project thus has a direct link to the UN's global objectives that address No Hunger and Ecosystems and Biodiversity.

Bios:

Elsa Kosmack Vaara is a senior UX/interaction design researcher at Rise Sics Västerås. Elsa was engaged as an explorative design researcher in the Mobile Life Vinnova excellence centre for several years and holds a PhD in Human Computer Interaction from the Royal Academy of Technology in Stockholm.

Ksenija Komazec is a research engineer working in the field of UX design at RISE SICS Västerås. Her passion is to design, visualize and communicate messages in a playful and tangible way.

8. Annette Arlander: Performing with Plants

Performing with plants, especially with trees, is an artistic research project aiming to investigate the question "how to perform landscape today?" which I have worked with for several years. The question is not rhetorical; our relationship to the environment has changed drastically and demands new approaches. A post-humanist perspective prompts us to rethink the notion of landscape, and to realize that the surrounding world consists of creatures, life forms and material phenomena with differing degrees of volition, needs and agency. What forms of performing landscape could be relevant in this situation? One possibility is to approach individual elements, like singular trees, and explore what could be done together with them, for instance performing for camera together. The main aim of the project is to explore such possibilities in practice. Read more at <http://www.uniarts.se/english/research-and-development-work/research-projects/performing-with-plants>

Bio

Annette Arlander, DA, is an artist, researcher and pedagogue, one of the pioneers of Finnish performance art and trailblazers of artistic research. At present, she is professor in performance, art and theory at Stockholm University of the Arts and visiting researcher at Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki. For artworks and publications, see <https://annetearlander.com>