



APPROACHING PLANTS: STUDYING HUMAN-PLANT RELATIONS BEYOND DISCIPLINES

Würzburg, 23-24 March 2023
University of Würzburg
Chair of European Ethnology/
Cultural Analysis

Convenors: Arnika Peselmann
Darya Tsymbalyuk



Julius-Maximilians- Funded by

**UNIVERSITÄT
WÜRZBURG**

DFG

Deutsche
Forschungsgemeinschaft
German Research Foundation

Wednesday, March 22

19:00 - Dinner at *Vrohstoff*, Theaterstraße 1-3
(for all who are already in town, self-pay)

Thursday, March 23rd

Hörsaal am Tropenhaus, Botanical Garden, Julius Sachs Platz 4

09:00 - 09:25 Introductory remarks

09:30 - 11:00 Roundtable I: Ontologies and Epistemologies: What Are the Starting Points of
Our Engagement with Plants?

11:00 - 11:15 Coffee break

11:15 - 12:45 Roundtable II: Plants and Language: Critical Storytelling Practices

12:45 - 13:30 Lunch break

13:30 - 15:00 Guided tour of the botanical garden

15:30 - 17:30 Workshop

19:00 - If you would like to walk to the restaurant together, meet at hotel lobby

19:30 - Dinner at *Auflauf*, Peterpl. 5

Friday, March 24th

Hörsaal am Tropenhaus, Botanical Garden, Julius Sachs Platz 4

09:00 - 10:30 Roundtable III: Ethical Dilemmas of Engaging Vegetal Others

10:30 - 10:45 Coffee break

10:45 - 12:15 Roundtable IV: Collaborating with Plants: Limits of Co-Making and Agential
Encounters

12:15 - 13:00 Reflection session

13:00 - Lunch and workshop farewell

Roundtable I: Ontologies and Epistemologies: What Are the Starting Points of Our Engagement with Plants?

Western ontologies have deeply shaped western academic knowledge, which is steeped in anthropocentrism, and often results in othering and objectifying vegetal beings. At the same time, western epistemologies are rooted in extractivist scientific and colonial practices. Ontologies and epistemologies serve as framing mechanisms, and often pre-determine our first encounters with plants. What role do ontologies and epistemologies play in constructing our relations with vegetal others? How do you engage with the frames they are providing in your work? What are ways to reflect, resist or step back from dominant and often long learnt perceptions of vegetal beings? What does the tool kit of your disciplinary methodic training provide you with and where does it need to be extended?

Presenters: Hilal Alkan, Arnika Peselmann, Kat Petroschkat, Luise Stark

Moderator: Darya Tsymbalyuk

Roundtable II: Plants and Language: Critical Storytelling Practices

As humans, we rely a lot on language to share experiences and pass on knowledge. With the means of language, we also construct worlds and represent (nonhuman) others. In this roundtable we discuss what are the limits and possibilities of telling stories about plants, inclusive of plants, and with plants? Given that many languages, such as English, are embedded in long legacies of scientifically objectifying and colonially extracting plants (and communities they are part of), how do we navigate telling stories? Academic language, in particular, is conventionally fixed in linearity, are other ways of storytelling more permissive of engaging with the vegetal through linguistic subversion and creativity?

Presenters: Iman Dattoo, Susanne Schmitt, Darya Tsymbalyuk

Moderator: Arnika Peselmann

Roundtable III: Ethical Dilemmas of Engaging Vegetal Others

In the west, the new green or vegetal turn resulted in the growing interest in plants not only among the general public but also among scholars and artists, who often seek to engage vegetal others in their work. In some academic disciplines an awareness of the ethics of conduct is long established: to be able to do research on human subjects, one has to obtain an ethical clearness, this, however, is often not the case of working with plants. The institutionally bureaucratic ethic forms might not be the best way to reflect on the ethics of engagement with plants in our work, but what are the ways you have questioned the ethics of your projects? What ethical dilemmas have you ran into in your work? Have you observed other dilemmas in your field?

Presenters: Pearl-Sue Carper, Kalle Hamm, Hannah Pitt

Moderator: Annette Arlander

Roundtable IV: Collaborating with Plants: Limits of Co-Making and Agential Encounters

This roundtable focuses on the (im)possibilities of co-making knowledge with plants. Just like humans plants are agential beings, but unlike with humans, we cannot directly ask them what they think about us engaging them in our work. Is a collaborative human-plant co-making of knowledge possible, and what kind of collaborations are possible? Does plant agency structure and shape our (research) projects, and if so, then how? Does engagement with plants change our understanding of knowledge and the knowledge-making process, and if so, how? Did plants teach you anything in your practice of working with them?

Presenters: Annette Arlander, Sandra Calkins, Cornelia Ertl, Iryna Zamuruieva

Moderator: Susanne Schmitt

Participants:

HILAL ALKAN is a researcher at Leibniz Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin. Her research centers around care and gift practices in various realms of social life. Her current research is about human-plant relations in migration. Her articles appeared in the *American Ethnologist*, *Citizenship Studies*, *Migration Letters* and in other collections. She has co-edited *Urban Neighbourhood Formations: Boundaries, Narrations, Intimacies* (Routledge, 2020) and *The Politics of the Female Body in Contemporary Turkey: Reproduction, Maternity, Sexuality* (IB Tauris 2021).

Project page: <https://www.zmo.de/en/research/mainresearchprogram/environment-and-justice/company-of-plants>

ANNETTE KRISTINA ARLANDER, born 1956 in Helsinki, where she lives and works. Artist, researcher and a pedagogue, one of the pioneers of Finnish performance art and a trailblazer of artistic research. Graduated from the department of directing at the Theatre Academy 1981, Doctor of Arts (Theatre and Drama) 1999. Professor of Performance Art and Theory at Theatre Academy 2001-2013. Professor of artistic research at University of the Arts Helsinki 2015-16. Professor in performance, art and theory at Stockholm University of the Arts 2018-2019. AVEK, Media Art Prize 2014, State Prize for Multidisciplinary art 2018.

Project page: <https://ponderingwithpines.com/>

Twitter: @AnnetteArlander

Instagram: @annettearlander

SANDRA CALKINS is an Assistant Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Freie Universität Berlin. Her work explores the intersections of postcolonial science, agriculture/gardening, multispecies studies and public health. It appeared in [Social Studies of Sciences](#), [Science, Technology, & Human Values](#), [The Sociological Review](#), [Medicine Anthropology Theory](#), [Anthropology Today](#), among others. She is currently finishing a manuscript on Ugandan-Australian collaboration in banana science and directs the DFG-project entitled "[Touching Plants. Affective Encounters in the Botanical Gardens and Museum at Freie Universität](#)".

Project page: <https://www.sfb-affective-societies.de/en/teilprojekte/A/A07/index.html>

PEARL-SUE CARPER is a research assistant at the Chair of European Ethnology/Cultural Analysis at the University of Würzburg. Her main research is located in the field of Multispecies Studies. In her Master Thesis (Würzburg 2021), she examined human-rat encounters in urban spaces. She is currently working on her dissertation project, which deals with the significance of the rose hip in the context of a niche economy and the discourses and possibilities the fruit opens up for rural spaces and economies.

Website: <https://www.phil.uni-wuerzburg.de/eevk/team/wissenschaftliche-mitarbeiterinnen/pearl-sue-carper-ma/>

IMAN DATOO (b.1995) is an artist & researcher based in London. Her practice brings together botany and cartography through the narrative environments of stories, operating in the overlapping disciplines of the tacit and scientific to consider new vocabularies for our animate world.

Language - visual, spoken, and intuited - is Iman's tool to disturb and open pathways for communicating more resilient and sacred relationships between plants and people. She is interested in map-making as a tactic to turn us towards things, inhabit things, and readjust to their methods of rooting and re-routing.

Iman centres joy on the newness that may arise from the scaffoldings built across different ways of knowing and building worlds. As an artist trained in architecture, she often composes in hybrid and time-based media including sculpture, film, painting and drawing.

Website: <https://www.imandatoo.com/>

Instagram: @imandatoo @kinnomicbotany

CORNELIA ERTL completed her MA in Social and Cultural Anthropology at Freie Universität Berlin. Her MA thesis explores the social and ecological outcomes of the InterOceanic Highway in the Peruvian Amazon region, based on long-term fieldwork. She currently works on her PhD, which is embedded in a project on affect and human-plant relationships at the Botanical Garden in Berlin. Based on one year of ethnographic research, her work focuses on the affective dynamics between plants and gardeners emerging from daily routines and sensory encounters and explores the ways of relating to one another and "growing together" that are at play. Central topics are care, agency, knowledge, feeling, response-ability and ambiguity. Her research interests include multispecies studies, human-plant relations, notions of Umwelt, infrastructure, sensory ethnography and speculative methods. Cornelia is currently spokesperson of the working group Umweltethnologie at DGSKA (<https://umweltethnologie.com>). You can contact her at cornelia.ertl@fu-berlin.de.

KALLE HAMM graduated as a visual artist from the Lahti Fine Art Institute in 1994 and as a Master of Arts from the University of Art and Design in 2002. Hamm worked as a principal Taika Design and Art School Taika at the Lahti from 2000 to 2003 and as a museum lecturer at the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma from 2003 to 2007. Hamm has dealt with the relationship between humans and plants in his works. In his works, plants are active agents that interact with their environment. Hamm is also one of the founding members of the Band of Weeds sound collective. Hamm has also collaborated with visual artist Dzamil Kamanger since 1999. The works made together examine the relationship of marginal groups with the mainstream population: exclusion, inclusion, and equality. Key themes are cultural interaction, multiple identities, and the individual's position in society.

Website: <https://www.kallehamm.fi/>

Project page: <https://contemporaryartarchipelago.org/commission/kalle-hamm-band-of-weeds-the-new-pangaea/>

ARNIKA PESELMANN is a researcher at the department of European Ethnology/Cultural Analysis at the University of Würzburg. She has received her PhD in Cultural Anthropology from Göttingen University for her study on negotiations of cultural heritage and property in the Czech-German border area. In 2022 she has started a DFG-research project on human-plant relations in commercial orcharding in Northern Germany combining approaches and perspectives of multispecies, agrifood and rural studies.

Website: <https://www.phil.uni-wuerzburg.de/eevk/team/wissenschaftliche-mitarbeiterinnen/dr-arnika-peselmann/>

KAT PETROSCHKAT is an artist and researcher exploring and refiguring narratives on ecology and technology. Her work combines audiovisual media with craft, technological and organic matter as well as living organisms into narrative stagings in form of conceptual installations and performative interventions.

Kat Petroschkat has studied Fine Art at Akademie der Bildenden Künste Munich, Cultural Studies at the Humboldt Universität Berlin, and holds a PhD in Applied Art and Culture Studies from the Kunstuniversität Linz.

Her work is often based in project-related collaborations, for example with partners from scientific institutions or various professions, but also regularly with the artist and anthropologist Dr. Susanne Schmitt and the performance collective "The Hercules and Leo Case".

Alongside numerous public performances, commissions, and exhibitions, her artwork has been shown at V2_Lab for the Unstable Media in Rotterdam, Lothringer13 Kunsthalle in Munich, Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, Design Museum in Gent, Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen and Stiftung Kunst und Natur Nantesbuch.

Website: <https://katpetroschkat.net/>

HANNAH PITT is Lecturer in Environmental Geography, School of Geography & Planning, Cardiff University Wales UK. A human geographer, her research and teaching focus on human-environment relations and sustainability, with a focus on communities and action in the UK, in particular related to food systems and their transformation. She was awarded a Sêr Cymru II Fellowship to investigate skills and knowledge in horticulture, research seeking to revalue the work and workers who grow crops. She specialises in collaborations with community organisations, and has particular interest in how social science research can understand human-plant relations. She is a founding member of the Careoperative (Care et al. 2021) and co-convenor of international activity to develop a vision for Good Food Work.

Website: <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/people/view/475490-pitt-hannah>

Twitter: @routesandroots

SUSANNE SCHMITT is a sociocultural anthropologist and sensory ethnographer, interdisciplinary artist, and certified systemic counsellor working with interdisciplinary teams. Her work focusses on creative collaborations within and beyond the label of "art meets science", multispecies

worlding, and the aesthetic dimensions of the workplace and sites of knowledge production like Museums of Natural History, Aquariums, historical textile and fashion collections or Botanical Gardens. Her work includes choreographic audiowalks for Natural History Museums across the globe ("How to Not be A Stuffed Animal. Moving Museums of Natural History through Multispecies Choreography", Creative Director/PI, funded by Volkswagen Stiftung, with Laurie Young), broken cocktails for broken worlds ("Barfly, Danish National Gallery and other sites, with Kat Petroschkat) and a former nail salon temporarily transformed into the marsh and water gardens of the Berlin Botanical Garden to address issues of interspecies touch ("Haptic Hortus," Berlin Science Week 2022). Her teaching and cooperation work includes guest professorships (MCTS Munich), Fellowships (Institute of Advanced Sustainability Studies, Potsdam) and transnational residencies (Sense Lab, Montreal).

Website: www.susanneschmitt.org; <https://www.rifs-potsdam.de/en/people/susanne-schmitt>

LUISE STARK studied Textile Art/ Textile Design first and works as a multimedia artist at her studio ATELIER TEXTUR. Her investigations are realised in (visual) poetry, abstract photography and (documentary) film formats. Since 2019 she is studying European Ethnology and Religion Studies in Würzburg, with a special interest in design anthropology, beyond human studies and economics of religion. Her focus is on combining artistic and ethnographic methods, where art has not to be the final presentation form but is used as a non-textual tool. The exploration of aesthetics and aesthetic experience forms a basic research question for her that finds expression in written and materialised reflections. As a cultural scientist in training with a design background she is taking on editorial tasks and communication design for various science communication formats. Between 2020 and 2022 she worked with beyond-human-designers from different countries (Germany, Denmark, Netherlands) in different collaborative formats and participated as a filmmaker and ethnographer. She is now member of the Symbiotic Spaces Collective. This project focuses on multi- species habitats for urban wildlife and their aesthetic investigation as well as the design of optimized habitats for endangered species.

Website: <https://www.luisestark.de/>

Instagram: @Luise_m_m_stark

DARYA TSYMBALYUK writes, researches, and draws. Her work lies at the intersection of environmental humanities and artistic research, and is based on feminist and decolonial methodologies. Darya is a Max Hayward Visiting Fellow at St Antony's College, University of Oxford (2022-2023). She has received her PhD in 2021 from the University of St Andrews, Scotland, and her dissertation was dedicated to human-plant relations in stories of displacement and war in Ukraine. Her articles and essays appeared in Nature, Open Democracy, Antennae: Journal of Nature in Visual Culture, NiCHE: Network in Canadian History & Environment, Arcadia: Environment & Society Portal, Springs: The Rachel Carson Center Review, to name a few. Together with Victoria Donovan, she is a co-author of an open access book Limits of Collaboration: Arts, Ethics, and Donbas (Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung 2022). Together with Kateryna Voznytsia, Yulia Serdyukova, and Viktor "Corwic" Zasypkin, Darya is a co-author of a docufiction animation

Displaced Garden. Based on her PhD research, the film tells stories of humans and plants displaced from the east of Ukraine as a result of Russian occupation of the region in 2014.

Website: <https://daryatsymbalyuk.com/>

Twitter: @DaryaTymbalyuk

Instagram: @darya_tymbalyuk

IRYNA ZAMURUIEVA makes images, writes, walks, organises and performs. Originally from the middle of the Ukrainian steppe, Iryna now lives by the North Sea coast in Scotland. Here she works with a sustainability organisation [Sniffer](#) on transforming organisations and places to flourish in the future climate. This involves leading climate change adaptation projects (with [Adaptation Scotland](#)) and exploring the role of creative practices in eco-social transformations (with [CreaTures](#)). She's currently researching the relationship between land ownership & management and climate action in Scotland, with insights feeding into climate and land policy. In parallel, Iryna is also writing and making images that explore human-environmental relationships and has been curating [Climate Art Labs](#), an art/research/activism project exploring the meanings and impacts of climate change through art in Ukrainian environments.

Instagram: @iryna_zamuruieva