

"There is a crack in everything,
that's how the light gets in"
Leonard Cohen

1. Description of my project, exploring a research question:

Central question of the research proposal

At this point, the proposed research question can only be described as point of departure from the place where **humans meet their non-human** environment. The research is driven by questioning agency, complexity and participation, as well as eco-semiotics, experimental art education, embodied knowledge, participatory and experiential learning and I embrace cognitive dissonance when thinking of complex contexts.

The roots of these theoretical perceptions are found in my current artistic practice that comprises the following five strands of work. All of them pivot around the antagonistic relationship between mankind and environment. Important notions are risk, fear, imperfection, nature and culture, consciousness, embodied knowledge, intuition, just to list a few.

The five strands are:

The long term project **Melliferopolis** is focused on honeybees in urban contexts. It is a trans-disciplinary initiative at the intersection of art and bio-sciences centered around honeybees. Finding interfaces between humans' and bees' ecologies, the focus is on the work with biological systems. The project engages with insects and plants, as well as systemic phenomena (hive mind, ecological systems, community). The beauty of unpredictability, the engagement with failure, risk and fear and a slow, long term development are intrinsic to this work.

Veget:Ability are explorations within the plant world with a focus on plant neurobiology. The performances "Vegetal SpeedDating" and "Feast of Pollen Gold" are putting plants or the relation between plants and humans in the spotlight and propose playful or surprising encounters with the vegetal world.

Also, I like to investigate the act of pollination, the intimate moment when a pollinator visits the flower to perform the sexual act needed for the plant to make a seed - in other words, communication around pollination and the plant's response to an insect's visit.

The **Institute for Relocation of Biodiversity** is an imaginary agency taking climate change and loss of habitat as starting point to contemplate on possible futures for endangered species. Antagonistic views - from scientific suggestions on how to fix the world to eco-ethical considerations - inform and inspire this work and create a polarity between the wish to "save the

world” and the impossibility of solving wicked problems and issues as big as climate change.

Kin Tsugi Transformations is ongoing research around materiality, repair, transformation and the understanding of imperfection and impermanence. The practice explores the ancient Japanese craft - repairing ceramic objects by using gold or silver for the crack - and proposes contemporary interpretations of it. By introducing biological materials the concept moves from glueing and repairing to healing. Applying the concept to communities, landscapes or damaged situations invites a wabi-sabi approach for societal cracks.

The ideas around an experimental knowledge hub under the **working title Museum Frisch** is a homage to the Austrian Nobel Prize Winner Karl von Frisch.

In the dark years of the 20th century, the ethologist translated the meaning of the honeybees' “waggle dance” and succeeded to attribute the purpose of the dancing to sharing detailed information about location, amount and quality of food sources within the community of the hive¹. The “waggle dance” is poetic and fascinating and points to the vast and unmapped regions of ecosemiotics², biosemiotics³, as well as interspecies relations in general. The project node “Museum Frisch” explores innovative forms of generating, framing and sharing knowledge and how to make both the research process and the findings available within a framework of art education.

The above described artistic endeavors are grossomodo marginal practices and difficult to categorize. In that sense, they dwell at the edges and in the cracks of current arts practices and can be named anti-disciplinary⁴ – a term describing what doesn't fit within traditional disciplines - a field of study with its own particular words, frameworks, and methods. Continuing the mapping of these regions is noteworthy.

2. Proposed research trajectory and methodology

The described strands of my practice have emerged at different moments in time, and are therefore not all at the same stage of maturation.

The work with honeybees has been a centre point of my practice for ten years and is therefore the most reflected. The other strands are more or less new and the potential to work with them in depth is still to be exploited.

I see my work as practice based and process based. These two principles will also inform the research trajectory and can be seen as the pivot points of all methodology. Instead of aiming for clear results, the path will unfold in the doing, showing the next steps to take. Serendipity and

1 Frisch, K., (1957) *Erinnerungen eines Biologen*. Springer, Berlin.

2 Ecosemiotics: semiotics of relationships between nature and culture vs Biosemiotics: communication within biological systems / Nöth, W., *Ecosemiotics in Sign Systems Studies* 26, 1998 (pp. 332-343)

3 Maran T., Kull K., (2014) *Ecosemiotics: main principles and current developments in Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 96 (1): 41–50

4 <https://joi.ito.com/weblog/2014/10/02/antidisciplinar.html>, Joi Ito, MIT Media Lab

coincidence need to be allowed, as they are the spices of creative processes.

In my understanding, the most valuable methodologies to deepen an ongoing practice are related to the principles of co-creation and collaborative design. Sharing and exchanging unfinished thoughts can challenge novel interpretations and point to new, yet undiscovered doors. Inspiration and insight can come from trial and error or aimless wandering. Finding new ways of collaborating by creating alliances, discovering unnoticed institutions and designing platforms and nets for future work are in my interest.

Stretch collaboration is a term defined by Adam Kahane as “How to get things done together in complex situations even with people we don’t agree with, like or trust”. It describes an approach to collaboration that embraces discord, experimentation and genuine co-creation.

This concepts comes from the political and corporate world, but seems most useful in any, also artistic, context when aiming at professional relationships rather than emotional entanglement. I want to introduce and practice this approach.

Overall, during the year at a.pass, I aim to nurture the emergence of a constellation that creates contextual variables of competencies, people and institutional landscapes that can be seen as a palette of possibilities for the future of my artist practice.

3. Potential of my research to contribute to experimental performative or spatial modes of knowledge production

In my art practice, I often choose formats related to rituals or ceremonies. Generally, they cannot be categorized as “pure performances”, but rather they are hybrid forms of engaging with the audience through participatory interventions and can be seen as initiation, or invitation to experience an art work, as introduction to a knowledge field or subtle integration into the intervention, sometimes un-noticeable at first. The performative aspect of my work can be a silent durational intervention, it can be an invitation to sharing a meal, a walk or a conversation that bears the potential for transformation.

The sites where my art practice becomes public are rarely conventional art venues. Public spaces in the city - like a park, a street, or the Botanic garden – host installations, interventions and semi permanent artistic manifestations. A lecture hall during an academic conference, a shop in a multi-ethnic quarter of the city or living rooms in private houses become the stage for facilitated encounters and curated conversations, for experimental transformative set ups.

These venues attract a variety of participants and visitors, and are often accessible to a more divers audience than commonly encountered in museums, galleries or theaters.

Since in my art practice, the involvement of the visitor often becomes part of the piece, the choice of venue is crucial. Noticeably, both humans and non humans can be counted as visitors and participants.

Mostly, the public sites for my interventions are in urban contexts and are selected to be easily

accessible or open at all times, with low thresholds for accidental passers by. The sites are also chosen for their potential to transform. The locations are often non designated areas or “non places”, that is empty geographical landmarks which are yet to be filled with life⁵. An intervention in that spot might enable a shift to happen and change the location into a “place”, defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity.

In the case of Melliferopolis, this transformation happens first for a large variety of pollinators that are attracted to visit the flowering bed of an installation, followed by the human visitor who now finds the place worth noticing and attending.⁶

Phenomena of this kind have been described by the concept of “urban acupuncture”, specified by Jaime Learner, former mayor of Curitiba in Brazil: It is a phenomenon where the city becomes a catalyst of interactions between people⁷.

Small scale interventions of this kind can have an impact on the social fabric of the city. In my work, the effects were noticeable both for human and non human entities, as the interventions create incentives for inter-species encounters. This is urban acupuncture for interspecial interactions and is therefore a catalyst for people but also for relations between human and non human agents.

Facilitating encounters between mankind and non humans, like wildlife or plants, addresses the separation that humans experience from their environment, and is an intrinsic part of my art practice. The visitor is invited to engage with the immediate environment, mediated through experimental formats. The emphasis lies in offering an experience of facilitated encounters that acknowledge human-animal or human-plant relations.

These encounters with unfamiliar agents are at times unexpected and evoke a number of reactions from people, from awe to anxiety, from surprise to disgust.

The tensions connected with love and fear of nature exemplify the paradoxes between acceptable and appreciable and unacceptable and uncontrollable nature and human-wildlife interactions. These topics are connected with the very existential questions of human life and our place on earth⁸, a rich field for explorations, research and practice.

Finding cracks and ruptures when they show, triggers me to find transformative answers rather than trying to fix the problem. In my Kin Tsugi practice this engagement manifests clearly. Maybe at times less visible, but nonetheless very present, this approach is interwoven in all of my practices.

5 Augé, M., 1995. *From Non-Places, An Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Verso; London, New York: p.75ff

6 Stadlbauer, C. *Inter-species Encounters at the “Hexa-Hives” in Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 2016

7 Green J., 2014. “Jaime Lerner’s Urban Acupuncture” In: *Uniting the Built and Natural Environments*, American society of Landscape architects. Accessed on 14/09/2016 at: <https://dirt.asla.org/2014/09/18/jaime-lerners-urban-acupuncture/>

8 Tokarski, M. 2016. *Dangerous Animals and our Search for Meaningful Relationships with Nature in the Anthropocene*. In: Tonnessen, M. (ed.), *Thinking about Animals in the Age of the Anthropocene*, pp. 181-196, London