



Biodiversity and the Cultural Landscape

a symposium organized by Contemporary Matters

Tuesday, January 14 & Wednesday, January 15, 2020

Biodiversity and the Cultural Landscape

In recent years, the loss of biodiversity has increased at an alarming rate. It has also led to the formation of interstate organizations such as IPBES focusing on conserving the variety of species. However, since Earth has undergone at least five mass extinctions, why should we act now? And if we do, we need to ask: *how* should we act?

In the realm of today's sciences, the arts and humanities are not usually privileged as an authority or approved source of knowledge when reflecting on issues concerning biodiversity. Yet, this separation of the arts and hard sciences only emerged in the late-nineteenth century with the rise of new technological advancements, precipitating an epistemic shift in knowledge production. After the exposure of the conceptions of nature and biology as social constructs developed across generations, there is an urge to renegotiate these terms and update them for the 21st century. In order to do so, we are turning toward contemporary cultural and activist practices that steadily make biodiversity a subject of discussion. Merging approaches from life sciences and

cultural studies through the deconstruction of the binary opposition of nature and culture equates to embracing the complex and large-scale hybridity of biodiversity.

For this symposium, we invite researchers, scholars, artists, and activists to come together on a public forum to discuss new approaches for human and non-human co-existence at the University of Vienna.

We believe that biodiversity constitutes a multifaceted challenge on a global scale. The endangerment thereof impacts all classes, groups, professions and nations, thus highlighting the entanglement of human and non-human agents in our contemporary world and the necessity to put these various affected actors in conversation with one another. In fact, by facilitating an exchange between rather uncustomary combinations of perspectives on the subject of biodiversity, we can perform (bio)diversity in the very structure of the symposium.

Some of the questions we are hoping to discuss include: How may human intervention increase biodiversity? Can there be such a thing as peaceful co-existence between humans and the environment, especially in late capitalism? Can we even assume that the loss of biodiversity has a negative impact on the environment? How can we re-evaluate the colonial background of the life sciences? How can we include indigenous voices and incorporate their knowledge as a source for combating the loss of biodiversity? What kind of artistic positions may help us grasp the magnitude of the global environmental crisis?

Program

Tuesday, January 14, 2020

mumok kino
Museumsplatz 1, 1070 Vienna

- 19:00** **Film Screening of “Water Makes Us Wet”**
by Beth Stephens & Annie Sprinkle, 75min
Panel Discussion
with Brishty Alam, Simeon Gazivoda and Magdalena Stöger
Moderation: Fanny Hauser

Wednesday, January 15, 2020

Aula am Campus
Hof 1.11, Campus der Universität Wien, Spitalgasse 2, 1090 Vienna

- 10:00 - 10:15** **Opening**
- 10:15 - 10:45** **Biodiversity in the Anthropocene**
Eva Horn
- 10:50 - 11:20** **The End of Nature (As We Knew It)**
Fahim Amir
- 11:20 - 11:30 Coffee break
- 11:30 - 12:00** **Endangered Species: On the Loss of Biodiversity
in Contemporary Art**
Ingeborg Reichle
- 12:00 - 12:45** **Public discussion**
with Eva Horn, Fahim Amir and Ingeborg Reichle
Moderation: Sophie Publig

- 12:45 - 14:00 Lunch break
- 14:00 - 14:30** **Re-reading Victor Gruen: The Cultural Landscape
Between Arcadia and Habitat**
Roswitha Schuller
- 14:35 - 15:05** **Whole Earth s Cataloguing**
Tahani Nadim & Sybille Neumeyer
- 15:05 - 15:15 Coffee break
- 15:15 - 15:45** **Science-Policy Interrelations in and for Protecting
Marine Biodiversity**
Alice Vadrot
- 15: 45 - 16:30** **Public discussion**
with Roswitha Schuller, Tahani Nadim, Sybille Neumeyer and
Alice Vadrot
Moderation: Mihály Németh
- 16:30 - 17:00 Coffee break
- 17:00 - 17:30** **Art Contributing to Biodiversity**
Maria Huhmarniemi
- 17:35 - 18:05** **Ecological Catastrophe and Cultural Impoverishment
of the Far North of Russia**
Yulia Kopr
- 18:05 - 18:15 Coffee break
- 18:15 - 18:45** **Heading for Extinction and What to do about It**
Paul Sajovitz (Extinction Rebellion)
- 18:45 - 19:30** **Public discussion**
with Yulia Kopr and Paul Sajovitz
Moderation: Julia Jarrett

Tuesday, January 14, 2020

Water Makes Us Wet An Ecosexual Adventure

by Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens
USA, 75min

With a poetic blend of curiosity, humor, sensuality and concern, *Water Makes Us Wet* chronicles the pleasures and politics of H2O from an ecosexual perspective. The film follows the artists Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens and their dog Butch, in their E.A.R.T.H. Lab mobile unit, as they explore water in the Golden State. Ecosexuality shifts the metaphor “Earth as Mother” to “Earth as Lover” to create a more reciprocal and empathetic relationship with the natural world. Along the way, Annie and Beth interact with a diverse range of folks including performance artists, biologists, water treatment plant workers, scholars and others, climaxing in a shocking event that reaffirms the power of water, life and love.

Annie Sprinkle’s and Beth Stephens’ work reflects two lines of force within radical feminist art. While Stephens (born in 1960 in Montgomery, West Virginia) was intervening in the gallery space and within video art beginning in the late 1980s, introducing representations of lesbian and queer culture, Sprinkle (born in 1954 in Philadelphia) was working to undo the dominant codes of representation in pornography, as a porn actress and activist, campaigning

to defend the rights of sex workers. Their coming together as an artistic duo in the early 2000s represents the alliance of these divergent discourses as it gives way to “ecoSEX” art and activism. They are married to the Earth, Sky, Sea, Soil, and many other nature entities.

Panel Discussion

with Brishty Alam, Simeon Gazivoda and
Magdalena Stöger

Moderation: Fanny Hauser

Brishty Khatun Alam studied natural sciences in London and Art and Photography at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Currently, she works and teaches at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna, as well as a freelancer. Her most recent work *C.A.T.: Catastrophic Animals on Terra* was published in 2019.

Simeon Gazivoda studies German philology at the University of Vienna. As a queer performer and environmental and LGBTIQ activist, he organized the event series Drink & Draw & Drag and charity events with a queer-political agenda such as Anything Goes. He is also involved with and member of the Green Party’s queer branch Die Grünen Andersrum Wien.

Magdalena Stöger studied art history and communication studies in Berlin and Vienna. She worked for various institutions

such as the 21er Haus, the ZKM or the Secession in the curatorial departments, as well as a freelance curator and art historian. She co-founded the initiative Contemporary Matters and currently works as a tutor at the Department of Art History at the University of Vienna.

Fanny Hauser studied art history and comparative literature in Paris and Vienna. She worked as a curatorial assistant for the Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Vienna, and the documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel. While co-founding the initiative Contemporary Matters, she is also co-director and co-founder of the art association Kevin Space since 2016.

Wednesday, January 15, 2020

Biodiversity in the Anthropocene

Eva Horn

In her lecture, Eva Horn will discuss a specific role that biodiversity has played in the discovery and modelizations of the earth system. Some of the questions that will be presented for consideration are: If we are currently facing a dramatic loss of biodiversity, how does this affect the more general diagnosis of an ecological meta-crisis discussed under the term of the Anthropocene? How can we understand the role of humans within the earth system if we take the specific vantage point of species loss?

Eva Horn is Professor of Modern German Literature at the Department of German at the University of Vienna. Her areas of research include literature and political theory, disaster imagination in modern literature and film, cultural conceptions of climate, and the Anthropocene. She is author of *The Secret War: Treason, Espionage, and Modern Fiction* (Northwestern University Press, 2013), *The Future as Catastrophe* (Columbia University Press, 2018), and, together with Hannes Bergthaller: *The Anthropocene - Key Issues for the Humanities* (Routledge, 2019).

The End of Nature (As We Knew It)

Fahim Amir

Criticism of environmental destruction is often based on highly problematic notions of a “pristine nature” or is transformed into the eco-capitalist concern for sustainable resource management. Indeed, after Chernobyl and Nestlé, we now live in the age of potent molecules and undeclared ingredients. But just as Brecht, who once had installed the banner “Don’t Stare so Romantically” in theatre halls, we too should assume a more critical engagement towards the most pressing questions of our time, their epistemic framing and associated pictorial worlds. This widening of the horizon of ecological intelligibility could help foster a less normative, selective and aggressive look at the worlds around and beyond us.

Fahim Amir is a philosopher and author. He has held visiting professorships at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, at the University of Campinas São Paulo and at Kunstuni Linz. Amir’s research explores the thresholds of naturecultures and urbanism, performance and utopia, colonial historicity and modernism. His most recent publication *Schwein und Zeit. Tiere, Politik, Revolte* (Nautilus, 2018) was honored with the Karl Marx Prize 2018. It was included in the ZEIT Sachbuch-Bestenliste and chosen as one of the best books of the year 2019 by the Goethe Institute.

Endangered Species: On the Loss of Biodiversity in Contemporary Art

Ingeborg Reichle

The talk will explore how contemporary artists contribute to raise awareness about the human-induced extinction crisis and the rapid loss of biodiversity we face. Overfishing, pollution, acidification, and rising temperatures due to climate change are factors that have been putting stress on our ecosystems for decades and pose a serious threat today. As a consequence, more and more artists are getting involved to forge ahead to the forefront of nature conversation or create scenarios for the future, based on current scientific findings and predicted consequences – for example – the irreversible consequences of the waste regimes of our affluent societies.

Ingeborg Reichle is the Chair of the Department of Media Theory at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. In 2017 and 2018 she was also serving as Founding Chair of the Department Cross-Disciplinary Strategies, designing an integrated curriculum for the new BA study program Cross-Disciplinary Strategies: Applied Studies in Art, Science, Philosophy, and Global Challenges. She studied in London and Hamburg and gained her PhD in art history in 2004 from the Humboldt University Berlin, where she also gained her habilitation

in 2013. Before joining the faculty of the Department of Media Theory as full professor in 2016, she was FONTE professor at the Humboldt University Berlin. In Vienna she serves as co-host for Leonardo’s LASER Talks, an international program of gatherings that bring artists and scientists together for informal conversations.

Re-reading Victor Gruen: The Cultural Landscape Between Arcadia and Habitat

Roswitha Schuller

In 1973 the Victor Gruen foundation Los Angeles published Gruen’s research, *Centers for the Urban Environment. Survival of the Cities*. In his research Gruen draws a new environmental agenda in the context of, what he calls, shopping towns. Doing so, he critically refers to Le Corbusier’s modernist urban planning charter *La Charte d’Athenes* (passed in the Congrès International d’Architecture Moderne - CIAM 1933, published 1941). “Mall maker” (Hardwick, 2003) Gruen thereby understands themed architecture and natural surrogates like plants, ponds, or fountains in urban and sub-urban shopping and leisure environments as a way of preserving the “real” nature outside the urban realm. In her lecture, Roswitha Schuller will introduce Gruen’s theses from the perspective of cultural landscape studies, carving out

Gruen's landscape conceptions against the backdrop of historical European landscape conceptions as the Arcadian trope is one. Also, she will set Gruen's theses in the historic frame of the emerging environmentalism of the time, and develop a set of contemporary questions alongside Gruen's *Charta von Wien* (The Vienna Charter, 1972).

Roswitha Schuller is a lecturer at the Institute for Art and Architecture IKA at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. She is a part of Hanakam & Schuller artist duo based in Vienna, whose practice explores and redesign the rules of the fine arts for particular contexts and purposes. In 2013, Schuller was an IFK-akademie fellow, she is holding a Dr.phil. in Art Sociology and Cultural Studies from the University of Applied Arts Vienna. In 2012, she graduated with her thesis *Happy Ending Nature. The role of the Arcadian in sociocultural space* (advisor: Roman Horak). Schuller's recent fields of research include Cultural Landscape Studies, Gender Studies on Landscape, the Arcadian and Art-based research.

Whole Earths Cataloguing

Tahani Nadim and Sybille Neumeyer

Biodiversity has become the dominant term through which science, policy and natural history museums imagine and address life forms: environmental devastations are framed as biodiversity loss while protecting and conserving biodiversity is regarded as central for human well-being and sustainable development. It is a fairly new term (coming into being in the 1980s) but it has had a remarkable career. In a performative lecture, Sybille Neumeyer and Tahani Nadim tackle what the term renders present, absent and unthinkable. Particularly, they engage with the intra-actions of life forms and forms of life, demonstrating how changing notions of the biological are always already implicated with changing notions of the social. Thinking biodiversity as an ongoing process rather than a state (of nature) they appropriate and rework the format of the Whole Earth Catalogue into a practice of cataloguing whole earths.

In this, an item is catalogued if it is deemed:

- 0.1 missing or excluded from dominant Western discourses,
- 0.2 promising biocultural provocations,
- 0.3 refining earthly attitudes,
- 0.4 ready to be archived,
- 0.5 expressive of economic rationales,
- 0.6 subjectively interesting, ...

Tahani Nadim is a junior professor for socio-cultural anthropology in a joint appointment between the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin and the Humboldt-University's Institute for European Ethnology. Her interdisciplinary research combines the sociology and the anthropology of science and focuses on problematizing data practices and data infrastructures in biodiversity discovery and natural history collections. She co-heads the department Humanities of Nature at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin.

Sybille Neumeyer is a multimedia artist with a background in art history, linguistics, ethnology and visual communication. Her work focuses on ecological issues and explores the relationships and entanglements between humans and non-humans. Her practice encompasses drawings, installations, performative lectures, moving and still images. Through polyphonic (hi)storytelling and cross-disciplinary research she is currently investigating planetary health and the intersections of agriculture and the chemical industry in Germany after WWI.

Science-Policy Interrelations in and for Protecting Marine Biodiversity

Alice Vadrot

Struggles over what constitutes legitimate environmental knowledge can only be understood if we acknowledge global inequalities in producing, using and contesting science between the Global North and the Global South. Global knowledge about the environment is powerful because it draws the lines between legitimate modes of representation of environmental degradation in world politics and marginalized views on nature. In her talk, Alice Vadrot proposes that if we wish to study the use and contestation of environmental knowledge in world politics, we should turn our attention to international negotiation sites and investigate both the use, contestation and legitimation of this knowledge in terms of practices, and the structural conditions under which scientific knowledge is produced and recognized worldwide. The talk will use the case of marine biodiversity in the high seas to illustrate how this could look like in research practice and show why it can be beneficial for scholarship to study the (geo-) political and material dimensions of science-policy interrelations.

Alice Vadrot is Assistant Professor for International Relations with a focus on Environmental Politics at the Department of Political Science of the University of Vienna and Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre for Science and Policy (CSaP) of the University of Cambridge. Vadrot holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Vienna, which she completed in 2013. From 2015 to 2018, she was an Erwin Schrödinger Fellow of the Austrian Science Fund. She did her postdoctoral research at the University of Cambridge and returned to Vienna as a Senior Post Doc in 2017. In 2018, she won a Starting Grant from the European Research Council (ERC). Since November 2019, she is member of the Young Academy of the ÖAW and on the board of the Austrian Biodiversity Council.

Art Contributing to Biodiversity

Maria Huhmarniemi

The talk explores two art projects focused on biodiversity that Maria Huhmarniemi conducted as an eco activist artist-researcher. The first project addresses the threat that the construction of a new hydroelectric power station in a meadow in Rovaniemi, Finland posed to a rare butterfly native and the obstacles that prevented its construction up until now. In the talk, Huhmarniemi will elaborate on how she

artistically responded to this case as an installation artist and evaluate the wider impact of the art project in the context of contemporary art's potential influence on environmental politics. The second project is the socially and environmentally engaged art project Meadows and Wood-Pastures in which Huhmarniemi collaborated with a dancer, landscape ecologist and several pupils to comment on environmental issues such as agricultural nature, biodiversity reservation and the agency of natural entities. The talk will present both of these projects in the framework of *Biodiversity and the Cultural Landscape*.

Maria Huhmarniemi is an artist and a teacher at the University of Lapland, Faculty of Art and Design. In her work as a visual artist, she engages with questions concerning the Northern regions and environmental issues such as the relationship between people and nature, environmental responsibility and biodiversity. She does socially and environmentally engaged art. As a researcher, she is interested in political contemporary art and education for sustainability through art. In her doctoral thesis (2016), she developed a transdisciplinary collaboration between artists and researchers. The motive was to find out how contemporary artists can participate in local discussions on environmental politics through art.

Ecological Catastrophe and Cultural Impoverishment of the Far North of Russia

Yulia Kopr

On the Northern territories of Russia there are more than forty ethnic nationalities, all of them descendants of ancient hunters and reindeer herders who have since olden times inhabited these places. For many years, indigenous peoples of the Far North of Russia, whose culture and worldview are inextricably linked to their long-established way of life in the tundra, are deprived of their cultural codes: their economic, communal, and religious traditions are being eradicated first by breaking their connection with nature through a new system of a sedentary lifestyle and forced assimilation, and subsequently, by introducing these peoples into market conditions, the development of which is carried out only through successful sales of culture and "exotic" knowledge. In this lecture, various historical periodizations of Russian history such as the colonization and industrialization of Siberia in the Soviet era as well as in Modern Russia will be discussed, with special emphasis on how these transformations incurred ecological disasters, which in turn affect/ed the culture and art production of indigenous peoples inhabiting these territories.

Yulia Kopr is a researcher and photographer, currently working towards an additional master's degree at the Department for Art History at the University of Vienna. Her academic interests range from the analysis of cultural policy developments in postwar spaces to the application of new methodologies, scientific approaches and decolonizing practices in the articulation of indigenous peoples' knowledge. She is also a participating member of the Vienna-based, student-led initiative Contemporary Matters, which conceptualized and organized the symposium *Biodiversity and the Cultural Landscape*.

Heading for Extinction and What to do about It

Paul Sajovitz (Extinction Rebellion)

The presentation is an abridged version of the talk, *Heading for Extinction and What to do about It*, which has been widely used by the global grassroots-movement Extinction Rebellion to mobilize concerned citizens to take nonviolent direct action and participate in mass civil disobedience. The lecture will cover topics ranging from the science behind the dire ecological emergency and our socio-economic and political systems that have continuously failed to address these grave environmental problems for decades, to the strategies and methods of protest, the shift from the model of sustainability to cultivating a regenerative culture, as well as

the challenges and perspectives of a global social movement as Extinction Rebellion highlighting its central aspects.

Paul Sajovitz is an environmental activist involved with the movement Extinction Rebellion (XR), which he helped to establish in Austria over the course of 2019. That same year, he also completed his bachelor's degree in biology (ecology) at the University of Vienna and is currently working towards a master's degree in conservation science and biodiversity management. His work within XR is mainly focused on media and communication strategies, also acting as a spokesperson for Extinction Rebellion, Austria.

Contemporary Matters is a student initiated platform launched in 2018 raising critical awareness on the role of "the contemporary" in the increasingly transdisciplinary field of art history.

www.contemporarymatters.org

Contemporary Matters .



mumok

