

ART & /IN ECOLOGY

Human-Non Human Interconnections in Art, Visual Culture & Everyday Life.
Site specific theory in practice in Vuosaari two-period module Jan-April 2021

Wk 7: Political Ecologies of & in Space Part 3 Some thoughts about Soil, Materials, Photographic Practices & Care

Meeting ID: 683 5415 5377

Find your local number:

<https://aalto.zoom.us/j/68354155377>

Source: Google Maps

Timeline today

9-10

Breakout group reading discussion on Jane Bennet

10.-11.

Guest input from University of Helsinki PhD researcher Alicia K. Ng on her naturecultural interactions of waste, soil microbes, plants, etc.

11-12.30

Guest input from Noora Sandgren Photographer,
i) Photographic practices, material partners and care
ii) Community projects in Vuossari

12.30-14.30 Break

14.30-

Groups of 3 independent field walk devised by Noora Sandgren
Site specific engagement with more than human entities in Kangaslampi

Questions for Jane Bennet & Political Worms

Questions for discussion

How does Bennet build up an argument for worms as political actants?

What evidence does she give for this?

What theoretical tools does she draw upon in order to argue this?

How does she argue that a certain kind of anthropomorphism might have positive consequences?

Could one consider COVID 19 a political actant?

Some quotes that might help your discussion

P 94 "Worms, or electricity. or various gadgets. or fats, or metals, or stem cells are actants, or what Darwin calls "small agencies:" that, when in the right confederation with other physical and physiological bodies, can make big things happen"

P96 Charles Darwin: "Worms have played a more important part in the history of the world than most persons would at first assume" (Mould, 305).

.. It would be consistent with Darwin to say that worms participate in heterogeneous assemblages in which agency has no single locus, no mastermind, but is distributed across a swarm of various and variegated vibrant materialities.'

P 97 This assemblage is an ecology in the sense that it is an interconnected series of parts. but it is not a fixed order of parts, for the order is always being reworked in accordance with a certain "freedom of choice" exercised by its actants.

Questions for Jane Bennet & Political Worms cont'd

P 97 (Latour's example: 'This question presumes a kind of vegetal agency in a natural system understood not as a mechanical order of fixed laws but as the scene of not-fully-predictable encounters between multiple kinds of actants. Savanna vegetation, forest trees, soil, soil microorganisms. and humans native and exotic to the rainforest are all responding, in real time and without predetermined outcome, to each other and to the collective force of the shifting configurations that form.'

P98 'in some times and places, the 'small agency" of the lowly worm makes more of a difference than the grand agency of humans'.

P 98 "But the narcissism of this gaze backfired, for it also prompted Darwin to pay dose attention to the mundane activities of worms, and what came to the fore through paying attention was their own, distinctive, material complexity. He was able to detect what natural historians call the "jizz" of a worm, which the geographer Jamie Lorimer describes as "the unique combination of properties . . . We at first may see only a world in our own image, but what appears next is a swarm of "talented" and vibrant materialities (including the seeing self)."

P99 "the player should try to reproduce with his finger the motion of "an emaciated crow perched on a bare tree or pecking at the snow in hope of finding something to eat";"

P 100 "Dewey presents a public as a confederation of bodies, bodies pulled together not so much by choice (a public is not exactly a voluntary association) as by a shared experience of harm. that, over time, coalesces into a "problem."... Like the conjoint action of Darwin's worms, the conjoint action of Dewey's citizens is not under the control of any rational plan or deliberate intention."

P 102 "What is more, in naming a problem (rather than an act of will) as the driving force behind the formation of a public, Dewey (almost) acknowledges that a political action need not originate in human bodies at all."

P 104 "How can humans learn to hear or enhance our receptivity for "propositions" not expressed in words? How to translate between them? What kinds of institutions and rituals of democracy would be appropriate? "

P 106-107 On Ranciere: "The demos is, we read, "neither the sum of the population nor the disfavored element within," but an "'excess" irreducible to the particular bodies involved...

... Here again the political gate is opened enough for nonhumans (dead rats. bottle caps. gadgets. fire. electricity. berries. metal) to slip through. for they also have the power to startle and provoke a gestalt shift in perception: what was trash becomes things, what was an instrument becomes a participant, what was foodstuff becomes agent. what was adamantite becomes intensity.

.. But what if we loosened the tie between participation and human language use. encountering the world as a swarm of vibrant materials entering and leaving agentic assemblages?

P 108 A vital materialist theory of democracy seeks to transform the divide between speaking subjects and mute objects into a set of differential tendencies and variable capacities. I think this is also what Darwin and Latour were trying to do when they told their worm stories.

P109 "... surely the scope of democratization can be broadened to acknowledge more nonhumans in more ways, in something like the ways in which we have come to hear the political voices of other humans formerly on the outs: "Are you ready, and at the price of what sacrifice, to live the good life together?"

Alicia K Ng



Alicia Ng is a PhD candidate in the interdisciplinary environmental sciences program (DENVI) at the University of Helsinki. Her research is concentrated on electronic waste (e-waste) in China, specifically bioremediation techniques to investigate non-human interactions amongst media and soil ecologies. Her research interests include changes in understandings of humanity and the environment in the Anthropocene, and the interrelations between technology, environment, and society.

Noora Sandgren

Noora Sandgren is a visual artist & art educator working with photography and its bendings, installation, texts and embodied practices. In her artistic research she's interested in the theme of fluidity, the circular inter- and intra-action of different materialities, their livelines within shared space, at times marked by entangled ecological questions. Her ways of working is site-sensitive and often takes place in her home garden. Noora is a graduate of MA in Photography at the Aalto University, where she also studies her MA in Art Education department. She holds a BA in Social Psychology at the University of Helsinki. Noora's art has been exhibited in various solo and group exhibitions in Finland and internationally. Currently she's preparing for an exhibition project related to the Bioart Society, and Aalto Biofilia artist residency, ÖRES residency as well as curatorial interdisciplinary programme related to community artwork in Vuosaari 21 project. -

Image:
Dialogue 5.2.2017
(30 min)



Irwan Ahmet & Tita Salina

Irwan Ahmet & Tita Salina: Staying with the trouble & practices of care: Engagements between humans, ecologies, landscapes, things in Fukushima



Okuma, Fukushima



“This cleaning act is a collective project by five artists who visited a nursing home in the city of Okuma, Fukushima. Hastily abandoned after the earthquake and subsequent radiation leaks, in every room the wall clocks were stopped, the whole frozen in time.

Together the artists cleaned one room and restored everything to just as it was before. It is unlikely that anyone will see it, as it may be thousands of years before the danger of the radiation passes. At the time the project was made, the house had witnessed 1,103 sunsets since the disaster happened.”
Irwan Ahmet Tita Salina 2016



Irwan Ahmett & Tita Salina Video of Okuma Old People's Home cleanup expedition
<https://youtu.be/p3geCLcCnkI>



Irwan Ahmett & Tita Salina Video of Okuma Old
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Tita Salina, *1001st Island—The Most Sustainable Island in Archipelago*, Photo: Irwan Ahmett. 2015.



Irwan Ahmett & Tita Salina Mediation between contaminated earth and the sea



Mediation between contaminated earth and the sea



Irwan Ahmett & Tita Salina Mediation between contaminated earth and the sea



Irwan Ahmett & Tita Salina Mediation between contaminated earth and the sea



Irwan Ahmett & Tita Salina, Sending Haze NTU CCA Singapore 2017

Homework reading

- Theory:

Making time for soil: Technoscientific futurity and the pace of care
Maria Puig de la Bellacasa

- Design/Art:

Traces from the Anthropocene: Working With Soil

Riikka Latva-Somppi*, Maarit Mäkelä* and .zgü Gündeşlioğlu**

Next Week 9 17 April:
Political Ecologies of & in Space part 4
Monsters Ghosts & Spirits

9-10

Breakout group discussion on readings

10.15 -11

Noora Sandgren feedback (one hour)

11-12.00

Lucy final input: Political Ecologies of & in Space
Part 4 Some notes on Monsters, Ghosts & Spirits

Afternoon

Group consultations

READING: Edouardo Kohn *How Forests Think*



{if your bait can sing the wild one will come}
Like Shadows Through Leaves,
by The Migrant Ecologies Project
Conceptualized by Lucy Davis, together with: Sound Designer, Zai Tang;
Cinematographer & Editor, Kee Ya Ting.
Editor, Daniel Hui & Design Studio Crop Singapore.
Funded by a Singapore Art Museum commission
& National Arts Council of Singapore DPG grant
Project page <http://migrantecologies.org/Like-Shadows-Through-Leaves>

28 April Lucy in Conference. You are most welcome to sit in,
or independent work.

<https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/whats-on/phytogenesis-entanglements-in-a-more-than-human-world>



Image credit: W Arnold