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# **Editorial: Slow Life of Vegetal, Animal, and Some Composite Organisms**

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This thematic issue of Research in Arts and Education focuses on exploring research with species other than humans.

Botanical world is rapidly changing. Since around 2005 there has been research on sentient and cognitive qualities of plants. Even twenty years earlier scientists proved that there are collaborative systems of shared mycorrhizal network under our feet through which carbon can pass between plants. We have a better understanding of porous and pluralistic ontology of plants and composite organisms such as lichen.

During the last decade Michael Marder and other researchers have developed plant philosophy, studied communication of plants, and written some thoughts about plant politics (Cagliano et al., 2019; Marder, 2013; 2014; Peeples & Depoe, 2014). Dialogue between biological sciences and the humanities is vivid. Human relations to the vegetal world have been reconsidered in many ways and plants, bryophytes, lichen, and fungi have been seen as active and communicative organisms.

Also, in art and artistic research much has happened since the first exhibition to present plants as art more than 80 years ago. In 1936 Edward Steichen exhibited *Delphiniums* in the New York Museum of Modern Art. Before the exhibition flowers were used as a subject for art but they were not themselves seen as art. Steichen had developed new varieties of *Delphiniums* through twenty-six years of cross breeding and selection. Flowers were huge, and nobody denied their beauty, but at the time living plant matter displayed in the art museum raised questions about art and definitions of aesthetics (See Gedrim, 2007). These days the *Steichen Delphiniums* exhibition is regarded to have combined art and biosciences, and as such it can be considered as the predecessor of art realized with or of living organisms.

Today it is not only scientists and bioartists who work with plants, lichen, moss or fungi. Contemporary artists do not only use plants, lichen or moss as their material, but study plants from their own conditions, as independent creatures having their own systems of communication and networks. Many artists seek connection and try to collaborate with the botanical and symbiotic cultures. One of the most intriguing things for artists – at least in essays of this issue – is slowness of vegetal and animal life, its own temporality as an opposition to restless, progress-oriented, and short-tempered anthropocenic culture. Even the patience of ticks surpasses human hustle to get something done.

The value of vegetal life and the meaning of soil for growth is understood better in contemporary times of climate change. Life would not be possible without underground insect populations

and mycorrhizal networks communicating with trees and other plants. Life would not be the same without such animals as bees or birds either.

Often when we talk about anthropocentrism we also talk about domestication. There are human-made differences between wild plants, weeds, cultivated plants, and crop as well as between wild animals, domesticated animals, livestock, and pets. Our mutual relations with plants as well as animals demand also new ethical and political terms if we want the relation to be more egalitarian and collaborative.

Natasha Myers (2017) has half cheekily and half seriously introduced the term “Planthroposcene.” According to Myers, Planthroposcene is not a time-bound era but refers to both creating new scenes and new ways to see relations between plant and people. Let’s take gardens as an example. We cultivate our gardens which are by definition “spaces where human beings operate artificially over nature” (Diogo et al., 2019, p. 7). But very often ‘nature’ seeks its own ways operating ‘naturally’ over gardener’s intentions. I am here thinking about my own relation to and negotiations with *Aegopodium podagraria*, which have also lots of other names such as ground elder, herb gerard, bishop’s weed, goutweed, gout wort, snow-in-the-mountain, English masterwort and wild masterwort, vuohenputki in Finnish. My ambivalent relation to this edible *herbacerosus perennial* is based on admiring and hating its vitality and invasive nature. Its own way of being does not care about me. This opens up a fissure into a lifeform I do not totally understand despite its biological descriptions. And there, in the fissure, lies an artistic perspective. Artists can bring ineffable and mystical dimensions to very animate and touchable biological organisms. Claire Pentecost did that when claiming in her *Our Bodies, Our Soils* exhibition in 2015 that “Composting is alchemy” (Pentecost, 2015).

In many texts of this issue, we can read and sense astonishment and awe, and endeavor to comprehend and collaborate with a tree, moss, lichen, ticks, rabbits or a berry bush.

In the first visual essay “Wandering Tree. Along the Path of Acclimation” Agnes Meyer-Brandis and Ulla Taipale deal with the fact that contrary to common belief plants move. Very slowly – but they can move in the landscape. It is their way to survive the impacts of climate change. As a part of her *The Wandering Tree* project Agnes Meyer-Brandis

demonstrates tree migration in Siikaneva peatland, Finland. Meyer-Brandis has installed The Office of Tree Migration (OTM) and a station on the bog where it is possible to observe and explore methods that allow trees to move away from the changed climate. These absurd and impossible methods that allow trees to move faster will be collected into poetical vision and stories where a protagonist is a wandering common pine tree, *Pinus sylvestris*.

The second visual essay brings a reader even closer to wet soil and more detailed world of moss. “Yearning for Kinship: An Artistic Exploration of Moss and Embroidery” by Eline A. Gaudé is based on practice-led research on author’s relationship with moss, realized through embroidery. According to Gaudé, embroidery provides care and material intimacy as well as slowness in making, which equate with slow temporality of moss growth. Gaudé has taken a close look at living moss carpet, their habitation, and choreography of varied species. She has spent three summers in forests of Northern and Southern Ostrobothnia in Finland and created an intimate companionship with mosses. Through patient work with embroidery Gaudé has got to know mosses and through embodied practice she has built up a kinship with more-than-human world.

“Lichenizing Pedagogy: Art Explorations in More-than-Human Performance and Practice” by Rachel Zollinger, Mariko Oyama Thomas, Hollis Moore, and Kaitlin Bryson is an outcome of performative writing and visual inquiry project. The writers have taken lichen as a teacher and ally, and considered transcorporeal, intertwined multispecies relationships as pedagogical tool much in the same way as soil scientists have practiced “soil pedagogy” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2019); that is, living-with, studying-with, and working-with lichen and building a less anthropocentric pedagogy. The writers realized a couple of performative projects. They made a textual compost of Fluxus-type scores which they also performed. They also took notice of how lichen resides certain spaces and built a wall to mark their different ecological transition zones.

Lichens can be something to learn-with, but what about learning-with stray creatures, the ones that according to us humans are not where they should be although we might have created circumstances for them to invade ‘our’ landscape. Laura Beloff’s essay “Investigating Stray-Concept and Ticks as a Co-Species” is about ticks, those loathed and feared little

insects that nevertheless are an important part of ecosystems. Beloff's artistically driven investigation on these little creatures has led her to build an artificial Tick Garden for them. There ticks have a suitable habitat and population for finding a mating partner. But in early summer Beloff watches ticks sitting and waiting patiently on the highest points of grass stalks in hope that a host for their next meal goes by, and they can jump. Nevertheless, they cannot.

In her article "Kaniini nimeltä Arvo. Kulttuurisbiologinen eläinsuhde eettisten risti-riitojen paljastajana" Sara Ilveskorpi argues that ethical choices made in terms of sustainability may be different from morality-based ethical choices. Ilveskorpi lives with rabbits in a permaculture-driven household aiming for as self-sufficient lifestyle as possible. Thus, a reader is offered a closer look at the lives of individual rabbits. The main protagonist of this article is Arvo, a Californian meat and fur rabbit Ilveskorpi bought for breeding. Arvo had a spacious cage and relished with pears. He lived with Ilveskorpi family for over three years. Ilveskorpi writes also about sadness and guilt when an animal dies from a sickness, an old age, or was butchered.

For the reader the happenings in Bart Vandeput's and Petri Berndtson's essay "Plant Steaming Concrete Staining" might seem like someone is pulling a rabbit out of a hat. In an exhibition venue few hours after activating an installation something unexpected happened. Bartaku, an artist, is used to 'mere happenings' with *Aronia m.* bushes with which he has made artistic research for years. Human and non-human collaboration has become a natural way of life for him. In attempts to make events sensible to a reader, Bartaku invited respiratory and aerial philosopher Berndtson to comment on the aerial dimensions of the surprising, loud, and mystical *bang*.

The last visual essay in this special issue is by Annette Arlander who has been performing with plants and trees already for five years. "Looking at (Overlooked) Lichen: Visual Journaling as Part of Meetings with Remarkable and Unremarkable Trees" is a journal of lichen photographs, a sidetrack to her main project on tree bark. When compiling the visual material Arlander noticed a variety and beauty of lichen, but admits that just looking at these images does not increase one's knowledge or understanding of lichen in any real manner. Still, these images are material that on some day might turn out to be part of an artistic

composition – as complex formation as lichens themselves. Or they remain what they are: lichen images *an sich*.

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