



# **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



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### **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*