Mutating Ecologies in Contemporary Art (Barcelona, 1 Dec 16)

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MUTATING ECOLOGIES
IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Ist International Symposium
Meier Auditorium (MACBA, Plaça Joan Coromines, Barcelona)

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Keynotes: Maja & Reuben Fowkes (Translocal Institute, Budapest)
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The Anthropocene and climate change not only define the biogeophysical planetary conditions in the early decades of the 21st century but also describe an unprecedented social and cultural space in which environmental crisis coexists with, and is in fact related to, humanitarian disaster and multiple geopolitical conflicts on a global scale. Cognitive capitalism as a historical form of progress and biological essentialism are today being imposed as dominant metanarratives. In this new territory, distinguished by structural inequalities and regimes of deterritorialization and controlled mobility, the governmentality of our technologically-mediated societies operates according to a logic of manufactured risk with economies unfolding on the basis of a delusional boundless availability of natural reserves, ignoring the ecological limits of the planet. The understanding of the multi-faceted implications that these conditions entail for the sphere of relations between human and non-human entities and the configuration of possible political horizons, in other words, the question of how to live together otherwise, remains the fundamental issue of social and human sciences of our time, providing similarly new possibilities for contemporary artistic and cultural production.

The neomaterialist geo-ecophilosophical constellation of thought developed by Gregory Bateson, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti and John Protevi constitutes an opportunity with which to reconsider epistemologies and ethics in the Anthropocene, in their gambit for an expanded approach to ecology, that not only includes the natural (environment), but also the social (socius) and the mental (psyche) spheres, linking planetary sustainability as the capability to think through these three registers (Guattari, 1989). In the context of the development of this

ethical-political paradigm, and as a way to assume our responsibility in the face of our historicity, our relation to the planet and other species become inseparable from the analysis of the power conditions and relations that define our location. The challenge of our post-human and post-natural condition consists in seizing the opportunities for new kinship systems with sexualized, racialized and naturalized otherness, fostering a life-centred egalitarianism beyond holism, and focussing on the composition of a plane of radical immanence, triggering processes of becoming the others, with whom sustainable relations are built (Braidotti, 2015). These non-anthropocentric and post-humanist ethics, incompatible with the unitary and transcendental subject of Kantian morality, are articulated in the replacement of the logic of the recognition of sameness for trans-species co-dependency, and the philosophy of rights for an ethics of sustainability: the structure of the post-human subject is neither static nor fixed, but post-identitarian, transversal and embedded in multiplicity: an affective, relational and mutating subjectivity.

Artists have been imaginatively working with ecology as an expanded field since the 1960's, both as instituting practices and as a critique of the role of cultural institutions. Creative transdisciplinary projects have favoured biodiversity and community development in line with a notion of environmental conservation or restoration were among the most representative currents. Today, ecology is a prism through which artists are working with issues related to radical gardening and permaculture, sustainable bio-fuels, micro-economies, speculative design, open-source technologies, food access, biohacking, post-gender subjectivities and sustainable social practices, dismantling traditional oppositional dualisms between mind-body, reason- emotion, human-animal, theory-practice, the material and the discursive, and the actual and the virtual, trying to think life and the world otherwise. The Ist International Symposium Mutating Ecologies in Contemporary Art seeks to deepen this notion of expanded ecologies by examining current transdisciplinary artistic, cultural and curatorial practices that provide different ways to understand, contest and interrogate our relation to the earth through discursive, visual and sensual strategies and methodologies, experimenting beyond disciplinary confinements and generating new subjectivities, new posthuman ethics and novel posthuman politics.

Maja and Reuben Fowkes are curators, art historians and co-directors of the Translocal Institute for Contemporary Art, a centre for transnational research into East European art and ecology based in Budapest that operates across the disciplinary boundaries of art history, contemporary art and ecological thought. Their work has focused on the theory and aesthetics of East European art from the art production of the socialist era to contemporary artistic practices, while their interests within the field of art and ecology have entailed investigation of environmental art history under socialism, visual cultures of the Anthropocene, the position of art within the environmental humanities, and the intersections of contemporary art with plants, animals, rewilding, the biosphere and beyond-human anthropology. They hold PhDs from University College London and Essex University respectively, and work on the art history of Eastern Europe since 1945, environmental art history, as well as contemporary art and ecological thought. Recent publications include MajaFowkes'sThe Green Bloc: Neo-Avantgarde Art and Ecology under Socialism (CEU Press, 2015) and River Ecologies: Contemporary Art and Environmental Humanities on the Danube (Translocal Institute, 2015). Reuben Fowkes is an editor of Third Text, and currently preparing a special issue on East European art of the 1960s and 70s. Their forthcoming contributions include a chapter on alternative art of the 1980s in Eastern Europe for the Afterall Exhibition Histories series and a journal article on the Danube and contemporary art for Geo-Humanities. Their

curatorial projects include the Experimental Reading Room (2014-6), the River School (2013-15) and the exhibition Walking without Footprints (2016). They are currently visiting lecturers at Central European University where they teach a course on Visual Cultures of the Anthropocene for the Environmental Humanities Initiative.
www.translocal.org

http://artglobalizationinterculturality.com/activities/symposiums/symposium-2016/

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