

Plant Agency in Contemporary Art and Environmental Humanities (Budapest, 5-6 May 17)

Central European University, Budapest, May 5–06, 2017

Deadline: Feb 24, 2017

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Vegetal Mediations: Plant Agency in Contemporary Art and Environmental Humanities

Environmental Arts and Humanities Initiative

Central European University Budapest

Plants have always played powerful roles in social and ecological systems. Rather than mere passive bystanders to history, plants act as agents, mediating relations both among people and between people and their environments, knowledge, markets, and politics, as well as serving as mediators in non-human spheres. Recent findings by biologists have challenged prevalent assumptions that reduce them to 'photosynthesising green machines' (Marder) and revealed the complex social life of plants in their ability to act on their environment by controlling the microbiota on their roots, send biochemical messages to insects, recognise kin and share information about droughts and other threats. The deteriorating living conditions facing plants as a result of accelerating anthropogenic changes to the Earth System, from the effects of climate change to genetic modification, have also engendered responses and reflections from artists, writers and theorists that consider vegetal non-cognitive thought and non-representational memory, plant ethics and rights, and the relationship of humans and plants in the Anthropocene. Exploring the various social, ecological, and political mediations of plants can allow us to explore deeper understandings of the intersection of nature and culture, human and non-human, and matter and thought.

This conference seeks to open an interdisciplinary discussion of the manifold role of plants as mediators, both as agents and enablers of intra-human interactions and in terms of non-human communication and exchange. Topics to be addressed include: is it possible to think beyond an anthropocentric concern with the instrumental value of plants for nourishing our bodies, making the air breathable and stimulating our senses? What can we learn from the social life of the vegetal world that might guide our species in the search for viable solutions to ecological crisis? Do plants offer a model for coexistence and planetary being with relevance for human society, politics and economics? How might an engagement with plant agency affirm non-heteronormative ways of living and relating beyond the animal-centric perspective, in correspondence with feminist and queer critiques of the modern western notion of subjectivity? What can be learned from indigenous and ancient traditions about plants as co-members of the natural world? What can intellectual and sensorial encounters with vegetation reveal about its specific relation to temporality and what particular insights does contemporary artistic practice offer in the conceptuali-

sation of plant agency?

We invite proposals for papers and artistic presentations on the various ways in which plants mediate social and ecological relationships. Please send a 200 word abstract and short CV by 24 February 2017 to the organisers at eah@ceu.edu. Accepted participants will be notified by mid-March.

This conference is organised by the Environmental Arts and Humanities Initiative at Central European University in collaboration with Translocal Institute. The Environmental arts and Humanities Initiative aims to create a common platform for academic researchers, artists, and ecological activists creatively negotiating planetary issues at the intersection between scientific and humanities-based approaches to the environment. For more information see: www.ceu.edu/eah

Reference:

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ArtHist.net, Jan 24, 2017 (accessed Dec 15, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/14596>>.