

TAUT | TEMPORARY ARTISTS UTOPIA TOOL

Corner College zu Gast im TAUT und im
Kunstverein Wagenhalle e.V.,
Innerer Nordbahnhof 1, Tor 4-6, 70191 Stuttgart

Mit der freundlichen Unterstützung der Schweizer Kulturstiftung Pro Helvetia und des Bundeskanzleramts Österreich.

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KUNST

End!angered Species Plantation Memories and Other Troubled Voices in the Age of the Capitalocene

A group exhibition with works on display by **Ulrike Buck, Monica Ursina Jäger, Knowbotiq, Uriel Orlow, Ana Roldán, Katharina Swoboda, Lena Maria Thüring**
and performances by **Ulrike Buck, Michael Paukner, Ana Roldán, Katharina Swoboda, Anne Käthi Wehrli**
curated by **Dimitrina Sevova**

a collaboration between Kunstverein Wagenhalle e.V., Stuttgart, and
Corner College, Zurich.

at **Kunstverein Wagenhalle e.V. / TAUT**

Innerer Nordbahnhof 1, Tor 4-6, 70191 Stuttgart

Opening Friday, 28 October 2016 at 18:30 h

20:00 h Performance *Banana as Tourist* by **Ana Roldán**

20:45 h Lecture performance *On the Grouping of Penguins* by
Katharina Swoboda

21:30 h Gedichte und theoretisches Saxophon *Wieso merkt niemand dass
dieser Stuhl eine Brennnessel ist!* by **Anne Käthi Wehrli**

Date to be announced:

19:00h Lecture performance *Grete und das Fäustchen* by **Ulrike Buck**

Friday, 28 October 2016 - Saturday, 26 November 2016

Curatorial Text

End!angered Species Plantation Memories and Other Troubled Voices in the Age of the Capitalocene

*"We are not exotic but ordinary, as a result, the others are not exotic
either."* (Bruno Latour) ¹

*"It matters what stories tell stories, it matters what thoughts think
thoughts, it matters what worlds world worlds."* (Donna Haraway,
quoting Marilyn Strathern) ²

¹ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge/MA: Harvard University Press, 1993 (1991)), p. 127. The original French title adds: "Essays in symmetrical anthropology."

² Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Staying with the Trouble," at the conference *Anthropocene: Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, 5 September 2014 <<http://opentranscripts.org/transcript/anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/>> (accessed 2016-09-03).

The exhibition project *Endangered Species*³ critically and aesthetically interrogates some contradictory aspects of the current dominant concept of the Anthropocene in the economy of knowledge, and rather prefers to take further the alternative terms of the Capitalocene (Jason W. Moore, 2015) and the Plantationocene (Donna Haraway, 2015). It proposes an other geopolitics of knowledge through a practice of telling stories whose counter-memory goes beyond the asymmetrical distribution of knowledge in the rhetoric cartography of power to invent potentialities of emancipation and visibility, new social relations and distribution of bodies across space and time.

The project expresses indignation with the current human and nonhuman conditions in the Capitalocene and opens up an emergent social space where a new political body can be imagined. It is a process that requires more sociality and more stories, non-innocent and non-entertaining stories in which the referent is no longer inevitably on Nature's side, and the speaker on the side of society and the subject. The stories, in which "there is no linguistic play of a speaking subject on the other," envelop new forms of thought, whose quasi-objects have not been named yet. They belong to nature and technology, to the collective, to discourse and the social, but do not play out stereotypes of the "Real as Nature, narrated as discourse, collective as Society, existential as Being: [...] the quasi-objects that the moderns have caused to proliferate."⁴

The exhibition maps the ethico-aesthetic paradigm of this new political and utopian body, considered from the perspective of the contemporary immune system, and the topography of new socio-ecological concerns. It builds a collective environment, a milieu of shared knowledge, historiography and experience to deal aesthetically with bodies-politics-stories-voices.

At the same time, in order to imagine these new ecologies of co-existence and co-habitation, it deals with formal issues of grouping and socialization of situated people and non-people in the context of the exhibition at Wagenhalle, too. It explores how the grouping of architectural structures, objects, containers, audiences, art practices, art works, infrastructure and the social and art-cultural context of the place take part in how the story is told. This milieu, together and each agent and object one by one, tells site differentiated stories that engender a participatory and collectively heterogeneous experience out of which a wild forest, i.e., the concrete science of the story and its own spatiality and temporality, can grow from the middle of the space of the exhibition, an exercise from which Nature's non-representability can emerge as a coyote, a tropical plant or other potent trickster.

What is interesting about the geological Age of Man, the Anthropocene, is that it brings back to the Earth human history as an agent. This Age is formed not only by geological forces, but social forces, too. It coalesces geology and sociology, history and geography, biology and power, nature and culture. The Anthropocene is thus an agent of hybridization of all of these. It gives an unprecedented possibility of socialization between human and nonhuman that brings a closer approximation between them than ever before. Most importantly, sociality is no longer a human privilege. For instance, from an environmental problem that has emanated from massive infrastructure changes, global warming turns into a social problem, and paradoxically brings new forms of sociability as it troubles all of us to the extent that we can no longer be sure what can be called nature and what is social, technological, symbolic and ideological.

³ A play on endangered through the interference of the emotional interval of an exclamation mark that separates it into two other possible words, end and angered. The title still alludes to endangered species as species in the wild seriously at risk of extinction, categorized as such by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List as likely to become extinct. *Endangered* (EN) is the second most severe conservation status for wild populations in the IUCN's scheme, after *Critically Endangered* (CR).

⁴ B. Latour, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

Beyond that, a more precise rethinking of ecological crises and the environmental consequences of globalized chains of production and command rooted in industrialization and imperial colonialism, is enabled by the concept of the geological Age of Capital, the Capitalocene. If Donna Haraway asserted, in her chapter *Teddy Bear Patriarchy*, that "Nature is, in 'fact,' constructed as a technology through social praxis,"⁵ Jason Moore finds that today, "Wall Street [...] is a way of organizing nature,"⁶ as the tectonic forces of financialization shape the topography of what remains of nature. In the perspective of these phenomena he defines "capitalism as world-ecology," which brings to the fore regimes of capitalist accumulation and a "green arithmetic" that is now hegemonic within the neoliberal concept of the eco-city. Through green algorithms, the capitalism of the biosphere threatens the natural environment of the social of human or nonhuman alike. Processes of global warming can be considered on this background rather than as an effect of a growing population of the Earth.

The global crises of the Anthropocene can be understood as crises of sociality on the dividing line between the social and the natural, and the relation between capitalism and nature, as a world ecology of large plantation systems. On this backdrop, what could be practices of decolonisation within the discourses of the Anthropocene in a Western context? What is the chance of inventing new forms of sociality between human and human, between human and nonhuman, a decolonized, multi-species socialization? This other socialization or collectivism would be constructed not only around human sociality with its reliance on 'power' and 'legitimacy,' but as a new biological body yet to emerge, neither Nature nor Society. Therefore, the project explores different aesthetic and political strategies of telling other stories about resurgence and other ecologically engaged perspectives in a damaged world in which refugia have been destroyed.⁷

The project embraces the argument that cheap nature is at an end; cheapening nature cannot work much longer to sustain extraction and production in the contemporary global world, because most of the reserves of the earth have been drained, burned, depleted, poisoned, exterminated, and otherwise exhausted. *Endangered Species* call out: cheap nature really is over!⁸ This is the necessary end of every new beginning, formed by social practices of an other sensible ecology of co-existence that would produce and reproduce an other nature and other sociality within the web of life, from where a new sociality emerges to "multiply the nonhumans enrolled in the manufacturing of the collective"⁹ and "add many more hybrids in order to recompose the social link and extend its scale."¹⁰

The troubling weaving voices tell stories in different registers that come from different refrains and realities, a ritornello repeating that cheap nature is over. They embody the end of the historical relations that produced cheap nature. This end does not mark the extinction of a species, the death of its last individual. It is not about the disappearance of the species but about the appearance of multiplicities of new global kin that present themselves to confront the unparalleled catastrophe of that shipwreck. The end stays here to mark a disagreement with social

5 Donna J. Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York & London: Routledge, 1989), p. 54.

6 Jason W. Moore, "Capitalism as World-Ecology" <<http://www.jasonwmoore.com/About.html>> (accessed 2016-10-19).

7 Refugia (pl. of refugium): environmental habitats with space and time dimensions that operate on evolutionary time-scales and have facilitated the survival of biota under changing environmental conditions for millennia.

8 Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin," *Environmental Humanities*, Volume 6, Number 1 (2015), pp. 159-165.

9 B. Latour, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

technology that cheapens nature! This is an end that has been produced by the exhaustion of the historical relations in the diagram of power that produced cheap Nature. Colonialism is an exploitation of relations, too, which turns Nature into a cheap object, harnesses unpaid labor, controls the reproductive power of women, as well nature as a perpetual system of production and reproduction, a natural economy of the body which is never part of the archives.

Against the ongoing consequences of colonialism, which has to be thought in terms of social relations of exclusion within the system of domination, is there a chance of what Audre Lorde called 'dismantling the master's house'¹¹ from inside? What kind of critique, what kind of practices are needed to decolonize European Society in the plurality and heterogeneity of a collective project of the oppositional postcolonial, in the geopolitical space that emerges from "globalization as a zone of confrontation between hegemonic and counter hegemonic projects"¹² and the extreme proliferation of hybrids and mestizaje, and other mixed forms like torrents, shibboleths that disperse in the immense variety of movements to undermine the constitutional framework of the hegemony of western modernity? The exhibition project deals with issues of spatiality, with how we can accommodate hybrids and give them space?

Endangered Species are in the 'taxonomy' of queer worlding, taking part in a kind of multi-species 'anthropology,' that is a hybridization of biology, history, geography and art practices. The project brings on display the work of artists who have 'discovered' and invented, through their practices, history as a new continent, and time as a jungle or desert, the wilderness of heterogeneous time of different orders of reality, in a rather geographical and archaeological than purely psychoanalytic endeavor. Their artistic strategies of displacement invite the spectator to look with their ears, to gaze by hearing, to abandon the anthropological matrix and dismantle the master's house from within.

Endangered Species are not the survival of biota as relict populations, nor fossilized species that have before been widely spread. They are other survivors, mutational, unidentifiable, inhomogeneous, formless taxa that have the potential to expand their refugium under changing environmental conditions, biotic agents of conjunction that reconnect the isolated refugia and makes a path to connect the human and non-human situated conditions together, that infuse life, re-invent historical relations that will no longer exhaust Nature.

Plantation memories are retrospective, anachronistic and non-modern forms of historical metabolism, multiplicities of trouble voices detached from representation that generate a new beginning of the past, "not as a regulated series of dates, but as historically situated events with respect to their intensity."¹³ They emancipate their past, and through their story make us reconsider "to what extent we have never been modern."¹⁴ They are a collection of voices with divergent registers, which generate a metanarrative of the social emancipation of subversive subjectivities and anger.

Plantation memories were born from the system of plantations, whose genealogy is rooted in the "primitive accumulation of botanical knowledge"¹⁵ and its language of domination and violence, in the inequality perpetuated by European colonialism which installed and enforced plantational technologies across the globe as it transported the

11 Audre Lorde, 1984.

12 Boaventura de Sousa Santos, "From the Postmodern to the Postcolonial – and Beyond Both," in *Decolonizing Social Science*, ...

13 Cf. B. Latour, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 144.

15 Jason W. Moore, "The Capitalocene. Part II: Abstract Social Nature and the Limits to Capital," <http://www.jasonwmoore.com/uploads/The_Capitalocene__Part_II__June_2014.pdf> (accessed 2016-09-03).

plantations for extracting surplus and accumulating, foreshadowing the factory model. Plantation memories are the return of the repressed that refuse to continue to reproduce repression. They are ordinary voices of extra-exotic, 'inappropriate/d others,'¹⁶ without the mask of either 'self' or 'other.' They remain voices without forming a subject, "they are agency without defended subjects."¹⁷ They never become subjects and never take part neither in the construction of the self, nor of the other, like in Virginia Woolf's 1931 novel *The Waves*, which could be seen as trapped in the imperial narrative, but in which one of Bernard's many becomings – his 'becoming-savage' – is an ethical way of being in the world that breaks with western colonial modernity. The stories that Bernard tells, whose monstrous voice remains savage in the passage, is a linguistic figure in the grammar of the multitude, of this collective singularity, which is politics by other means. Like the cyborg herself, whose savage monstrosity is a different engagement with a being who is neither 'it,' 'you,' 'thou,' 'he,' 'she,' nor 'they' in relation to us.¹⁸

Plantation memories render the imperceptible into stories co-extensive not only with the discourse of biology "as a labouring system, with all the ambiguities and dominations inherent in that metaphor,"¹⁹ and with the nature of social relations of domination, of power production and reproduction in the web of life, with "the discursive tie between the colonized, the enslaved, the non-citizen and the animal – all reduced to type, or species [...] is at the heart of racism and lethally, flourishes in the entrails of humanism" that brought about the historical relations that produced cheap nature.

In Donna Haraway's definition of *Teddy Bear Patriarchy*, she explores the perfect monumental form of the *Garden of Eden*, which is the museum (of natural history), as its pillar, which bears at its entrance the epitaph: "If these people cannot go to the country, then the Museum must bring nature to the city." The Zoo and the Botanic garden contribute their own to this effort, and have added their own surplus to that of the Museum to develop the visual machine, with the tools, techniques and methods of the technological dispositif of the *Garden of Eden* and its plantation system. They offered visions, writes Donna Haraway, because the *Garden of Eden* is the visionary system of a technological dispositif, with its infrastructure and spatiality, where "they required a science of 'instauration' jungle peace" in a world of struggles. *Endangered Species* are no longer content to maintain that science. They are angered and critical, willing to re-order the plantation system of knowledge and its visual machines.

The project seeks a new terminology to inspire new critical thought and new alternatives, and develop an other ethico-political articulation to respond to the global ecological crisis, which makes a close approximation between the terms of Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, without concealing any of them because we need this proliferation and multiplicities of terms. In her storytelling manner of doing science, Donna Haraway proposes, in the spirit of her fabulous pragmatogony, to look for terms that work not by metamorphosis or dialectics, but by substitution, as each carries with it its own context and precision:

"And last night at dinner I understood that the Capitalocene must be renamed as the Plantationocene. And that is indeed the invention of the plantation, not the configurations of the circulation of capital, although of course they're tightly linked and coupled. But the moving of, shall we say, genomes around planet Earth. The transportation of people, plants and animals, trees and tubers, microbes, and the trade

16 Trinh Thi Minh-Ha, "She, the Inappropriate/d Other," *Discourse* (Berkeley/CA), No. 8 (Fall/Winter 86-87).

17 Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 2.

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

routes involved in that, the systems of slavery in particular, the systems of indenture and slavery, the ways that plantation systems, unlike gardens and breeding plots and many kinds of agriculture, plantations require a labor from elsewhere. Because what precisely needs to be broken is hefting, the attachment to place. Precisely what's broken in the Plantationocene is the love of place, the possibility of the love of place. And Anna taught me that by talking about sugar, many varieties of sugar, and her experience in Indonesia as an ethnographer, and the radical reduction of sugar and sugar plantations in slave-based agriculture, and the importation of the technology from Brazil into the Carribean to remake the world through sweetness. The Plantationocene probably does a much better job of collecting up in a net bag the complexity of what we are living through than either Anthropocene or Capitalocene can do.”²⁰

Text: Dimitrina Sevova

²⁰ D. Haraway, “Anthropocene...,” *op. cit.*