

Book of Abstracts

Blue Animal Aesthetics Conference

Organized by

Martin Ullrich, Hochschule für Musik Nürnberg

Jessica Ullrich, Kunstakademie Münster

Tabea Sabrina Weber, Universität Bielefeld

Karl-Grillenberger-Straße 3a, 90402 Nürnberg (subway station „Weißer Turm“)

KGS 06 (Seminarraum)

Wednesday, 22 October 2025

13.00-13.30 INTO THE BLUE: WELCOME NOTES

Jessica Ullrich, Martin Ullrich, and Tabea Sabrina Weber (Conference Organizers)

Rainer Kotzian (President, Nuremberg University of Music)

13.30-15.00 Panel I: BLUE EMPATHY

Chair: Martin Ullrich

Eva Meijer: Creating new water languages for, with and about fishes (online)

Joeri Verbesselt: Feeling-with Fish, Feeling-with Ancestors: Toward a North Sea Aesthetics of Re-Existence

Sune Borkfelt: Teaching with Seagulls and Mermaids: Reflections on Using Critical Animal Pedagogies in a Coastal Town

Eva Meijer: Creating new water languages for, with and about fishes ¹

Fishes are seen as silent in western human societies, which legitimates their exploitation in the fishing industry and elsewhere. Biologists and ethologists like Victoria Braithwaite and Jonathan Balcombe have challenged this view for decades, by drawing attention to their inner and social lives, but in cultural discourses and practices not much has changed. In my presentation I will argue that the silencing of fishes should be challenged, but that humans should not try to argue for their capacities or moral standing from within the same framework of knowledge and power that erased their individuality, because this legitimates and reinforces this framework which is inherently anthropocentric. Instead, we should focus on a) criticizing the entanglement of anthropocentrism and capitalism that silences nonhuman animals, including in academia (and science more broadly), b) establish new cultural practices with and about fishes in non-invasive and non-exploitative ways, and c) learn from fishes about how to deal with the environmental disasters that are threatening us all, again in non-invasive and non-exploitative ways, in order to find new ways of moving forward that are just. I will argue that humans

¹ I use the word 'fishes' instead of 'fish' following ethologist Jonathan Balcombe, who uses it to acknowledge that these beings are subjects with their own personalities and relationships, like other animals (including humans).

need to learn to see fishes differently and, focusing on language specifically, I will argue that for that we need new languages. I will flesh this out by drawing on a plurality of human, fish and multispecies linguistic practices, including (my own) poetry and novels about the sea, fish languages, and fish-human conversations.

Bio:

Eva Meijer is a philosopher, visual artist, writer and singer-songwriter. They write novels, philosophical essays, academic texts, poems and columns, and their work has been translated into over twenty languages. Recurring themes are language including silence, madness, nonhuman animals, and politics. Meijer also works as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Amsterdam, writes essays and columns for Dutch newspapers, is a member of the Multispecies Collective and De Vereniging ter Bevordering van Troost (The Association for the Promotion of Consolation). Recent books in English are *Multispecies Assemblies* (VINE Press) and *Multispecies Dialogues. Doing Philosophy with Animals, Children, the Sea and Others* (Amsterdam University Press). More information: www.evameijer.nl.

Joeri Verbesselt – Feeling-with Fish, Feeling-with Ancestors: Toward a North Sea Aesthetics of Re-Existence

My paper proposes a situated aesthetic framework for recovering interspecies kinship in the wake of eco- and memocide along the North Sea. It brings into dialogue Lars Spuybroek's notion of aesthetics as a "sympathy of things" (2016)—a resonance grounded in intuitive attunement, drawing on Bergson's interspecies example of the wasp's precise empathy with the caterpillar—with Syaman Rapongan's Indigenous Tao concept of an "aesthetics of existence," rooted in the edible images handed down by Elders: "flying fish, black night, ocean waves, and the moon" (2014).

I explore how these frameworks converge in the artistic practice of Astrid Nobel (Fostaland), whose paintings incorporate gifts from the sea—animal bones, seawater, and pigment from drift matter—to evoke an "aesthetics of re-existence."

Her works, with titles like *Where the animals go to die* (2023) and *The whales come to get the bones of their ancestors* (2024), form a devotional language of grief, memory, and sacred reciprocity with marine life. In contrast to colonial-capitalist "cargo cultures," Nobel's practice offers a slow, reverent attention to marine animal death as a mode of kin-making.

Guided by Rapongan's vision of interspecies pedagogy, where a child is invited by a whale to witness the underwater world (*Eyes of the Sky*, 2012), I ask: what might it mean for North Sea humans to learn again to feel-with fish? To face the ocean as a living archive of ancestral life?

The paper interweaves Spuybroek's theory, Nobel's materialist poetics, Rapongan's narrative ethics, and recent Blue Humanities and interspecies thought (e.g., Balcombe 2016; Salmond, Hikuroa & Robertson 2023, Strang 2023) to articulate an aesthetics of re-existence (Vázquez 2020). It proposes that aesthetic-euphoric elevation, through sacred attunement to marine mortality, might open renewed ethical relations toward feeling-with ancestors, animal and otherwise, in the wake of extinction.

Bio:

Joeri Verbesselt (°1990) is an award-winning artist, researcher, and writer exploring human-animal relationships in ecological imaginaries. He holds master's degrees in Audiovisual Arts – Film and Art History, and a Doctorate in the Arts from the University of Leuven (2024). His films blend documentary, performance, and experimental storytelling. *retreat* (2020) was nominated for the NEXT:WAVE award at CPH:DOX, while *Only with hunters do we have wild animals* (2024), made in collaboration with Indigenous Tao and Truku communities in Taiwan, won a Special Jury Award at the Hualien Film Awards. He collaborates across disciplines, including with dancer Wan-Lun Yu and novelist Syaman Rapongan, with whom he co-authored the book chapter “Interspecies Storytelling for Prudent Predation” (2024). Currently, he lectures in Art History at the University of Leuven and is editing his first book, *The Hunter and the Nurse*.

Sune Borkfelt: Teaching with Seagulls and Mermaids: Reflections on Using Critical Animal Pedagogies in a Coastal Town

Recent decades have seen debate on the role of place in critical pedagogical strategies and their potential connection to “place-based education,” chiefly in relation to social justice issues and indigenous peoples (e.g., Gruenewald 2003; Bowers 2008). But what of nonhuman animals and their habitats in this context?

Taking its starting point in interdisciplinary courses and seminars taught in a coastal city, and drawing on different aesthetics disciplines as well as human-animal studies more broadly, this paper explores the potential of coastal places for critical animal pedagogies. Through an eclectic mix of pedagogical theory and specific examples, it asks how a maritime place-based education can contribute to stated educational goals of critical animal pedagogies such as fostering empathy and critical engagement with nonhuman animal issues. In so doing, it suggests that utilizing the potential of the coastal setting and discussing the presence of sea creatures – current, historical, real, mythical, and metaphorical – can indeed help along the “return of animals” to university classrooms (Welling & Kapel 2012) and deconstruct species categories while also providing a fruitful “experiential knowledge component” (Perry 2022) in addition to theoretical knowledge and exercise of the imagination. As such, it provides an argument for how place-based education partly rooted in aesthetic attention can provide ethical consideration for nonhuman animals in place of the empowerment that similar strategies have been suggested to provide for human groups.

Bio:

Sune Borkfelt has lectured at Aarhus University, Denmark, since 2007. He is author of *Reading Slaughter: Abattoir Fictions, Space, and Empathy in Late Modernity* (Palgrave, 2022), as well as co-editor (with Matthias Stephan) of *Literary Animal Studies and the Climate Crisis* (Palgrave, 2022) and *Interrogating Boundaries of the Nonhuman: Literature, Climate Change, and Environmental Crises* (Lexington Books, 2022). His research on topics such as nonhuman otherness, the naming of nonhuman animals, postcolonial animals, vegan literary studies, and the ethics of animal product marketing, has appeared in a variety of journals and edited collections. He is also editor of a 2016 special issue of the journal *Otherness: Essays and Studies* focused on animal alterity.

15.30-17 Panel III: BLUE ANIMAL TECHNOLOGIES

Chair: Dorothee Fischer-Kuklau

Magdalena Grüner: Slippery Pictures, Submerged Epistemologies: The Muddling Potential of Painting Under Water

Zeynep Abes/Ellie Schmidt: Submerged Archives (online)

Victoria Mummelthei: Crabs, Slugcats, and Sideways Thinking: Following Animals at the Water's Edge in Digital Games (online)

Magdalena Grüner: Slippery Pictures, Submerged Epistemologies: The Muddling Potential of Painting Under Water

A small canvas, merely 33 by 27 centimeters, shows a section of coral reef sitting in the characteristic white sand of Bermudian waters. Painted by German-American artist Else Bostelmann in the early nineteen-thirties, this oil sketch represents one of the few remaining examples of a peculiar artistic practice that experienced brief enthusiasm in the early twentieth century: underwater painting. Equipped with diving helmet, oil paints and easel, Bostelmann ventured into her 'underwater studio', where she was subjected to the effects of seawater to human perception: colors were absorbed gradually, distances seemed suspended, shapes appeared distorted. Yet, instead of translating these effects to terrestrial paradigms, she chose to depict the coral reef through seawater, in turn picturing the submerged opticality she was experiencing. The result was an oil sketch that rendered coral in muted colors rather than spectral flamboyance, that showed the outdoors as a confined, intimate space instead of a vast landscape, that prioritized encounter over mastery.

Yet not a single underwater painting was ever published in the context of the expeditions. In my paper, I explore some of the reasons behind this conspicuous absence. Drawing on ocean scholars like Melody Jue, Stefan Helmholtz, and Elizabeth DeLoughrey, I present the argument that the oil sketch remained unpublished precisely because it was painted under water—not despite it. Seawater, immersed in which the oil sketch was produced, caused slippages from terrestrially shaped notions of seeing and knowing, destabilizing paradigms of humanistic, universalist science. The image was visually and epistemologically slippery, perplexing, even, and ultimately omitted and dismissed as though it was an error. I propose that rather than simply claiming 'objective truth', the painting articulates a submerged, slippery epistemology that invites a reimagination of human's relationship with the ocean.

Bio:

Magdalena Grüner is a scholar of the entanglements of art and ocean science in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. She earned her PhD in art history from Universität Hamburg (Germany) with a dissertation titled *Abyssal Visions. The Science/Fictions of the Bermuda Oceanographic Expeditions*. She studied art history, philosophy, and design in Madrid, Vienna, and Hamburg. Her research has received generous support from the Gerda Henkel Foundation, the Princeton University Library, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and the Getty Research Institute, where she was a predoctoral fellow in 2023/24 (Art and Technology). Before joining the DFG-Centre for Advanced Studies Imaginaria of Force as a fellow, she was a scholar in residence at the German

Museum of the Masterpieces of Science and Technology in Munich. She will join the USC Society of Fellows in the Humanities as a postdoctoral fellow in the academic year 2025/26.

Zeynep Abes/Ellie Schmidt: Submerged Archives

Submerged Archives is a collaborative artistic research project by artist researchers Ellie Schmidt and Zeynep Abes. We use experimental 3D scanning technologies, such as Gaussian splatting, to document and archive unique and precarious underwater ecologies.

Off the Southern California coast, communities of juvenile fish, algal forests, and pockets of extreme biodiversity have developed around abandoned oil rigs off the Southern California coast. These rigs, originally designed for removal, have become unexpected habitats for marine life.

We use underwater footage to create detailed 3D models of these sites. Our process blends fieldwork at dive locations and interviews with marine scientists and community members. Our project also includes archival research into the cultural history and future of decommissioned offshore rigs. We aim to use these 3D scans to create immersive experiences that can be used as research and public facing installations to invite audiences to engage deeply with our underwater ecosystems. We explore new methods of visualizing contested natural sites, to make them more accessible for communities that are often left out of environmental decision making.

We propose to present our artistic research and methods at the “Blue Animal Aesthetics” conference to create an interdisciplinary space for exploring how environmental knowledge is created, shared and censored, specifically in relation to underwater ecologies. We aim to develop new methods of visualizing submerged spaces, to make them more visible and accessible for communities that are often left out of environmental decision making.

Our artistic research is guided by several questions, including:

What are the ecological, political, and cultural stakes of leaving immense man made structures in place versus dismantling them?

How can marine scientists and visual artists best collaborate to protect biodiversity through interdisciplinary artistic research and storytelling?

Our project’s first version: <https://vimeo.com/1094081046/6a15bc5d15?share=copy>

Bios:

Zeynep Abes and Ellie Schmidt are PhD candidates at the Media Arts + Practice division at the University of Southern California. Zeynep is an artist and curator from Istanbul, Turkey. She studied film and interactive media at Emerson College, worked on Sundance’s New Frontier exhibitions, and earned an MFA from UCLA’s Design Media Arts program. She primarily works with archived media, 3D scanning technologies and immersive media. Her work has been featured in notable festivals and conferences like Ars Electronica, Siggraph, ISEA, IEEE and the LA Art Show.

Ellie Schmidt is a filmmaker and visual artist, researching social, ecological and physical Pacific coastlines through film, swimming, boating and love stories. She uses documentary films, nonfiction and installation to ask what romantic attachment and fishing can teach us about landscapes of loss. Together, we pursue mutual interests in underwater exploration, marine science, experimental filmmaking, and memory through our creative research projects.

Victoria Mummelthei: Crabs, Slugcats, and Sideways Thinking: Following Animals at the Water's Edge in Digital Games

I keep noticing the crab in *A Short Hike*. It scuttles away when I get close, disappears into tide pools, reappears somewhere else entirely. There's something about its sideways movement that feels different from other game animals—less predictable, more... crablike? Seals pop up near docks in *Spiritfarer*, slipping between water and platform with an ease that makes my boat-bound character look clumsy. In *Alba*, I'm stumbling across shorebirds doing their own thing—fishing, nesting, migrating—while I fumble with my phone trying to document them. These animals seem to have their own spatial logic that doesn't quite match how games usually organize space. But these aren't quite the marine animals that blue humanities usually focuses on. They're the in-between creatures that complicate the neat division between terrestrial and aquatic life. What happens when we pay attention to animals that refuse the land/sea binary that structures so much our environmental thinking?

I want to look closely at a few games that spend time in these liminal spaces, following the animals that call them home and watching how they move through spaces humans have divided. I'll bring a lot of gameplay clips and screenshots—because there's no substitute for experiencing *Rain World*'s slugcat getting grabbed and dragged underground by pole plants disguised as climbing poles to understand what I'm getting at.

Bio:

I started in Arabic philology, which taught me to pay attention to details that others might overlook. Somewhere along the way after the PhD on sea imagery in modern Syrian erotic poetry, I got curious about questions that didn't fit neatly into any one discipline—how do we capture the affective experience of navigating flooded game worlds? How does virtual photography reveal the colonial gaze embedded in game worlds? How do we write research that serves readers rather than our own reputation? How do we syndicate knowledge beyond institutional gatekeeping? I call this "explorative humanities," though I'm never quite sure what that means. I think about the "blue" in digital games and virtual photography mostly, and whatever else catches my attention on my nodiscipline blogs at [hypotheses](#) and [substack](#) and share everything openly on [Zenodo](#)—including the failed grant applications and half-formed ideas that usually stay hidden.

Thursday, 23 October 2025

09.30-11.00 Panel IV: BLUE ANIMALS IN LITERATURE

Chair: Tabea Sabrina Weber

Emma Crossey: Virginia Woolf: *Coral Entanglements* (online)

Sophie Elzière: 'Among the creatures of light, creatures of light': The blue ecopoetics of Ted Hughes's *River* (online)

Mohammed Afsal: *Blue Animal Aesthetics: Marine Life, Agency, and Fiction in the Anthropocene* (online)

Emma Crossey: Virginia Woolf: Coral Entanglements

On the one hand, coral in Virginia Woolf's work evidences the exploitative history of humans towards marine creatures. Coral jewellery was particularly popular in nineteenth-century Europe and North America. It was used across necklaces, bracelets, earrings and other ornaments. It experienced a revival in the 1920s, within Art Deco designs. It is no surprise then that coral jewellery surfaces in multiple places across Virginia Woolf's oeuvre, both in her fiction and in her personal writings - from coral tie-pins to new coral bracelets. Whilst this presence is interesting to note as material culture, its relevance is greatly deepened by acknowledging coral's complex significance, in relation to colonialism and to environmental concerns, as coral continues to be destroyed from over harvesting and climate change. Yet, Woolf's most fascinating coral depictions display a compelling transformative relationship between humans and the more-than-human, particularly relevant in consideration of the Anthropocene. Woolf's watery visions across her essays and books show towns falling into water, and major cities wrecked by coral. They depict a (non-human) nature that endures, in comparison to human transience; the human body is transformed (or consumed) by the non-human. Woolf's coral challenges anthropocentrism and mimics ecosystems through literal and linguistic entanglements. Recognition of Woolf's human-coral entanglements contributes to recent calls to re-evaluate Woolf (and modernist literature more generally) through the lens of eco-criticism. As our coral bleaches and sea levels rise, these visions are also hauntingly topical to current climate change concerns.

Bio:

Emma Crossey is a PhD student at King's College London whose thesis explores the prevalence of bone and skeletal imagery throughout the works of Virginia Woolf. Emma graduated with a BA in Ancient History and English from the University of Exeter (2014) and an MA in modernism from UCL (2015). Emma spent eight years working mostly in the charity sector, managing Digital Fundraising at organisations such as Unicef UK, Alzheimer's Society and Crisis UK. Returning to academia in 2023, Emma now works as a Graduate Teaching Assistant and is the Content Editor for the WoolfNotes project (woolfnotes.com), a major digital humanities project bringing Woolf's last remaining substantial unpublished works into the public domain: her reading and research notes. Emma has forthcoming articles in *The Virginia Woolf Miscellany* and *The Year's Work in English Studies* (Oxford University Press).

Sophie Elzière: 'Among the creatures of light, creatures of light': The blue ecopoetics of Ted Hughes's *River*

In *Poetry in the Making*, Ted Hughes compared imagination with the 'concentrated excitement' of the angler, 'alarming itself with the size of the thing slowly leaving the weeds and approaching the bait'. His 1983 collection *River*, published in collaboration with photographer Peter Keen, also coincides with the poet's commitment to protect the West Country rivers.

The critters of the river world are given pride of place in descriptions that celebrate their divinity. The river is a 'god of light' and the salmon invite humans to 'join water, wade in underbeing', through a healing process 'among the creatures of light, creatures of light'. They must 'dissolve' like the cormorant that dives into water to 'become fish'.

This experience of immersion sheds light on the entanglements of all ‘bodies of water’ (Astrida Neimanis) as ‘transcorporeal’ living species (Stacy Alaimo), that must learn to live and die well together in ‘troubled waters’ (Donna Haraway).

In this respect, the poems and photographs inscribe in dried-up liquid form (pen ink or film bath) the fluid expressiveness of the river world, one that eludes definition and fixity, only to wonder: what is then the language of water, and of the critters that live with it?

Peter Keen displays the ever-rewritten palimpsest of the water flows, from foam and bubbles to ripples and waves, while Ted Hughes brings to the fore the messages and perceptions of the river world. The poet notably presents living forms as ‘vibrant matters’ (Jane Bennett), by depicting ‘phosphorescent’ creatures or the river’s ‘oily lights’ and ‘gluey splittings’.

The collection also points out the creative ecology of all living species, which each step in their cycles of growth, migration and decay makes manifest. *River* magnifies the creative and expressive power of nature, while showing a continuum of sensorial experience between human and non-human beings in the shared and ‘infinite liberty’ of the river world.

Bio:

Sophie Elzière, PhD, defended her doctoral thesis on the poetic work of Ted Hughes in 2021. She currently teaches English at the INALCO, member of Paris Cité University, France. Her current research focuses on poetry, philosophy, stylistics, ecopoetics and the blue humanities, sound and visual studies.

Mohammed Afsal: Blue Animal Aesthetics: Marine Life, Agency, and Fiction in the Anthropocene

This paper examines how contemporary anglophone fiction from across the globe reconfigures marine space and animals as active, affective, and aesthetic agents in the face of ecological crisis and planetary interdependence. Drawing on the frameworks of the Blue Humanities, critical posthumanism, and animal studies, I analyze works such as Amitav Ghosh’s *Gun Island* (2019), Rivers Solomon’s *The Deep* (2019), J.M. Ledgard’s *Submergence* (2011), and Richard Powers’ *Playground* (2024), which stage encounters with marine life forms—from microscopic plankton to cetaceans—not merely as environmental scenery but as expressive entities capable of intervening, guiding, disrupting, or even retaliating against human actions and narratives.

In these texts, marine life forms are not reducible to metaphor; rather, they enact what is often called blue animal aesthetics, wherein oceanic nonhuman life becomes a conduit for articulating agency beyond the human. These organisms disrupt migratory routes, resist extractivist economies, safeguard submerged histories, and embody forms of planetary mourning. In doing so, they unsettle dominant conceptions of time, responsibility, and narrative coherence, inviting the reader into relational imaginaries that echo Astrida Neimanis’s “hydrologics of relation,” Stacy Alaimo’s “transcorporeal vulnerability,” and Rosi Braidotti’s “medianaturecultures.”

Grounded in close textual analysis and informed by theoretical insights from Stefan Helmreich’s *Alien Ocean*, Kathryn Yusoff’s aesthetics of geologic time, and Dipesh Chakrabarty’s planetary thought, this paper argues that marine life in these novels functions as an aesthetic and ethical force that challenges the anthropocentric logic of literary and cultural representation. Ultimately, these fictions contribute to

the articulation of a posthumanist, ocean-centered sensibility, wherein marine animals not only register the effects of human-induced crisis but also resist, respond, and reimagine ecological futures through the medium of narrative.

Bio:

Mohammed Afsal is an independent literary and cultural researcher from Kerala, graduated from the English Department of Jamia Millia Islamia, a central university of India, New Delhi, with academic interests in blue (oceanic) imaginaries, postcolonial ecocriticism and environmental humanities, critical posthumanism and new materialisms, contemporary world literature and ecologies, and transnational studies. He has been offered admission to the PhD program in English at the University of Bristol, UK, where he intends to work under the supervision of Dr. Laurence Publicover and Dr. Florian TJ Stadler. His proposed doctoral project examines literary representations of the ocean and nonhuman agency in the context of the Anthropocene and globalization. He is currently seeking scholarship support to begin his doctoral research.

11.30-13.00 Panel V: CONTEMPORARY ART: BLUE THEORIES

Chair: Jessica Ullrich

Pandora Sypererek: *Mama Octopus: Making Kin AND Babies in the Chthulucene*

Dorothee Fischer-Kuklau: *Axolotl auf Augenhöhe? Wasserlebewesen in Aquarien der Gegenwartskunst*

Julia Katharina Thiemann: *Von tentakulärem Denken zu Bodies of Water*

Pandora Sypererek: *Mama Octopus: Making Kin AND Babies in the Chthulucene*

'We are animals', repeats the titular heroine of *Nightbitch*, the 2024 film based on Rachel Yoder's 2021 novel about a young mother who finds herself turning into a dog. This mantra is reflected in a slew of recent books, films and artworks that consider the animality of human mothering. Yet amid this recent exploration of humanimal reproduction and care, one mother stands out. The octopus has become a popular figure of fascination ever since the 2020 Netflix feature *My Octopus Teacher* documented the filmmaker's relationship with a wild common octopus up to her inevitable death following procreation. Nevertheless, the documentary received criticism for the heteronormative narrative it projected onto an 'intrinsically queer' creature (Lewis 2020).

The radical potential of octopuses' lifeways is well known to animal studies scholars, and especially to scholars of blue animal aesthetics, via tomes such as Sy Montgomery's *The Soul of an Octopus* (2016) and Peter Godfrey-Smith's *Other Minds* (2016). Donna Haraway (2016) defined an entire geographical epoch through the metaphor of the tentacular as an alternative ontology to the monolithic Anthropocene. However, in tandem with her theorisation of the Chthulucene, Haraway coined the dictate to 'make kin, not babies'. Albeit promoting more-than-human coexistence and reproductive choice above anthropocentrism and capitalist reproduction, this sentiment has been linked to neo-Malthusian concepts of overpopulation and their ecofascist overtones.

This paper will address the fraught reproductive politics surrounding such posthumanist theory in conjunction with cultural identifications with nonhuman models of reproduction and care. Specifically, it will focus on the octopus mother. Artist Laure Prouvost's ongoing series of sculptures exploring

motherhood through octopus physiology conflate nipples with suckers and maternal omnipresence with tentacular omnipotence across scales of care that extend to the global. I will consider how these and related works navigate humanimal kinship as a response to ecological breakdown in the face of bourgeois motherhood and the privatised family.

Bio:

Pandora Sypererek researches the intersections of art, science, gender and the nonhuman within cultures of display. Her research has been funded by the Leverhulme Trust, Paul Mellon Centre and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. She is co-founder of the research project *Curating the Sea*, co-curator of the exhibition *Sea Inside* (Sainsbury Centre, 2025), and co-editor of *Oceans: Documents of Contemporary Art* (Whitechapel Gallery/MIT Press, 2023) and a special issue of the *Journal of Curatorial Studies* (2020). She led Loughborough University's Institute of Advanced Studies' 2023-24 annual theme 'Gestation: Bodies, Technologies, Ecologies, Justice'. Her entry on Animal Studies for the *Johns Hopkins Guide to Cultural and Critical Theory* is forthcoming and she has published book chapters and journal articles on gender and ecological aesthetics in natural history display. Pandora holds a PhD in the History of Art from University College London. She is Tutor, V&A/RCA History of Design.

Dorothee Fischer-Kuklau: Axolotl auf Augenhöhe? Wasserlebewesen in Aquarien der Gegenwartskunst

Damien Hirsts bekannte Installation *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* aus dem Jahr 1991 ist zu einem kanonischen Werk der modernen Kunst(geschichte) geworden. Gleichwohl der tote weibliche Hai im Glaskasten nicht im Mittelpunkt dieses Vortrages stehen soll, dient er als anschaulicher Einstieg in meine Analyse von exemplarischen Kunstwerken mit und von lebenden Wasserlebewesen in der Gegenwartskunst. Einsiedlerkrebse, Spinnenkrabben und Axolotl werden zu den Protagonist*innen meiner Untersuchung und besiedeln mit Wasser gefüllte Glastanks in Ausstellungshäusern.

Ich möchte die Werkserie *Zoodram* von Pierre Huyghe mit der, deutlich weniger bekannten, Arbeit *Gallery Peacetime* des britischen Künstlers Aaron Angell in Beziehung setzen. Beide Installationen werden unter Berücksichtigung ihrer Rezeptionsbedingungen und der Rolle der darin (zumindest temporär) lebenden Wassertiere hin analysiert. Wie ich demonstrieren werde, scheint das Aquarium als Raum im (Museums-)Raum besonders dafür geeignet, um über unser gegenwärtiges Verhältnis zu anderen Tieren zu reflektieren, aber auch grundsätzliche Fragen der Rezeption von Kunst zu verhandeln. Während für die *Gallery Peacetime* drei Axolotl über vier Wochen in einem Aquarium wohnen, wurde das Interieur des Wassertanks wöchentlich getauscht. Im Rahmen dieser wechselnden ‚Ausstellungen‘ innerhalb der *Gallery Peacetime* fungieren die Wassertiere als Betrachter*innen-Stellvertreter*innen und werden darüber hinaus zu mitgestaltenden Entitäten. Die Tiere werden instrumentalisiert, sind Motiv und Material. Darüber hinaus wird ihnen aber auch ein Subjektstatus zugeschrieben, wenn ihnen Rollen als Schauspieler*innen oder Kunstkritiker*innen zuteilwerden.

Bio:

Dorothee Fischer-Kuklau, M.A. (*1995) studierte von 2014 bis 2019 „Literatur - Kunst - Medien“ mit dem Schwerpunkt Kunstwissenschaft an der Universität Konstanz, dem University College Cork und der Universität Wien. Von 2020 bis 2023 arbeitete sie als wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin und Dozentin für Kunstgeschichte an der Universität Trier. Seit 2024 ist sie Koordinatorin des interdisziplinären TRANSMARE-Instituts an der Universität Trier, das sich der epochenübergreifenden Erforschung des Maritimen und des maritimen Transfers von Menschen, Gütern und Ideen von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart widmet. Ihre bildwissenschaftlichen Forschungsschwerpunkte liegen in der Frühen Neuzeit und der (Post-)Moderne, mit einem Fokus auf Mensch-Tier-Beziehungen. Mit einem besonderen Interesse an Wasserlebewesen hat sie über die Rolle der Tiere in der zeitgenössischen Kunst sowie über das Sammeln von präparierten Fischen in der Frühen Neuzeit publiziert (siehe unten). Als Doktorandin im Fach Kunstgeschichte der Universität Trier arbeitet sie derzeit an ihrem Promotionsprojekt zur physischen und bildlichen (Re-)Präsentation von Fischen in naturkundlichen Sammlungen des 18. Jahrhunderts.

Julia Katharina Thiemann: Von tentakulärem Denken zu Bodies of Water

Die Fremdheit maritimer im Vergleich zu menschlichen Tieren scheint auf den ersten Blick groß und doch teilen wir nicht nur eine Entwicklungsgeschichte. Der Umgang mit Differenzphänomenen, die menschliche Exzeptionalismus-Tendenzen verstärken, weist aktuell interessante Wendungen auf. So finden sich immer mehr Stimmen, die die besonderen Fähigkeiten und Fertigkeiten von Wasserwesen in den Vordergrund rücken. Hierbei ist der Oktopus eine Art Symboltier geworden. Zugleich werden Positionen immer sichtbarer, die das verbindende Element des Wassers nicht nur stark machen, um Humandifferenzierungen aufzulösen, sondern auch um Speziesschränken zu überschreiten. In diesen Bewegungen der vielfachen Grenzüberschreitungen nehmen ästhetische Positionen einen besonderen Stellenwert ein, da künstlerische Arbeiten per se die Kraft der Imagination und des Phantastischen bergen. Zahlreiche künstlerische Arbeiten des letzten Jahrzehnts setzen sich nicht zufällig mit Wasserwelten, immersiven Ozeandarstellungen, aber auch einzelnen maritimen Lebensformen auf empathische Weise auseinander. Das Bewusstsein von Meeresbewohner:innen, das dem Geist menschlicher Tiere in den vergangenen Jahrhunderten deutlich untergeordnet wurde, gerät in Forschung, Literatur und Kunst zunehmend in den Fokus. Alternative Denk- und Seinsweisen werden dabei nicht nur in Abgrenzung gesetzt, sondern als bereichernde, teils sogar einende Klammer (de-)konstruiert.

Anhand exemplarischer Arbeiten, wie z.B. Sarah Brownes (*1981) filmischer Arbeit „Report to an Academy“ (2016), die den Versuch, ein Oktopus zu werden in den Mittelpunkt stellt, sowie Emilija Škarnulytės (*1987) „Equalia“ (2023), die Grenzen aquatischer und menschlicher Lebensweisen mithilfe der Figur der Meerjungfrau, flankiert von Delfinen, symbolisch und visuell überschreitet, werden Fragen nach alternativen Selbst- und Fremdbildern aufgezeigt.

Die scheinbare Fremdheit wird dabei, angelehnt an Theorien u.a. von Astrida Neimanis und Donna J. Haraway, durch das einende und lebensnotwendige Element des Wassers zu einer Form der Verbundenheit und Verwandtschaft. Was würde sich verändern, würden wir Tentakel, Fischschwänze oder Kiemen ausbilden und anderen Formen der Intelligenz, des Denkens und des Verständnisses von

Ästhetik Raum geben? Könnte dies zu einer stärkeren Anerkennung nicht nur von feministisch-queeren, sondern auch mehr-als-menschlichen Lebensweisen in relationalen Denkgebäuden führen und dabei unseren ästhetischen Ausdruck neu prägen?

Bio:

Julia Katharina Thiemann ist als Kuratorin und Autorin mit dem Schwerpunkt zeitgenössischer Kunst für unterschiedliche Institutionen, Künstler:innen sowie in freien Projekten tätig. Sie studierte Kunstgeschichte an der Goethe-Universität und der Städelschule in Frankfurt sowie Germanistik und Soziologie an der Leibniz-Universität in Hannover. Ihr wissenschaftliches Volontariat absolvierte sie in der Städtischen Galerie Wolfsburg. Danach war sie als Kuratorin in verschiedenen Institutionen, wie u.a. Weserburg Museum für moderne Kunst in Bremen, Badischer Kunstverein Karlsruhe, Kunstverein Wilhelmshöhe, Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Villa Streccius, Q18 im Quartier am Hafen sowie der Villa Merkel – Galerie der Stadt Esslingen und weiteren kuratorisch tätig.

Zudem publiziert Julia Katharina Thiemann regelmäßig zu zeitgenössischer Kunst in Katalogtexten und Magazinen, wie z.B. KUNSTFORUM International. Sie hatte u.a. einen Lehrauftrag für Kuratorische Theorie und Praxis am kunsthistorischen Institut des KIT in Karlsruhe. Julia Katharina Thiemann wurde mit dem Kuratoren-Stipendium Rheinland-Pfalz, Esslinger Bahnwärter-Stipendium für Kuration und dem C/O Berlin Talents Award für Kunstkritiker ausgezeichnet. In ihren aktuellen Projekten lotet sie vor allem ökologische Fragestellungen mit Fokus auf mehr-als-menschliche Perspektiven sowie Entgrenzungstendenzen in den Künsten aus. Dabei thematisiert sie oftmals soziopolitisch drängende Fragen unserer Zeit und macht aktuelle ästhetische Diskurse in der Spiegelung junger Künstler:innen erlebbar.

14.30-16.00 Panel VI: CONTEMPORARY ART: BLUE PRACTICES

Chair: Jessica Ullrich

Hartmut Kiewert: Neue aquatische Räume und das Ende der Fischerei-Industrie

Nicole Schuck: Die Kleinsten gerade noch sichtbaren. Makrozoobenthos in der Elbe, in den Spreewaldfließen und im Bodensee

Denise Ackerl: Mermaiding and More: Performing Eco-Futures with Nonhuman Prosthetics (online)

Hartmut Kiewert: Neue aquatische Räume und das Ende der Fischerei-Industrie

In Hartmut Kiewerts Bildwelten ist das Mensch-Tier-Verhältnis nicht mehr von Objektivierung und Ausbeutung, sondern von Empathie und Solidarität geprägt. In seinem neuesten Bildstrang zu Unterwasserwelten und Meerestieres ist auch die Fischerei-Industrie ruiniert. Fischtrawler sind nur noch Wracks vor der Küste oder auf dem Meeresgrund. Im Spannungsfeld zwischen Kollaps und Utopie werden auch überflutete Fastfoodrestaurants zu neuen Habitaten für Fische und andere Meerestiere. Jenseits der Verwertungszwänge scheint in Kiewerts Gemälden eine mögliche multispezies-gerechte Zukunft auf.

Bio:

Hartmut Kiewert (geb. 1980 in Koblenz) studierte von 2003 bis 2010 Malerei und Grafik an der Kunsthochschule Burg Giebichenstein in Halle (Saale). Seit 2008 setzt Kiewert sich mit dem gesellschaftlichen Mensch-Tier-Verhältnis auseinander. In seiner Malerei eröffnen sich Gegenbilder zum heutigen, durch Ausbeutung und Verdrängung gekennzeichneten Umgang mit nichtmenschlichen Tieren. Schweine, Kühe und Hühner sind aus Mastanlagen und Schlachthöfen befreit und erobern Parks, Shoppingmalls und Straßen. Die Tierindustrie ist ruiniert und Menschen und andere Tiere begegnen sich auf Augenhöhe. Die tierlichen Individuen treten als Handelnde, als Subjekte ihres eigenen Lebens, als dem Menschen Verwandte in die Bildwelten und laden die Betrachtenden ein, das hegemoniale, von Objektifizierung und Beherrschung geprägte Verhältnis zu überdenken.

Nicole Schuck: Die Kleinsten gerade noch sichtbaren. Makrozoobenthos in der Elbe, in den Spreewaldfließen und im Bodensee

Meine Aufmerksamkeit gilt seit 2023 verstärkt dem Makrozoobenthos, eine an Gewässerböden lebende Organismengruppe, die alle wirbellosen Tiere umfasst, die mit dem bloßen Auge gerade noch erkennbar sind. Deren Vielfalt in den Binnengewässern gibt Auskunft über die Wasserqualität und ist besonders wertvoll für das Ökosystem: Sie filtrieren das Wasser, verspeisen organisches Material am Flussgrund und sind Nahrungsquelle für größere Tiere wie Fische.

Für Ausstellungen und Installationen im öffentlichen Raum erkundete ich den Lebensraum Elbe, Bodensee und Spreewaldflüsse anhand von Beobachtungen, Recherchen, Field-Recordings und im Austausch mit Biolog:innen. Auf dieser Grundlage entstanden Zeichnungen, Flaggen, Wand- und Audioinstallationen, die die Binnengewässer und ihre vielfältigen Bewohner unter der Wasseroberfläche ins Bewusstsein der Besucher:innen rücken.

Neben ökologischen Betrachtungen spielten der Eigenwert und der ästhetische Wert eine bedeutende Rolle für meine Handzeichnungen. Ich näherte mich zeichnerisch einzelnen Subjekten, stellvertretend für ihre Spezies, beispielsweise aus der Gruppe der Köcherfliegen und Strudelwürmer. Diese Zeichnungen wurden auf Flaggenstoffe gedruckt und im öffentlichen Raum platziert, wo Wind und Wetter ihre Verletzlichkeit und die des Ökosystems spiegeln.

In Audioinstallationen greife ich akustische Forschungsmethoden der Meeresbiolog:innen vom Alfred-Wegener-Institut für Polar- und Meeresforschung (AWI) auf und überführe sie in ein sinnliches Hörerlebnis. Für gewöhnlich ist das Innenleben von Binnengewässern Menschen nicht zugänglich. Wie intensiv und langanhaltend beispielsweise die Lautstärke von Motorbooten und Jetskis unter Wasser zu hören ist, ist meistens nicht bekannt. Akustische Gewässerverschmutzung stellt jedoch für Fische und andere Wasserbewohner wie den Fischottern eine hohe Belastung dar, denn diese Tiere können in der Regel hervorragend hören.

Aktuelles Projekt:

„Die Tönung der Elbe – Geräuschvolles Unterwasser“ ist eine künstlerisch-forschende Auseinandersetzung mit der akustischen Gewässerverschmutzung von Binnengewässern in Deutschland, die dieses Thema gleichermaßen poetisch wie informativ, analog wie digital in einer Dauerinstallation in und an der Elbe bei Lauenburg und im weltweiten Web visualisiert und hörbar macht.

Das Projekt ist ein Plädoyer für einen sensiblen und wertschätzenden Umgang mit einer Unterwasserfauna, die sich unserer direkten Wahrnehmung entzieht und weltweit unter der akustischen Belastung durch den Menschen leidet. In enger Zusammenarbeit mit dem AWI und dem Künstlerhaus Lauenburg.

Bio:

Nicole Schuck wurde in Herford / Westfalen geboren und lebt in Berlin. Sie studierte u. a. an der Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig, wo sie als Meisterschülerin bei Professor John Armleder 2004 ihren Abschluss machte. Seitdem ist sie freiberuflich als Künstlerin tätig. Schwerpunkte ihrer Projekte sind die Themen Wildtiere, natürliche und urbane Lebensräume, Ökologie und Naturschutz. Die transdisziplinäre Zusammenarbeit und der Austausch mit Forscher:innen ist ein wichtiger Bestandteil ihrer Projekte. Seit 2017 befasst sie sich speziell mit Ökosystemleistungen und weiteren Werten von wildlebenden Tieren. Ihr Buch „Geschätzte Tiere“ erschien im Hatje Cantz Verlag, gezeigt werden darin ihre Arbeiten der vergangenen Dekade. www.nicoleschuck.de

Denise Ackert: Mermaiding and More: Performing Eco-Futures with Nonhuman Prosthetics

In my proposed performance lecture I want to present my current practice-as-research project exploring trans-species embodiment through performative engagement with nonhuman prosthetic devices—specifically a mermaid tail and a water lily pond–inspired petticoat. These wearable forms function as sensory tools for inhabiting alternative modes of moving, sensing, and relating to nonhuman life-worlds.

While the mermaid tail offers a recognisable hybrid body between human and aquatic animal, the water lily petticoat invokes a more abstract organic modality—emphasising further stillness, horizontality, and fragility (see *Ophelia Rising* 2025). During the lecture, I transition between these prosthetic forms live on stage, inviting the audience into a somatic inquiry that examines how these devices shape affective, perceptual, and ecological relations. Moving beyond myth and metaphor, my work activates these garments as aesthetic interfaces for cultivating shared vulnerability and ecological kinship.

Situated within Blue Humanities, performance, and multispecies ethics, and grounded in Indigenous epistemologies, my research seeks to challenge anthropocentric perceptions and open speculative, decolonial pathways for attuning to more-than-human worlds through wearable forms. Drawing on Donna Haraway’s “becoming-with,” Silvia Federici’s re-enchantment of the body, and Vanessa Watts’ “Place-Thought,” the lecture reflects on performative interventions in Berlin, Vienna, and the Amazons.

These prosthetics extend the body into new affective registers, enacting slow, tactile, and frictional movements that disrupt human-centric spatial norms. The research also builds on knowledge shared by Amazonian artists, including Maria do Rio Negro, and Indigenous thinkers such as Susan Hill and Sheryl Lightfoot—foregrounding reciprocal, place-based methods that resist extractivist logic.

Part lecture, part slow metamorphosis, this live presentation invites a rethinking of bodies, borders, and beings—proposing performance as a method of eco-sensory knowledge-making, and nonhuman prosthetics as a medium for becoming otherwise.

Bio:

I am a performance artist, researcher and lecturer, focusing on ambiguous feminine identities and human/nonhuman kinships in decolonial and socio-political contexts. In 2013 I moved from Vienna to London where I completed my practice-based PhD (2021) at the University of the Arts London (AHRC Doctoral Research award, 2017) researching feminist strategies of resistance. Before that, I studied painting, economics and political sciences in Vienna and since 2017 I've been teaching in Creative Research at the University of the Arts London. In 2022 I produced the project Danceministerium Berlin as part of the Fresh A.I.R residency program (Berlin) and now conduct independent research as a mermaid across aquatic, urban and various in-between landscapes

16.30-18.30 Panel VII: MUSICS OF BLUE ANIMALS**Chair: Martin Ullrich**

Jafar Aghabararnia Goudarzi: Water and Myth in Mazandarani Songs: A Mythological Reading of Aquatic Events

Janet Sit/Betlem Pallardó: Echoes in Elsewhere: Marine Acoustemologies and the Aesthetics of More-than-Human Futures

Wouter Capitain: Symphonies of the Deep: Humpback Composers and the Colonial Politics of Listening

Alex South: Musicking with, or musicking alongside, the sounds of another species? Between indifference and disinterest

Jafar Aghabararnia Goudarzi: Water and Myth in Mazandarani Songs: A Mythological Reading of Aquatic Events

This paper explores the mythic function of water in the traditional songs of Mazandaran, a lush northern province of Iran bordering the Caspian Sea. Drawing from the region's rich ecology—interwoven with rivers, springs, dense Hyrcanian forests, and the ever-present sea—this study investigates how aquatic elements are aesthetically and symbolically represented in local sung narratives (soruds). Particular attention is given to references to fish, rivers, rain, wells, and the sea in folk songs sung by rural women and shepherds, where water is often linked to loss, longing, rebirth, and death. This presentation situates these songs within the framework of archetypal criticism and mythopoetic structures. By referencing Carl Jung's notion of the "collective unconscious" and the water archetype as a symbol of life, transformation, and the maternal, the study examines how aquatic imagery in Mazandarani music aligns with universal mythic functions. Furthermore, drawing on Iranian mythological sources—such as the reverence of Anahita, the goddess of waters, and the purification rituals rooted in Zoroastrian traditions—this work highlights how water mediates between the human and more-than-human realms. Methodologically, this project employs narrative and sonic analysis, combining ethnomusicological field recordings with textual analysis of lyrics. It argues that aquatic themes in these songs function not merely as environmental reflection but as portals to mythic consciousness, especially in a time of ecological rupture. The paper contributes to the aesthetics of the Chthulucene by foregrounding local ecological knowledge and its mythic-poetic expression through water, animals (particularly fish), and sound.

Ultimately, this study offers an ecocritical and decolonial perspective on Mazandarani musicking, proposing that fluid lifeworlds in these songs invite new relational ways of thinking with water, myth, and nonhuman others in times of planetary transformation.

Bio:

My name is Jafar Aghabararnia Goudarzi. I am a Ph.D. candidate in Cultural Sociology at Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch, and hold an M.A. in Ethnomusicology from the University of Art, Tehran. My research focuses on Mazandaran's folk music, oral traditions, and cultural memory, supported by over two decades of fieldwork. I am a santour performer and author of instructional books on santour technique and duet performance. As the founder of Farabi Music Academy, I am also active in teaching and music education. My recent work explores rural soundscapes and interspecies musicking, with a strong interest in the visual anthropology of music and ethnographic filmmaking.

Janet Sit and Betlem Pallardó: Echoes in Elsewhere: Marine Acoustemologies and the Aesthetics of More-than-Human Futures

In response to ongoing ecological disruptions and multispecies entanglements, we propose an artistic-research presentation that blends scholarship and performance. Immersed in underwater listening and recording practices across Scotland, Spain, and the U.S., our work explores how embodied acoustic experiences facilitate “thinking through water” in land-based settings. Our core argument is that by shifting focus from decoding animal sounds to co-creating shared sonic spaces, artistic practice can cultivate forms of relational and multispecies kinship.

Drawing from decolonial, more-than-human, and ecocritical frameworks, we are developing a fluid methodology grounded in relationality, perception, and attunement.

The performance component will include live and/or recorded sonic material that explores “lingual” production across species—through breath, gesture, vibration, emotion, and resonance. To do so, we will weave our hydrophone recordings with our own vocal gestures. We ask: what happens when we create a space to listen to the mingling of multispecies tongues?

What speculative futures might emerge when we allow ourselves to think, feel, and sound collectively with our more-than-human kin?

Water becomes both medium and methodology: a fluidic shift of terrestrial references that invites relational co-perceiving across difference. Through experimental sound and performance, we engage with the aesthetic dimensions of interspecies encounters — not to translate or decode, but to attune, witness, and co-create. Drawing on more-than-human epistemologies and speculative aesthetics, our work invites audiences to imagine futures shaped by collective listening and relational care. By dissolving the boundaries between researcher and performer, human and animal, word and sound, we position sonic practice as an ethical and aesthetic mode of encounter—foregrounding entanglement, reciprocity, and shared vulnerability in a time of Blue extinctions and planetary change.

Bios:

Janet Sit is a Toronto-based composer, sound artist, and PhD candidate in Music Composition at UC San Diego. Her interdisciplinary practice explores ocean humanities, marine ecologies, and sound

through acoustic/electronic composition, installation, and scholarly writings. Drawing on her background in zoology, scuba diving, and first-generation immigrant experiences, she engages decolonial and multispecies approaches through the lens of “thinking through water”.

Her current project, *Ties and Tides of Kinship*, supported by the SGSAH EARTH Scholarship, involves cold-water diving, underwater field recordings, and coastal heritages in Scotland. Her works have been presented in Canada, China, Germany, the U.K., and the U.S. Letters from the Water/*Cartas del Agua* was featured in CRISAP’s In the Field 2 Symposium in 2024, and in 2025 she premiered her thesis project *Saltwater Shadows*, a multisensory installation using wavefield synthesis and moving image. Janet is committed to fluid, relational sound and music practices that foster speculative, collaborative world-making.

Betlem Pallardó (she/they) holds a degree in Hispanic Studies and a Master’s in Advanced Hispanic Studies, both from Universitat de València (Spain). She is currently undertaking her PhD as a Doctoral Researcher in the Department of Spanish at the Universitat de València, supported by the Spanish FPU (University Professor Training) grant. She is also a member of the editorial team of the academic journal *Kamchatka. Revista de análisis cultural*. Her research interests are centered on the cultural representation of sites of violence towards other-than- human animals.

Wouter Capitain: Symphonies of the Deep: Humpback Composers and the Colonial Politics of Listening

In 1970, Roger and Katy Payne released *Songs of the Humpback Whale*, an environmental album consisting entirely of scientific recordings of whale vocalizations. The album was not only a commercial but also an ecological success: partly inspired by Payne’s work, the Save the Whales movement of the 1970s mobilized global support for whale conservation. In this paper, I analyze the album’s reception in relation to anthropocentric and specifically Eurocentric standards of sonic creativity.

I argue that the dominant narratives surrounding humpback whale song since the 1970s have been shaped by the compositional aesthetics of European classical music as a normative frame of reference. Assertions that whale songs exhibit creativity, intelligence, and cultural complexity frequently draw on Eurocentric ideals of musical structure, development, and variation. Indeed, humpbacks have been compared to “composers” like Beethoven that compose “symphonies of the deep” and “even use the sonata form.” While such comparisons have played a crucial role in raising awareness of whaling and ocean degradation, they also risk reinscribing colonial hierarchies by reaffirming European cultural supremacy. Because European classical music is notated, rigidly structured, and seemingly rational, it has historically been framed as the pinnacle of human cultural achievement. Invoking the terminology and aesthetic values of this repertoire to elevate the status of humpback songs may inadvertently reproduce such claims of superiority and distinction. I argue that this conflicted reception of humpback whale song highlights the need to confront the deeply intertwined legacies of anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism together.

Bio:

Wouter Capitain is a postdoctoral researcher at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (2023–2025). He investigates how music is used in twentieth-century popular culture to construct and

deconstruct human-animal distinctions. Forthcoming articles from this research project will appear in *Textual Practice* (on music and interspecies equality in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*) and *Music and the Moving Image* (on music, race, and human-animal boundaries in Disney's *The Jungle Book* and *The Little Mermaid*). He previously taught popular music studies at the University of Amsterdam (2014–2016) and Utrecht University (2016–2023). In 2021, he defended his doctoral dissertation on Edward Said and the intersections of music and postcolonialism. He edited Said's posthumous book *Said on Opera* (2024), published by Columbia University Press, and is currently writing a monograph on Said's music-related work for Bloomsbury.

Alec South: Musicking *with*, or musicking *alongside*, the sounds of another species? Between indifference and disinterest

As part of a long-running ecomusicological practice research inquiry into musical treatments of cetacean sounds, I have recently been working compositionally with the vocalizations of the long-finned pilot whale, focusing on two very different projects. For 'Keening – Song of the Stranding', a site-specific performance memorializing a recent mass stranding on the Isle of Lewis (Scotland), I devised new music in close collaboration with Nerea Bello (voice) and Katherine Wren (viola). In 'Imagine an ocean', my composition forms part of a larger piece including pre-existing music by Emily Doolittle and framed by a new fable by poet Lesley Harrison.

Both works are based on close listenings to recordings of pilot whale vocalizations coupled with creative interpretations of bioacoustical research into the way pilot whales structure their highly diverse sounds into repetitive sequences. The individual circumstances of the creation of the works have taken them in very different directions regarding the compositional treatment of the bioacoustical findings, performer freedom, and form of emotional expression.

I will perform excerpts and/or present audio/video recordings from these pieces, interrogating compositional decisions made during their creation and examining tensions arising between the aesthetics and ethics of working with the sounds of the more-than-human world. In particular, I will focus on how the musical works simultaneously exhibit and challenge notions of multispecies entanglement, using Édouard Glissant's (1990) 'right to opacity' and Naisargi Davé's (2023) concept of 'indifference' to suggest alternative compositional models for multispecies aesthetic engagement.

Bio:

Alex South is a Postdoctoral Fellow at IASH (University of Edinburgh) and lectures on undergraduate music courses at the University of St Andrews and Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. His current interdisciplinary research into pilot whale vocalizations builds on his PhD 'Cetacean Citations' (University of St Andrews/Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, 2024), which combined bioacoustical studies on humpback whale song with practice-led research from a zoömusicological perspective. Alex is an improviser and composer, and frequently collaborates with other musicians, poets, visual artists, and dancers. His compositions inspired by whale song have been performed across the UK and internationally, featured in recent CBC documentary 'The Musical Animal'. His collaboration with Sequoia 'Whale, Bow, Echo' was released on their award-winning album 'Water Music' (Scottish Award

for New Music 2023). Poetry film 'Veleva Veleva', for which he composed the score, was nominated for the Scottish Arts Trust Scottish Landscape Awards 2023.

Friday, 24 October 2025

08.30-09.30 Panel VIII: BLUE SYMBOLISM

Chair: Robert Bauernfeind

Cortney Anne Berg: Medieval Aquatic Resistance: The Animal Hybrids at St. Martin's Church in Zillis
Yufei Guo: Korallen in barocken Apothekenfresken: im Kontext von Glaube, Heilkunst und maritimer Globalität

Cortney Anne Berg: Medieval Aquatic Resistance: The Animal Hybrids at St. Martin's Church in Zillis

The terrestrial-aquatic hybrid creatures lining the painted ceiling of St. Martin's Church in Zillis, Switzerland, impose their own logic on the anatomy of the animal. Medieval natural philosophers believed that every terrestrial animal had an aquatic counterpart, explaining the terrestrial torsos and heads of familiar animals, such as foxes and elephants, combined with the tails and fins of fish. Despite their easy explication, these aquatic hybrids do more than demonstrate medieval thinking about animals: they line the border of the painted ceiling, surrounding Christological narrative panels. The viewer walking into the church and looking up at the ceiling is confronted with a gridded series of panels whereby the narratives of Christ's life are contained and isolated by an oceanic environment populated by the strange and unexpected, yet the artists who painted the ceiling render the aquatic ecosystem as being under Christ's dominion by giving them terrestrial features. This paper argues that the hybrid animals on the ceiling guard the boundary between the terra cognita and the unknown environs beyond the waves, completely encircling the known world metaphorized by the teachings of biblical narratives, but their familiarity demonstrates the human desire to understand and ultimately tame the unmastered waters. Hybrid creatures on the margins of maps and other images often warn against venturing outward, but in this case, these hybrid aquatic animals show an ambiguity towards the unknown. Their familiarity defines the ocean as a knowable, and therefore conquerable, space, indicating the human desire to dominate the animal and the lands beyond, but they always swim just out of reach, which ascribes an agency to the animal and their watery ecosystem to resist the influence of humans. Despite their conformity to medieval philosophies of aquatic animals, these hybrid creatures transcend their animality and repel human interference into the natural world.

Bio:

Cortney Anne Berg is a PhD candidate at the City University of New York Graduate Center in art history and a recipient of a Fulbright fellowship to Germany. She will begin conducting dissertation research in September at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. She has a master's degree from Arizona State University and two bachelor's degrees from California State University at Chico. Her research focuses on late medieval courtly culture, animal and monster studies, medieval manuscripts, and Arthurian romance, and her dissertation examines the Leiden copy of the Arthurian

Romance Wigalois. The research on the ceiling in St. Martin's in Zillis is a continuation of a project from her master's program, and continues her work on animals and monsters with respects to ecocriticism.

Yufei Guo: Korallen in barocken Apothekenfresken: im Kontext von Glaube, Heilkunst und maritimer Globalität

Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Darstellung von Korallen in barocken Apothekenfresken im südlichen Heiligen Römischen Reich. Korallen werden darin als marines Material betrachtet, dessen ästhetische, medizinische und symbolische Bedeutungen die verflochtene Geschichte von Kunst, Ökologie und Imperium offenbaren. Anhand von Beispielen wie der Apotheke der Elisabethinen in Wien und der Apotheke des Juliusspitals in Würzburg, deren Fresken Erdteilallegorien zeigen, analysiere ich, wie Korallen als Meerestiere – die oft fälschlich als Mineralien oder Pflanzen klassifiziert wurden – frühneuzeitliche Vorstellungen von Exotik und die Materialität der Heilmittel verkörperten. In der katholischen Barockkultur galt Koralle als Mittel zur Blutstillung und zur Abwehr des Bösen. Ihre rote Farbe ließ sie zugleich zum Sinnbild für das Blut Christi werden. Als Korallen Einzug in Wunderkammern, Reliquienbehälter und Rosenkränze hielten, wurden sie auch zu einem festen Bestandteil apothekerischer Bildprogramme – als visuelle Kurzform einer globalen *materia medica*. Der Beitrag verortet diese Korallendarstellungen im größeren Kontext der kolonialen Ausbeutung und des globalen Wissenswandels. Korallen erscheinen in den Fresken teils als Symbole Afrikas oder Amerikas, teils in europäischen Händen. Diese willkürliche Zuordnung spiegelt das lückenhafte Wissen über diese Erdteile ebenso wider wie ihre Einordnung als „exotische Fremde“ und „Beutegut“. Zudem erfolgte ihr Abbau oft unter ausbeuterischen Bedingungen. Europa erlangte durch den überseeischen Korallenhandel beträchtlichen Reichtum. Das Vorkommen von Korallen in höfischen, religiösen und medizinischen Kontexten sollte daher nicht nur als theologisches Symbol oder Naturwunder verstanden werden, sondern auch als Produkt des frühen globalen Kapitalismus, der maritimen Vernetzung und der barocken Weltanschauung. Die Analyse dieser Apothekenfresken und der Vergleich mit Darstellungen in unterschiedlichen Räumen zeigen letztlich, wie Meeresorganismen – deren Lebendigkeit, Kommerzialisierung und spirituelle Bedeutung nur schwer einzuordnen sind – in Räumen der Heilung, des Glaubens und des Imperiums inszeniert wurden.

Bio:

Yufei Guo, M. A., ist Doktorandin der Kunstgeschichte an der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. Im Jahr 2023 schloss sie ihr Masterstudium mit der Arbeit „Baugeschichte und Funktionsstruktur des Heilig-Geist-Spitals in Landshut“ ab. Seitdem forscht sie zu Kunst in frühneuzeitlichen Spitalapotheken. Ihr besonderes Interesse gilt der visuellen Kultur von Wunderheilungen.

10.00-11.00 Panel IX: SHARK

Chair: Tabea Sabrina Weber

Robert Bauernfeind: Watson und die Folgen: Bilder und Ästhetiken von Mensch-Hai-Interaktionen von Copley bis Dua Lipa

Stephanie Lotzow/Peter Podrez: Bloody Animal Aesthetics – Hai-Horror und die Konflikte um marine (Lebens-)Räume

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Für ihr 2024 erschienenes Album *Radical Optimism* ließ sich die englisch-albanische Sängerin Dua Lipa in einem Foto inszenieren, das sie im Wasser zeigt, den Blick gelassen auf die Rückenflosse eines Hais gerichtet, der sich ihr nähert. Das Bild spielt mit einer Fülle von Referenzwerken, die bis zu John Singleton Copleys Gemälde *Watson und der Hai* aus dem Jahr 1778 zurückgeführt werden können, das den Angriff eines riesigen Hais auf einen Schiffsjungen darstellt. *Watson* war nicht die erste Darstellung einer Mensch-Hai-Interaktion in der europäischen Kunstgeschichte, zeigte ein solches Thema aber erstmals als monumentales Historienbild und erlangte, nicht zuletzt durch seine Verbreitung in der Druckgraphik, eine Vorbildfunktion für Werke der Hoch- und Populärkultur gleichermaßen, die bis ins frühe 20. Jahrhundert andauern sollte. Dann wurde die Haiattacke zum Topos des Abenteuer- und Horrorfilms, in der monumentalsten Form in Steven Spielbergs *Jaws* aus dem Jahr 1975. *Jaws* steht am Beginn des Hai-Horror als regelrechtem Subgenre der Filmgeschichte, das bis in die Gegenwart beinahe regelmäßig Produktionen von mäßigem Anspruch hervorbringt, in dem sich Menschen der Angriffe von Haien erwehren.

Mein projektierte Beitrag fragt nicht nur nach der Bildgeschichte der Mensch-Hai-Interaktion in der Moderne, sondern soll diese Bilder auch ästhetisch verorten. Dabei kommt den Begriffen des Erhabenen, des Grotesken und des Unheimlichen zentrale Bedeutung zu: Dem Erhabenen als Schlüsselbegriff einer Naturästhetik des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts, die in Eindrücken des Lebensbedrohlichen nicht nur einen paradoxen Reiz ausmacht, sondern implizit auch einen Stimulus zu Dominanz und Eroberung beinhaltet, dem Grotesken und dem Unheimlichen als Erfahrungen, die jeweils komplementär zum Erhabenen auf widersprüchlichen Empfindungen basieren. Ein besonderes Augenmerk gilt im Übrigen der Geschlechterzeichnung jener Figuren, die in den Bildern mit Haien interagieren, da sich dabei ein fragwürdiger Wandel in der Besetzung einer als männlich konnotierten Heroik nachvollziehen lässt, die jeweils auf der Verknennung der Haie beruht: Diese meiden Menschen gewöhnlich; ihre Überzeichnung als Menschenfresser ist ein kulturelles Konstrukt.

Bio:

Robert Bauernfeind ist wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter am Lehrstuhl für Kunstgeschichte der Universität Augsburg. Dort erfolgte 2015 die Promotion mit der Dissertationsschrift *Die Ordnung der Dinge durch die Malerei. Jan van Kessels Münchner Erdteile-Zyklus* und 2024 die Habilitation mit der Schrift *Haie als Menschenfresser. Geschichte eines Zerrbildes*.

Vorher studierte Bauernfeind Kunstgeschichte an der Universität Augsburg und absolvierte den Masterstudiengang „Historische Kunst- und Bilddiskurse“ an der Universität Augsburg, der KU

Eichstätt sowie der LMU München. In Frühjahr und Sommer 2009 war Bauernfeind Praktikant in der Gemäldegalerie sowie dem Kunstgewerbemuseum Berlin, von 2010 bis 2013 Promotionsstipendiat der Gerda Henkel Stiftung.

Die Forschungsschwerpunkte liegen im Bereich der niederländischen Malerei und wissenschaftlichen Illustration der Frühen Neuzeit sowie der visuellen Populärkultur der Moderne. Ihnen nähert sich Bauernfeind methodisch-theoretisch vornehmlich aus der Warte der Cultural and Literary Animal Studies. Zu den Publikationen zählen neben der Dissertationsschrift Aufsätze zum Tierbild in Früher Neuzeit und Moderne, zur Ästhetik des Blockbuster-Kinos und zum Filmplakat. Mit Pia Rudolph hat Bauernfeind den Tagungsband *Bilder exotischer Tiere zwischen wissenschaftlicher Erfassung und gesellschaftlicher Normierung* (2021) herausgegeben, mit Andreas Tacke und Michael Wenzel *Das Meer in der Kammer. Maritime Themen und Materialien in Kunstkammern der Frühen Neuzeit* (2024). Derzeit in Planung sind die beiden mit Dorothee Fischer-Kuklau herausgegebenen Bände *Weder Fisch noch Fleisch: Tierpräparation vor 1850* sowie *Tierbild und Wissenspopularisierung im 19. Jahrhundert*.

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Tierhorror thematisiert Konflikte zwischen Spezies, wobei Tiere aus anthropozentrischer Perspektive als ‚das Andere‘ gedacht werden (vgl. Schluchter 2024). Der Hai besitzt dabei einen besonderen Stellenwert: Seit *Jaws* (1975) hat sich das Subgenre des ‚Hai-Horrors‘ herausgebildet, das bis heute sein Territorium vom Film (*Into the Deep*, 2025) auf andere Medien, z.B. auf das Computerspiel (*Depth*, 2014), ausweitet.

Dabei werden Haie oft als aggressive Bestien inszeniert, etwa durch blutige Darstellungen ihres Mauls. Diese ‚Dämonisierung‘ bedient das klischeehafte Narrativ des Hais als monströse Bedrohung (vgl. Carroll 1990). Dies ist gekoppelt an die spatiale Dimension: Raumtheoretisch (vgl. Lotman 1993) lassen sich für Hai-Horror zwei zentrale semantisch-oppositionelle Grenz(überschreitung)en beobachten. Einerseits ist die horizontale Grenze zwischen Land und Wasser relevant, deren Überschreitung nur dem Menschen möglich ist. Andererseits ist die vertikale Grenze von Bedeutung, die durch die Wasseroberfläche markiert wird und Räume über und unter Wasser trennt. Während der Mensch hinabtaucht, überschreitet der Hai die Wasseroberfläche nur punktuell. Diese Grenzen gehen mit Verteilungen von *agency* einher und konstituieren Machtverhältnisse zwischen den Spezies. Der Mensch ist dem Tier über Wasser überlegen und kompensiert seine Schutzlosigkeit unter Wasser mit Ausrüstung und Waffen. Der Hai ist dem Menschen unter Wasser durch seine spezifische Physiognomie überlegen, aber über Wasser schutzlos. Vor dem Hintergrund dieser spiegelbildlichen Vulnerabilität handelt Hai-Horror räumliche Konflikte zwischen den Spezies aus. Zwischen Anthropozentrismus und Speziesismus einerseits sowie tierlicher Perspektive und Handlungsmacht andererseits oszillierend, stellt Hai-Horror die Frage: Wer stört wen und wessen Grenzen werden dabei überschritten? (vgl. Gansel 2013)

Der Vortrag geht Antworten nach und beleuchtet aus medienkulturwissenschaftlicher Perspektive das Subgenre des Hai-Horrors hinsichtlich seiner ästhetischen, räumlichen und ideologischen Dimensionen. Dabei zeigt er, welche kulturellen Funktionen medialer Hai-Horror besitzt – indem dieser (gestörte) Mensch-Tier-Raum-Verhältnisse inszeniert, bietet er Reflexionspotential an, um über Exploration, Annexion und Protektion mariner Lebenswelten nachzudenken.

Bios:

Stephanie Lotzow, M.A., ist Doktorandin am Institut für Germanistik der Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen und Teamleiterin im Projekt „LevelUp: Serious Games in Higher Education“ (JLU Gießen). In ihrem Dissertationsprojekt untersucht sie mediale Spezifika des Phänomens Störung in ludischem Horror. Neben ihrer Forschung zu medialen Inszenierungen von Perturbationen mit einem Schwerpunkt auf Game Studies liegt ihr Forschungsinteresse im Bereich Game Design auf ludischer Wissenschaftskommunikation. Ausgewählte Publikationen: Lotzow, S.: Ludonarrative Inszenierungen von Pandemien und ihre Rezeption am Beispiel von „The Last of Us“ (2013) und „Plague Inc.: Evolved“ (2012). In: Gansel, C./Pérez, J.F. (Hg.): Störfall Pandemie und seine grenzüberschreitenden Wirkungen. Göttingen 2023, S. 309-329; Thon, J.-N./Krampe, T./Lotzow, S.: Playful Poetics: Metareferential Interfaces in Recent Indie Games. In: Poetics Today. International Journal for Theory and Analysis of Literature and Communication, 43/4/2022. Durham, S. 729-771.

Peter Podrez, Dr. phil., ist Akademischer Rat am Institut für Medienkultur und Theater der Universität zu Köln. Seine Forschungsschwerpunkte umfassen u.a. analoge und digitale Game Studies, medienkulturwissenschaftliche Animal Studies, medialen Horror, Filmtheorie und Filmgeschichte, Medien und Räumlichkeit. Neben seiner akademischen Tätigkeit widmet er sich den Kontexten von Spielen, Tieren und Horror unter anderem in journalistischen und kuratorischen Bereichen. Ausgewählte Publikationen: Podrez, P.: Be a Bee. Animalische Spielbarkeit in Tiersimulationen. In: Hennig, M./Krah, H. (Hg.): Spielzeichen IV. Genres. Glückstadt 2023, S. 285-310; Podrez, P.: Der Horrorfilm. In: Stiglegger, M. (Hg.): Handbuch Filmgenre. Geschichte – Ästhetik – Theorie. Wiesbaden 2020, S. 539-555; Podrez, P.: Mit der Taschenlampe gegen die Mächte des Bösen. Horror im Computerspiel. In: Schalleger, R./Faller, T. (Hg.): Fantastische Spiele. Imaginäre Spielwelten und ihre soziokulturelle Bedeutung. Berlin u.a. 2017, S. 233-254.