

Pasts and Futures of Rewilding Symposium

Pre-symposium Lecture

Thursday, March 20th

Université Paris Cité
Olympe de Gouges Building,
Room 830, 8th floor

3.30pm-5pm

(in collaboration with FLT and the Environmental Humanities Workshop)

Burak SEZER (Technical University Dortmund, Germany): “Texts of Bewilderment. Toward a Mind-Ecology of the Wild”

“Rewilding” is chiefly discussed in frameworks surrounding, among others, ecological conservation (Soulé and Noss 1998), environmental anthropology (Bollig 2022), and geography (Lorimer et al. 2015), but its implications extend to affectual and aesthetic domains too. Drawing on the work of George Monbiot (2014), it is acknowledged that rewilding practices and discourses should not be restricted to landscapes but must also be applied to emotional states and conceptual apparatuses of humans in general. Against this background, the relevance to examine the metaphorical, symbolic, and psychological connotations of rewilding has been continuously emphasized ever since (Clayton 2019), but the role of the arts and aesthetics is noticeably missing in this framework.

I will argue that rewilding narratives can elicit such a rewilding through literary aesthetics in ways that are reminiscent of schemes of landscape or urban rewilding: pre-existing orders and categories are challenged in not only cartographical but also epistemological ways, and pragmatically useful ecological strategies are flanked by dimensions of affect and emotion. I propose the term “bewilderment” for this aesthetic rewilding: capitalizing on the fact that the “wild” slumbers therein, bewilderment denotes a hesitancy, a deep confusion of well-established but ultimately dysfunctional knowledge systems of lifeforms and ecologies, demanding a radical reevaluation of them in both the faraway wilderness and our most intimate urban or suburban surroundings.

In literary theory, this follows the tradition of a technique promulgated in Russian formalism called “defamiliarization” (Shklovsky 1917), which likewise seeks to dismantle the ossified preconceptions of the reader. In effect, bewilderment will lead to an aesthetic rewilding of what is – through custom, habit, fossilized narratives – erroneously regarded as insipid or mundane, expanding aesthetic and affectual ways of articulating life. In doing so, I will follow Gregory Bateson and Félix Guattari’s important interventions to the scientific notion of ecology in that both focus on the necessary dimension of the “ecology of mind” (Bateson 1972) and “ecosophy”, more specifically “mental ecology” (Guattari 2004). Using examples from American literature – from wilderness narratives to science fiction – I will show how spatial rewilding occurs in tandem with a mind-ecology of the wild through bewilderment.

5.30pm-7pm

Tobias MENELY (UC Davis): “One Thousand and One Climate Futures: Models, Scenarios, Fictions” – Chair: Thomas Dutoit (U. de Lille)

In recent decades, new modes of representation have been developed to forecast planetary futures defined by specific degrees of climatic discontinuity. In this talk, I'll examine a wide spectrum of possible Earth futures, beginning with the quantitative climate models that underlie climate targets such as the 1.5°C and 2°C futures at stake in international climate negotiations. I'll then turn to scenarios such as the IPCC's Shared Socio-Economic Pathways, which integrate Earth System models with predictions about how societies and states might mitigate and adapt to global warming. Finally, I'll consider how climate fiction, as an emergent literary genre, has internalized epistemological features of modeling and scenario planning even as it also speculatively imagines implausible, nonlinear, and plural futures.

Each of these futurological modes seeks to represent feedback between Earth systems and social systems, including the role of planetary forecast itself in mediating decisions. The formal condition of such decision-making, I'll suggest, is the branching timeline, which represents the present as a node potentially leading to a variety of determinate futures. As I reflect on the proliferation of possible futures circulating in our tumultuous present—from solar communism to hothouse Earth—I'll focus on the position and identity of the auditor to whom these futurological forecasts are addressed, the sovereign, like Shahriyar in the *One Thousand and One Nights*, whose power is at stake in the multiplication of stories. Representations of planetary futures anticipate a new (geo)politics, a form of sovereignty adequate to an integrated yet self-differing planet that is the structuring condition of all (geo)political relations.

**Pasts and Futures of Rewilding
Symposium**

**Friday, March 21st – Saturday, March 22nd
Université Paris Cité**

**Organized by Tobias Menely (UC Davis), Thomas Dutoit (Université de Lille),
Cécile Roudeau (Université Paris Cité/CNRS ECHELLES UMR 8264) with
Valentine Alloing (ECHELLES)**

This symposium invites scholars to share research on rewilding as a socio-ecological practice. How should we understand rewilding as restorative or reparative but also as experimental or utopian? What pasts does rewilding seek to restore and what futures does it seek to create? How should we conceptualize rewilding in terms of the tensions between intervention and withdrawal, management and release? What forms of the human (or the Anthropos) are at stake in rewilding? What role does technology play in rewilding? How might we understand rewilding as a site of political struggle or geopolitical contestation? What meanings are at stake in wildness? What is the relation of wildness as a political category, implying willfulness or autonomy, and ecological justifications for rewilding related to resilience, functionality, complexity, and/or self-organization? How do cultural and literary forms shape rewilding practices? What are historical precedents for contemporary rewilding?

Friday, March 21st

**Université Paris Cité
Olympe de Gouges Building
Room 830, 8th floor**

10am-10.30am. Welcome and coffee

10.30am-12pm. Panel 1 – The Wild is Cultural (Chair: Tom Nurmi, NTNU)

**Antoine TRAISNEL (U. of Michigan) – “Biodiversity Must Be Preserved:
Biopolitics After Climate Change”**

Tobias MENELY (UC Davis) – “Rewilding Multispecies Cultures”

12pm-1.30 pm: Lunch break

1.30pm-3pm. Panel 2—Narrating Rewilding: The European Scene

Arnaud GANE (U. Louvain) – “Cybernetic Natures and Wild Natures: Exploring the Relationship between Conservation Science and Modernity through Ethnographies in French-speaking Europe”

Régis BARRAUD (U. de Poitiers) – “The storytelling of rewilding in Europe: Narrative Frameworks, Imagination and Agency”

3pm-3.30pm: Coffee break

3.30pm-5.30pm. Panel 3 – Be-wild-ing (Chair: Tom NURMI, NTNU)

Burak SEZER (Technical University Dortmund) – “Aesthetic Rewilding: On Bewilderment in American Literature”

Michael JONIK (U. of Sussex) – “Rewilding and Degrowth: Re-reading Thoreau”

Thomas DUTOIT (U. de Lille) and Cécile ROUDEAU (U. Paris Cité) – “Of Palms and Plovers: W.S. Merwin in Hawaii”

Saturday, March 22nd
Université Paris Cité
Halle aux Farines Building,
HF 027 C, groundfloor

10am-12pm: Panel 4 – Land and Agency (Chair: Tobias Menely, UC Davis)

Monica VASILE (Maastricht U.) – “Takahe Tensions: Interventions and Disturbance in Species Recovery Histories”

Linde DE VROEY (U. of Antwerp) – “Who owns the Wild? Land Ownership, Global Narratives and Local Agency in Scottish Rewilding”

Gala MORRIS (U. of Glasgow) – “Echoes of the Land: Reimagining Rewilding Through Multisensory Connections”

12pm-1.30pm

Lunch & Discussion: Towards European Environmental Humanities?

1.30pm-3.30pm: Panel 5 – Speculative Rewilding (Chair: Valentine ALLOING, U. Paris Cité)

Peter SANDS (U. of York) – “Rewilding and Ecotechnology: Between Hopepunk and Misanthropy”

Ben DE BRUYN (UC Louvain) – “Homewaters: Marine Sanctuaries in Blue Anthropocene Fiction”

Sarah BEZAN (U. of Cork) – “Aging, Epochalization, and Rewilding World-Flesh in Matt Bell’s *Appleseed*”