

**Preparing For Post-Collapse: Seminar & Symposium of Environmental Humanities Switzerland (EH+)**

**Veranstalter:** Christoph Kueffer / Marcus Hall / Philippe Saner / Philippe Forêt, Schweizerische Akademische Gesellschaft für Umweltforschung und Ökologie, SAGUF

**Datum, Ort:** 16.06.2014–21.06.2014, Zurich / Zürich

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Historical, social, philosophical, and cultural insights offer fresh perspectives for addressing and understanding complex environmental problems. Environmental Humanities aim to identify effective, sustainable, and equitable ways of living within the earth's natural limits through the methods and insights of the humanities.

In Spring 2013, a new Working Group in Environmental Humanities was founded with the aim of strengthening this field in Switzerland while encouraging better networking and cooperative activities, bringing together researchers from the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences from all parts of Swiss academy.

In June 2014, the group organized an international symposium and summer school. The events took place at the Botanic Gardens of the University of Zurich from 16 to 21 June 2014; it was hosted by the SAGUF (Schweizerische Akademische Gesellschaft für Umweltforschung und Ökologie / Working Group for Environmental Humanities), headed by Christoph Kueffer, Marcus Hall, Philippe Saner and Philippe Forêt. The two core themes of the event were „from the wild to rewilding“ and „from collapse to post-collapse“ in natural and human systems. All living organisms today are survivors and even beneficiaries of previous collapse. As we approach future stages of urgent transition, now is a crucial moment to bring together diverse experts into new conversations.

Dean of the School of Natural Sciences at the University of Zurich, BERNHARD SCHMID (Zurich), highlighted in his welcoming remarks the modest but long-standing

commitment to Environmental Studies at his university. Since the early 1990s, an Institute for Environmental Studies and Sciences has been offering courses at the Bachelor's level, and since 2005 as a full Master's degree. He explained that there continues to be significant interest shown by his university in broad-based environmental study, including Sustainable Development and Environmental Humanities.

Reviewing the wide range „from Parasitism to Symbiosis“, MARCUS HALL (Zurich) showed how individuals in communities can be considered either competitors or cooperators with one another: in the first instance, they are either parasites or hosts; in the second instance they are symbionts, providing mutual assistance. This dichotomy of parasites and symbionts helps us understand both our biological and cultural worlds; there is strong evidence to suggest not only that parasites evolve into symbionts, but that symbionts evolve into parasites.

PHILIPPE FORÊT (Zurich) suggested „a strategy for success when all odds are against you,“ examining failure and redemption in in-between areas. Focusing on methodological issues, he brought various case studies from the 1770s to today, arguing that success after failure depends on the articulation of place, values and community, the creation of an area open to negotiations, and the command of new tools.

PHILIPPE SANER (Zurich) brought examples from „Post-collapse in Borneo“, where the Rhino and Forest Fund engages in the restoration of Borneo's landscape. Saner briefly outlined the current status of the project's work on site and presented an ongoing long-term conservation initiative in the Tabin Wildlife Reserve.

CAROLINE WECKERLE (Zurich) presented the daily practices with ritual plants in a Tibetan community in Southwest China as a valuable tool for research on interrelatedness of people with their biodiverse environment. Weckerle showed how people communicate and integrate with their environment through daily religious practices and specific use of ritual plants.

EMMA SHEPHEARD-WALWYN (Kent) showed how culture affects biodiversity and

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its conservation, as evident in her investigation of the Kaya forests of the Mijikenda people in coastal Kenya. Her findings demonstrate that sacred sites are important for biodiversity, cultural heritage and ecosystem services.

Also referring to sacred sites and the ontologies of sustainability, FABRIZIO FRASCAROLI (Zurich) claimed that the modernist obsession with 'nature as a resource' has long overshadowed the equally important role of nature as a source of symbolic meanings and inspiration. In his opinion, the phenomenon of sacred natural sites can be a preferential arena for better understanding the prominence of those symbolic values.

In a panel focusing on the ways ecologists face damage, CHRISTOPH KUEFFER (Zurich) analysed the dilemma scientist are facing, between restoring the past and inventing the future in contemporary research and conservation. DENNIS HANSEN (Zurich) showed the audience how awesome tortoises are, in their capacity as restoration and rewilding engineers.

In a lecture on ecology's confrontation with limits, MATTHEW BOOKER (Raleigh, NC) told the tale of the rise, fall and aftermath of an oyster fishery, one of the basic foods of late 19th century industrial cities in the US. Booker suggested some ways history might broaden our assumptions about human interventions in ecosystems.

Also referring to North America, JEFFREY CLARY (Zurich) presented „Lessons from the University of California Natural Reserve System“. Societies, Clary argued, have created diverse frameworks for protection of natural systems.

In a panel about agriculture and biodiversity, ANGELIKA HILBECK (Zurich) analysed in detail several contemporary examples for the politics of Synthetic Biology, whereas OLIVIER EJDERYAN (Fribourg) provided a glimpse of the policies of river restoration and agro-environmentalism in Switzerland.

ANNA DEPLAZES ZEMP (Zurich) argued that humanists need to accompany, assess and influence the development of synthetic biology, as the dimension of genetic modifications has dramatically increased in recent years with the emergence of synthetic biology.

There is a crucial need, in her opinion, to integrate the aims and claims of synthetic biology into a wider world view that is dominated by more than the view of living organisms as machines.

In a talk titled „Collapsing Methods: Probing Urban Wilds under Assumed Identity“, EMILY ELIZA SCOTT (Zurich) discussed the Los Angeles Urban Rangers, an interdisciplinary art group she founded in 2004 that develops guided hikes, campfire talks, field kits, and other interpretive tools to spark creative explorations of everyday habitats in its home megalopolis.

A longer hike was presented by LARS LARSSON (Åre) in a lecture about „Sven Hedin's Documenting of Human-Environmental Change in Asia“. Hedin (1865 – 1952) was an internationally recognized Swedish geographer who devoted his life to exploring Central Asia. The purpose of the Sven Hedin Project is to reveal changes in the human-environmental landscapes Hedin documented, primarily by conducting repeat photography based on his historical images.

In two interactive outdoor activities, participants of the workshop experienced our immediate environment a bit differently. ALISON POULIOT (Canberra) took the participants to "Fungal Foray" in the botanical gardens: the group searched for fungi while contemplating ways of considering ecological and social interactions via fungal networks, seeking a richer interpretation of the significance of this largely unseen kingdom, deepening human-fungal affinities. JUANITA SCHLAPFER-MILLER (Zurich) suggested ways of experiencing Non-Visual Mapping, venturing out into the Botanical Garden and, going out of the realm of the familiar and creating maps of the surroundings without access to our most dominant of senses.

The panel „Writing in Post Collapse“ brought literature to the fore. In her talk „Anticipating Collapse – Novels as Gate to Historical Ecological Perception“, AGNES KNEITZ (Beijing) opined that descriptions of environments are an integral part of almost every literary text. Kneitz showed how texts are produced by environments and shape environments in turn by affecting the reader's view.

RACHEL NISBET (Lausanne) talked about „Wordsworth’s Environmental Shock Wave“ in his poem „There Was a Boy“, where a boy’s lakeside „mimic hootings“ are returned to him at dusk, so he anticipates the arrival of „echoes loud/ redoubled and redoubled“. STEPHEN TATUM (Salt Lake City, UT) presented on the writings of Bolaño and Bowden on „the Border“. Tatum explored how each author’s particular inflection of the spectral, of spectrality and of spectralization both reveals and participates in an alternative „occult economy“.

Another panel focused on disasters’ aftermath. Examining the long-time memory of natural disasters, CHRISTIAN ROHR (Bern) argued that remembering specific experiences in (natural) disasters is maybe the most important basis coping with future hazards. FRANZ MAUELSHAGEN (Essen) referred to „likely and less likely disasters“: meteorological and climatological disasters show how expectations are generated historically by previous experiences. Explaining why humanities matter in climate science, OLIVER WETTER (Bern) demonstrated how pre-instrumental historical data (that is archives of society) provide more reliable data about extreme climatic events than the archives of nature (like tree rings or ice cores).

Another panel concentrated on „Past Futures“. Referring to „Scenarios and our Present Futures“, PATRICK KUPPER (Zurich) asserted that since the 1970s scenarios have become common means to imagine the future. Kupper contemplated how and why this tool has changed our perceptions of the future and of the present. Examining the present, DAN TAMIR (Zurich) argued that what we see today is a unique moment in global modern history, in which three crucial factors – Peak Oil, Climate Change, and Population Decline – not only intertwine but also amplify and intensify one another.

Connecting art and environment, VERONIKA RALL (Zurich) referred to „Film as Boundary Object“. Science, Art, and Humanities might seem categorical entities. But they are historically shifting „paradigms“ or „Denkstile“: Film can reflect and resonate our looking, our perceiving, that is our *theoria* of the world. ALISON

POULIOT (Canberra) opened up a conversation to explore possibilities for visually communicating environmental concepts and issues, titled „Visualising Across Borders“. As environmental issues loom large and often bewilderingly, we may need to negotiate the tensions between communicating factual information and inspiring environmental empathy. Adding several questions, JUANITA SCHLAPFER-MILLER (Zurich) discussed „Artists as Humanists – Why Collaborate with Scientists?“. Are artists humanists? What new knowledge will cooperation between arts, humanities and environmental research produce? What role might artists have in an environmental humanities discourse?

A natural scientist, ANDREAS FISCHLIN (Zurich) gave a thorough yet disturbing presentation regarding „Future Climates“. On the practical side of human coping with this change, THOMAS PRINCEN (Ann Arbor, MI) discussed „The Politics of Urgent Transition“: not only is our day’s energy transition unlike all previous ones, but its social dimensions are largely unexplored. Princen construed transition to be a long-term process of social change that differs significantly from emergency and crisis.

Back to sustainability, BRACK HALE (Lugano) described the „Sustainability Initiative“ of his institute, examining its experience with developing sustainability-related initiatives across the curriculum, faculty scholarship, and in campus operations. CLAUDIA HEGGLIN (Zurich) presented the University of Zurich’s „pathway“ following sustainability“. Asking whether sustainable development is rhetorically powerful but meaningless, she examined the role of the concept of sustainable development in universities.

Focusing on war and post-collapse, MARTIN GUTMAN (Freiburg) described the „Landscapes of Peace“ following the Second World War. Socially and politically, scholars have referred to a „Zero Hour“ in which life began afresh around the globe. But what of the environment? „Ecode as War“, the talk given by BRONWYN LAY (Leuk-Stadt), began with Michel Serres Natural Contract, where war is conceived as subjective violence. While the criminalisation of genocide arose

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from the ashes of WW2, ecocide is ignored by the laws of War. If ecocide were to be recognised, this would alter the current dominant paradigm of regulation. Finally, JOHANNA FASSL (Lugano) described her experience with war veterans and their artistic perception of the environment in her detailed report about "The (non) Representation of Memory from the Combat Zone".

The last day of the conference was dedicated to examining the perspectives and the needs for Environmental Humanities in Switzerland. JOHAN EDMAN (Stockholm), programmes director at the Swedish Foundation for Strategic Environmental Research; MARCO ARMIERO (Stockholm), director of KTH-Environmental Humanities Laboratory in Stockholm and STEPHEN TATUM (Salt Lake City, UT), director of the Environmental Humanities Graduate Program at the University of Utah all shared insights and lessons from dealing with the emerging field at their respective institutes. DANIELA THURNHERR (Basel), GABRIELA WÜLSER (Zurich), CHRISTIAN ARNSPERGER (Louvain) and CLAUDIA ZINGERLI (Zurich) presented the current state of the art in the field in Swiss academia.

Director of the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, CHRISTOF MAUCH (Munich), noted the very high quality of presentations, the impressive level of energy and good-will displayed, and generally welcomed participants – more than sixty overall – into a growing world-wide network of humanists and social scientists who are joining natural scientists in studying pressing environmental issues. Mauch noted that holding regular events in Switzerland will attract community members and other academics. He mentioned specifically that projects should be co-developed between the Swiss network and the Rachel Carson Center, from exchanges of speakers and co-organized events, to pursuing other projects of common interest. Switzerland, he stressed, can and should become a leading partner for developing multi-disciplined environmental research, teaching, and outreach.

#### **Conference Overview:**

1. *From the Wild to Post-Collapse: Introduc-*

*tion*

Marcus Hall (Zurich), From Parasitism to Symbiosis

Philippe Forêt (Zurich), Apology of Failure

Philippe Saner (Zurich), From wild to post-collapse in Borneo

#### 2. *Discovery in Ecosystems*

Caroline Weckerle (Zurich), Fostering Relatedness to the Environment: Ritual Plant Use in Tibet

Emma Shephard-Walwyn (Kent), How Culture Affects Biodiversity and its Conservation

#### 3. *Ecology Confronts Limits*

Matthew Booker (Raleigh, NC), Rise, Fall and Aftermath of an Oyster Fishery

#### 4. *Ecologists Face Damage*

Christoph Kueffer (Zurich), Restoring the Past or Inventing the Future?

Dennis Hansen (Zurich), Tortoise Rewilding

Jeffrey Clary (Zurich), What are protected areas for, anyway?

#### 5. *Agriculture & Biodiversity*

Angelika Hilbeck (Zurich), Politics of Synthetic Biology

Olivier Ejderyan (Fribourg), Policies of Synthetic Biology

Anna Deplazes Zemp (Zurich), Humanists need to accompany & influence synthetic biology

#### 6. *Urban Field Research*

Emily Eliza Scott (Zurich), Collapsing Methods: Probing Urban Wilds under Assumed Identity

Alison Pouliot (Canberra), Fungal Foray

Juanita Schlapfer-Miller (Zurich), Non-Visual Mapping

#### 7. *Writing in Post-Collapse*

Agnes Kneitz (Beijing), Novels as a Gate to Historical Ecological Perception

Rachel Nisbet (Lausanne), 'There Was a Boy':

Wordsworth's Environmental Shock Wave

Stephen Tatum (Salt Lake City, UT), Spectralization of Local & Regional: Bolaño & Bowden on the Border

8. *Disaster Aftermath*

Christian Rohr (Bern), Long-time Memory of Natural Disasters

Franz Mauelshagen (Essen), Likely and Less Likely Disasters

Oliver Wetter (Bern), Why Humanities Matter in Climate Science; Resolution, Reliability, Impact

9. *Past Futures*

Patrick Kupper (Zurich), Scenarios and our Current Futures

Dan Tamir (Zurich), Peak Oil, Climate Change, Technology Population & Collapse of the 20th-Century

Lars Larsson (Åre), Documenting Environmental Change in Asia: Rediscovering Sven Hedin's Word

10. *De-Framing & Re-Sensitizing Environmental Research*

Veronika Rall (Zurich), Film as Boundary Object

Alison Pouliot (Canberra), Visualising Across Borders

Juanita Schlapfer-Miller (Zurich), Artists as Humanists: Why Collaborate with Scientists?

11. *Cycles in Nature and Culture*

Andreas Fischlin (Zurich), Future Climates

Thomas Princen (Ann Arbor, MI), The Politics of Urgent Transition

12. *Sustainability's Rise and Fall*

Brack Hale (Lugano), Sustainability Initiative

Claudia Heggin (Zurich), „Sustainable Development“ – Rhetorically Powerful but Meaningless?

Fabrizio Frascaroli (Zurich), Bread and Meaning: Sacred Sites and the Ontologies of Sustainability

13. *War and Post-Collapse*

Martin Gutman (Freiburg), Landscapes of Peace following WW2

Bronwyn Lay, (Leuk-Stadt), Ecocide as War

Johanna Fassl (Lugano), The Hell in Our Memory or the (non)Representation of Memory from the Combat Zone

14. *Environmental Humanities: Perspectives & Needs*

Philippe Forêt (Zurich) / Marc Hall (Zurich) / Christoph Kueffer / Bernhard Schmid (Zurich)

*Experience with Enviro Humanities*

Johan Edman (Stockholm) / Marco Armiero (Stockholm) / Stephen Tatum (Salt Lake City, UT)

15. *Enviro Humanities in Switzerland*

Daniela Thurnherr (Basel) / Gabriela Wülser (Zurich) / Christian Arnsperger (Louvain) / Claudia Zingerli (Zurich), Four Short Inputs

16. *Conclusions and Comments*

Christof Mauch (Munich)

Tagungsbericht *Preparing For Post-Collapse: Seminar & Symposium of Environmental Humanities Switzerland (EH+)*. 16.06.2014–21.06.2014, Zurich / Zürich, in: H-Soz-Kult 16.09.2014.