

Mangroves are coastal intertidal forests that serve as habitats for thousands of species in tropical regions and help protect communities during cyclones by acting as buffers and reducing the impact of storm surges.

Photo by Florida-Guidebook.com on Unsplash

mesh

multidisciplinary
environmental studies
in the humanities

SYMPOSIUM

Disaster Preparedness in *Multispecies Worlds*

11–12 July 2025

Tagungsraum, Seminargebäude 106
University of Cologne



UNIVERSITÄT
ZU KÖLN



Alexander von
HUMBOLDT
STIFTUNG



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Sydney
Environment
Institute



Australian Government
Australian Research Council

SYMPOSIUM

Disaster Preparedness

in *Multispecies Worlds*

There is growing evidence that the cumulative impacts of industrial societies on several vital Earth systems are reaching or have passed critical thresholds. Contemporary societies have barely begun to confront the potentially catastrophic impacts of escalating extinctions, toxic pollutants, and growing climate disruption in the medium to long-term. Moreover, environmental changes are already contributing to a range of local/regional disasters, including food and water shortages, the spread of disease vectors, and the increasing frequency and intensity of weather-borne extremes (e.g. storms, flooding, heat waves and wildfires). Whilst such disasters are generally cast as singular events, they arise from longer-standing patterns of interrelationship among culture, society, technology and environment. They also have long-term consequences. How people prepare for, respond to, and recover from such calamities depends on their assumptions about their environment, the stories they tell about it, and their historically conditioned modes of perceiving and interacting with more-than-human others. Disaster preparedness therefore has a sociocultural dimension, no less than a technoscientific one, entailing fundamental questions of value, meaning and identity, as well as issues of social cohesion, cooperation and wellbeing.

This symposium takes storytelling as a site for the exploration, enactment, and unsettling of entangled human and nonhuman lives in the horizon of rapid environmental change. Our particular focus is the complexity and stakes of narrating multispecies and intergenerational histories and futures, spaces of (unevenly) shared living and dying, in a time of escalating extinctions, ecological unravelling and climatic disruption. How might paying attention to the ways in which other species experience and craft their worlds open up new possibilities for co-existence in catastrophic times? And what kinds of future imaginaries and educational practices might be conducive to enhanced disaster preparedness, risk reduction and transformational resilience? Bringing together perspectives and approaches from across the environmental humanities and social sciences, we examine the forces, commitments, and assumptions that shape such stories; the institutions and regimes of knowledge and expertise that underlie them; the media and genres through which such stories are told and circulated; the ideologies that articulate themselves through these accounts and their silences; as well as the responsibilities and limitation of telling others' stories, human and not.



PROGRAMME

Thursday, 10th July 2025

Artyfarty Gallery, Vogelsanger Str. 195a, 50825 Cologne

19:00 – 22:00 **Exhibition Opening**
“Multimedia Perspectives on Disturbances”
organized by a.r.t.e.s. Forum 2025
“Disturbance:s” & MESH

Friday, 11th July 2025

Tagungsraum, Ground Floor, Seminargebäude 106
University of Cologne, Albertus-Magnus-Platz, 50931 Cologne

9:30 – 10:00 Registration & Morning Coffee

10:00 – 10:30 **Symposium Opening & Introduction**

10:30 – 12:00 **Panel I: Temporalities**
Chair: Kate Rigby

Luke Kemp

Political Science & International Relations,
University of Cambridge

The Beginnings and Ends of the Anthropocene

Michelle Bastian

Environmental Humanities, University of Edinburgh

*Narrating Disaster Through the Spectre
of Ecological Mismatches in Time*

Stephen Muecke

Cultural Studies, University of Notre Dame Australia

*The Power of Stories and the Power
of Multispecies Intelligence*

12:00 – 13:00 Lunch Break

13:00 – 14:30 **Panel II: (Multi-)Modalities**

Chair: Natalie Dederichs

Laura Maria Lojo-Rodríguez

English Literature, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela

*"An Almost Apocalyptic Uprising":
Environmental Disaster and Multispecies Worlds
in the Contemporary Short Story*

Carolin Schwegler

Sociolinguistics, MESH, University of Cologne

*Addressing and Coping with Climate Futures?
Multimodal Practices in Digital Discourse*

Julia Hoydis

English Literature, University of Graz

*Blessing or Curse? The Role of AI for Disaster
Preparedness in Novels about Environmental Crisis*

14:30 – 15:00 Coffee Break

15:00 – 16:30 **Panel III: Waters**

Chair: Franz Krause

Maan Barua

Human Geography, University of Cambridge

*An Amphibious Urbanism /
Cut 4: The Desert Arrives Slowly*

Sandro Simon

Social & Cultural Anthropology, University of Cologne

*Mollusc Lifeworlds:
Conflict, Care, and Conviviality
Amidst a Drowning Delta*

Mars Briones

Environmental Humanities, MESH, University of Cologne

*A Couple of Catastrophes:
Geomythic and Ethnographic
Disaster Narratives in Visayan Twin Islands*

16:30 – 17:00 Coffee Break

17:00 – 18:15 *Welcome Address*
Andreas Hüttemann
Vice Dean for Research and Early Career Researchers
at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

Keynote Lecture I
Chair: Roman Bartosch

Alexa Weik von Mossner
American Studies, University of Klagenfurt
*(Re)creating Multispecies Connections:
Narrative and Disaster Preparedness*

18:15 – 21:00 Reception

Saturday, 12th July 2025

Tagungsraum, Ground Floor, Seminargebäude 106
University of Cologne, Albertus-Magnus-Platz, 50931 Cologne

9:30 – 10:00 Morning Coffee

10:00 – 11:00 **Keynote Lecture II**
Chair: Kate Rigby

Thom van Dooren
Environmental Humanities, MESH, University of Cologne &
Sydney Environment Institute, University of Sydney
Multispecies Storytelling in Catastrophic Times

11:00 – 11:15 Comfort Break

11:15 – 12:45 **Panel IV: Conflicts**
Chair: Christoph Lange

Léa Lacan
Social & Cultural Anthropology, University of Cologne
*Wildlife, Tsetse and Pathogens: Between Disease
Eradication and Coexistence in a Conservation
Landscape, Southwestern Zambia*

Sandra Swart

Environmental History, Stellenbosch University

Apartheid's Baboons: How Stories Hurt and Heal

Courtney Addison

STS and Anthropology, Victoria University of Wellington

*Eradication Nation: Storying Multispecies Futures
in Aotearoa New Zealand*

12:45 – 14:00 Lunch Break

14:00 – 15:30 **Panel V: Learning Futures**

Chair: Roman Bartosch

Heidi Bayoumy

English Language and Literature, Cairo University

*Rethinking Disaster: The Role and Representation
of Disaster in Selected Arabic Stories and Plays
for Children*

Natalie Dederichs

English and Teacher Education, University of Cologne

*Plan(e)t in Peril: Children's Literature
and the End of Vegetation*

Per Esben Svelstad

Teacher Education,
Norwegian University of Science and Technology

*What Is the Purpose of Education?
Adapting Bildung to the Anthropocene*

15:30 – 16:00 **Closing Remarks**

KEYNOTE AND PANEL DETAILS

Keynote Lecture I

Friday, 11th July 2025, 17:00 – 18:15
Tagungsraum, Ground Floor, Seminargebäude 106
and via Zoom
Chair: Roman Bartosch

(Re)creating Multispecies Connections: Narrative and Disaster Preparedness

Alexa Weik von Mossner

American Studies, University of Klagenfurt

Disaster preparedness is often understood as a set of measures undertaken by governments, NGOs, communities, or individuals to better respond to natural or manmade disasters with the main goal of saving human lives and livelihoods. Due to the growing climate disruption, recent years have seen a paradigm shift away from single-disaster management towards more systemic approaches that aim to increase communities' sustainability and preparedness in increasingly volatile riskscape. Weik von Mossner's talk calls for a better understanding of the central role of narratives in such approaches by considering nonfiction storytelling in cultural texts and strategic disaster risk communication campaigns that aim to not only raise awareness but also empower communities to enhance their resilience and wellbeing. The talk will consider what is at stake in such strategic storytelling and how it can go beyond purely anthropocentric concerns to account for multispecies entanglements and to (re)create connections with the more-than-human world.

Keynote Lecture II

Saturday, 12th July 2025, 10:00 – 11:00
Tagungsraum, Ground Floor, Seminargebäude 106
and via Zoom
Chair: Kate Rigby

Multispecies Storytelling in Catastrophic Times

Thom van Dooren

Environmental Humanities, MESH, University of Cologne
& Sydney Environment Institute, University of Sydney

Drawing on and thinking through a collection of stories of critically endangered snails from the Hawaiian Islands, this lecture offers a potted overview of multispecies studies as a field of scholarly inquiry that draws the humanities, the natural sciences, and a variety of other ways of knowing/ living, into dynamic conversation. The lecture focuses on three key topics. Firstly, what is it that characterises multispecies scholarship as a distinctive way of understanding and describing the world, perhaps even, as Bruno Latour has framed it, as a genre of 'alternative natural history'? Secondly, what does it mean to centre the role of storytelling in multispecies research: how does doing so open up new possibilities for not only engaging but transforming publics? Two particular interests in this regard are the 'ethical charge' of storytelling, and the capacity for multispecies stories to create new openings into questions of intra-human inequality and oppression. Thirdly, and finally, the lecture will explore the 'species' category: what work do taxonomic divisions do in multispecies scholarship, and how might thinking with and against species help us to both see and inhabit worlds differently? Taken together, the lecture works to outline the significance of multispecies storytelling as a creative and ethical practice in and for what Isabelle Stengers has termed 'catastrophic times.'

Panel I

Temporalities

Friday, 11th July 2025, 10:30 – 12:00
Tagungsraum, Ground Floor, Seminargebäude 106
Chair: Kate Rigby

The Beginnings and Ends of the Anthropocene

Luke Kemp

Political Science & International Relations,
University of Cambridge

When did the Anthropocene—a time when humans became a dominant force in shaping the Earth—begin? When will it end? I will answer these questions by providing a new history of how humans have transformed the Earth and an explanation of what root causes have driven these trends. One key driver is status competition. Status competition is evident throughout environmental history, from the beginnings of domestication often for elite feasts through to the demand for high-prestige goods during colonization. I'll then turn to the future, looking at what this means for the long-term survival of different species, including our own.

Narrating Disaster Through the Spectre of Ecological Mismatches in Time

Michelle Bastian

Environmental Humanities, University of Edinburgh

The problem of phenological mismatch—when birds arrive too early for peak caterpillar season, or pollinators arrive out of synch with their flowering companions—often provides a disaster narrative for journalistic explorations of climate breakdown. In this paper I will explore the match-mismatch hypothesis, as it is described by conservation ecologists, and the debates around the idea that the world's ecologies are dangerously falling out of synch. Taking a sceptical look at the lure of these types of declensionist narratives of ecological time, I question particularly on the ideologies of ordered and synchronous time that appear to underpin them.

The Power of Stories and the Power of Multispecies Intelligence

Stephen Muecke

Cultural Studies, University of Notre Dame Australia

“Twisted plot lines, arcs of suspense, motivated actors: these have so much more destructive power against human intelligence than specific falsehoods.”—Jane Goodall (Western Sydney University)

Poems, stories, academic essays and other forms are burgeoning in response to the climate crisis, and they are all small interventions that collectively gain more traction the more they network together. Their power to change situations is multi-valent: to be *distributed* (getting beyond the page and into film, video and the internet), to draw on the power of ancient *myths*, to mobilise human *imagination* and its power to make people think critically about those other stories embraced by the “Modern humans” (Latour) who have led us into danger.

This intervention analyses the *Snowpiercer* (2013) story, powerful in an immediate material sense in that such films have considerable impact. But it is powerful also in its mythic generativity. The story is post-apocalyptic with a train speeding around the whole frozen planet with people trapped in it. The metaphor is compelling: both a kind of Noah’s Ark, and a modernized, mechanical version of the Norse myth of the Jörmundgandr, the world serpent that grew so large that it encircled the globe and ate its own tail. It is the nadir of industrial modernity’s mad headlong rush.

I treat other powerful stories, for instance the video-poem *Rise: From One Island to Another*, about Indigenous people preparing for climate emergencies, and my own fieldwork with the Goolarabooloo people in Australia. With them, I wonder how their concepts of multispecies kinship (and intelligence) can be mobilised with even greater power.

Panel II

(Multi-)Modalities

Friday, 11th July 2025, 13:00 – 14:30
Tagungsraum, Ground Floor, Seminargebäude 106
Chair: Natalie Dederichs

“An Almost Apocalyptic Uprising”: Environmental Disaster and Multispecies Worlds in the Contemporary Short Story

Laura Maria Lojo-Rodríguez

English Literature, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela

When asked about the particular environmental concerns which made their way into her short story debut collection *Fen* (2016), British writer Daisy Johnson explained how her stories entailed an “almost apocalyptic uprising” from otherwise silenced characters – “animals [...] and the landscape itself” – in response to environmental human intervention and massive destruction. This talk aims to address Johnson’s *Fen* through the lens of a posthuman relational ontology in advocating “multiple and complex reconfigurations of diversity and multiple belongings”, including the consideration of the life of animals and non-human entities in a “human-non human continuum” (Braidotti 25–26). Johnson’s flight from realism and her preference for “apocalyptic, weird fiction” (Hirshman 2017, 201), alongside her imaginative vision of a multispecies world, paradoxically unearth the writer’s historical situatedness in urgently addressing her own ecological concerns in a liminal topology, the Fens, prey to global growth and the exhaustion of natural resources.

Works Cited

- Braidotti, Rosi. 2017. “Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism.” In *Anthropocene Feminism*, ed. Richard Grusin, 21–48. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Elkins, Amy E. 2019. “Writing on Water: A Conversation with Daisy Johnson on ‘Everything Under.’” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, April 6 2019, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/writing-on-water-a-conversation-with-daisy-johnson-on-everything-under/>.
- Hirshman, Harriet. 2017. “‘Weeping in Coffee Shops’: An Interview with Daisy Johnson.” *Short Fiction in Theory & Practice* 7 (2): 199–203.

Addressing and Coping with Climate Futures? Multimodal Practices in Digital Discourse

Carolyn Schwegler

Sociolinguistics, MESH, University of Cologne

Public discourse arenas such as social media allow insight into how people prepare for disaster conditions. These platforms are lively and dynamic hubs of communication that complement analyses of other forms of storytelling by highlighting everyday digital interaction.

Social media discourse encompasses contributions from mainstream news institutions, political/economic actors, activists, private users and communities. This paper draws on a corpus of Instagram data concerning the topics *climate change*, *veganism*, *netzero*, and *antinatalism*. Analysing these four sub-corpora sheds light on communicative practices in the context of both “wicked problems” and discourse segments that rather address a small number of the most pressing concerns. Against this backdrop, and based on the investigation of topical discourse entanglements, this analysis identifies various linguistic and multimodal practices of expression and discourse participation, as well as categories of micro-genres currently characteristic of digital environments—to outline how people address, reflect on, and cope with climate futures.

Blessing or Curse? The Role of AI for Disaster Preparedness in Novels about Environmental Crisis

Julia Hoydis

English Literature, University of Graz

Increasingly, we find realist fictional stories which narrate the twin disasters that humans are ill-prepared for: environmental degradation and the advance of generative AI.

This paper will explore the thematic and formal intersection of the development of AI and environmental crisis in these narratives, drawing on two case studies from recent Anglophone fiction, Oana Aristide’s novel *Under the Blue* (2021) and Richard Power’s *Playground* (2024). The texts move the discussion of environmental and technological risk beyond matters of representation on the content level and formal experimentation. They achieve a decentering of the human while tackling two of the present’s most pressing concerns, framed as separate yet interrelated moments of change and crisis. This is often realized by employing narrative strategies such as

twists—on the level of plot and discourse—which surprise and shock the reader and unsettle notions of trust and narrative (un)reliability.

Panel III

Waters

Friday, 11th July 2025, 15:00 – 16:30

Tagungsraum, Ground Floor, Seminargebäude 106

Chair: Franz Krause

An Amphibious Urbanism / Cut 4: The Desert Arrives Slowly

Maan Barua

Human Geography, University of Cambridge

What might urban habitation look like if one began not with land but water? What would the politics of urbanization become if wetness was brought into the fray? This talk proposes an amphibious urbanism: a means of thinking about the urban condition by focusing on life (bios) in its surrounds (amphi-) (cf. Krause 2017). It is centered on Guwahati, a city of 1.2 million in northeast India. Flooding in Guwahati is routine, and disaster has become ordinary. Life—both human and other-than-human—is mired in industrial effluent and unfolds in a milieu of toxicity. Focusing on one particular wetland in the urban extensions, the talk examines three aspects of an amphibious urbanism: the porosity between conservation and ruination, accumulation and dispossession, commoning and enclosure. These themes are drawn together to think of the futures of more-than-human and urban worlds. The talk draws from a book and visual project steeped in ethnographic endeavour.

Mollusc Lifeworlds: Conflict, Care, and Conviviality Amidst a Drowning Delta

Sandro Simon

Social & Cultural Anthropology, University of Cologne

Molluscs are omnipresent in the Sine-Saloum Delta, Senegal. They mediate quotidian practices and basic needs as well as multispecies relation, memory and meaning. Delta dwellers glean for molluscs, eat and sell them,

and they use their shells for roads, dams, houses, incense, jewelry, amulets, as future-telling devices and, formerly, for pottery and medicine. At the same time, molluscs and their shells have also been the subject of (post)colonial governance and exploitation and of Western science. In the face of the delta's drowning, these differently positioned practices and imaginaries around molluscs gain relevance, yet also come into tension.

Relying on my multimodal dissertation research, this lecture performance weaves together video, sound, (auto)ethnography, creative non-fiction, photography and drawing to inquire human-mollusc-spirit relations in and beyond delta. Composed as a sensuous journey oscillating between the factual and the fictional, the representative and the experimental, it traces mollusc gleaning and processing as haptic practices of care and resistance; molluscs as mediators of diasporic desires; shell infrastructuring between the promise and failures of colonial pasts and anthropocenic presents; and multispecies encounters as speculative openings for belonging and conviviality.

A Couple of Catastrophes: Geomythic and Ethnographic Disaster Narratives in Visayan Twin Islands

Mars Briones

Environmental Humanities, MESH, University of Cologne

The shift from a hazard-focused paradigm to one that investigates the social, cultural, and political processes that render certain individuals more vulnerable than others has led to the wide rejection of the term “natural disaster” in the field of disaster studies. Through this paradigm shift, disasters have been framed in terms of the historically conditioned interactions between natural hazards and human vulnerability. In this paper, I examine how the nature-culture dualism underpinning this framework is potentially unsettled by disaster narratives about two couples—one, a pair of mythological figures, the other, my ethnographic interlocutors—in the islands of Leyte and Samar in the Philippines. Interweaving interpretations of a legend about a giant crab, Mount Danglay, and Cancabato Bay, and of the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan disaster, I render the narratives through multispecies storytelling—highlighting the (de)coupling of human-nonhuman, biotic-abiotic actions and conditions. This reframing suggests how place awareness and the recognition of more-than-human vulnerability can spell the difference between disaster and preparedness.

Panel IV

Conflicts

Saturday, 12th July 2025, 11:15 – 12:45
Tagungsraum, Ground Floor, Seminargebäude 106
Chair: Christoph Lange

***Wildlife, Tsetse and Pathogens:
Between Disease Eradication and Coexistence
in a Conservation Landscape, Southwestern Zambia***

Léa Lacan

Social & Cultural Anthropology, University of Cologne

The tsetse fly has long been feared in Africa for transmitting trypanosomiasis, a disease affecting both humans and livestock. During the colonial era in southern Africa, wildlife was extensively culled as a food staple for tsetse and a reservoir for trypanosomes. In contemporary Zambia, large-scale conservation efforts promote closer coexistence between wildlife, people and livestock, but also raise pressing concerns: how can people live with dreadful pathogens in shared landscapes?

This presentation traces shifting narratives that cast tsetse flies and wildlife alternately as threatening disease vectors, agents of wilderness, or tolerable neighbours. Drawing on archives, entomological literature and interviews with local farmers in southwestern Zambia, the study examines how knowledge, technologies, and stories—mediated by farmers, scientists, and institutions—shape the fears and possibilities of coexisting with tsetse. Ultimately, this presentation interrogates the ‘killability’ of tsetse and wildlife, and explores the possibilities of living with ‘dangerous others’ amidst competing dreams of disease eradication and ‘wilder’ coexistence landscapes.

Apartheid’s Baboons: How Stories Hurt and Heal

Sandra Swart

Environmental History, Stellenbosch University

There is a forgotten archive of the dying days of a white supremacist regime. In 1997, the Apartheid-era covert bio-chemical warfare program was finally exposed, after a top agent was arrested and classified files revealed. These files and subsequent revelations allow us to reconstruct this

clandestine project, which appeared to be a hybrid of a Nazi plot and a bad James Bond movie. Its scientists manufactured crowd control agents, from ecstasy to teargas, assassination weapons. There was also a shadowy eugenic impetus in experiments towards anti-fertility and anti-virility vaccines for black South Africans. In the newly democratic South Africa, these operatives faced allegations of violence far beyond any ethical military standard. The Truth Commission and trials reveal how animal bodies were pressed into the service of the state. Baboons and other animals were deployed in ways that were both brutal and bizarre. But this history also reveals something far more sinister about how primates are used in conventional science then and today. So I ask how do we reconstruct stories when the subjects are more-than-human? How do we find the story when the archive is deliberately destroyed? Finally, why revisit this heartbreaking, fragmentary and frustrating history? This talk probes the possibilities of telling stories about the state's greatest secret – the harm it might do and the hope it may bring.

***Eradication Nation: Storying Multispecies Futures
in Aotearoa New Zealand***

Courtney Addison

STS and Anthropology, Victoria University of Wellington

In Aotearoa New Zealand, introduced mammals compete with and predate on native birds, insects, and flora, driving what is generally regarded as a local extinction crisis. The primary response to this crisis is pest control, now including a national-scale effort to eradicate rats, possums, and mustelids from mainland New Zealand. Eradication logic assumes a fundamental incompatibility between native and introduced species, and posits a technological solution that is itself compatible with an increasingly financialized conservation sector. Taking eradication as one way of imagining Aotearoa's multispecies futures amongst others, this talk explores how multispecies relations, including deadly ones, are interpreted and enacted in situated local contexts. This makes visible a tension between the idea of disaster and the nature of intervention it invites, and more incrementalist readings of environmental change.

Panel V

Learning Futures

Saturday, 12th July 2025, 14:00 – 15:30
Tagungsraum, Ground Floor, Seminargebäude 106
Chair: Roman Bartosch

Rethinking Disaster: The Role and Representation of Disaster in Selected Arabic Stories and Plays for Children

Heidi Bayoumy

English Language and Literature, Cairo University

Introducing disasters to children is a necessary act as climate change effects hit almost every country around the world. Whether natural, environmental, or manmade, disasters remain a terrifying subject to children. The daily news and scenes of floods, fires, wars, earthquakes, hurricanes etc., are alarming spectacles to children. Still, it is pertinent to introduce them to such destructive and life-changing events to create ecological awareness and to ensure they have a role in disaster preparedness or recovery. To do so, it is important to turn to children's literature exploring how writers present disasters. My presentation will thus attempt to revisit contemporary Arabic stories and plays for children to examine the representation of disasters to children from an ecocritical perspective and the lens of critical disaster studies, highlighting disasters as symbols and carriers of ecological themes and lessons to the young readers/audience.

Plan(e)t in Peril: Children's Literature and the End of Vegetation

Natalie Dederichs

English and Teacher Education, University of Cologne

In this talk, I will explore the ambivalence of the term 'plant horror', which captures both the unsettling and absolute strangeness of plants as well as the frightening and indeed life-threatening possibility of a future without them. I will turn to imaginations of a world almost extinct of plants in contemporary works of children's literature to point out how such dark vegetal narratives confront young readers with the anthropocentric failure to

imagine shared vulnerability and mortality across species. By affirming feelings of ecological loss, the works I discuss invite practices of grieving past, present, and future extinctions. As I will demonstrate using examples from teaching practice, such an emotional engagement can be used productively in transformative literature and language pedagogy to encourage students to positively reframe what it means to be a 'good' future ancestor.

What Is the Purpose of Education? Adapting Bildung to the Anthropocene

Per Esben Svelstad

Teacher Education,
Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Education in the Western world is increasingly a question of accountability, i.e., measurable outcomes. Teachers are expected to perform actions ostensibly supported by empirical evidence, so that their students acquire predetermined skills in preparation for a rapidly changing world. By turning education into an individualist issue, this ideology ignores the relational nature of teaching and how it affirms the newness of the world and its inhabitants. Drawing on Gert Biesta's concept of purpose, Hannah Arendt's theory of plurality, and Jacques Rancière's idea of emancipation, I discuss possibilities for rethinking education beyond neoliberal goal-orientation. To what extent is the concept of *Bildung*, traditionally considered a human-centered term for individual cultivation, still relevant and adaptable to education in the Anthropocene?

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Courtney Addison is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Science in Society at Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington, in New Zealand. Situated between STS and anthropology, her current research explores the multispecies politics of poison use and the innovation turn in New Zealand conservation. She is one part of the *Science, Technology, & Human Values* editorial collective.

Maan Barua works on the politics, ontologies and economies of the living and material world. His current research is on metabolic urbanization and the politics of city-making. Maan is the author of *Lively Cities: Reconfiguring Urban Ecology* (University of Minnesota Press, 2023) and *Plantation Worlds* (Duke University Press, 2024). He is the PI on an ERC Horizon 2020 Starting Grant on Urban Ecologies, and is a University Lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Cambridge. He is currently working on a book on urban wetlands, provisionally titled *An Amphibious Urbanism*.

Michelle Bastian is a Senior Lecturer in Environmental Humanities at the University of Edinburgh. Her work looks at the role of time in human and non-human environments. Currently, she is exploring seasonal timing in plants and animals and how this is changing in a time of climate breakdown.

Heidi Mohamed Bayoumy is an Associate Professor at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, Egypt. She is the author of research papers in the fields of environmental children's literature, comparative literature, and drama. She has participated in several conferences and workshops. She is also a short-story writer for children. She teaches courses on drama, translation, and cultural studies. She is the author of several research papers published in national and international journals. Her recent works focus on children's literature from the lens of ecofeminism and critical disaster studies. Her book *A Study of the Role of Creatures in Plays and Films for Children* offers a comparative approach to Arabic and world children's literature from the perspective of semiotics, ecocriticism, and psychoanalysis. In 2019, she won Cairo University's Incentive Award in recognition of her research papers and academic activities.

Mars Edwenson Briones is a doctoral researcher at MESH, University of Cologne. His research draws upon the environmental humanities, disaster studies, and island studies to examine how art, literature, and discourses about catastrophes in the Eastern Visayas region of the Philippines can

contribute to ecological, decolonial, and archipelagic perspectives on disasters. Combining methods in the environmental humanities, including ethnography, with art making and poetry writing, he published his first suite of poems “Archive Pelagic” in 2024. He completed his master’s degree in Art Studies (Art History) at the University of the Philippines Diliman in 2020. In 2013, he obtained his bachelor’s degree in Communication Arts from the University of the Philippines Tacloban, where he then served as a faculty member until 2022.

Natalie Dederichs is a senior lecturer and postdoctoral researcher at the Department of English II, University of Cologne and the author of *Atmosfears: The Uncanny Climate of Contemporary Ecofiction* (Transcript 2023). Besides pursuing an academic career, she has worked as a teacher of English and German at different lower secondary schools in Germany. Her current research focuses on the intersection of ecocritical theory, children’s and young adult fiction, English language teaching and education for sustainable development.

Julia Hoydis is Full Professor of English Literature at the University of Graz, Austria. She previously taught at the universities of Klagenfurt, Duisburg–Essen, Cologne, and Cambridge, and was Academic Programme Manager of MESH, University of Cologne, from 2022–23. Her research interests in literary studies and the Environmental Humanities include the English novel, narratology, literature and risk theory, climate change narratives across different media, as well as posthumanism and new digital forms of storytelling. Among her book publications are *Climate Change Literacy* (co-authored with Roman Bartosch and Jens M. Gurr, CUP, 2023), the co-edited volume *Aging Studies and Ecocriticism* (Lexington Books, 2023), and *Risk and the English Novel* (De Gruyter, 2019). Together with David Higgins (Leeds), she is PI of the project “Just Futures? An Interdisciplinary Approach to Cultural Climate Models” (2023–2026, funded by the Austrian Science Fund FWF). She is also general editor of *Anglistik: International Journal of English Studies*.

Luke Kemp researches the end of the world. He is a Research Affiliate at the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk (CSER) at the University of Cambridge and a Visiting Fellow with the Cascade Institute. He has advised and led foresight studies for multiple international organisations, including the WHO and Convention on Biological Diversity. His work has been covered by media outlets such as the BBC, the New York Times, and the New Yorker. Luke holds both a Doctorate in Political Science and a Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies with first class honours from the Australian

National University (ANU). His first book, *Goliath's Curse: The History and Future of Societal Collapse*, will be published with Penguin in July 2025.

Léa Lacan is an environmental anthropologist at the University of Cologne and a member of the Global South Studies Center (GSSC). After her PhD on human-forest relations and conservation in Kenya, she is now working in the ERC-funded project 'Rewilding the Anthropocene' in southern Africa. Her current research focuses on the politics of local wildlife conservation and disease control in southwestern Zambia at the intersection of political ecology and more-than-human anthropology.

Laura Maria Lojo-Rodríguez is Full Professor of English Literature (Department of English Studies, Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, Spain). Her research interests comprise literature(s) in English, gender studies, environmental humanities, border theory and post-structuralist literary theory, among others. Some of her latest publications are *Gender and Short Fiction: Women's Tales in Contemporary Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2018, co-edited with Jorge Sacido); *Borders and Border Crossing in the Contemporary English Short Story* (London: Palgrave, 2019, co-edited with Barbara Korte) or *Postcolonial Youth in Contemporary Fiction in Britain* (Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 2021, co-edited with Jorge Sacido and Noémí Pereira). Lojo is also the principal investigator of the research project 'Tales from the Border': Global Change and Identity in Contemporary British Short Fiction, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation and Head of the Research Institute for the Humanities (University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain).

Stephen Muecke is Senior Research Fellow in the Nulungu Research Institute of the University of Notre Dame Australia. He is a cultural theorist and ethnographer who has collaborated for many years with the Goolarabooloo people of the Kimberley region in Western Australia. An early result of that collaborative work was the book *Reading the Country: Introduction to Nomadology* (1984), co-authored with Krim Benterak and Paddy Roe, which explored the meaning and politics of place through Aboriginal narratives, songs and paintings. More recently, again with Paddy Roe, he published *The Children's Country: Creation of a Goolarabooloo Future in North-West Australia* (2021). He is also a creative writer (*The Mother's Day Protest and Other Fictocritical Essays* was published in 2016) and has translated several books from French into English, notably *Another Science is Possible* (2018), by Belgian philosopher Isabelle Stengers, *The Wandering Souls* (2019), by French ethnopsychiatrist Tobie Nathan, and *Our*

Grateful Dead: Stories of Those Left Behind, (2021) by Belgian ethologist Vinciane Despret.

Carolyn Schwegler is Senior Researcher at MESH and the Department of German Linguistics and Literature I (IDSLI) at the University of Cologne. She is a sociolinguist focusing on pragmatics, in particular multimodal discourse and conversation analysis. Carolyn understands her discipline as an applied and culturally oriented research field with ample multidisciplinary links. Currently, she is engaged in several interdisciplinary and international projects, e.g. an AHRC/DFG-project on modelling climate futures (CCM) in multimodal discourse arenas, an EU-funded project about disease prediction (PreTAD), an interfaculty project concerning Human and Earth System Coupled Climate Research (HESCOR), as well as some smaller projects concerning interdisciplinary research on pain and wellbeing. Her most recent publications explore concepts such as agency, normality, coping, climate imaginaries, and group identities from a linguistic perspective. Furthermore, Carolyn is co-editor of the volumes *Nature, Environment, Sustainability* (Mattfeldt/Schwegler/Wanning 2021) and *Medial Identities* (Schwegler/Steen 2024).

Sandro Simon's research has explored marginal(ised) economic practices, mobilities and multispecies relations across wet and dry environments in West-, East- Central- and Southern Africa. He works at the intersections of environmental and economic anthropology, the anthropology of work, legal anthropology, science and technology studies, poststructuralism and phenomenology. He does so multimodally, combining different methods and forms of representation, such as film, sound, photography, academic text and creative non-fiction. He is based at the Global South Studies Center (GSSC) and affiliated with the Centre for Multidisciplinary Environmental Studies in the Humanities (MESH) and the CRC Future Rural Africa at the University of Cologne.

Per Esben Svelstad is professor of Norwegian at the Department of Teacher Education, NTNU in Trondheim. He likes to make his students work creatively on texts in different genres and media, exploring in dialogue what they might do with texts—and what texts do to them. His research interests include gender and queer theory, adaptation, and the culture of reading. Currently, he is working on a book addressing how literary education can contribute to Education for Sustainability and the Environment.

Sandra Swart is Professor and Chair of the Department of History at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. She received her DPhil in Modern

History from Oxford University in 2001, while simultaneously obtaining an MSc in Environmental Change and Management, also at Oxford. She studies the socio-environmental history of southern Africa, with a particular focus on the shifting relationship between humans and animals. She is an editor of the Brill book series *African and Asian Anthropocene: Studies in the Environmental Humanities*, an editor of the *South African Historical Journal* and past president of the Southern African Historical Society and current co-Vice President of European Society for Environmental History. She has supervised 21 successful doctoral students from Botswana, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. She has authored and co-authored over 80 peer-reviewed articles and chapters, co-authored two books, co-edited three books and is the sole author of *Riding High – Horses, Humans and History in South Africa* (2010 – soon coming out in Chinese!) and *The Lion's Historian: Africa's Animal Past* (2023, 2025).

Thom van Dooren, FAHA, is Professor of Environmental Humanities at the University of Sydney and a Humboldt Research Award funded Fellow in the Multidisciplinary Environmental Studies in the Humanities (MESH) research hub at the University of Cologne. His research and writing focus on some of the many philosophical, ethical, cultural, and political issues that arise in the context of species extinctions and human entanglements with threatened species and places. He is the author of *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (Columbia UP 2014), *The Wake of Crows: Living and Dying in Shared Worlds* (Columbia UP 2019), and *A World in a Shell: Snail Stories for a Time of Extinctions* (MIT 2022). His books have been translated into French, Japanese, and Italian and have won or been shortlisted for a range of prizes including the Ludwik Fleck Prize of the Society for Social Studies of Science, the Gold Nautilus Book Award, and the Prime Minister's Literary Award (non-fiction, shortlisted). With Deborah Bird Rose, he co-founded the journal *Environmental Humanities* (Duke University Press) in 2012 as the first space dedicated explicitly to this emerging field. www.thomvandooren.org

Alexa Weik von Mossner is Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Klagenfurt and principal investigator on the transdisciplinary research project "Visions of Sustainability: Documentary Films as Impulses for Societal Transformation" at the Sustainability Innovation Campus, a joint initiative of the University of Freiburg and the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology. Her research explores contemporary environmental culture from cognitive and transdisciplinary ecocritical perspectives, and she works as a disaster risk communication expert for the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) of

the European Commission. She is the author of *Cosmopolitan Minds* (University of Texas Press, 2014) and *Affective Ecologies* (Ohio State University Press, 2017) and has (co-)edited several books, among them *Empirical Ecocriticism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2023). Her most recent publications include *Fragile: A Novel* (Elzwhere 2023) and *Growing Hope: Narratives of Food Justice* (Cambridge University Press, 2025).
www.alexaweikvonmossner.com

Organising Team

Kate Rigby, Roman Bartosch, Franz Krause, Thom van Dooren,
Christoph Lange, Carolin Schwegler, Claudia Veltman,
Mars Briones, Daniel Gallano, Tanya Gautam, Yoonjung Kim,
Katrin Klandt, Saskia Maaßen, Jennifer Wasem

Contact

info-mesh@uni-koeln.de



mesh.uni-koeln.de

© 2025 MESH