Call for Papers - International Workshop: Relationality and More-Than-Human Storytelling

July 13-15, 2023, University of Augsburg, Germany

Over the last decade scholars in the Environmental Humanities, compelled by ever-accelerating climate crises, extreme weather events, toxic spills, and the unequal distribution of their disastrous consequences, have intensified their efforts in searching for meaningful ways to reflect the fundamental human impact on Earth's geology and its ecosystems. Amid these debates, calls to re-think or challenge the seemingly inherent centrality of humans as a species have grown louder, as anthropocentric understandings of humans' allegedly unique subject position have rightfully come under scrutiny. Some scholars of posthumanism have gone so far as to propose a non-hierarchical philosophy that integrates humans with living organisms as a whole, creating a flat ontology (DeLanda).

The human, in such conceptions, is to be fully decentered and agency is instead attached to phenomena that "'emerge'" as a result of the "entangled agencies" among various agents (Barad). While such approaches lead to fascinating new perspectives, their insights obviously also trouble core aspects of storytelling: looking for the non-human/more-than-human in literature is anything but intuitive, given that the act of writing is itself ultimately a human one. Various research methodologies within the Environmental Humanities, such as New Materialism, Elemental Ecocriticism, and Object-Oriented Ontology have proliferated in recent years as scholars seek to find new ways of conceptualizing human existence in a more-than-human world. At the same time, proponents of bringing about not only 'green' but just transitions have good reason to caution against losing sight of inequalities among humans in these endeavors.

This workshop aims to embrace these tensions through the lens of relationality as a potential means to decenter the human, while bearing in mind human injustices: Especially when thinking relationality not solely in terms of human-human relations, the human can arguably be placed in a wide and intricate network of what scholars such as Jane Bennett and Bruno Latour call 'actants.' Building on Erin James' categorization of "narrative as a particular cognitive affordance by which humans write worlds" (2022), it is our goal to interrogate and explore various ways of how this plays out in literature and other ways of storytelling.

Potential topics should focus on some form of relationality, including, but not limited to:

- Narratological experiments that decenter the human
- Human-animal relationships
- Nonhuman fiction
- Plant studies
- Reconsiderations of human responsibilities (and place) in a more-than-human world
- New Materialism
- Elemental Ecocriticism
- Object-Oriented Ontology
- Genre in the context of more-than-human storytelling
- Ethics of decentering the human

Please send a 300-500 word abstract and a short bio to relationality2023@philhist.uni-augsburg.de by April 10, 2023.