

OPEN FIELDS

Art and Agriculture

Reflections on the sensitive and diverse interaction between humans and nature have existed since prehistory in the form of art, as well as everyday and ritual actions. Today, this complex of themes shapes discourses in the natural sciences and the humanities, especially since we are increasingly reaching the brink of our planet's capacities through the (ab)use of natural resources with the help of turbo-capitalist economic growth. The unbridled acceleration of industry and business since the Industrial Revolution – higher, further, faster – ignores the complex relationship between nature and human beings and our dependence on a limited living environment. The global catastrophe of climate change first makes the vulnerability of taking and giving evident and raises the question of what is necessary for our existence.

Agriculture, which has fulfilled and regulated our basic needs since we became sedentary in the Neolithic Age, and art, which reflects society and confronts it with new possibilities, become exciting fields of reference in these considerations. The project ***OPEN FIELDS - Art and Agriculture*** focuses on these basic human needs for physical and mental sustenance. At the same time, it is about historical, political and social contexts, new impulses and current approaches. The meeting of two apparent opposites gives space to something new.

Inspired by the renewed interest in Alexander von Humboldt, in particular in his work *Cosmos* and his comprehensive description of Planet Earth, Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel state: "If there is a benefit to the tragedy of Covid-19, it is that it has made cruelly obvious to all the necessity of finally 'landing' somewhere, that is, of taking seriously the very shape of the critical zones that we inhabit together with myriads of virus, bacteria, plants, organisms and other living forms." (*Critical Zones – The Science and Politics of Landing on Earth*, eds. Bruno Latour, Peter Weibel and ZKM/Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, Cambridge, MA/London: The MIT Press, 2021, p. 7)

In 2000, the meteorologist Paul J. Crutzen coined the term "Anthropocene" as the period in which human influence on the earth is growing exponentially and leaving long-term traces. Closely related to this concept formation is the analysis of human-made changes on the earth's surface, which gives rise to new approaches to comprehensive ecological ethics. In the newly emerging Post-Anthropocene, this human dominance is examined and reflected upon in terms of its political, economic, social or personal history, and questions are asked

about a livable future in the critical zone – that stratum from and on which we live. These questions affect all realms.

The ***OPEN FIELDS*** project focuses on essential aspects at the local level, namely those of agriculture in direct encounter with art, because both are and provide necessities for the society.

With the beginning of sedentarization, the lasting influence of humans on the earth begins and, with agriculture, one of the oldest professions emerges, which means an encompassing attitude towards life.

Today, about one third of the earth's land surface is used for agriculture. This includes the cultivation and harvesting of agricultural products, forestry, fishing, hunting, cattle breeding, the growing of wine, grain, vegetables or fruit and their processing, the use of hydropower, but also seed breeding and product marketing, as well as the development of innovative and new approaches to production, from which key existential questions arise.

Because of developments aimed solely at rapid growth and quick profits, which exploited both the soil and the people, agricultural knowledge of the overall contexts and their appreciation gradually lost out to global considerations and interests. The successive shifting of cheap, ruthless, inhuman and unethical food production to other countries, the occupation of second worlds that are exploited to generate supposed wealth, the resulting forced migration, monocultures, factory farming or mass transport are phenomena that contradict life itself. The awareness that there is no permanent growth and that overexploitation cannot be carried out arbitrarily corresponds to appreciative agricultural action in the clever and respectful handling and knowledge of reflections on and reactions of nature and thus our survival.

Counteracting the retarding notions of a reactionary steering towards the supposed security of the nation state or the presently emerging regressive tendencies towards “blood and soil,” the ***OPEN FIELDS*** project is about exploring connections and understanding conditions within areas of tension that affect us all: from the issue of self- and external exploitation to financial or regulatory conditions, to the conflict zones of industrial mass production and regional, small-scale production, over-fertilization and the desire for balanced and complex cycles that take time, right up to pressure from retail chains, dumping prices, new forms of enslavement, struggles for survival, but also the demise of farmers. As a matter of fact, we are all faced with complex questions of life and survival, and problem areas that are not only dealt with in agriculture in an exemplary manner, but also with a vital dimension.

Art has always reflected events; it not only sharpens our view of the present, but also our awareness of contexts from history into the future. Being an artist does not mean pursuing

a profession in the traditional sense. Rather, it is also a way of life that combines *téchnē*, *epistéḗmē* and *aísthēsis*.

Collaboration and confrontation between art and agriculture should thus lead to an understanding that everything is connected and to the creation of new works. The relevant questions that affect us all should not be thought and worked out in distance to the immediate producers of animal or plant products — those tending the land to preserve specific cultural landscapes — but through direct encounter, friction, with mutual respect towards farmers and in reflection upon them. Instead of descending from a meta level, various layers and strata can be searched for, examined, tilled, questioned and addressed, new “landing approaches” can be started and fields opened.

OPEN FIELDS not only wants to open real regions of thinking and doing, but also new ones in terms of content and transdisciplinarity. It is not about studying purely theoretically and from afar, but about immersion, active participation and exchange to better understand processes and dynamics, explore history and specific local, political, societal history/histories and realities to question new approaches to coexistence, in order to address the future and to develop works from it.

Elisabeth Fiedler