

I am very excited to welcome you all to Surfing the Semiosphere, Ecology of Senses, and look forward to working together in Kilpisjärvi.

To make the most of our time together, pleasurable and productive, we need to develop a plan together prior to the fieldweek. Here and now is where we will start.

- It would be great if you could all introduce yourself briefly, what your particular interest is in the theme of our group, your expectations and any initial ideas you may have.
- The general goal of the workweek is to do (outdoor:) fieldwork, exploring, investigating, inventorying meaningful interrelationships in the surroundings of the biological fieldstation, based on biosemiotic principles. The general goal of the preparatory time will be to think about and outline specific field week goals and what would be ideal, practical, and feasible to bring to Kilpisjärvi in terms of equipment. What do we collectively already have, what can we otherwise arrange.
- In addition to our fieldwork, I also suggest we reserve some time for brainstorming and discussion during the fieldweek, to contextualize our fieldwork and so contribute to the larger goals of Biosemiotics, doing a different kind of research and reimagining our worlds in radical new ways. In the coming week I will provide some literature/background to get us started. Any, thoughts, contributions regarding field methods, sensors, Arctic environment or any other topic you think relevant is most welcome.

Dear All,

I hope you are all having a wonderful summer, considering or despite the sweltering heat in the northern hemisphere.

Our bioart fieldweek is nearing and it would be great if we can put our heads together to brainstorm and formulate some common goals and a workplan during the upcoming weeks.

Thanks to those of you who already wrote lengthy emails on their interest and expectations; I am looking forward to continue the process.

I am aware that the literature I sent earlier is a lot to go through, but maybe you had some time to skim. The reason why I choose those is to give you an idea of the effort of the biosemiotic research field to bridge the mind/body gap and extend the world of meaning to all organisms. Humans are not lonely at the top, but integrated/embodied in the bigger whole, and the question whether or not we need a brain/central nervous system pops up regularly, when trying to reconfigure (spatial) relationships.

So, here is a bit more on my background, interest and directions I am thinking of...

In a nutshell, my research as an archaeologist has long focused on diversity in human spatial experience and cognition (a fundamental cognitive domain), to understand how people organize their surrounding worlds. Based on my own research of Native American ancestral sites (New Mexico) and literature focused on other parts of the world, I have come to understand that an absolute frame of reference, common in many indigenous cultures, is not used in modern western thinking. My belief is that western spatial thinking abilities are somehow limited in comparison.

Through exploring spatial ontology I began to suspect the richness in multidimensionality, multimodality, and multiperspectival aspects.... Wind is a 'thing' maybe more important than 'things' (topography, architectural elements) that facilitate its movement. Things are different depending on the place of observation. Things can be objects or processes, relationships and movement are key. – it opened my mind to thinking about space differently and biosemiotics provided a framework in which to explore this further.

Fast forward

Although trained in, and excited about the possibilities that emerging geospatial methods and technologies had/have to offer, together with some colleagues, we began to think about a different mapping system beyond the Cartesian grid and 'god-view', inspired by wave characteristics that facilitate information flow, communication and inform navigation and movement.

Von Uexküll's Umwelt concept helps to imagine how different wave characteristics and frequencies are used by different organisms beyond human comprehension, and can serve as inspiration for novel mapping systems. For instance, to stay with animals for the moment, the ability of bees to navigate on polarized light. The Vikings 'mimicked' this ability by using Icelandic spar to navigate across the ocean. Reindeer seeing UV light; many animals having magnetoreceptive abilities and the possible role of cryptochrome. Introduction of man-made radiation may change all this... (we are polluting our native habitat in many different ways, although we may not be the only species doing that).

There is another reason why we humans are not so special as we think we are and should consider our place in the world more holistically instead of at the top of a hierarchical system.

I was fortunate to study with the late Lew Binford (New Archaeology) who posed that humans were scavengers, like crows and wolves, instead of 'noble' hunters.

We may think that we left that phase behind, but recent research supports Binford's ideas and not just for our ancestors. Unlike other primates, humans seem to have high stomach acidity, much like other scavengers. Meaning, their gut is designed to act as a strong filter for microbial damage (Beasley et.al. 2015).

I am currently on a large farm that produces raw milk dairy products, highly contested and forbidden on many markets, yet it seems our stomachs are made for it and as (immersed) humans we probably thrive around and within these diverse microbial communities. By killing off these cultures we do ourselves a disservice. Just like the wind, these cultures hold important messages, maybe we are just facilitators/vessel of the movement of these communities. Scaling up and down, multimodal and multidimensional....

The Arctic landscape offers ample opportunities to explore (and scavenge) the semiosphere....

Looking forward to your thoughts and ideas

Best

Judith

I am working both as an independent artist, and academic researcher in London. I have been making work in and around various issues relating to science for around 20 years and spent a great deal of this recent period developing fieldwork and field experiments as artworks, with Office of Experiments, which I founded in 2004. Office of Experiments is a network of researchers who work independently of academic research on projects of shared interest, often without a disciplinary bias. Our current research focuses on 'The Deep Field', a term for addressing artist work out in the field, in which we are very interested. Our website is currently being updated, but more information will be there soon. Aside from that I co-direct a research centre called CREAM at University of Westminster, which is also very interesting.

Before I start delving deeper, I look forward to learn a little more about the 'biosemiotics principles', that I hope will inform my own suggestions for fieldwork experiments. As I am interested in the concept and process of the experimental, including experimental systems (Rheinberger) I need to do this groundwork with these ideas to work out what might be of value to the group, before I suggest anything back to the group. So any further information- authors, artists, talks etc., are my starting point. I look forward to hearing more.

if this helps, I have looked recently at making 'material' or visible in situ, data, using a simple light painting / photographic approach, using seismic data feeds taken from a global sensor array. But I am also interested in the contrast between these high tech and remote human sensors, and the relationship to non-human actors- particularly as they are read with situated knowledge of a place. It is the contrast between what has been called the 'technosphere' and more socially/locally informed readings of nature that work closely with non-human actors around which I think I would like to explore further with others. Scale also interests me, as does the concept of an 'event' structure, a term for a kind of 'time based work' around which much of my work is based. This comes from the work of the late John Latham, a British artist I was in dialogue with.

So, I look forward to sharing with you as much as possible ideas and plans on what I hope to be a very engaging field lab.

With best wishes from the descending chaos of the UK!

Neal

I am an artist and a researcher, and I work mainly in Brussels, but also regularly in Barcelona. I am looking to translate matter, phenomena, and intelligence from nature to (metabolic) artworks. In this frame, I observe raw data from nature, which is programmed, scanned, or streamed to interpret it as information during in-field research phases. I am using several ways to bring out hidden structures in nature by constructing original technological methods to probe the living world and by translating that in artistic creations through sonification, visualization, sculptures, large-scale long-term installations, workshops, lectures and books.

I regularly collaborate with scientists and DIY technologies are often involved in my art. My research navigates between experimental urban horticulture, scientific research and metabolic sculptures,

and my experiments connect living, intelligent systems -as social insects (honeybees) and bacteria- and biotechnology with artistic and technological prototyping and experimentation. My toolset includes microbial life and material science, as well as various measurement and information technologies such as scanning electron microscopes (SEM), sensors, big data cloud storage, signal processing and artificial intelligence. The artworks that result follow a complex work-methodology combining first-hand observation in my rooftop garden lab and -apiary, laboratory probes, and digital monitoring.

For a large part of the past decade I have been growing, hacking, digitizing, building, and thinking about beehives – particularly those in urban areas. This has led to the bio-art project 'The Intelligent Guerrilla Beehive', which got an Honorary Mention at Ars Electronica 2017, in the Hybrid Art discipline. Collaborating with biologists, designers and engineers, I have been re-conceptualizing what a beehive is and what it can be. My experiments connect living, intelligent systems and technology/biosciences with social, architectural and technological prototyping and experimentation. This long-term project has been an incredible source of inspiration for research into issues of ecology, architecture and social sustainability of urban environments, addressing urban ecology, politics, and social systems. My work illustrates radical and necessary ecological searches for sharing urban life.

Complementary to my artistic work, I am a cultural facilitator, curator and educator. I was the (co-) founder of several non-profit art organizations, as Looking Glass, So-on and Okno (1997–2015). For these organisations I was producing several european cultural projects and I through those I was developing a strong national and international cultural network.

I am very much looking forward to the Field-Notes workshop and to get know all of you. Kilpisjärvi looks amazing and it will be a true challenge to surf its ecosystem!

all the best & see you in September,

AnneMarie Maes