

VITAL GREEN HOUSE

VITALGREENHOUSE ERC Project
Launch Conference

25 March, 2025

9.00-17.30

International Institute of Social History (IISG)

Cruquiusweg 31, 1019 AT, Amsterdam

Max Nettlela room

Launch Conference Programme

09.00-09.30	Welcome coffee
09.30-10.30	Welcome and introduction to the VITALGREENHOUSE project by REBECA IBÁÑEZ MARTÍN , MAYA LANE , and NICOLAS LEGROS
10.30-11.15 Keynote	MANUEL TIRONI - <i>Suelos in Transition: Soil Care, Local Knowledge, and the Limits of Agroecology</i> Discussant: BRANWYN POLEYKETT , UvA
11.15-11.30	Coffee Break
11.30-12.20 Session 1	ELSE VOGEL - <i>Talking Tails: Developing Porcine Life in Dutch Pig Farming</i> SOPHIA EFSTATHIOU - <i>Technologies of Effacement: Shaping Ethics Through Technology in Human and More-Than-Human Encounters</i> Discussant: SOPHIE ELPERS , Meertens Institute
12.20-13.15	Lunch Break*
13.15-14.30 Session 2	ANTONIA WEISS - <i>Vital Stories, Deep Foodscape: Human and Plant Mobility in an Amsterdam Greenhouse</i> CLEMENS DRIESSEN - <i>Revisiting Cartesian Futures: Or How to Escape the Greenhouses Descartes Built in Westland?</i> ŠPELA PETRIČ - <i>Exercising Irreverent Intimacies in the 'Weltinnenraum des Kapitals'</i> Discussant: FENNA SMITS , UvA
14.30-14.45	Coffee Break
14.45-15.35 Session 3	DANIEL MÜNSTER - <i>Cycling, Fixing, Amending: Soil Repair with Biochar in India</i> MAAN BARUA - <i>Plantation Worlds</i> Discussant: DAT NGUYEN , NIOD
15.40-16.30 Session 4	ELLA JAE FISHER - <i>Labor Movements: Habit, Regiment, and the Will to Wander</i> HEATHER PAXSON - <i>Timescapes of Food Mobilities</i> Discussant: MAGGIE SCHMITT , author and independent researcher
16.30-17.30	Borrel
18.00	Dinner (for speakers and discussants only)

*Important: Please RSVP for the conference (limited space), as well as indicate any dietary preferences using [this form](#).

Abstracts

Manuel Tironi

Suelos in Transition: Soil Care, Local Knowledge, and the Limits of Agroecology

Caring for *suelos* (soils) is a fundamental practice for Indigenous and non-Indigenous small farmers in southern Chile. While destabilised and sometimes denied by different waves of state-fueled modernist agro-tech in the last century, new programmes and calls for an ‘agroecological transition’ have turned traditional, Indigenous, or otherwise place-based soil knowledge into policy objectives. In this presentation I draw on an ongoing interdisciplinary project on soil care in Curarrehue to discuss the limits of agroecology as a theory and praxis when *suelos* is taken as a concept to think-with. On the one hand, the meaning of ‘agroecology’ needs to be slowed-down if *suelos* is granted with the possibility of intervening in the making of more just, situated, and sustainable human-soil relations; on the other, *suelos* render visible that a transition to agroecological soil management in communities extenuated by inequality and survival requires to dismantle and redesign structural, institutional, and operational arrangements well beyond ethics and discourse.

Manuel Tironi is associate professor at the Universidad Católica de Chile.

Else Vogel

Talking Tails: Developing Porcine Life in Dutch Pig Farming

Like beak trimming in poultry and dehorning in cattle, pig tail docking is meant to adapt animals’ bodies and behavior to current industrial housing standards. It is, however, not only a painful procedure; animal welfare scientists argue that the state of pigs’ tails is revealing of a broad range of welfare issues and thereby a valuable ‘iceberg indicator’. In this presentation, I detail how the efforts of researchers, farmers and veterinarians to abolish tail docking and prevent tail biting shape the pig farm as a lively and affective infrastructure and ‘captive ecology’ (Holmberg, 2021). Drawing on ethnographic research in the Dutch pork industry, I show how the problematization of tail biting has led to regulatory and research practices with highly curated spatial, material and social arrangements that highlight particular versions of animal subjectivity and sociality. Through the attention to tail biting, the animal house thus emerges not only as a place where meat is produced but also as epistemic sites where pigs are placed ‘in order to know them as animals’ (Holmberg 2021: 862).

Else Vogel is assistant professor at the University of Amsterdam.

Sophia Efstathiou

Technologies of Effacement: Shaping Ethics Through Technology in Human and More-Than-Human Encounters

In this presentation I introduce the concept of ‘technologies of effacement’ (TEFFs). I propose that some technologies involved in agricultural labour do not only work as material, technical or social apparatuses but also as ethical actors. This happens because TEFFs block encounters through, what philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (thinking of humans) has called the ‘face’: i.e. embodied or body-based interfaces which reveals beings’ uniqueness, or their radical

otherness and that call us to encounter them from a space of unknowing, unlearning and ethics. Rather TEFFs help encounter human and more-than-humans in agriculture as already known, typified, or professionalised, leaving little room for ethics to shape encounters. TEFFs include a. architecture, and built environments, including special enclosures or cages, b. entry and exit rules into agricultural spaces, c. personal protective equipment, d. protocols for interacting with other human and more-than-human beings, in the agricultural space, e. naming and labelling conventions. Besides operating to expedite work, or ensure safety or hygiene, I argue that these technologies modulate the potential for ethical encounters to happen in agricultural spaces.

Sophia Efstathiou is a senior researcher at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

Antonia Weiss

Vital Stories, Deep Foodscape: Human and Plant Mobility in an Amsterdam Greenhouse

Over the past year, a disused commercial greenhouse located on the periphery of Amsterdam has been transformed into an allotment complex under glass, allowing citizens to grow crops for personal consumption in a modified climate. In this presentation, I share some of the initial insights and questions that have been raised in the context of an ongoing study that closely follows a group of greenhouse gardeners, and which investigates the individual life stories behind their horticultural skills and garden creations. Drawing on a combination of ethnographic, historical, and spatial forms of analysis, the paper charts intersecting histories of migration and plant mobility as they become manifest in the greenhouse environment. I situate these histories of mobility in relation to the 'deep foodscape' which the greenhouse gardeners inhabit and continue to modify and shape.

Antonia Weiss is a postdoctoral researcher at the Wageningen University and a Research Fellow at the AMS Institute.

Clemens Driessen

Revisiting Cartesian Futures: Or How to Escape the Greenhouses Descartes Built in Westland?

No, René Descartes didn't build greenhouses in Westland. Nor should we project the figure of evil genius behind our late modern condition on a single dead white male. But if we can trace the still dominant mix of Cartesian ideas as they emerged in seventeenth century Dutch landscapes, perhaps this helps to find ways to escape the world of the contemporary greenhouse and the thinking it inspires: growing food in abstract space, where life is treated mechanically, knowledge is disembodied, landscape is passive matter to functionally optimize, people are not yet proper robots, and nature is to be mastered and possessed. Is another greenhouse possible? Or can we find vibrant relations in the cracks of cartesian logics?

Clemens Driessen is assistant professor at Wageningen University and Research.

Špela Petrič

Exercising Irreverent Intimacies in the 'Weltinnenraum des Kapitals'

For one week in February 2025, six artists entered the industrial tomato greenhouse as the consumers we are, in the multiple senses of the word: as those who eat the tomatoes, as those who purchase the vegetables, and as those who inadvertently buy-into the affordances of this economic-technological apparatus. As bodies who are cultivated by this industrial infrastructure and who re-produce it by internalized patterns of thought and behavior. For this week we considered our presence in the greenhouse normalized, as if a right acquired through the struggle to establish the means of our bodies' production a matter of public concern. Guided by contamination, risky encounters, and the erotic we explored propositional intimacies towards the possibility of our transformation as consumers against hegemonic futurities at large.

Špela Petrič is a new media artist.

Daniel Münster

Cycling, Fixing, Amending: Soil Repair with Biochar in India

My paper offers reflections on my recent anthropological fieldwork in the emergent world of biochar in India. Biochar is carbon rich material that is produced in a process of oxygen deprived burning (called pyrolysis). My work traces the multiple meanings, aspirations, and interests that meet around this emergent technology. The main uses of biochar are in environmental remediation, (agrarian) waste management, soil fertility restoration, carbon sequestration. I hope to show how in the Indian context biochar although universally praised as revolutionary technology and hopeful technology for climate, landscape ecology and soil repair is caught up in conflicting interests. I hope to show some of the fault lines between communities of practice that foreground either soil repair, carbon fixing, or waste removal. Each of these perspectives have consequences for the scalability of biochar, its value/valuation, and potential for accumulation/extraction. I foreground communities that approach biochar through the needs of toxic/degraded soils.

Daniel Münster is associate professor at the University of Oslo.

Maan Barua

Plantation Worlds

This talk aims to formulate a grammar for grappling with the legacies of plantations and their persistence as a coercive duration. Drawing from long-term ethnographic and archival work on tea plantations in Assam, northeast India, it identifies how plantation logics - including the exploitation and expropriation of life, the violent imposition of spatial binaries, the simplification of ecology, and the generation of ruins - not only enabled the expansion of colonial rule but became a modality of power that serves as a possible blueprint for coercive modes of accumulation from life. The talk then turns to the ways in which plantation logics operate in the present, notably in terms of a necropolitics of capital and the continued expansion of the plantation form. In conclusion, the talk discusses what plantation legacies might offer for thinking about agriculture in contexts beyond the case, and through the world views of one's interlocutors, hints at situated ways in which these coercive logics might be undone. The talk is presented in both a narrative and visual mode.

Maan Barua is university lecturer at the University of Cambridge.

Ella Jae Fisher

Labor Movements: Habit, Regiment, and the Will to Wander

Labor is oftentimes a form of movement, but who can move, how they move, and why are questions of power. In garment production zones in Nicaragua, the bodily movements of laboring are not only deeply habituated but also highly regulated. Laboring bodies are governed as commodity flows within geographic space, from bathrooms to borders. They are the cumulative site of inhabited experience, sometimes expressing as chronic disease. And in Nicaraguan production zones they are also the regimented by efficiency experts, including on-site consultants who report on such things as ‘extraneous arm movements.’ The politics of movement in work is, unsurprisingly, connected to a counter politics of movement. Many line workers, for example, actively seek out less attention-demanding, but lower paying, positions because they allow the mind to ‘wander’ whilst doing work. Meanwhile, some alternative workplaces have formalized the vernacular politics of daydreaming, as Marcuse explores, by creating spaces within which the will to wander may push back against the regimented movements of the body that are so characteristic of the conversion of those creative energies of labor into capital. This paper explores the connection between labor and movement in all its forms, with an eye toward generating new lines of inquiry into human and nonhuman experiences of labor.

Ella Jae Fisher is professor at Western Washington University.

Heather Paxson

Timescapes of Food Mobilities

Transportation and logistics today are factored as part of the production of goods. Drawing on ongoing ethnographic research, this paper describes the work of cheese importers and exporters in terms of harmonising asyncoated timescapes of mobility and perishability. The skilled work of moving cheese across oceans and borders reveals the role of time - beyond more familiar elements of place - in consolidating and preserving the material qualities that are valued in speciality foods.

Heather Paxson is William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Anthropology at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Schedule

Launch Conference

Date:	Tuesday 25 March, 2025
Time:	9.00 - 17.30
Conference Location:	International Institute of Social History (IISG), Cruquiusweg 31, 1019 AT Amsterdam
Conference room:	Max Nettelau
Coffee and Lunch:	Provided at venue*
Evening Dinner:	TBD

*Important: Please RSVP for for the conference (space is limited), lunch and indicate any dietary preferences using [this form](#).

If you have trouble finding either location, call Rebeca: +31629157062.