

## Working Title: Politics in Disguise

Claus Schöning project proposal for Resonances:NaturArchy of the Joint Research Center  
31.08.2022

Medium: digital film

Duration: 10-20 minutes

Sound: 5.1 Dolby

How to imagine a politics of the non-human? If politics is a human practice, then the question shifts to how we, as humans, can escape the narrow definition of the human self in the practice of policy making. As discussed in the scientific background of the proposal, there are methods to integrate values and identities into policy making. I want to explore these methods scientifically and performatively for non-human values and identities. Only because we, as humans, can hardly grasp the *conditio non humana* from firsthand experience does not entail that we should not try to do just to our environment. If pretending to be non-human, how would humans conduct policy making? And could there be a guideline to sensitise policy makers for the non-human? How to confront the formal practice of policy making with the vast and diverse dimensions of the non-human?

Central to my approach is the performance in disguise as a form of hiding and pretending. This engagement with the representational discourse can be traced throughout my work. In particular it relates to my 2021 film *Beast Science*, which prominently features a costume as well. The acting in disguise specially draws attention to the dilemma of understanding non-humans as humans in a playful and visually surprising way, while addressing omnipresent concerns of appropriation. The notion of escaping oneself is embedded in the playful act of performing as something different. How could a mushroom behave in the process of policy making? How would animals argue for their values?



*Image 1: sketch of a film still #1*



Image 2: sketch of a film still #2

I want to confront the institutional space of policy making - namely office and conference rooms - with the playful and weird culture of disguise. (see images 1 and 2) Aesthetically I want to produce a cinematic experience with highly composed images and high-quality footage, colour grading and sound. While being reminiscent of subcultures like the Furrries or Live Action Role Playing, the displacement of these disguised agents to the formal world of politics asks for who the policies are made and who is making them. I especially want to incorporate questions regarding our blind spots for non-human values in the film (see planned reserach in the scientific background). The film will be presented in a cinema like setting (see image 3 and 4)

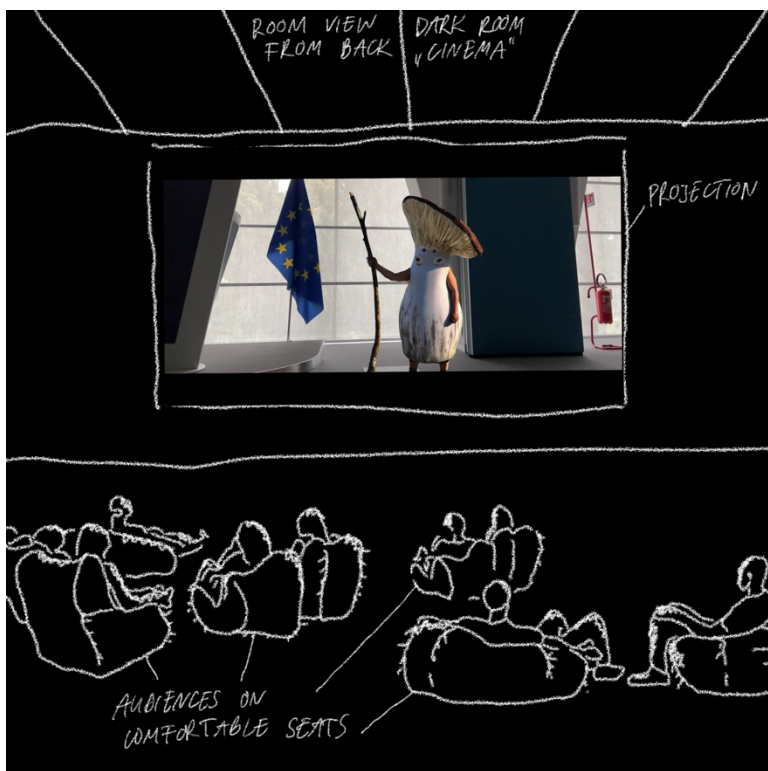


Image 3: view from the back of the showroom

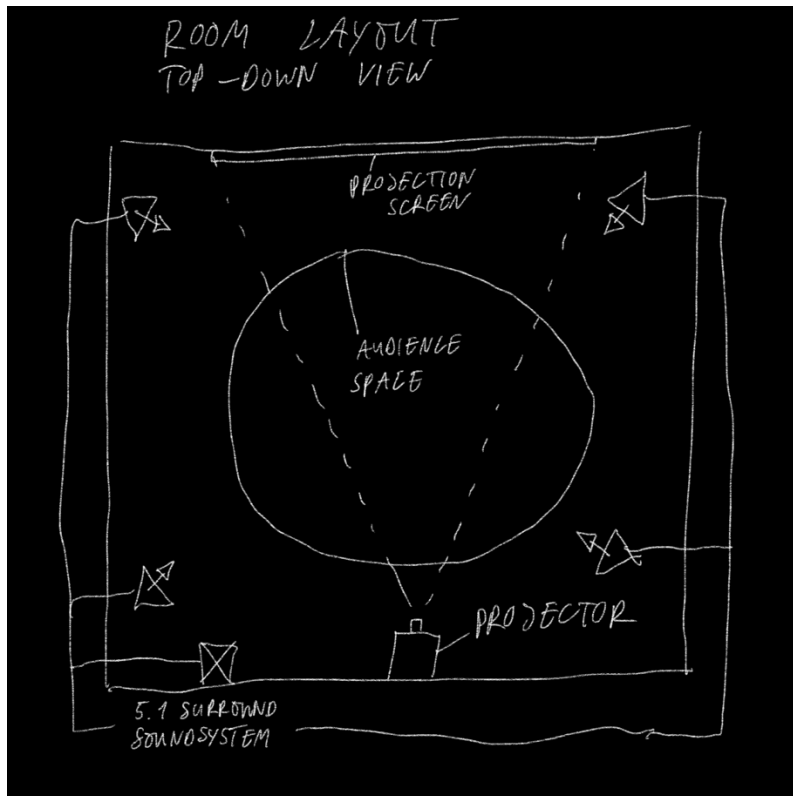


Image 4: top-down view of the showroom

For the production of the costumes, I am in contact with Prof. Stefanie Wenner (performance and theater), who is also conducting performances as a mushroom as well as the make-up department of the Academy of Fine Arts Dresden, with which I developed the costumes for earlier works. I also want to contact the european Furry community for expertise.

For the production of image and sound I can draw on experts in videography, postproduction and sound design from previous productions.

Other works that inspired this proposal include ANIMAL by Annika Larsson (2012), Stefanie Weners performances (from 2018) and Natasha Sadr Haghhighians Ankersentrum (2019).

As my scientific partner Julian Keimer is an expert for policy analysis and co-authored a report on values and identities in policy making, I want to connect the fields of nature and law with identity, meanings and values. With him I want to assess the possibilities to implement the values of non-human nature in policy making. I can well imagine implementing more experts in the field of biodiversity to get a better understanding of non-human networks (Gregoire Dubois would be fitting) and experts on evolutionary biology, as part of the research could be directed to the origins of values (see scientific background)

#### Technical Framework (exhibition):

- Dark room
- projector (min. full HD, approx. 3000 Lumen, projection size and distance depending on room)
- playback device (depending on video formats)
- 5.1 Dolby Surround system
- possibly acoustic optimisation of the room
- mounts and cables
- comfortable seats for the audience

#### Budget estimation:

- costume design and production: 2500 EUR
- 3 filming days with videographer, lighting, make-up, sound: 5000 EUR
- transport/location scouting: 1200 EUR
- equipment rental (filming): 1000 EUR
- postproduction (sounddesign, colour grading, cut, delivery): 1500 EUR
- equipment rental (exhibition): 1000 EUR
- exhibition setup: 700 EUR

Total production budget: 12900 EUR

# Scientific Background

Claus Schöning, Julian Keimer, 31.08.2022

Many different narratives can be imagined to tell the story of human impact on the non-human<sup>1</sup>. Narratives that seem to dominate the contemporary discourse on tackling climate change share an economic rationalist approach. They emphasize the commensurability of growth and sustainability, and the belief that a pragmatic trajectory is needed to realise the so called orderly transition<sup>2</sup>.

Even from a capitalist perspective it seems favourable to invest now and minimise losses in the future - if intergenerational responsibilities are not discarded. As the time frame for such a transition shrinks to ten years<sup>3</sup> utilitarian voices become louder, stating that there is no time for fundamental change. So the free market should be stimulated to organize the transition by its own means. Certainly in this narrative the non-human remains as the exploited, being at the mercy of humans, that want to exploit - sustainably.

Is sustainable exploitation a sustainable purpose? Will it legitimise sustainable exploitation of humans? How to treat the non-human not as mere means but ends in themselves? How will politics of the post climate change be like?

What I am concerned with here is the ability of a speciesist sustainability to sustain.

The European Commission Joint research Centre is developing methods and tools to make policymaking more aware of various values, including ones, policymakers do not hold themselves<sup>4</sup>. These methods and toolkits, albeit being designed for the recognition of various human values, could be used to explore how to be sensitive to non-human values in policy making.

For this purpose a literature research on non-human values will be essential, but also on the possibilities of their assessment in the first place. A starting point could be Chapter 3.4.1 of the Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC<sup>4</sup>, where non-human values were briefly discussed, however their application to policy making remained untouched.

Another possible starting point could be to understand the history and evolutionary development of human values, as well as their universal applicability in human societies where they were assessed<sup>4</sup>. Analogously, non-human values should apply universally at least to some species or groups thereof and should as a whole be beneficial to the survival of the individual and group – as in the evolutionary psychological explanation for human values<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> John S. Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997

<sup>2</sup> *A call for action: Climate change as a source of financial risk*. First Comprehensive report, Network for Greening the Financial System, Paris, France, 42 pp. 2019

<sup>3</sup> IPCC, 2022: Summary for Policymakers. In: *Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, p. 26

<sup>4</sup> Scharfbillig, M., Smillie, L., Mair, D., Sienkiewicz, M., Keimer, J., Pinho Dos Santos, R., Vinagreiro Alves, H., Vecchione, E., Scheunemann L., *Values and Identities - a policymaker's guide*, EUR 30800 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021, ISBN 978-92-76-40965-6, doi:10.2760/349527, JRC126150.

<sup>4</sup> Kolstad C., K. Urama, J. Broome, A. Bruvoll, M. Cariño Olvera, D. Fullerton, C. Gollier, W. M. Hanemann, R. Hassan, F. Jotzo, M.R. Khan, L. Meyer, and L. Mundaca, 2014: Social, Economic and Ethical Concepts and Methods. In: *Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*

<sup>5</sup> Sinn, J. S. (2019). Mapping Ideology: Combining the Schwartz Value Circumplex with Evolutionary Theory to Explain Ideological Differences. *Evolutionary Psychological Science*, 5(1), 44–57.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40806-018-0165-5>

Sinn, J. S., & Hayes, M. W. (2017). Replacing the Moral Foundations: An Evolutionary-Coalitional Theory of Liberal-Conservative Differences. *Political Psychology*, 38(6), 1043–1064. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12361>

Esoteric and romanticised representations of the non-human should be avoided, as they have to be regarded as an act of appropriation (similar to what has happened in postcolonial discourses previously<sup>6</sup>) but limits to commensurability also have to be taken into consideration<sup>7</sup>. A tangible outcome could be a collection of questions to assess our blind spots for non-human values. With a resulting spectrum of non-human values and potentially adopted methods and toolkits for their implementation into policy making, there can be a contribution to practical guidelines for the politics of the future. As humanity is faced with the unprecedented challenge of climate change, the urge to integrate the neglected voices of the non-human into a sustainable policy and vision become vital. If we attempt to explore and integrate these values we may find new and unexpected visions of sustainable policy making and perhaps even of ourselves.

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<sup>6</sup> Isabell Stengers, *Capitalist Sorcery*, Editions LA DECOUVERTE, Paris, France, 2005, 2007, p. 63

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Nagel, *What Is It Like to Be a Bat?*, *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 4 (Oct., 1974), pp. 435-450