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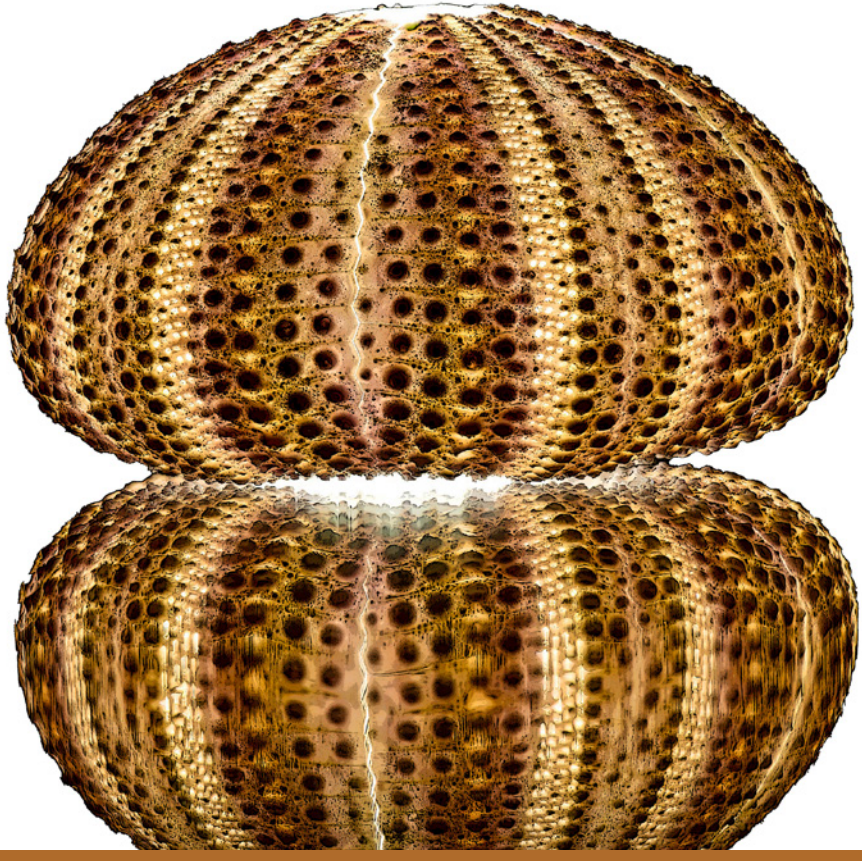
New German-language Nature Writing and the Language of Resonance and Reflection



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ABSTRACT

Nature writing is traditionally a genre of non-fictional, essayistic writing which combines vivid natural descriptions, profound introspection and ethical musings. Since 2000, the New Nature Writing (NNW) has emerged in Europe rejecting the escapist, heroic and sometimes nationalist conventions of the original American genre. This article analyses three examples from German New Nature Writing (NNW) from the early 2000s: *Laubwerk. Zur Poetik des Stadtbaums* ('The Poetics of the Urban Tree') by Marion Poschmann (2018), *Hafen von Greifswald* ('Port of Greifswald') by Judith Schalansky (2018), and *Wurzelstudien* ('Root Studies') by Anna Ospelt (2020). As with its British counterpart, German NNW is characterised by 'an attitude of mindfulness' (Goldstein 2018) and a poetic perception of nature, and is filled with 'protest energy' (Fischer 2019). Our paper will argue that, despite the very distinct approaches of the authors, these texts demonstrate an astonishing similarity in their quest for a 'language of resonance' between humans and the plant co-world and in their creation of new spaces of nature-cultural resonances

KEYWORDS

New Nature Writing, resonance catastrophe, language of resonance, mindfulness

New Nature Writing is sparked by the environmental crisis and seeks responses to it. While British NNW primarily discusses a 'recall of the wild' (Huggan 2016), the debates in German-speaking NNW focus on mindfulness and a new language of resonance with the aim of finding a poetic reflexive attitude towards nature in light of global environmental destruction. This essay starts with a brief overview of this new genre in Britain and Germany and outlines their differences and similarities. We will then look at three recent texts by some prominent German-speaking female writers. These texts are connected by a common interest of the writers in the vegetal world. Through a close reading of their observations and descriptions of nature, we will delineate how the texts under examination serve as illuminating examples of German NNW which is characterised by a particular interest in finding a new

language of resonance for the relationship between the human and the plant world.

In response to the pervasive estrangement between humans and the natural world, sociologist Hartmut Rosa has introduced the concept of resonance (2016) as a distinct mode of engaging with the world. Resonance, according to Rosa, involves a reciprocal response where a subject is impacted by the world, perceives its otherness and uniqueness, and undergoes transformation through self-efficacy, a 'triad' of affectation, emotion and transformation (Rosa 2019: 19).[1] Rosa delineates three dimensions of resonance: the 'horizontal', which pertains to social relationships such as love and friendship; the 'diagonal' which encompasses relationships with the material world; and the 'vertical', characterised by a relationship with the world as an all-encompassing totality when the perceived counterpart extends beyond the individual. In the highest form of resonance, the world itself is said to be 'given a voice' (Rosa 2019: 20). For Rosa, resonance develops when body, mind, and the tangible world converge into a harmonious triad (2016: 291). Departing from the longstanding Cartesian subject-object dualism, the concept of resonance signifies a paradigm shift by offering a viable relational framework to describe relationships between humans and the world. This concept of 'resonance' as a reciprocal relationship in its three dimensions can be fruitfully adapted to plant studies.

I. NEW NATURE WRITING SINCE THE 2000s

In the American literary tradition, nature writing is defined as a 'form of the personal, reflective essay grounded in attentiveness to the natural world and an appreciation of science but also open to the spiritual meaning and intrinsic value of nature' (Armbruster and Wallace 2001: 2). According to Thomas Lyons' influential *Guide to America's Nature Writing*, the genre has been characterised by three main criteria since its inception with Henry David Thoreau: the inclusion of 'natural history information, personal responses to nature and philosophical interpretation of nature' (Lyons 2001: 20). The foundational characteristics have persisted through subsequent genre definitions, but have also undergone

1 All translations of the text by Hartmut Rosa are by the authors.

expansion and evolution in recent times. This evolution has been closely intertwined with the development of ecocriticism since the late 1980s, extending its influence beyond traditional boundaries. The expansion encompasses not only fictional genres (Slovic 2004: 888) but also other literary forms and media (Armbruster and Wallace 2001) as well as critical perspectives addressing questions of region, ethnicity and gender.

In the last two decades, the British literary landscape has seen a 'golden age' of New Nature Writing (NNW) (Macfarlane 2013: 166). Unlike its American counterpart, this 'renaissance in Britain' is not only fueled by a profound 'longing for wilderness and nature', but more importantly, has been profundly 'energised by [a] sense of menace and hazard' stemming from the climate crisis (Ibid.: 167). Writers of the contemporary wave of British NNW challenge the recurrent accusations of nostalgic and elitist escapism, as highlighted in the debate between Poole (2013) and Mabey (2013). They actively embrace ethnic minority voices, engage in reflections on the global climate crisis, and explore new ways of representing 'wilderness', encompassing not only untouched or rural landscape, but also urban places and post-industrial wastelands (Macfarlane 2015, Stenning 2015: 2). Against a backdrop of alienation, personal loss and depression, particularly underscored by Richard Mabey (e.g. 2005), there is a notable emphasis on the healing power of connecting with nature. Jos Smith's extensive exploration of New Nature writing highlights how authors such as Macfarlane, Mabey, Tim Robinson and Alice Oswald introduce a dynamic sense of place that stands in contrast to homogenised urban cultures. In their depiction of landscapes, islands or suburban wastelands, these writers offer a counterpoint to the alienation often associated with modern life, all while diverging from 'nationalist conventions' (Smith 2017: 206) prevalent in the nineteenth century's genre tradition in North America. Jason Cowley, in the preface to a thematic issue of the journal *Granta* on NNW (2008), underscores the experimental character of the genre and its different relationship with the environment: 'They are about the discovery of exoticism in the familiar, the extraordinary in the ordinary' (Cowley 2008: 9, 11). The exploration of the extraordinary extends beyond secluded natural settings to include cities, their outskirts and industrial sites (Lilley 2017). NNW, thus, reveals an expansive understanding of nature, encouraging a rediscovery of the extraordinary within both natural and urban landscapes.

In the debate on NNW, the consideration of genre and form assumes a prominent role. In contrast to the earlier tendency to narrowly define the genre as non-fictional essayistic writing, British NNW actively seeks fresh literary and aesthetic responses to environmental degradation (Lilley 2017). This approach encompasses a diverse array of forms, including fictional genres such as novels and poetry. Described as 'passionate, pluriform and essential' (Macfarlane 2015: 6), NNW is characterised by 'originality and playfulness with form' (Stenning 2015: 5, Cowley 2008: 10). Despite this considerable expansion of the genre's scope, the majority of current NNW literature remains rooted in non- or semi-fictional texts. Autobiographies, travelogues, natural histories, and popular science essays continue to form the core of NNW expression (Stenning 2017). Nonetheless, this dynamic interplay between various literary forms underscores the genre's adaptability and its commitment to exploring diverse avenues in addressing environmental concerns.

In the face of the challenges posed by the Anthropocene, the traditional concept of nature undergoes a transformation, yielding to an often dystopian portrayal of a devastated landscape and a technologically altered environment. Within this context, the question of preserving of what remains in the natural world and establishing environmental justice comes to the forefront. It is important to note that this is not an unique phenomenon of the British literature; it is equally evident in the German-language nature writing, as will be explored in this article. The shared concern for conservation and environmental equity transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries, reflecting a global awareness of the urgent need for sustainable practice and ethical considerations in the Anthropocene era.

II. NEW NATURE WRITING IN GERMAN-LANGUAGE LITERATURE

The discussion on British NNW has found resonance in the German literary landscape, where nature writing has played only a modest role in the last 200 years (Goodbody 1998: 13, Fischer 2019: 33).[2]

2 See also the debate on the possible reasons why a comparable tradition of nature writing has not developed in Germany in the twentieth century, because of 'the burdened legacy' (Goodbody 2015: 124; Heise 2017: 3) of 'National Socialism with

Nevertheless, a deeper, albeit concealed, tradition with transnational influences, stretching from figures like Linné, Gilbert White and Thoreau back to Goethe and Alexander von Humboldt, and continuing to the present, can be excavated (Dürbeck and Kanz 2020). The impetus for a new nature writing movement emerged notably from the publishing house Verlagsgesellschaft Matthes & Seitz Berlin, which launched the *Naturkunden* series in 2013. Edited by the writer and book designer Judith Schalansky, this series is characterised by bibliophile design and rich illustrations.[3] In 2017, Matthes & Seitz Berlin, in collaboration with the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, inaugurated the 'German Prize for Nature Writing', an annual accolade. The surge of interest in German-language nature writing also found expression in several literary festivals in 2018, seen as 'a part as well a mirror of the book market' (Schröder 2020: 317). Significant contributions to this burgeoning field come from Jürgen Goldstein (2018, 2019), Simone Schröder (2018, 2019) and Ludwig Fischer (2019). Their articles and monographs trace the roots of German nature writing back to Goethe and Alexander von Humboldt, establishing connections with modern figures like Ernst Jünger, Peter Handke, W.G. Sebald, Werner Herzog and others. This exploration demonstrates a growing interest in nature writing within the German literary sphere and its evolving dialogue with transnational traditions.

The aesthetic openness and ecological contemplation inherent in the NNW align well with the diverse forms of nature writing found in contemporary German-language literature. According to Schröder, nature essays are 'determined by a descriptive, introspective and reflective dimension' where 'scientific, subjective-emotional and ethical contents are linked' (2018: 344). Broadening the definition of contemporary German-language nature writing, Goldstein (2018) refers to it as a 'language-guided school of mindfulness for the discovery of the visible, but overlooked' (104). He emphasises the 'perception-shaping function' of language (Goldstein 2019: 27) and laments a widespread 'resonance catastrophe' of our society. He identifies nature writing as a means 'to

its blood-and-soil ideology contaminated the linguistic matrix for writing about the relationship between humans and nature' (Malkmus 2020: 18).

3 The series, comprising more than 100 volumes in 2023, has the intention to make the genre of nature writing in German-speaking countries known.

counterpose a sensitivity toward natural phenomena against the threatening silencing of the world' and to 'enhance our ability to resonate with our natural surroundings' (Goldstein 2018: 108). Similarly, for Bernhard Malkmus (2020), writing about nature signifies a new 'language of resonance' (21), characterised by the 'ability to let nature write itself via human language as a medium' (25). Nature writing, in this context, is a 'language-political project' (Ibid.). Fischer (2019) delves into the concept of the 'natural co-environment' ('Mitwelt': 112), asserting that, from Thoreau to Mabey, it has always been filled with a certain 'protest energy' (59) and 'counter-stories' (171), thereby addressing a fundamental ethical dimension.

In addition to the language of resonance and the protest energy, German-language nature writing exhibits further distinct features such as an 'authentic' experience with an 'autobiographical trait' (Fischer 2019: 45) and a focus on 'high literary-aesthetic demands' that transcends the non-fictional tradition (46, 180). Goldstein (2018) also emphasises the longstanding German tradition of nature poetry. In addition, he highlights the 'diagnostic and therapeutic potential' of nature writing 'in the tension field of of modernity' (Goldstein 2019: 13). While the concept of an 'attitude of mindfulness' (Goldstein 2018: 104) centres on individual subjectivity, writers like Ulrike Draesner (2018)[4] and Judith Schalansky argue for the importance of the writer's withdrawal from their own ego as a vital condition of nature writing. The poetic endeavour, articulated by Schalansky in a 2018 literary-festival discussion, is not 'to write … about oneself but of what one sees' (Schröder 2020: 331), which aligns with Gilbert White's approach of humility in nature writing and the genre's long empiric tradition. On the other hand, she concedes, as with other contemporary writers, 'that there is no untouched nature but cultural landscape' (Ibid.). Consequently, nature writing entails not only attentiveness to nature's changes and degradations, but also connects a critical dimension to the genre (Kanz 2020: 58).

In summary, German-language nature writing is characterised by (a) functioning as a 'school of mindfulness', engaging in precise, knowledge-based description of natural phenomena (descriptive dimension);

4 For Draesner (2018), 'Natur-Schreiben' is a 'writing in accord with nature' which is linguistically constructed and alters the signs of mimesis while giving 'the ego relief from itself' (165).

(b) establishing a language of resonance to rekindle an aesthetic connection with nature (aesthetic dimension); (c) fostering an awareness of both culturally shaped landscape as well as of planetary environmental destruction (critical dimension); and (d) embodying an ethically reflected attitude (ethical dimension).

III. ON REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLES OF GERMAN-SPEAKING NATURE WRITING

Surveying the new current of nature writing, a notable trend emerges – a new generation, highly aware of the estrangement from nature and the pervasive environmental destruction, is actively seeking (re-)connection to the natural world under precarious conditions (Tsing 2015). Contemporary authors, driven by this awareness, engage in the creation of a poetic perception of nature and in the exploration of a resonate language, often experimenting with innovative literary forms. In a genre historically dominated by male voices, this essay analyses three texts by contemporary female authors who have contributed significantly to the evolving tradition of nature writing in Germany: Marion Poschmann's 'Laubwerk. Zur Poetik des Stadtbaums' ('Laubwerk. On the Poetics of the Urban Tree'), a speech she gave upon receiving the inaugural German Prize for Nature Writing; Judith Schalansky's 2018 essay 'Hafen von Greifswald' ('Harbour of Greiswald'), featured in her acclaimed anthology *Verzeichnis einiger Verluste* (*List of Some Losses*); and Anna Ospelt's *Wurzelstudien* (*Root Studies*) from 2020, a hybrid essay complemented by images and video-stills, created with the support of a Nature Writing fellowship. To ensure comparability, we analyse these texts around four common themes which play pivotal roles in each work: (1) nature observation and natural-cultural interrelations; (2) poetic perception of nature; (3) variations of a language of resonance; and finally (4) the ethical dimension.

The three authors employ distinct methods to establish a resonant connection with botanical nature: Poschmann adopts the technique of a 'deep mapping', involving meticulous observation of specific natural phenomena – in her essay, the autumn leaves' changing hues – during a specific time frame. Through the detailed analysis of the deep structure, she asserts that it 'reveals the greatness of the world' (Poschmann 2018:

118). In Schalansky's essay, the focus is on tracing the origin of the river Ryck in her hometown of Greifswald. Walking its course three times over a period of several weeks in the melancholic northern German spring, she carefully records her observations and reflects on her naming practice of flora and fauna as a form of witnessing nature before species face extinction. Ospelt's *Wurzelstudien* entails a personal exploration of her own roots, leading her to connect with trees, leaves, roots and rhizomes. This journey shapes her methods of observation and writing as she intertwines her search for identity with the natural world. The three essays use different forms to find and create a resonance between the human subject and the surrounding vegetal world.

(1) Nature observation and natural-cultural interrelations

The three selected texts share a common starting point which is the recognition that our understanding of nature is inherently shaped by our cultural perspectives. Poschmann's exploration of the urban trees in Berlin, as she conducts an intensive foliage survey known as 'Laubschau' (leaf watching) emphasises the multifaceted nature of trees. She contends that a tree 'can be perceived not only as an aesthetic marvel, but also as a manifestation of the historical, political, geographical, and ecological conditions of its location' (Poschmann 2018: 117). Poschmann highlights the historical significance of trees lining old trade routes and draws attention to the meaning embedded in street names such as 'Chestnut Avenue' or 'Under the Linden', which reveal the name of the trees initially planted in these locations (118). Cities maintain a tree cadastre. Urban forestry offices are actively engaging in planting 'climate trees' (120), a term 'registered as a trademark' (Ibid.), as they are believed to withstand the challenges posed by the climate crisis. However, she underscores that the threats faced by urban trees are not just from the climate crisis, but also from co-habiting with humans: deicing salt, dog urine, construction work and soil sealing (121) contribute to the endangerment of urban trees. In Poschmann's perspective, the urban tree serves as a symbol of the city's 'wilderness' (129). Engaging in foliage-watching inspired by the Japanese tradition of *momijigari* (the admiration of the maple turning red), she explores how the transformation of trees, particularly their changing colours, provides a unique avenue for people to re-connect with the vegetal world. This experience, she argues, allows individuals to perceive nature through a different

lense, fostering an awareness of natural phenomena, and opens our mind for a relationship of resonance with the natural world. (115).

In recounting her journey through the forest and suburbs to the port of Greifswald, Schalansky paints a stark picture where pollution and sombre hues dominate, revealing a deeply disturbed and degraded landscape. The autofictional narrator meticulously details the rich variety of flora and fauna in the Greifswald surroundings, juxtaposing it with the harsh reality of pollution from litter, toxins and slurry. The narrative weaves a melancholic atmosphere through the portrayal of the pale light characteristic of the northern German spring, the persistently cool weather, and the 'relentless east wind' (Schalansky 2018: 176). Unlike Poschmann, who was able to find aesthetically pleasing foliage with bright hues, the narrator in Schalansky's text could find no untouched woodland, but only culturally and technically transformed landscape. The journey through the woods is impeded not only by the boggy terrain and 'blistering black mud' (185) but also by clay roads marred by tractor tracks (177), electrified fences (183), barriers and deep clearances for power line constructions (185). The water was littered with 'liquor bottles of brands no longer distributed' (177), and the field soil took on a 'soapy' texture (175). The deleterious effects of pesticides manifest in 'discolored hydrogen blond' edges of the rape leaves (Ibid.), while the pervasive scent of 'slurry hangs in the air' (180). Amid this, 'a sprayer douses a barley field' (185). This form of Nature Writing, characterised by an acute awareness of the landscape marred by the ravages of civilisation, can be aptly termed 'critical nature writing' (Kanz 2021). Despite the harsh realities described in the text the narrator doesn't shy away from acknowledging the melancholic beauty of the landscape, portraying it through a color palette that includes words such as 'pale', 'leaden', 'streaky' (175), 'greenish drab' (181), 'rusty' (174, 179), 'algae-black' (175). This melancholy, stemming from acute awareness of what vegetal nature had to endure through our civilisation, contributes to the distinctive tune of the narrative.

Schalansky's approach to mapping the landscape is characterised by empathy, yet it remains steadfastly unsentimental. She employs precision and knowledge in her descriptions of the landscape the narrator traversed. Throughout her sixteen-page essay, nearly every sentence introduces a species of mammal, bird, insect, tree, plant, fungus, lichen or moss, surpassing 150 instances. From the pond mussel to the common

toad, from the blackcap to the azure damselfly, and from the plague and swallowwort to sour grass and star moss to orchid and golden lilac – Schalansky's naming practice serves a purpose: to document and preserve before these life forms fade into obscurity. In aligning with Annie Dillard's perspective, Schalansky implores a nature writer 'to be a witness',[5] a sentiment echoed in the forthcoming anthology she is editing, titled *To Be a Witness*, focusing on classics of nature writing not just as an art form but as a crucial medium for documenting and bearing witness to the existence of the natural world.[6]

Anna Ospelt's *Root Studies* has a comparable descriptive depth as the autofictional narrator employs a analytical method to observe trees, leaves, flowers, roots and various plant parts, often subjecting them to dissection and microscopic examination in the manner of a nineteenth-century naturalist. At the same time, Ospelt weaves her nature observations with genealogical reconstruction and reflection on her own writing process together. Her text is organised in four folders. The first folder contains the life story and some poems from publisher and writer Henry Goverts, a former owner of the family home. The autofictional narrator uses a withered leaf from the aging hanging beech tree named 'Henry Goverts' (Ospelt 2020: 15) from her parents' garden as both a lens for focused observation and a filter for a distinctive way of seeing. The second folder narrates the story of her grandfather, who, along with his brother from the local tannery, had planted an oak tree. The autofictional narrator not only learns about the various products derived from the oak, but also reveals a 'technological pedigree of the leather industry' (67). She contrasts its hierarchical structure with her own metamorphic peeling process, drawing parallels to a lily bulb. The third folder, titled 'Rhizome', compiles 61 'connections' depicting resonating experiences with roots, bulbs, leaves, trees and a developed herbarium revealing a 'root-rhizome network' (116). The last folder presents a text sample, possibly the first chapter of a novel featuring a protagonist named Ivy Blum, establishing a kind of rhizomatic human-plant relationship as a central theme. Ospelt's text weaves together intricate relations between

5 Schalansky at the Festival *Eventi Litterari*, Monte Veritá, 30 March–2 April 2023: https://www.matthes-seitz-berlin.de/autor/judith-schalansky.html (1:31:00).

6 Judith Schalansky (ed.). Wir sind hier, um Zeuge zu sein. Ein Lesebuch. Berlin: https://www.matthes-seitz-berlin.de/buch/wir-sind-hier-um-zeuge-zu-sein.html?lid=1

writing, roots and leaves, uniting botany and literature. The author is particularly intrigued by linguistic-metaphoric similarities, affinities, and interrelationships between vegetal nature and culture, playfully experimenting with these connections.

(2) Poetic perception of nature

A central theme in Poschmann's essay involves a profound reflection on language, particularly in her admission of attempting 'for years to write a tree' (Poschmann 2018: 123) in its tree-like essence – an endeavour to capture its 'sensual, unique, and atmospherically dense' nature (Ibid.). However, she acknowledges encountering a 'fundamental problem' inherent in nature writing: the 'unbridgeable hiatus between language and world' (123, 125). To address this challenge, Poschmann draws upon various perspectives. Firstly, she turns to the Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō, emphasising the importance of establishing a 'connection to nature' with the ultimate aim of 'becoming one with nature' (128). Poschmann describes how, in Japanese aesthetics, entities emerge from the 'void, from the infinite', seeking to 'convey a feeling of the indescribable' through words (130), which she portrays as a 'spiritual force' (130). Secondly, referencing the American nature writer John Muir, Poschmann emphasises the significance of 'disinterested pleasure, devotion, and evocation' present in Muir's 'precise and affectionate description' (128) of California trees and mountains. Thirdly, she invokes Romantic poetry, suggesting that the depicted not only mirrors the subject but also possess a 'capacity for poetic cognition' (131–32). Writing a tree, for her, entails the integration of these diverse dimensions. She contemplates that the 'perception that really touches us when we perceive a tree in its autumn dress ... is rooted in an empathy with that spiritual aspect of nature' (132), where 'spiritual' denotes the infinite or atmospheric.[7] She further notes that a tree resonates with us 'because it is so close to us, so fundamentally similar, so beautiful in its uniqueness' (132). Derived from a Romantic tradition, Poschmann views the task of nature writing as a 'new romanticisation of the world, a poetic

7 Helga Braunbeck (2023) analyses Poschmann's 'poetic taxonomy', in her poetic lectures, on writing as an 'animistic process' (12) as a form of 'phytographia' (13) in the sense of Patricia Viera as well as a 'co-creation' or 'sympoeisis' in the sense of Donna Haraway (Ibid.).

perception of nature' (125), yet she asserts that such romanticisation is without any 'sentimental transfiguration' (133). This nuanced approach highlights her commitment to portraying nature in its particularity, eschewing sentimental embellishments while capturing its inherent beauty and connection to the spiritual as a resonant relationship.

Similar to Poschmann, Ospelt is also deeply engaged in cultivating a poetic perception of nature in her *Root Studies*. Her exploration takes diverse forms, whether visiting Berlin's oldest tree, the oak affectionately named 'Dicke Marie' by the Humboldt brothers (Ospelt 2020: 91), or delving into microscopic examination of flower petals. Ospelt's conscious connection to nature unfolds as she creates herbariums or collects weathered leaves to use them as a lens to observe the world. Throughout her *Root Studies*, Ospelt seamlessly integrates her own photos and video stills – in which she often places herself in the picture – into the narrative. This approach draws attention to the media perspective and serves as a distinct feature of her work. For instance, she juxtaposes a picture of the inside of a wrist, presumably her own, with a beech leaf, both traversed by veins in a violet hue, albeit with distinct materiality, texture, and color.[8] While both images exhibit lines and veins, the deliberate arrangement aims to find a comparative perspective that acknowledges their differences while emphasising maximum similarity. This juxtaposition of seemingly disparate elements – a tree leaf and a section of a human body – strives to reveal a shared essence without masking their inherent distinctions. Notably, these visual elements correspond with the text on the opposite page, reinforcing the integration of multiple perspectives in Ospelt's exploration of the nature-culture connection:

> CONNEXION
>
> I do not wish to become a tree. I wish to want to become a tree.
> I would therefore like to become a tree poetically ...
>
> CONNEXION
>
> However, wanting to become a tree already has a transformative effect on me.
> (Ibid.: 108)[9]

8 For a more detailed analysis of the text-image relation, see Dürbeck (2023).

9 German text: 'KONNEXION / Ich möchte kein Baum werden. Ich möchte ein Baum werden wollen. / Ich möchte daher poetisch ein Baum werden wollen […].

The conclusion, 'I would therefore like to become a tree poetically', reflects an acknowledgement of the impossibility of an ontological transition between two distinct modes of being. Nevertheless, Ospelt skillfully establishes the poetic imagination as a method capable of bridging this existential gap and create a diagonal resonance in Rosa's sense. Despite the inherent dissimilarity and differences captured in the images of the wrist and the leaf, the text employs poetic imagination to construct a link between the two entities. This quote also serves as a representative example of Ospelt's narrative approach – a rhizome-like continuation. Drawing inspiration from Wolfgang Hensel's work *Plants in Action* (1993), where he notes that '[r]hizomes grow at their tip and die at their end. This is how they slowly creep through the soil' (96), Ospelt contemplates the writing process as a gradual growth, where all components remain interconnected. In other words, the 61 aphoristic-like 'connections' in the chapter 'Rhizomes', exploring various observations and experiences with leaves, roots, bulbs etc., from a vibrant network of ideas that grows from knot to knot and intertwines human and vegetal nature little by little poetically, akin to the slow, creeping growth of rhizomes. Affected by roots as well by rhizomes, the text unfolds two different resonating dynamics, in a diagonal as well as in a transformative dimension in Rosa's sense.

(3) Language of resonance

All three texts discussed here grapple with distinct modes of resonance as defined by Rosa. Poschmann delves into moments of resonance as she reflects on the descent of autumn leaves which she catches. Her poetic perception of nature, demanding 'a refined gift of observation' (Poschmann 2018: 130), encompasses all three dimensions of resonance, the horizontal (empathy), the diagonal (materiality) and the vertical, as the connection with leaves and trees approaches the aforementioned 'spiritual aspect of nature' (132). These resonant experiences are also expressed through her deliberate linguistic choices: 'the falling leaves, carried by layers of air, engage in a dance of verbs – swaying, spinning, drifting, tumbling, overturning and then floating again'. By choosing these verbs to describe the falling leaves, Poschmann gives them agency

// KONNEXION /Allerdings hat bereits das Baumwerdenwollen eine transformative Wirkung auf mich'. (O 108)

and reminds her reader of the activities of the vegetal nature, as she terms them, 'leafy activities'. This linguistic approach effectively bridges the previously lamented 'hiatus between language and the world'. Of particular importance is her neologism 'Laubverben' (verbs of leaves). Drawing from Robin Wall Kimmerer's 'Grammar of Animacy' in her book *Sweetgrass* (2013), which analyses the language of the Native American Potawatomis, a prevalence of verbs corresponds to the concept of an animated, effective nature. By describing falling leaves with an animated language of movements, Poschmann emphasises the enchantment inherent in this unruly natural phenomenon of falling leaves.

A different form of resonant relationship can be seen in a scene in Schalansky's essay, where she hears the 'bright voice of the bullfinch' and responds to its 'cheerful, monosyllabic call' (Schalansky 2018, 182). Describing the bird's reluctance to emerge from its shelter unless she reclines amidst the grass 'in the half-shade of pine trees' and it can perch 'directly above [her]' (Ibid.), she illustrates a heightened resonance within this sitting. Within this enclave, a profound resonance unfolds on a horizontal plane. Schlansky recounts, 'Its breast glows vermilion. I respond in kind, and the exchange continues for a while until it unexpectedly launches into a lively, previously unheard song comprising five verses that elude my attempts at imitation' (Ibid.). This encounter, transformative for the otherwise reserved author, articulates a fleeting yet profound moment of joy and intimacy. As she closes her eyes, an afterimage of 'the tangle of branches appears once again on her red blazing eyelids' (183).

Rosa describes resonance as a phenomenon of 'sounding back' that materialises when 'two sides or entities enter into a relationship' characterised by the distinct articulation of each participant's '*own voice*' (Rosa 2019: 21). Additionally, he elucidates that resonance 'inevitably and irrevocably presupposes *difference*', acting as a counterforce to one-sided appropriation, and its realisation comes at the cost of undergoing personal transformation (21–22). As a result, 'alienation' emerges as a 'complementary counter-concept' (16) to the dynamics of resonance. Rosa intricately ties the concept of resonance to the aspiration of forging an alternative to the prevailing paradigm of '*ruling and disposing*' (30), emphasising its ethical and political implications.

Against this backdrop, the two instances of resonance with non-human entities depicted in the nature writing of Poschmann and

Schalansky can be viewed as a means of reclaiming a severed connection with nature through literature. Importantly, this isn't a simplistic, nostalgic 'return to nature', but a transient experience amid the poignant acknowledgement of the continual environmental degradation inherent in late modernity. Nevertheless, a receptiveness to nature can seize those enchanting moments, offering a brief but impactful reminder of the possibility of resonance.

Similarly, the first-person narrator in Ospelt's text captures moments of resonance with the plant world, crafting a language replete with neologisms. For instance, she metaphorically details her metamorphosis through dance, coining an untranslatable neologism: 'Ich lilienzwieble mich' (Ospelt 2020: 75). Derived from the noun 'lily', this action verb not only maintains a botanical essence but also accentuates the dynamic nature of transformation. In another passage, the text portrays a parallel resonant relationship between the first-person narrator and a Japanese fan maple in her parents' garden: 'I stroke the branches. The leaves tingle, they tickle each other. The frosty leaves that I plucked off, they curl' (88). When expressions such as 'züngeln sich' (to flicker its tongue), 'sich kitzeln' (to tickle itself) or 'sich krausen' (to curl up) are employed in the reflexive mode, the activities seem intrinsically motivated. Assuming an agency within the plant world, Ospelt forges a language of resonance between the two entities – human and plant – endeavouring to linguistically mirror the agency of plants, consequently enriching language creativity.

In conclusion, all three texts underscore the significance of empathetic observation of natural phenomena and the resonating, creative use of language. Deep mapping or closely observing the ever-changing natural phenomena set in motion a blend of physical and poetic responses. The language of resonance unfolds diversely: in Poschmann's text, it manifests as a poetic contemplation of the agency of the plant, expressed through 'Laubverben' like 'trudeln, treiben, taumeln' (spinning, drifting, staggering); in Schalansky's essay, it emerges through an exchange of calls with the bullfinch in the uninhabitated woodlands, inspiring a multi-verse song that captivates the human listener; in Ospelt's *Root Studies*, it takes the form of neologisms and reflexive word constructions to capture the agency of plant, while the rhizome-like 'connections' in the text culminate in a fragment of a prose, progressively propel the text forward on a performative level. In this context, the connection with and immersion in nature leads to a self-induced

transformation, articulated through a distinct poetic language reflective of nature's agency. The relationship of resonance with the vegetal world forges novel connections that not only captivate the human observer but also reshape one's self-perception as resembling a lily-bulb or an ivy, thus offering an alternative to a utilitarian or dominating relationship with nature.

(4) The ethical dimension

As previously noted, German-language nature writing is marked by a distinct protest energy (Fischer 2019). This characteristic is evident in various forms in the three texts under examination. In the conclusion of her essay, Poschmann delineates the role of nature poetry not only as a means to evoke wonder and mystery but also to reveal the 'destructive power [of each individual]' (Poschmann 2018: 133). Asserting that a 'new romanticization of the world, a poetic perception of nature' is 'unavoidable if we want to prevent an ecological catastrophe' (Ibid.), she assigns a ethical or even political dimension to nature writing. In another essay on nature images and poetry, Poschmann (2016) contends that maintaining a seismographic attention and sensibility for upheavals [*Erschütterungen*] in the making constitutes a 'political act' (27). Her *Laubwerk*-essay illustrates how the lost connection to nature can be rekindled by embracing a new and romanticised perspective of the world (Poschmann 2018: 133). She further reminds us of our mortality and spiritual essence, framing our experience of the world as a transient moment, akin to a realm of ephemeral leaves that changes hues for a fleeting span: '[w]e are mortal, but we are also spiritual beings. The world is a dream, it appears to us as a world of fleeting leaves that change color for a few days. We must therefore treat it all the more carefully' (Ibid.). Consequently, she advocates for a more caring approach to the surrounding world. In essence, Poschmann recognises in nature writing the potential to acknowledge the vitality and vulnerability of the natural environment, using a poetic language to heighten our awareness and contribute to its preservation.

While Schalansky refrains from making normative statements about literature, she sees her writing as a witness testimony to the diverse facets of nature and its anthropogenic changes and destruction. Upon reaching the port of Greifswald, she intertwines the origin of

the town Greifswald and her own birth, looking at the hospital in the background. She concludes:

> Somewhere beyond, nestled in the Rosental valley between Ryck and Baberow, lies the salt springs, which, along with the river, would have been the reason why the forest was cleared and a market town was founded on the marshy terrain. In the brackish water a lifeless bream drifts … On a schooner's railing perch three barn swallows, their fox-red throats aglow in the evening sun. (Schalansky 2018: 188)

This confronting image intricately weaves together her own origin and the origin of the place. Human settlement, indicative of the birth of a civilisation, comes at the costs of subjugating nature and displacing habitats. The juxtaposition of the polluted harbor and the soothing evening light highlights the ambivalence of the present. Schalansky's essay is an illuminating example of 'critical nature writing' through its explicit acknowledgement of environmental damages and destruction brought about by civilisation. Nevertheless, amidst the destruction, traces of nature persist – exemplified by the presence of barn swallows. The role of writing is to document these aspects, serving as a reminder and a call to action: it is upon us readers to preserve the remnains of nature depicted in her words.

In Ospelt's *Root Studies*, there are dual conclusions. In the postscript, she first confronts the climate crisis, recounting how, amidst persistent heat, she not only tended to her parents' garden but also 'began to water the trees at the edge of the forest' (Ospelt 2020: 122). This reveals a caring approach to the plant world, forming the foundation of her writing. Secondly, she contemplates the transient nature of her text in the face of a potential environmental catastrophe: 'While reading the four folders, I kept falling asleep and dreamt of ~~burning~~ forests. I have to read the sheets again and lay them out again, in reverse order.' (122) Through her actions such as rereading the leaves in reverse order, Ospelt demonstrates her engagement with vegetal nature, a process inherently tied to the process of her writing. The creative endeavour unfolds in tandem with nature – whether it be the leaf through which she observes the world and connects with Goverts and her home, or the tree linking her with her family, or the roots, lily bulbs, and rhizomes which foster her transformation and facilitate her creative process. To discuss these ethical aspects of this chapter in the broader field of plant ethics (Kalhoff et al. 2018) demands another paper.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, all three authors contemplate their writing in the context of the environmental crisis and experiment with novel ways of expression to (re)establish a resonating connection with the vegetal nature. Their essays engage with specific aspects of NNW and propel it forward in German-language literature with a poetic poise. This involves, firstly, a meticulous observation, refined perceptivness and precise identification of natural phenomena (descriptive dimension); secondly, a language infused with empathy and resonance (aesthetic dimension); thirdly, a connection to one's own person and their role as a witness (introspective dimension), emphasising a perspective grounded in humility and respect (ethical dimension); fourthly, a reflection on the function of language as a cultural archive (reflective dimension). Lastly, the portrayal of nature and landscape is rooted in a natural-cultural entanglement that concurrently documents civilisational and technical interventions into nature, along with their associated damages and losses, with the overarching goal of preserving what is left (ethical/political dimension).

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