

Workstream: New assemblage of change and conservation - (Non-)human storytelling of evolution, innovation, curation, attention, care and maintenance

The chemist Lee Cronin describes life as “the universe developing a memory” where “the number of steps needed to construct the molecule [...] tells us the minimum amount of memory the universe must have to remember how to create that object”. Such a memory is materialized storytelling. Stories told by nature surround us. Diverse water precipitation forms (hailstones, snowflakes, ice pellets, rain droplets) capture meteorological stories. Stories of earth and water movements, weather conditions and meteoric encounters are engraved in the Grand Canyon in the US, red needle rock formation Tsingy Rouge in Madagascar, Lake Hallstatt in the Austrian Salzkammergut, the Lonar Crater Lake in Maharashtra, India, the Stone Forest/Shilin in Yunnan, China or the Perito Moreno Glacier in Patagonia, Argentina.

Stories of change are complex, intertwined, and relational, telling more about entanglements and embedded co-agency than visible at first. Diverse spider nets talk of adaptation and co-evolution (Vollrath&Selden, 2007). Even we embody evolutionary stories, relicts of past purpose, in our wisdom teeth and goosebumps.

We tell stories of innovation and change (e.g. clean energy) to encourage viewing something as not pre-determined and enable overcoming path dependencies, and stories of conservation and maintenance (e.g. food terroir) to pass on knowledge and values of local practices. Both are important in light of climate change. New ways of talking about innovation have emerged, not as brilliant moments of singular geniuses but communal process of knowledge pooling (Potts, 2019). We inquire if diverse framing of the new, combined with a creative unfolding of stories and practices handed down (not only by humans) can shape purpose, design and use of new technologies and if innovation and conservation are truly opposites or more a question of new assemblages of stories.