



Thinking from the Substrate

JUNE 3–5, 2024
 HARNACK HOUSE, IHNESTRASSE
 16–20, 14195 BERLIN, GERMANY

ORGANIZED BY EMILY BROWNELL
 (UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH) AND
 TILMAN MUSCH (MPIWG)

Bringing together scholars from a broad range of geographical and disciplinary positions, “Thinking from the Substrate” is an invitation to think critically and expansively about the relatively thin layer between our atmosphere and the subterranean world and how it functions most fundamentally as a container for life. The substrate is a medium used for infinite things: a site of metabolic transformation, a place where toxins accumulate, a store of material for remaking the world. Looking to what travels through the substrate and also what comprises it—minerals, parasites, organic matter—offers a view into the past while also provoking questions about the promise and constraints of the future. The broad, open-ended question that anchors this workshop is: What can we learn about our current historical moment when we start from the ground up?



On day one of the workshop (June 3), we will approach this larger question from the insights of individual research and case studies. The second and third days (June 4–5) will offer both small and large group discussions with the goal of constructing a collective public syllabus for a class on the substrate. The point is not a bibliography, but to create a dynamic, engaging website for public use that can also be used for teaching.

This event is by invitation only.

PROGRAM

MONDAY, JUNE 3

9:30–10:00 AM WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

10:00–10:30 AM COFFEE AND TEA BREAK

10:30 AM–12:00 PM PANEL 1: SOIL'S METABOLISMS

1) *Aporias of Health on the World's Largest Sewage Farm*

Seth Denizen, Washington University in St. Louis

2) *Vital Waste: Propagating Urine as Manure*

Tamar Novick, Humboldt University

3) *Water under the Surface*

Cynthia Browne, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science

4) *The Slowest Death of Soil Humus*

Johannes Lehmann, Cornell University

12:00–1:00 PM LUNCH

1:00–2:30 PM PANEL 2: RESIDUAL HISTORIES

1) *Rings of Fire II: Arsenic Cycles through Racism and Empire in the Americas*

Jayson Porter, Brown University

2) *Colonialism, Modernity, and Toxicity: The Afterlives of Development in Ndungu Agricultural Development Project in Tanzania*

Lulu Tessua, University of Nairobi

3) *Overburden, Flyrock, and Spoil: Strip Mining as American Wasteland*

Steven Stoll, Fordham University

4) *Beneath the Sands: Towards a Political Ecology of the Uncultivable*

Dotan Halevy, Van Leer Institute

2:45–4:15 PM PANEL 3: SUBSTRATES AND BELONGING

1) *Thinking through Soil: A Cultural Geology of Be(long)ing:*

Ge-schiebe, Ge-schichte, Ge-wichte

Paul Kurek, University of Michigan

2) *Salt and Sodium Carbonate from the Central Sahara*

Tilman Musch, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science

3) *Kuboma: Soil Idiom and Collective Belonging*

Amiel Bize and Basil Ibrahim, Cornell University

4) *The Mistreated Living Treasure Under Our Feet: Exploring Modern and Indigenous Soil Knowledge*

Mazi Sanda, University of Ngaoundere

4:15–4:30 PM COFFEE AND TEA BREAK

4:30–5:00 PM WRAP-UP DISCUSSION

5:30 PM OPTIONAL LECTURE:

The History of Coping with Environmental Challenges in the Exploration, Development, and Production of African Mineral Resources: Insights for Sustainability and the Way Forward

Prof. Samuel Akande (University of Ilorin)

TUESDAY, JUNE 4

10:00–11:00 AM FULL GROUP DISCUSSION ON SYLLABUS STRUCTURE / WHAT SHOULD AN ENTRY LOOK LIKE?

11:00–11:20 AM COFFEE AND TEA BREAK

11:20 AM–12:00 PM FULL GROUP DISCUSSION CONT'D

12:00–1:00 PM LUNCH

1:00–4:00 PM GROUP WORK, NATASHA RUSSELL, ARTIST AND ILLUSTRATOR IN CIRCULATION BETWEEN GROUPS

4:00–4:15 PM COFFEE AND TEA BREAK

4:30–5:00 PM LARGER GROUP CHECK-IN AND DISCUSSION

OPTIONAL EVENING EVENT AT SPORE: DETAILS TBA

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 5

10:00–11:00 PM FULL GROUP DISCUSSION ON SYLLABUS STRUCTURE OR SMALL GROUPS (TBD)

11:00–11:20 AM COFFEE AND TEA BREAK

11:20 AM–12:00 PM GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL WORK

12:00–1:00 PM LUNCH

1:00–2:30 PM PRESENTATIONS

2:30–3:00 PM COFFEE AND TEA BREAK

3:00–4:00 PM CLOSING REMARKS AND FUTURE PLANS

5:00 PM DINNER PLANS (TBA)