

A GUIDEBOOK TO LIFE ELSEWHERE



C.A.T. CONTENT

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C.A.T.

UMWELT

INTERSECTION

III

Margit Busch

If you think about the term 'environment', the first thing that comes to your mind is probably not you yourself. Isn't it something that surrounds you, the circumstances, the conditions, the physical, chemical, biotic and social factors? Environment is not static. Environment changes with time, not least due to the activity of organisms that make their environment into a home. A more-or-less physico-chemical exchange.

These reflections already disclose that there must be an entanglement between subjects and their environment and that one affects the other. The environment shapes the subjects; the subjects shape the environment. One could now assume that a given environment at a given moment presents the same objective measurable conditions to each individual, conditions to which it is more or less adapted.

But then something is not taken into account. It is the way that an individual perceives the world. According to the biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864–1944), every organism cuts its specific environment (he used the term *Umwelt*) out of the world, according to its needs and its perceptual equipment. Things change their meaning in relation to the subject. This relationship transforms an object into a carrier of meaning that is imprinted on it by the subject, and it is the assemblage of meanings that shapes the environment of every individual. The meaning attributed to one and the same object changes depending on the subject perceiving it and its momentary condition. For example, a puddle has a different meaning for a thirsty dog and for you who might not want to step into it and get wet feet. In a nutshell: the *Umwelt* of an animal is mirrored in its inner world.

This applies probably to each living being including C.A.T.s.¹ C.A.T.s have needs, like other organisms, and specific perceptual equipment, but they also have an idea of the world, be they aware of it or not. An idea that shapes their actions but also their perception (or should I say to what they pay attention?). Their longings are not only driven by bare necessities but also influenced by their imagination.

Assume an experiment: what happens if a bunch of C.A.T.s from a school in Vienna set foot in an environment which is not the one they are accustomed to and make it their home for a while? A geographically determinable location in Ukraine, Transcarpathia, Nyzhnje Selyshche, about 650 km from Vienna. They didn't come as tourists; they wanted to exchange with the environment in every respect. Taking into account the Uexküllian idea of an individually cut-out world, one can end up in an attitude of radical constructivism, in an image of solitary bubbles floating in four-dimensional space-time. But I imagine those bubbles form intersections, corridors, bridges, they have channels of exchange, they oscillate, get tuned and play a collective melody every now and then. The C.A.T.s from Vienna experimented with tools² to interact with their environment, to change perspective and to tune in. They shaped and got shaped.

What you hold in your hands is a travelogue anthology of this endeavour, expressed in various ways. It contains stories about aliens, encounters, discoveries, exchange, changes of perspective, interactions and intersections. It bares the tools used to make the C.A.T.s familiar with their environment, the place, its community and with each other. It talks about doing nothing and traps, about hammocks and mosses, about sanctuaries in miniature worlds, about patterns, history and found objects, about oligarchs and subsoil, about walking in one another's shoes, about belly circumferences and trees, about intellectual and scientific approaches, about frolic, music and dancing in the rain, about clothes and their making, about shelter construction and hospitality, about Greek coffee and reading the future, about a typewriter and analogue filming, about random dudes and sleepless nights.

1. C.A.T. concept – Rosie Benn (see p. 17).

2. Toolshed – Brishty Alam (see p. 25).

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