

compost storytelling workshop



Elif Gökaltay
PhD Candidate, Industrial Design - Istanbul Technical University
Lecturer - İstanbul Ticaret Üniversitesi

compost storytelling

a methodological approach designed for critical (multispecies) ethnography, focusing on heterogeneous, **open-ended**, and **small stories** interwoven with **everyday interactions**. **extending storytelling beyond human narratives to include the roles of other-than-human species in assemblages.**

Hohti, R., & Tammi, T. (2024). Composting storytelling: An approach for critical (multispecies) ethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 30(7), 595-606.

dynamic and open-ended | written between field notes and analysis, allowing for continuous additions and precisions even long after leaving the field. a "messy mix of temporalities" where story layers accumulate.

nonlinearity and polyphony | multiplicity of voices and temporalities, emphasizing intra-active transformation. more modest role for the human protagonist, attention to the material world and other-than-human agents. open form, often refraining from traditional beginnings and ends, to foster the openness of story assemblages.

process of piling, folding, and turning | involves "piling up, folding in, and turning around" observations, little narratives embedded in daily practices.

disturbance of hierarchies | challenges hierarchies related to authorship and the human-centric view in research. Highlighting that stories are always multiple and interconnected.

*Inside the school building I cross the entrance hall,
one knows these kinds of secondary school entrance
halls by heart, they are so familiar, always similar
but when I open the greenhouse door, another world
overwhelms
Scents and smells from blooming and decaying plants
bright lights
cries, shouts, sounds and chirps, accompanied by
smaller rustles
and the humming sound of a humidifier
I am anxious to go there and hear what has happened,
what's new, how the animals and plants are doing.
(composting fieldnotes)¹*

*Ilkka the iguana occupies a central place in the
greenhouse.
We find him most of the time standing (or sitting?) still
on a branch
in his special glass-walled, extra-heated hut.
Ilkka is respected and acted upon with a certain
cautiousness
thanks to his beautiful but dangerous looks.
Already, eye contact with this big, slow, stiff reptile feels
hypnotic.
One morning, we meet a former student of the school
who used to be Ilkka's responsible caretaker
he comes every now and then to check if Ilkka still
remembers him.
"He does," he says while stroking Ilkka's cheek.*

*Encouraged by this encounter
we also touch and stroke Ilkka
his rough skin (like the surface of a bag or shoes, I
think—but alive)
Ilkka closes his eyes as if in pleasure, like cats do.
When we stop stroking, Ilkka opens his eyes, as if say-
ing, “Go on!”
And when we continue stroking his forehead
he again closes his eyes.
Some weeks after the episode
a kid in the greenhouse mentions to us
that iguanas have a third, invisible eye in the middle of
their foreheads.*

*We came here to do multispecies ethnography about
child–animal relations,
but in the greenhouse we lose our efficacy and become
indecisive,
halted and overwhelmed by strange encounters
such as the combination of the dove Romeo
and the mechanic humidifier at the centre of the ceiling
with the label Princess.
Romeo and the other birds enjoy sitting on Princess, the
humidifier in the ceiling
while it is working, humming and spraying water all
over.
Sometimes they knock on the machine as if to turn their
shower on.
The greenhouse birds also like electric wires:
they do tricks on them and sleep on them
rather than on the wooden sticks hung in the ceilings
that are meant to serve as swings.
“It is not always easy to guess what the birds like to sit
on,” says Armi.*

Task

The objective is to explore the **multispecies relationships** embedded in the everyday life of the campus and to reimagine these encounters through an alternative narrative method.

- Each student will conduct an on-site observation and record a **10–20 second micro-video** capturing a moment, interaction, material trace, or atmospheric detail. Each group will compile its 12 individual videos.
- The videos will be assembled. The goal is not to preserve each video's original intention but to explore how these video fragments generate a multispecies story.
- Building upon this visual process, each group will then craft a **written narrative** that draws inspiration from the assembled videos.