



# H-Environment

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## H-Environment Roundtable Reviews

Volume 10, No. 2 (2020)  
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-environment>

Publication date: January 21, 2020  
Roundtable Review Editor:  
Kara Murphy Schlichting

**Sonja Dümpelmann, *Seeing Trees: A History of Street Trees in New York City and Berlin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).  
ISBN: 9780300225785**

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**Introduction by Kara Murphy Schlichting, Queens College CUNY**

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To an urbanite, a street tree can be an amenity, a desirable feature that offers shade, or an ornament, bringing welcome green to the stone, pavement, and brick of the urban fabric. Trees also help constitute the spaces of streets and parks, an integral aspect of the urban landscape. They are also, of course, living things that contribute to local ecosystems. **Sonja Dümpelmann's *Seeing Trees: A History of Street Trees in New York City and Berlin*** tells the history of urbanites' relationships with the urban canopy in two "model" tree cities. Beginning in late-nineteenth century New York City and concluding in turn-of-the-twenty-first century Berlin, Dümpelmann tells a complex and accomplished transnational, comparative, environmental and landscape history. In so doing, she explicates "how street trees have been considered variously as aesthetic objects, creators of space, territorial markers, instruments of emancipation and empowerment, sanitizers, air-conditioners, nuisances, upholders of moral values, economic engines, scientific instruments, and ecological habitats" (2). With mastery of a vast collection of American and German archives, Dümpelmann illuminates the connections between trees, cities, residents, governance, science, politics, and culture.

*Seeing Trees* traces how, since the nineteenth century, residents, urban foresters, city planners, and government officials have spoken for or against tree planting. But environment is not a passive stage for action in either Berlin or New York City. In his response to *Seeing Trees*, **Evan Friss** reflects on the mutually-reinforcing relationship between humans and nonhuman nature in urban environments and praises Dümpelmann's history for its foregrounding of trees' agency. Friss also highlights the benefits of the book's transnational elements, while also asks the author to further explain her choice of the cities of Berlin and New York City to tell this history.

**Charlotte Leib** asks Dümpelmann to reflect on the state of the fields of landscape history and environmental history. Leib classifies *Seeing Trees* as a bridge between these areas of scholarship and discusses the opportunities and limitations that she and Dümpelmann have identified in working across these fields. Focusing on the historiographic lineage of *Seeing Trees*, Leib underscores the ways in which Dümpelmann furthers the scholarship on urban trees. Leib also considers the merits of teaching *Seeing Trees* and proposes approaches for courses in the history of science; on environmental catastrophe and the social and ecological impacts of war; on urban environmentalism and environmental change; and on "greening" movements in response to the climate change crisis.

The final reader response is by **Catherine McNeur**. McNeur surveys the many roles trees serve in this history, including the link between trees and human health and the struggles of city officials to find and plant the "perfect" urban tree. McNeur additionally reflects on the symbolism of trees and asks the author to speak further on the symbolism of "weeds" and ecological belonging. In regard to the cultural

importance of linden trees in Berlin from the reign of King Frederick I to the Nazi Party, McNeur wonders about the ramifications of botanical inclusion and xenophobia.

Sonja Dümpelmann uses her author response to discuss her motivations for a comparative study of street trees in Berlin and New York City. She also elaborates on the roads not taken and potential avenues for future research on the urban canopy of other metropolises. In so doing, she makes a case for place-specific analysis of the relationship between trees, people and politics, and urban form. Dümpelmann addresses a number of specific questions raised by Friss and McNeur, from street tree art to botanical xenophobia; she concludes with a broader state-of-the-field, reflecting on how environmental humanities has grown to offer an intellectual home to scholars invested in interweaving environmental and landscape histories.

Before turning to the first set of comments, I would like to pause here and thank all the roundtable participants for taking part. In addition, I would like to remind readers that as an open-access forum, *H-Environment Roundtables* is available to scholars and non-scholars alike, around the world, free of charge. Please circulate.

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**Comments by Evan Friss, James Madison University**

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**H**ave you read Richard Powers’s latest novel, *The Overstory*? If not, you should. It’s a fascinating tale that illuminates the power of trees, the power they hold as earthly creatures in their own right and the power they hold over us humans. In his story, trees are much more than setting. Across generations and geographies, mulberries and maples, lindens and locusts are characters. It is a provocative piece of fiction, a rare work that forces the reader to pause and meditate on big questions about our own world. So does Sonja Dümpelmann’s *Seeing Trees: A History of Street Trees in New York City and Berlin*. And you should read it too.

In Dümpelmann’s history, like Powers’s fiction, trees have agency. They don’t just bend to human will; they shape our experience and the cities in which we, and they, live. It’s this symbiotic relationship between trees, cities, and people that is at the heart of Dümpelmann’s inquiry. How did trees “naturalize” cities that have been fashioned from concrete, asphalt, steel, iron, and plastic; choked by industrial smoke and vehicle exhaust; and tuned by an orchestra of honking horns, rattling trains, blaring radios, and whirling air-conditioners. Just as importantly, how did people—whether by planting or felling, doctoring or stitching, loving or fearing—“urbanize” trees?

When we think of city trees, we think first of the great urban parks, which have their own terrific histories. But *Seeing Trees* is about a less popular and a less visible variety: the trees that line the streets. Passersby (historians included) often don’t even notice them. But Dümpelmann spends 249 pages staring at them, thinking about how they have shaped their cities and how their cities have shaped them. *Seeing Trees* is a deeply researched study of how urban planners, landscape architects, and city dwellers of all stripes thought about, valued, and gave meaning to street trees.

Dümpelmann’s book spans from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first century and focuses on two cities, New York and Berlin. The introduction and epilogue highlight similarities (e.g., in both cities people fretted about falling branches and darkened buildings, while advocates touted their health and climate benefits) and differences (e.g., New York’s trees were imperiled by dog urine, Berlin’s by dog urine, but also firebombs, and, during techno concerts, human urine as well). In the half of the book that deals with New York, Berlin and other cities occasionally make a comparative appearance as does New York and elsewhere in the other half. The Berlin section generally covers the span from World War II onwards whereas much of the material on New York predates the war, making direct comparisons a bit more difficult. There are also transnational elements. Trees and knowledge about them float from one side of the Atlantic to the other. Berliners benefitted from global advances in tree science. New Yorkers admired, and sometimes copied, what was going on in Berlin.

But why New York and Berlin? Why not, say, Washington, D.C. (“The City of Trees”) and Paris? Or smaller cities like Augusta, Georgia (“The Garden City”) and Malmö, Sweden. According to Dümpelmann, New York and Berlin were “cities that early urban planners and designers looked to for comparison . . . [and] were both important cultural and industrial centers” (8). The author may have made a more heavy-handed argument for the choice, but she is not suggesting that New York and Berlin are exceptional. Rather, we are left with the thought that such analyses could be carried out in many different cities. And so, *Seeing Trees* is part comparative history, part transnational history, and part neither. On their own, both sections stand as absorbing case studies. Together, they add different flavors to Dümpelmann’s impressive cocktail of environmental, landscape, and urban history.

The book opens in New York. While we might imagine an abundance of street trees in New York’s early, less-industrial, less-populated days, street trees were actually relatively uncommon and planting was largely the domain of private citizens for much of the nineteenth century. Following along the lines of Catherine McNeur’s wonderful book, *Taming Manhattan*, which illuminates how New Yorkers came to seek control over their environment—the hogs that roamed, and the garbage that lined, the streets; the contaminating sewage; and, yes, the trees— Dümpelmann explores how New Yorkers conceived of street trees in a rapidly growing metropolis.<sup>1</sup> There were plenty of reasons not to want them. As just one example, mid-nineteenth-century nativists railed against foreign species of trees, labeling them “filthy” immigrants (41).

But as industrialization roared, the need for trees and their salutary effects—shade, beauty, and a taste of nature—became more pronounced. Planted in piecemeal fashion and without careful management and care, the trees that did line the increasingly bustling streets decayed quickly and died in great numbers, prompting a wave of newly professionalized city foresters to push for trees to be “systematically and scientifically managed” as part of the “Taylorization of the American City” in the early twentieth century (39). In the age of standardization and for the sake of “beauty, comfort and the increase of property value,” street trees were to be bred and planted symmetrically, “straight and sound stemmed” (39). The concept sounds a lot like the rationale behind the Commissioners’ Plan of 1811, which created a rectangular grid of streets in the name of efficiency and economy. Unlike the nation’s capital, New York was to be a city without embellishments, no “circles, ovals, and stars” and instead lined with salable lots to be filled with “right-angled” easy-to-build houses.<sup>2</sup> The trees, just like the streets before them, became a symbol of uniformity. (I wonder what the Bohemians living on Greenwich Village’s

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine McNeur, *Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> “Remarks of the Commissioners for Laying Out Streets and Roads in the City of New York, Under the Act of April 3, 1807,” *Map of the City of New York and Island of Manhattan with Explanatory Remarks and References* (New York: William Bridges, 1811).

crooked streets thought about all of these trees planted in uniform.) The trees were also living paradoxes, valued for their unnatural naturalness. When trees developed cavities, tree surgeons filled them with cement.

In charge of all of this planting and caretaking was, finally, the municipal government and the Department of Parks in particular. The tug between private/public responsibility is a central theme of the book and urban and environmental histories in general. And it is interesting to see how late, relatively, street trees came under the umbrella of municipal management in New York.

It wasn't just landscape architects and the parks department that saw an opportunity in trees. As Dümpelmann examines over the course of two chapters, New York women and African Americans became tree champions, affording them a unique way to engage in public and political issues. As part of the municipal housekeeping movement, women led campaigns to beautify downtowns, including planting trees. In so doing, women helped create "a naturalized city beautiful" that provided a "means to bridge the private and public spheres and transgress the binary of male-coded architecture and female-coded nature" (95). They also planted trees as a means of promoting bird life. This relationship—between animal life, street trees, and the city—might have been expanded in the book. (I kept thinking about New York squirrels.<sup>3</sup>) Considering that the environment is all about relationships and that environmental histories are about ecosystems, how do we draw the necessary boundaries?

In a chapter called "Planting Civil Rights," we learn about campaigns driven by African Americans to save and plant trees ("plant-ins"), which also served as a way for activists to "assert their rights to city spaces" and as a "tool of community building as well as a civil right that could be used against ghettoization" (97-98). Of particular interest is the Neighborhood Tree Corps, a group of children schooled in the art of trees. Members marched through the street, buckets in hand, on a mission to plant "a healthier and more sociable place" (104). The chapter raises interesting questions about power and control of the environment at the local level. Bedford-Stuyvesant was a neighborhood in need of trees and this chapter offers an example of a community seeking to take care of itself. Nevertheless, access to nature remained (and remains) unevenly distributed. It is privileged, white urbanites who have long lived on tree-lined streets and across from well-manicured parks.

Over in Berlin, the story is really a tale of two cities, divided by ideology and, eventually, a wall. During the war, trees were used as weapons (they were lined with explosives), firewood, and nourishment (berries). In the coming years, survivors planted trees to help bind dust emanating from ruins on both sides of the border, dampen traffic noise, heal the wounds of war, and improve "what it felt like to be and live in the city" (179).

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<sup>3</sup> Etienne Benson, "The Urbanization of the Eastern Gray Squirrel in the United States," *The Journal of American History* (December 2013): 691-710.

Just as Thomas Jefferson dreamed of an American capital built to embody the principles of republicanism, East German leaders pondered how to build “a green socialist capital city” (159). That is to say: What would Karl Marx do? Wondering whether Marx would have favored birches or silver maples might seem silly, but landscape architects really did try “to politically legitimize their work and couch it in socialist rhetoric” (161). For example, street trees were used to hide buildings that didn’t fit the socialist vision, including some particularly unattractive “American egg boxes” (154).

While Dümpelmann focuses on women and African-Americans to explore street advocacy in New York, for Berlin she highlights artists and activists who used street trees as their canvas and as their platform for environmental campaigns. The lively section recalls edgy art of the 1970s, including one piece that involved setting a tree on fire and decapitating another by guillotine. Highlighting these different kinds of actors made me wonder about further points of comparison. Were SoHo artists similarly toying with street trees? To what degree did race and gender play a role in street tree advocacy in Berlin?

Naturally, street trees also played a role in stitching Germany back together again. The former border was planted with trees and Berlin’s storied, tree-lined boulevard, Unter den Linden, was reimaged. During wartime, many of its trees had been destroyed, but in reunification, newly planted Lindens fostered a “collective identity” (223). The evolution of Unter den Linden is depicted through a series of beautiful drawings, plans, renderings, and photographs. Throughout, *Seeing Trees* is lavishly illustrated with maps, photographs, diagrams, brochures, and sketches. (One of my favorite images is an order form for the uniforms to be worn by employees of the New York City Department of Parks.)

By custom, book reviewers rarely write anything about a book’s physical nature. In our era, that’s probably a good thing, considering how many overpriced volumes consist of cheaply bound, emaciated pages, with no discernable attempt at beauty, no sense of design, no evidence of a human touch. But the trees that were pulped for these pages have been wondrously reconstructed, like a piece of furniture. The cover features a black-and-white, Depression-era photograph of a Harlem boulevard dotted by cars with bulbus-eyed headlights and a double-decker bus, shouldered by a crowded sidewalk, and shaded by uniform building facades. Lining both sides of the street are rows of trees that have been hand-colored. The cover isn’t just beautiful, it tells the story of the book: we need to see and appreciate the importance of street trees. And it’s not just the cover. The dedication page has an image of a Linden leaf. The Table of Contents even has a cartoon!

The well-illustrated story ends in the twenty-first century with an epilogue in which Dümpelmann considers how trees, once used to fight against miasma and offer shade, have become a central plank in the campaign to fight climate change. At the same time, modern city governments have tended to cede control and management

of street trees as part of the “increasingly global neoliberal management regime” (244). All the while street trees in cities around the globe experience early deaths. To save them, street tree champions are defending their value in terms of dollars and cents (and Euros). This is not entirely new. Even in East Berlin, activists and architects argued that trees had monetary value.

But this is commodification on steroids. In New York, the Department of Parks has quantified the value of every street tree (all 694,249 of them). The New York City Street Tree Map (<https://tree-map.nycgovparks.org/>) proudly displays their dollar values alongside the species (234 varieties) and “recent tree care activities.” As just one example, the 10-inch thick Thornless Honey Locust that lives out front my old apartment intercepts, supposedly, 2,071 gallons of stormwater per year (that’s worth \$20.50), saves the city 1,538 kWh in energy per year (\$194.14), swallows 3 pounds of air pollutants per year (\$15.81), and reduces carbon dioxide by 1,378 pounds per year (\$4.60). In sum, the Honey Locust is worth \$239.66 per year! (Not to mention, of course, the color and beauty it adds to the street.) In total, New York’s street trees provide annual benefits of nearly \$110 million . . . or about half of what the city’s most expensive penthouse recently fetched. Value is relative.

And value, as the history of street trees shows us, changes over time. Whether a nuisance or an amenity, a threat or a nest, trees fit perfectly along some streets in some places in some eras and didn’t fit at all in others. In a certain light, the trees seem like a dollop of nature misplaced onto an unnatural city. But the distinctions we make between city and nature are often superficial.<sup>4</sup> The beauty of street trees, and the beauty of *Seeing Trees*, is that they blur these distinctions and give us the chance to appreciate the “literal and figurative entanglement” of people, trees, and their cities (2).

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<sup>4</sup> See, for the most famous example, William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991).

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**Comments by Charlotte Leib, Yale University**

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*Seeing Trees* (2019): A New Environmental Landscape History

Spotting the shapes of leaves from afar, measuring and making notes, verifying the status of thousands of points on a map—this is how I spent much of this past summer: seeing and surveying trees. Requiring endurance, repetition, telescopic vision, and minimal human social interaction, the work was, in many ways, similar to a survey practice of another sort: that of archival research. The main difference was that this work took place outside, and my days began not with a list of boxes and folders, but with a list of numbered trees. Each morning I would turn on the iPad issued to me by my employer, the City of Cambridge, open the map-based app used by the city to track and maintain municipal trees, and proceed toward the area with the most dots. These represented trees I had been assigned to inspect. Once out in the streets, I often walked for hours without saying a word. Boles instead of boxes, foliage instead of folders, movement instead of stasis. Every tree a story. Every story only partially told: “*Ulmus parvifolia*, planted 2009, replaced 2011, 9.5 inches, some canopy dieback.” “*Tilia cordata*, planted 2019, 2.1 inches.” “*Quercus alba*, 39 inches, growing into sidewalk.” Aside from occasional conversations with inquisitive onlookers, I worked uninterrupted, reading database entries like these and updating them with new diameter-at-breast-height measurements and descriptors.

It was a routine of relative inner silence and outer noise—and one that left me with plenty of time and space to contemplate Sonja Dümpelmann’s newest book, *Seeing Trees: A History of Street Trees in New York City and Berlin*. As I traveled from tree to tree, moving at a pace slower than and separate from the whirl and the hum and the heaving of the engines, wheels, and walkers around me, I often found myself in conversation not only with the trees that were the objects of my attention, but also with those stories, spaces and places around which Dümpelmann’s study is centered. “Forest character and the urban hustle and bustle; holy dignity and serenity, and mundane noise are no doubt opposites.” The lines with which Dümpelmann begins her narrative, penned by a German landscape gardener in the nineteenth century, entered into my mind repeatedly as I went about my work. Wrapping steel tape around trunk after trunk, I marveled at the paradoxical presence of the street-side sentinels I encountered. Year after year they stood amidst the unrelenting pulse of urbanity, between hurried sidewalk and rushing street—not only surviving, but often thriving—growing wider and taller; putting out buds and leaves; pushing apart asphalt and brick; subsuming into their soft structure the hard-edged spaces around them. Layer after layer of woody growth, the trees had lain claim to the space between sidewalk and street, proving that they, too, belonged. “Forest character...mundane noise...” The words ran through my head as I surveyed, measured, and mused. How did these seemingly incongruous qualities come to define our modern streetscapes? Why have humans planted trees in cities,

despite the inherent challenges that trees face growing in urban environments?

Having taken Dümpelmann's course 'Forest, Grove, Tree: Planting Urban Landscapes' while a graduate student at Harvard, I approached my daily survey work with partial answers to these questions. I knew from reading Henry Lawrence's *City Trees: A Historical Geography from the Renaissance through the Nineteenth Century* (University of Virginia Press, 2006) that tree-planting along urban boulevards began in earnest in the mid-nineteenth century—spurred by the discovery of trees' capacity to purify air, and a desire on the part of city planners to sanitize and standardize urban streets.<sup>5</sup> In Dümpelmann's lectures, I had learned of how tree-lined streets, sacred groves, hunting grounds, public parks, and forest preserves had been variously designed, defended, consumed, contemplated, and created during times of scarcity and abundance, and of war and peace. And in the course of reading works by authors such as Richard Campana, Thomas Campanella, and Henry Gerhold, I had come to understand urban trees not only as spiritual symbols and territorial markers, but also as agents of scientific advancement and nation-building, and as emblems of agrarian virtue and economic growth.<sup>6</sup> But it was only after reading Dümpelmann's book that I gained a fuller understanding of how trees took root in our urban landscapes and grew enmeshed in our social, cultural, and political lives. Only then did the historical factors contributing to that enduring-if-paradoxical paradigm of "forest character" and "mundane noise" really become clear.

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*Seeing Trees* is indeed a remarkable work of historical synthesis. Centered on two cities—New York and Berlin—and organized into eight roughly chronological chapters that proceed from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, the book charts the myriad ways in which trees have been seen, shaped, and valued in time and place, and shows that it is possible to write histories that bridge between material and social worlds and macro- and micro-scales. While the past decades have seen more attempts to write histories in this vein, especially in the field of environmental history, *Seeing Trees* stands as a signal contribution to the effort, showing a way forward. Like those street trees that were once planted directly in the carriageway before sidewalks became widespread, Dümpelmann's book stakes out new territory in the field of urban landscape studies and forges new pathways

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<sup>5</sup> Henry W. Lawrence, *City Trees: A Historical Geography from the Renaissance through the Nineteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006). See also Lawrence, "Origins of the Tree-Lined Boulevard," *Geographical Review* 78, No. 4 (1988), 355-374.

<sup>6</sup> Richard J. Campana, *Arboriculture: History and Development in North America* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999); Thomas Campanella, *Republic of Shade: New England and the American Elm* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Henry D. Gerhold, "Origins of Urban Forestry," in *Urban and Community Forestry in the Northeast*, ed. John E. Kruse (New York: Springer, 2010), 1-23; Jill Jonnes, "What is a Tree Worth?" *The Wilson Quarterly* 35 (Winter 2011): 34-41. See also, Jonnes, *Urban Forests: A Natural History of Trees and People in the American Cityscape* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016).

for scholarship.

One of the main successes of the book is the way it brings together diverse historical and disciplinary perspectives in a rigorous treatment of an understudied aspect of urban development. Combining elements of landscape, environmental, and cultural history, and integrating analytic approaches from science and technology studies and studies in material and visual culture, the book is true product of interdisciplinary cross-pollination and a testament to the potential of such an approach. Yet it is also a product of the author's training in both landscape architecture and history, and a work shaped by the fact that few histories of street-tree planting and care had been written before it.

As Henry Lawrence rightly pointed out in 2006, one decade before Dümpelmann began writing her book, tree-planting, as a topic of historical study, "is one that has been largely ignored, falling between the cracks that divide different disciplines."<sup>7</sup> While Lawrence began to remedy this slippage with his publication *City Trees*, only a few additional titles appeared in the realm of arboreal scholarship in the years that followed. Among these were Ellen Stroud's *Nature Next Door: Cities and Trees in the American Northeast* (University of Washington Press, 2012) and Jill Jonnes' *Urban Forests: A Natural History of Trees and People in the American Cityscape* (Viking, 2016).<sup>8</sup> By highlighting how trees have affected climate, environment, and culture in cities and landscape regions across the US, these books importantly foregrounded trees' roles as transformative agents in processes of urbanization. Yet with their US-centric narratives, they hardly built upon the transnational, comparative perspective offered in *City Trees*. Furthermore, Jonnes' *Urban Forests*, a trade volume, lacked extensive citations. At the time of their publication, these books offered new perspectives. However, with their relatively limited geographic and temporal scope, they also reinforced one of the key tendencies that has come to characterize much of the work produced in the past decade on tree-related topics: the practice of writing about trees in particular time periods and national contexts.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lawrence, *City Trees*, xiii.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen Stroud, *Nature Next Door: Cities and Trees in the American Northeast* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012); Jill Jonnes, *Urban Forests: A Natural History of Trees and People in the American Cityscape* (New York: Viking, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> For recently-published histories that give attention to trees' place in cities and their roles in processes of urbanization, see: Anne Beamish, "A Garden in the Street: The Introduction of Street Trees in Boston and New York," *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 38, No. 1 (2018): 38-56; Mark Johnston, *Street Trees in Britain: A History* (Oxford: Windgather Press, 2017); Mark Johnston, *Trees in Towns and Cities: A History of British Urban Arboriculture* (Oxford: Windgather Press, 2015); and several articles by Joanna Dean, including: "The Unruly Tree: Stories from the Archives," in *Urban Forests, Trees and Greenspace: A Political Ecology Perspective*, ed. L. Anders Sandberg, Adrina Bardekjian, and Sadia Butt (Routledge, 2014); "The Social Production of a Canadian Urban Forest," in *Environmental and Social Justice in the City: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Richard Rodger and Genevieve Massard-Guilbaud (White Horse Press, 2011); "Seeing Trees, Thinking Forests: Urban Forestry at the University of Toronto in the 1960s," in *Method and Meaning in Canadian Environmental History*, ed. Alan MacEachern and William J. Turkel (Toronto: Nelson Education, 2009); "'Said tree is a veritable nuisance': Ottawa's Street Trees 1869-1939," *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine* 34, No. 1 (2005): 46-57. Some of the more successful

Dümpelmann's *Seeing Trees* strikes a better balance. Based on extensive and thoroughly cited archival research, it picks up where Lawrence's study leaves off, in the mid-nineteenth century, to chronicle in prose accessible to both academic and non-academic readers the multiple identities that trees have held in two transforming metropolises. The book's transatlantic New York–Berlin focus works well not only because these urban landscapes historically have been looked upon as “model tree cities,” (8) but also because it affords comparative views into the ways in which Progressive-era, Civil Rights, Nazi, and Cold War politics played out in these terrains and affected the character of each city's urban canopy. Embedded within narratives focused on these two global cities are other illuminating comparisons: between urban and rural transformation; internationalism and nativism; competition and knowledge transfer; professional “tree-doctors” and amateur “tree-butchers”; and top-down and bottom-up approaches to landscape design and city planning. Dümpelmann provides an overview of each of these themes in her introduction, which will be of interest to cultural, environmental, and landscape historians alike. Clearly written and original in argument, the introduction also could be assigned in graduate and undergraduate courses, either as a stand-alone text or in tandem with one of the book's amply-illustrated chapters—which include, on average, fourteen figures and plates apiece; an impressive feat in the realm of academic publishing.

Which chapter to assign, however, largely would depend upon what topics and historical moments are most suitable to the class discussion. *Seeing Trees* presents many possibilities. For courses in the history of science and scholars engaged in science and technology studies, the first, second, sixth and seventh chapters offer much to consider with their focus on how scientific discoveries and concerns for public health influenced the development of new arboreal technologies, urban planning practices, and standardized approaches to street-tree growing, planting, and care. For courses focused on environmental catastrophe and the social and ecological impacts of war, “Burning Trees: Street Trees in Wartime and Early Cold War Berlin,” would be most appropriate. Courses seeking to foreground the actions, intentions, and impacts of previously underrepresented agents of urban environmental change, meanwhile, would do well to include “Tree Ladies: Women, Trees and Birds in New York City,” and “Planting Civil Rights: Street Tree Plant-Ins in New York City” in their syllabi.

At its core, *Seeing Trees* is a book that cuts across many disciplines, integrating a variety of historical and analytic perspectives. It is also a book that punctures the perceptual divide between the built and lived worlds by asking readers to see trees as multitudes—of material substance and lived experience; as objects of technological innovation and subjects of cultural interpretation; “as aesthetic

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attempts to bring tree stories to a general audience include: Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate: Discoveries from a Secret World*, trans. Jane Billinghurst (Vancouver, BC: Greystone Books, 2016) and Richard Powers, *The Overstory* (New York; London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2018).

objects, creators of space, territorial markers...” and more (2). Through the many perspectives it offers and the attention it gives to material and social worlds, *Seeing Trees* provides the kind of history that has been, until recently, largely missing from scholarly work in landscape history, which has traditionally focused more upon formal, stylistic, and iconographic analyses of high culture and less upon the physical and cultural processes of landscape creation. For these reasons, the book deserves reading and assignment in its entirety.

There is, however, one chapter particularly deserving of our attention given our current political moment; and one that I would assign if forced to choose—not only because of its relevance to the urban greening schemes currently being proposed by different political parties in response to the climate change crisis, but also because of the diverse set of sources that Dümpelmann draws upon to illuminate previously unconsidered relationships between scientific research, political thought, landscape design, and planning. That chapter is number seven, “Greening Trees: Replanting East and West Berlin.”

Centered on tree-planting activities in Germany after World War Two and combining perspectives from an array of archival materials—including East German planning documents previously locked away in the catacombs of the *Altes Stadthaus* (ix-x; 281-286)—“Greening Trees” compares efforts to study and expand the urban canopy in East Berlin during the 1950’s, 60’s, and 70’s with tree-related scientific research and planning activities undertaken in West Berlin during the same period. Through an even-handed analysis of the “socialist city greening” (*sozialistische Stadtbegrünung*) agenda advanced in East Berlin and the more neoliberal approaches to city greening promoted in West Berlin, Dümpelmann highlights how trees factored into politically-inflected developments on both sides of the divided city. While questions of what species to plant, and where and how to plant them were answered differently across the divide—with East Berliners devising new tree-planting technologies predicated upon efficiency principles and West Berliners prioritizing loose, asymmetrical planting plans that showed the influence of planning concepts put forth in the late-nineteenth century and immediate postwar years—the question of whether trees should be planted at all was undisputed during the post-war period. As Dümpelmann shows, by the mid-twentieth century, planners, scientists and tree experts in both East and West Berlin all agreed upon the value of trees and their microclimatic benefits.

One of the greatest strengths of this chapter is its presentation of the scientific studies that shaped this consensus. Translating scientific literature and German sources into accessible prose, Dümpelmann clearly outlines the scope of scientists’ efforts to better understand trees’ bioclimatic, psychological, and noise-buffering functions. She also shows how their findings influenced new tree-planting concepts. One of the chapter’s pitfalls, however, is that it does not explore in depth the factors that prohibited the realization of some of these proposed planting schemes. Bottlenecks in tree supply and lack of labor for planting and maintenance are presented as two constraints, but other possible political and economic factors go

unexplored. Following the pattern of other chapters in the book, “Greening Trees” is a study of contrasts, rather than of causal relationships.

While “Greening Trees” marks a hinge-point within the book, showing how in Germany during the mid-twentieth century there began “a new phase of scientific street tree management,” (159) small changes in the chapter’s content and structure would have allowed for a more balanced combination of macro-and micro-level analysis. For example, while Dümpelmann hints at the differing political ideologies and economic systems that affected urban transformations in East and West Berlin, a deeper discussion of the planning practices enacted under Soviet Bloc and West German rule would have helped those less-versed in Cold War history better understand the impacts of global politics on city planning. In a similar vein, the chapter would have benefited from a set of maps illustrating the locations and extents of planning projects undertaken in Berlin during the reconstruction years and their impact on the city’s canopy. Had the chapter included maps like these—perhaps made using techniques similar to those used by historian Joanna Dean and geographer Jon Pasher in their study of Ottawa’s urban forest—it would have been enhanced in several ways.<sup>10</sup> First, the creation and inclusion of analytical maps would have allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of urban environmental change in Berlin during the Cold War Period, which likely would have revealed new insights into the limitations and merits of neoliberal and socialist planning approaches. Beyond offering new frames for historical and geographic analysis, such maps would have also helped to clarify Berlin’s Cold War political jurisdictions and overall urban form for readers unfamiliar with the city.

Yet the chapter’s lack of large-scale maps could also be seen as having a positive effect. Left without any visual aids showing the borders between the divided city, one is forced to navigate the text with an eye towards understanding the planning and tree-planting practices that shaped Berlin in its entirety during the Cold War period. The lack of orientation thus becomes an opportunity for interpolation: reading the text alongside diagrams and images of disparate visions for urban greening—some realized, others only imagined—one begins to see the city as not just one place or polity, but many worlds.

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True to its title, *Seeing Trees* invites perspectival shifts on multiple levels, rewarding readers who are willing to engage with its layered, comparative, and thematic structure. Even those who suffer from “tree blindness,” a condition that biologists define as “the inability to see or notice the plants in one’s own environment,” have

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<sup>10</sup> In this study, Dean and Pasher use historical aerial imagery of Ottawa to extrapolate canopy cover conditions in different historical moments. Their maps show how increasing cultural awareness of trees’ environmental benefits contributed to more tree-planting, but with uneven distribution. See Joanna Dean and Jon Pasher, “Mapping Ottawa’s Urban Forest 1928–2005,” *Historical GIS Research in Canada*, ed. Jennifer Bonnell and Marcel Fortin, (University of Calgary Press, 2013): 111–128.

something to gain from reading the book.<sup>11</sup> With its focus on the many identities that trees have held, *Seeing Trees* will indeed prompt readers of all sorts to look at landscapes differently. Thanks in part to the abundance of illustrations throughout, the book directly engages readers in a process of looking, and in doing so promotes a greater awareness of the ways in which trees' needs have been advocated for, expressed, and met in the past. By positioning trees as historical actors who, like humans, have experienced the trauma of drought, war, and political turmoil, the book engenders empathy on the part of the reader for the non-human world. In text and image, street trees are presented as entities constructed by humans, in need of our continual care, and as entities upon which humans rely.

Yet the book's illustrations are not meant to serve merely as visual evidence of the events, turmoil, and changing environments that trees have lived through. Rather, the illustrations are presented as aspects of visual culture and are analyzed by Dümpelmann as artifacts that have influenced humans' interactions with the material world. By intertwining textual, visual, and material analysis in this way, Dümpelmann advances a new approach to doing environmental history in *Seeing Trees*: one that considers changing relationships between nature and culture in terms of the images and artifacts that historically have mediated these relationships.

Dümpelmann's epilogue "Street Trees for the Future" forces further perspectival shifts, asking readers not only to remember the various roles that trees have held in time and place, but also to consider how their roles will continue to change in the coming years. What species will be planted in the future, in response to bioclimatic changes in cities? Who will plant, care, and pay for urban trees? And how will factors threatening trees' status in cities—such as climate change and "the erosion of government control due to an increasingly neoliberal global management regime" (244)—influence their "forest character"?

For Dümpelmann, it seems, coping with the uncertainty that lies ahead requires seeing trees in all of their complexity, and understanding how they have managed to persist in urban landscapes changed and changing. Waxing philosophic, Dümpelmann in her epilogue reminds us that it is the cyclical timescale of arboreal life that has been trees' saving grace: "Trees' inbuilt a priori obsolescence—death—has saved them from becoming truly obsolescent in cities and has enabled them to persist," she writes. "Every tree death provides a literal and figurative space, an opening and a moment to decide whether and how a tree should be replanted" (248). In many ways, this is one of the book's most illuminating conclusions. And in more ways than one, it is a hopeful reprise relevant to the work of writing history.

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<sup>11</sup> In 1998, Elisabeth Schussler and James Wandersee, a pair of botanists and biology educators, coined the term "plant blindness," and the above quoted definition is theirs. They first used the term in their presentation "A model of plant blindness," at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of the 15<sup>o</sup> Laboratory, Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. For their later articles on the concept, see Schussler and Wandersee, "Preventing plant blindness," *The American Biology Teacher* 61 (1999): 84-86; and "Toward a Theory of Plant Blindness," *Plant Science Bulletin* 47, (No. 1, 2001), 2-9.  
<https://www.botany.org/bsa/psb/2001/psb47-1.pdf>

Thinking of trees as symbols of death and rebirth, we might ask ourselves: when our stories grow old, and no longer serve us, at what point do we replace them? How can we tell stories that, like trees, embrace uncertainty yet remain firmly rooted in the landscapes and life-worlds to which they belong? How can our stories, like trees, serve multiple generations, and grow into forests that can shelter us when the mundane noise of earthly life becomes too loud? How can academic disciplines branch out and grow new roots without taking too many turns, which, in time, can lead to a loss in focus and scholarly verve?<sup>12</sup>

Academic disciplines that seek to retain their relevance must be like trees and respond quickly to the vicissitudes of the changing environments in which we live. They also must participate in the longstanding mutualistic relationship between the humanities and sciences, which, much like plants and mycorrhizal fungi, have historically relied upon one another. Participating in the academic world and writing history without losing touch with life, in all its forms, requires engaging in multiple fields and writing for multiple audiences, which can be an exhausting task. Yet, this is what is required of us today, if we are to maintain our awareness of the generations ahead of us who will stand at new crossroads, facing new questions. All academic disciplines—but especially history, a discipline whose purpose is rooted in asking and answering questions about the past—have the capacity to contribute to this process, this intergenerational dialogue.

Yet how to participate, when almost every discipline, including history, is divided into subfields and pockets of knowledge? As a landscape historian, the question is one that Dümpelmann considers often in her work. In her 2011 article “Taking Turns: Landscape History and Environmental History at the Crossroads,” Dümpelmann riffed upon the conceptual meaning of what it means to make a historiographic turn to draw attention to the potential for a productive and sustained dialogue between the fields of landscape history and environmental history. Highlighting how both fields had developed alongside but largely apart from one another, despite a common interest in relationships between human culture and non-human nature, Dümpelmann argued: “it is time for both fields to embrace and make use of what the other has to offer.”<sup>13</sup>

With *Seeing Trees*, Dümpelmann has followed the outline of her own advice and done just that. The book thoroughly combines approaches from landscape history and environmental history, as well as from other fields, while giving equal attention to how human-nature relations have been shaped by aesthetic ideals, technologies, scientific discoveries, cultural currents, climatic factors, site conditions, animals,

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<sup>12</sup> For an evaluation of the negative impact that historiographic turns have had in scholarly debates and historical scholarship, see Gary Wilder, “From Optic to Topic: The Foreclosure Effect of Historiographic Turns,” *American Historical Review* 117 (June 2012): 723–745.

<sup>13</sup> Sonja Dümpelmann, “Taking Turns: Landscape History and Environmental History at the Crossroads,” *Landscape Research* 36, No. 6 (2011): 625–640 (636).

insects, and more. Reaching beyond the bounds of traditional environmental history, *Seeing Trees* integrates theoretical frames and methodological approaches that build upon “the new cultural history,” as outlined by Lynn Hunt; “thick descriptions,” as theorized by Clifford Geertz; and conceptual ideas first promoted by geographers, such as the “spatialization of history.” These are all approaches that Dümpelmann outlined in her 2011 article as having the potential to contribute to the emergence of a new scholarly field, which she termed “new environmental landscape history.”<sup>14</sup>

In the spirit of the roundtable, I would like to invite Dümpelmann to revisit the concept of “new environmental landscape history” in her response. I am particularly interested in knowing more about how—if at all—the process of researching and writing *Seeing Trees* changed her conception of what “new environmental landscape history” is and could be. Has there been a significant turn on the part of environmental historians toward the field of landscape history in the years since “Taking Turns” was published? And vice versa, to what extent have landscape historians engaged with the work of environmental historians and their methodologies in the past decade?

I am interested in Dümpelmann’s answers to these questions because I believe in the potential of “new environmental landscape history.” Hybrid by nature, it is an expanded field that invites us to dwell in those productive threshold spaces that so often go uninhabited and overlooked: whether it’s that green verge between the sidewalk and street, where trees grow and insects buzz; that corridor between library bookshelves, where books are pulled and new connections are made; or that imagined border between history’s myriad subfields. And that’s what excites me most about *Seeing Trees*: the way it defines new thresholds for scholarship. In embracing marginality, complexity, and juxtaposition, it not only changes our view of trees, but also our conception of what landscape history and environmental history can be.

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<sup>14</sup> Dümpelmann, “Taking Turns,” 635–636.

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**Comments by Catherine McNeur, Portland State University**

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In 1926, a banjo-playing ad-man named Don Knowlton wondered if we might be able to consider some trees to be “civilized.” In Cleveland, Ohio, dubbed the “Forest City,” industry and the prosperity it brought with it had transformed the urban canopy. Old, cherished trees like oaks, maples, and elms were withering in the perpetual cloud of coal smoke, while ailanthus, white poplars, and willows “spread in abundance.” Reflecting on this change in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Knowlton wasn’t bemoaning the loss but rather celebrating the resiliency of the trees that flourished “where smoke and dust and grime and gases seem most vile.” These were trees that appeared to embrace industrialization, as well as the “trampling of thousands of human feet.” While not deliberately cultivated, in Knowlton’s eyes their proximity to human habitation made them civilized.<sup>15</sup>

Hardy or delicate, nuisance or treasure, the trees found along the streets of New York and Berlin in Sonja Dümpelmann’s *Seeing Trees* show the changing ways city governments, arborists, and individual citizens have both managed and conceived of the urban canopy. Dümpelmann juxtaposes the two cities in two time periods—New York from roughly the 1870s to the 1960s and Berlin from roughly the 1940s to the present—leaving much of the comparisons to the reader. Still, the variety of stories that she unearths in both cities shows overlap. Trees serve many roles, as sources of shade and fresh air, as well as civic pride and neighborhood revitalization efforts. They are habitats for desired birds and fodder for public artists. In both cities, they served as sources of fruit and firewood during economic downturns. They defy top-down aerial surveillance, providing both shadows for untoward activities and protection from air raids. They were also the victims of road salt, construction projects, vehicular accidents, and negligence. In short, they were and are very much a part of the city.

Officials in New York and Berlin alike sought the perfect urban trees: those whose roots might not be tempted to explore sewers or disrupt sidewalks and foundations. The ideal were low-maintenance trees that could provide all of the benefits of added greenery without mess. It’s for this reason that twentieth-century urban foresters embraced a kind of botanical sexism, planting male trees almost exclusively to avoid all the seeds that female trees drop. The drawback to this plan, though, was that the pollen produced by male trees has ultimately aggravated allergies and asthma for many urban dwellers.<sup>16</sup> As Dümpelmann points out, urban policy makers have long tied trees to human health, whether as the creators of clean air during cholera epidemics, as a local source of vitamins and nourishment from their fruits and nuts, or as a buffer from heat during global climate change. In *Smell Detectives*, Melanie Kiechle has also shown how urban trees that produce foul smells have also been

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<sup>15</sup> Don Knowlton, “Are Some Trees Civilized?” *The Atlantic Monthly* 138 (July 1926): 79-82.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Leo Ogren, [“Botanical Sexism Cultivates Home-Grown Allergies.”](#) *Scientific American Blog* (29 April 2015)

blamed for poor health, especially in the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> When trees grow in close proximity to humans, they are more likely to feel the reverberations of both complaints and praise, further echoing the connections between human health and tree health.

Trees also served as symbols of inclusion in the city. This is clearest during Dümpelmann's discussion of linden trees in Berlin where she traces how a linden-lined avenue, Unter den Linden, was reimagined at various points in the city's history. From its early protection by King Frederick I, to lindens being linked along with oaks to the Nazis' "blood and soil" ethic that tied German identity to native flora, the lindens have carried various meanings. Decades later, as East and West Berlin reunited after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the lindens were a way to revitalize and reconnect the ruptured city. They simultaneously marked inclusion and exclusion. I wonder if Dümpelmann found additional examples of botanical xenophobia in her research besides the ones she touches on briefly in both cities. These moments seem ripe for further exploration into how urban dwellers and those making decisions about street trees distinguished between those to welcome and those to exclude, whether trees or humans. In *Trees in Paradise*, Jared Farmer follows the fate of the blue gum eucalyptus in California, and the ways that it moved from a great-smelling, fast-growing exotic beauty to a much-maligned invasive incendiary.<sup>18</sup> The complicated ways that politics and nationalism layer onto botanical judgements add even more to the discussion of urban forestry.

In the same way that we rank various trees as icons, weeds, and everything in between, trees also serve as the keepers of our stories. Given how trees often outlive humans, it's not uncommon to find people using trees as botanical witnesses to massive changes in history. In the *Republic of Shade*, Thomas J. Campanella writes about the significance Americans placed on a variety of elm trees—from the Treaty Elm to the Cambridge Elm and beyond—these trees were physical connections to a political and heroic past. The trees themselves, when felled, had an afterlife as relics in parlors and glass cases in museums, holding more and more value because of the stories attached to them.<sup>19</sup> Comparable tree stories, however large or small, can help rally a community when a tree is threatened by development or new city plans, turning tree enthusiasts into activists. They bring the urban landscape into the foreground, and remind people about the investment they've made in their surroundings as well as the ways the city has changed over time. They feel like a tangible piece of a historic moment.

Given the economic value that mature trees give to a city block, they can also become a shorthand for reading social class onto a neighborhood. Dümpelmann's

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<sup>17</sup> Melanie Kiechle, *Smell Detectives: An Olfactory History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 68-70.

<sup>18</sup> Jared Farmer, *Trees in Paradise: A California History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 109-220.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas J. Campanella, *Republic of Shade: New England and the American Elm* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

chapter devoted to the community activist Hattie Carthan, shows how in the midst of urban renewal efforts, communities could battle the top-down designations of “blight” with trees. Carthan helped to change the narrative around her Brooklyn neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant by not only saving trees but also leading a tree-planting and nature education initiative. Trees can be a powerful force in establishing pride of place, but of course they can also help to gentrify neighborhoods as well.

The beauty of Dümpelmann’s work is that she reminds readers how closely tied urban trees are to human politics, design, social inequities, material needs, scientific and technological advances, and desires. The paradox then, is that while they are as reflective of human culture as perhaps any urban building might be, they are also beings unto themselves, existing slightly beyond human control. A growing number of urban environmental historians have continued to unpack just how wild urban spaces were and are, sometimes beyond what we recognize at first glance.<sup>20</sup> When Dümpelmann writes in her introduction that with the planting of trees “cities were naturalized and trees were urbanized” the element of human control and the separation of nature and culture (however transgressed) remains key.<sup>21</sup> Certainly plants that grow beyond human control tend to be denigrated as “weeds.” Did Dümpelmann find much debate about the designation or place of weed trees in her research? In urban spaces, we usually like the more subservient trees and plants rather than the ones that seem to act as if they have a mind of their own. Yet, as Don Knowlton noted in 1926 Cleveland, perhaps there is as much value in those resilient, untamed trees that grow “not because of direct human aid, but in the face of all factors ordinarily considered fatal to vegetable life.”<sup>22</sup> These wild weed trees are humbling reminders that we humans never fully have control of our landscapes.

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<sup>20</sup> For example: Ari Kelman, *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Matthew Klinge, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Michael Rawson, *Eden on the Charles: The Making of Boston* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Zachary J. S. Falck, *Weeds: An Environmental History of Metropolitan America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011); Catherine McNeur, *Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); Fred Brown, *The City is More than Human: An Animal History of Seattle* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017); Kiechle, *Smell Detectives*; Kara Schlichting, *New York Recentered: Building the Metropolis from the Shore* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); Andrew Robichaud, *Animal City: The Domestication of America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019).

<sup>21</sup> Sonja Dümpelmann, *Seeing Trees: A History of Street Trees in New York City and Berlin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 5.

<sup>22</sup> Knowlton, 82.

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**Response by Sonja Dümpelmann, University of Pennsylvania**

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What a treat to see the trees I address in *Seeing Trees* through the eyes of three colleagues who have taken the time not only to read but also to engage intensively with my narrative(s) in their above comments. I would like to thank Kara Schlichting for inviting me to this roundtable review and for assembling and organizing this group of thoughtful reviewers, and Evan Friss, Charlotte Leib, and Catherine McNeur for sharing their thoughts, comments, and some questions.

One of the unavoidable questions triggered by *Seeing Trees* is certainly the one posed by Friss, “why New York and Berlin”? Why not other cities, perhaps two capital cities, or two smaller cities, or why not focus on one city alone? Friss suggests perhaps making a more heavy-handed argument for the two cities, but while there are, I think, good reasons for Berlin and New York City which I lay out in the introduction and will therefore not dwell on here (both cities were model cities in terms of tree planting from a variety of points of view; they were the respective cultural centers in the two nations once street tree planting took off in a more systematic style in the late nineteenth century; early American urban foresters looked to Berlin, and later West-German foresters looked back to the US in terms of tree planting expertise; the necessary expertise in terms of forestry more generally largely reached the US from Germany besides France in the nineteenth century) there are also good arguments that could be made for other cities. It could, indeed, also have been Washington, D.C. and Paris, for example, and I have been thinking about this sequel! In the case I do take this on, it would likely be a stricter transnational and comparative history.

While there are therefore definite reasons to take on New York City and Berlin—not least New York City’s density that almost appears to defy any tree life in its urban streets—and the stories I tell are place- and site-specific, one of the intentions of *Seeing Trees* is to show that studying trees in time and place more generally can be worthwhile and enrich the respective places’ histories and understandings. While there may be many similar stories in different places, there will also be exceptional stories to tell of places as they relate to particular trees, people, and specific environmental and political conditions.

I appreciate Friss’s suggestion regarding a potential expansion on the relationship between tree and animal life in the city. Animals—domesticated or not—play an important role in the book at various moments, and in various forms—for example, dogs threaten street trees through their urine and feces; different insects harm street trees; and birds who can help keep insects at bay need trees to nest and thrive. By the early twentieth century street trees therefore were not only appreciated because of their aesthetic and climatological functions but also because they provide habitat. The recognition of street trees’ role as bird nesting habitat is important in my discussion of women’s early twentieth-century engagement and

activism around street trees. Street tree planting campaigns were not only part of women's municipal housekeeping; they were also closely connected to women's engagement in animal rights activism and nature preservation which at the time revolved in particular around forestry and bird protection in and outside of cities. While animals therefore inhabit some of the stories I tell, they are not foregrounded and this, I agree, could be a worthwhile additional endeavor in this book as long as the street tree was not lost out of sight.

In response to Friss's (and McNeur's) quest for further comparisons, particularly in terms of actors, their gender, and regarding artists engaging with street trees, I should mention that street tree activism was less common in the early twentieth century in Berlin than in New York City because the urban government more willingly took care of this new green infrastructure in the Reich's capital and in German cities more generally. Nevertheless, as I show in the introduction, German middle- and working-class women did take over some of the street tree work from men when the latter were at the front during the First World War. And while I argue that street tree art as a new genre developed in Berlin followed by artists in other German cities, in the US, Robert Smithson was among the early artists who also experimented with trees, albeit not specifically with street trees (192). After his work *Up-Side-Down Trees* and *Dead Tree*, in New York City in 1970, Smithson conceived of his kinesthetic art work *Floating Island*, a ninety-foot long barge with trees and shrubs planted on it. *Floating Island*, which appeared not unlike a dislocated piece, or "nonsite," of Central Park, was to be tugged by a boat around Manhattan Island. Whereas Smithson's *Floating Island* was only realized posthumously in 2005, environmental artist Alan Sonfist's *Time Landscape* was planted in the late 1970s on a lot near LaGuardia Place south of Washington Square Park. Conceived in the 1960s, Sonfist's objective was to grow a miniature forest recreating the type of vegetation that would have grown in this location at the time of North America's colonization by European settlers.<sup>23</sup> In contrast to the street tree art highlighted in the book, however, these projects were not specifically addressing street trees even though they were dealing with urban nature more generally.

Another aspect of comparison proposed by Leib—the addition of maps showing canopy cover in East and West Berlin over the course of time which would also have provided orientation to readers unfamiliar with these cities—is a very good point. And while this was initially intended through the use of aerial photographs, the scope of this book ultimately did not allow for inclusion.

Raising another important point, McNeur comments on botanical xenophobia and "weed trees" which play an important role in *Seeing Trees*. Did I find more examples of tree species which elicited aversion (I highlight the ailanthus in the discussion of

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<sup>23</sup> Sonfist's interest was similar to a more recent research project, "Mannahatta Project," led by the ecologist Eric Sanderson from the Wildlife Conservation Society, which was concluded in 2009 and sought to uncover Manhattan's ecology before European colonization.

New York City)?<sup>24</sup> Regarding Berlin, for example, particular linden species were considered alien and therefore less adapted along streets in the latter half of the twentieth century (233-34). At the beginning of that century, the völkisch-nationalist writer Heinrich Pudor had decried the fast-growing columnar poplar as decadent and “entirely un-German.”<sup>25</sup> By no means should this brittle tree, which had come to Germany from Italy, be planted in cities, he posited. The Italian fascists in the 1920s in turn considered the pine the “most Italian” tree which, as a consequence, was used to replace elm trees along Rome’s thoroughfares.<sup>26</sup> Irrational aversion and politically and ideologically charged sentiment for and against selected species has been a common phenomenon throughout history. Originally I had planned to include a comparative study of the ailanthus in NYC and Berlin because this particular tree also has a very interesting history including xenophobic sentiment in Berlin, but ultimately the decision to not turn the book into a strictly comparative volume and some other factors led me not to include this discussion. Overall, the debate about natives and non-natives, its political and ideological connotations as well as the close connections between botanical and social rhetoric is not new, of course. Landscape and environmental historians have treated this subject matter involving particular plant or tree species, and specific planting designs in a variety of contexts.<sup>27</sup> More recently, ecologists, sociologists, and anthropologists have also observed and pointed to the dangers of botanical xenophobia, and the easy voluntary and involuntary rhetorical slips that occur between botanical and social ecology that have also been instrumentalized in discriminatory politics and ideologies.<sup>28</sup>

In the last decade or so, studies in biology, botany, and philosophy have furthermore drawn our attention to the agency of plants, which among other things has been a reaction to the by-now quite well-established field of animal studies as well as to

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<sup>24</sup> For various treatments of the ailanthus also see the video “Feral Trees” by Metalab (at) Harvard (<https://vimeo.com/130915730>); Matthew Battles, *Tree* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Bettina Stoetzer, “*Ailanthus Altissima*, or the Botanical Afterlives of European Power” in *Botanical City*, Matthew Gandy and Sandra Jasper eds. (Berlin: JOVIS, forthcoming 2020).

<sup>25</sup> See Sonja Dümpelmann, “Die Stadt als Wald und der Wald als Stadt,” in *Design und Mimesis: Kreative Nachahmungsprozesse zwischen Natur und Kultur*, Antonia Ulrich and Friedrich Weltzien eds. (Berlin: Reimer, 2019), 92-109.

<sup>26</sup> See Sonja Dümpelmann, “‘La battaglia del fiore’. Gardens, Parks and the City in Fascist Italy,” *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes* 25, no. 1 (2005): 40-70.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Thomas J. Campanella, *Republic of Shade: New England and the American Elm* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Dümpelmann, “‘La battaglia del fiore’”; Gert Gröning and Uwe Schneider, *Gartenkultur und nationale Identität* (Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 2001); Philip Pauly, “The Beauty and Menace of the Japanese Cherry Trees: Conflicting Visions of American Ecological Independence,” *Isis* 87, no. 1 (1996): 51-73.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Ingo Kowarik, “Einheimisch oder nichteinheimisch?” *Garten und Landschaft* 99, no. 5 (1989): 15-18; Mark Davis et al., “Don’t Judge Species by Their Origins,” *Nature* 474 (2011): 153-154; Bettina Stoetzer, “Ruderal Ecologies: Rethinking Nature, Migration, and the Urban Landscape in Berlin,” *Cultural Anthropology* 33, no. 2 (2018): 295-323; Jens Lachmund, *Greening Berlin: The Co-Production of Science, Politics, and Urban Nature* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013).

environmental transformation and climate crises during the Anthropocene.<sup>29</sup> Scientists like Stefano Mancuso and Suzanne Simard have taught us about plant intelligence and the “wood wide web,” and more recent developments have led some governments to finally recognize the rights of nature. Long acknowledged by many indigenous peoples, attributing plants with personhood helps to admit their agency and recognize they are more than the numbers as which they appear in tree surveys, and which have been used especially in the last decade to monetize their so-called ecosystem services. In *Seeing Trees* I try to show how late nineteenth and twentieth-century tree workers, experts, and everyday citizens both ran up against but also sought to collaborate with the nature of trees and negotiated between human and arboreal needs. After all, the term arboriculture itself, which by the early twentieth century had come to be used in English to describe the planting and maintenance of street trees, encapsulates the fusion of nature and culture.

Charlotte Leib’s question appears fitting to conclude with. What is the relationship between landscape and environmental history today, and “has there been a significant turn on the part of environmental historians towards the field of landscape history since” my piece “Taking Turns” was published in 2011? While landscape historians have increasingly been perceiving environmental histories, I have not observed an equal interest from the side of environmental historians. This is among other things probably still due to the type of histories landscape historians have been writing. With *Seeing Trees* I am trying to uncover histories that are of equal interest to landscape and environmental historians, and to the environmental humanities more generally. And, in fact, it is this latter academic field that has established itself more fully in the decade since “Taking Turns” and that now offers a home to both environmental and landscape historians. Through its interdisciplinarity and its various analytical lenses including race, gender, and class, the environmental humanities are a valuable academic commons for humanists with environmental concerns to communicate across disciplinary boundaries. And trees, of course, provide the perfect metaphor: just like the branches of many trees, in the environmental humanities disciplines and activities can become entangled, letting us see the forest for the trees. At the same time, the environmental humanities can offer conversations which help to disentangle various perspectives and disciplines and sharpen their contours. Crown-shyness describes the phenomenon in some tree species to not touch each other’s crown, thus making the contours of neighboring trees visible. In history both entanglement and disentanglement may be necessary and useful to assume as many perspectives as we possibly can.

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Francis Hallé, *In Praise of Plants* (Portland: Timber Press, 1999); Matthew Hall, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011).

## About the Contributors

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**Sonja Dümpelmann** is a landscape historian and Associate Professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. She is the author and (co-)editor of several books. Besides the most recently published *Seeing Trees* these include *Flights of Imagination: Aviation, Landscape, Design* (UVA, 2014), *Women, Landscape Architecture and Modernity* (co-ed. with John Beardsley; Routledge, 2015), and *A Cultural History of Gardens in the Age of Empire* (Bloomsbury, 2013). She lectures internationally and has served as President of the Landscape History Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians and serves as Senior Fellow in Garden and Landscape Studies at the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington DC. Before joining UPenn she held associate and assistant professorships at Harvard University, the University of Maryland, and Auburn University.

**Evan Friss** is an associate professor of history at James Madison University and the author of two books: *On Bicycles: A 200-Year History of Cycling in New York City* (Columbia University Press, 2019) and *The Cycling City: Bicycles and Urban America in the 1890s* (University of Chicago Press, 2015).

**Charlotte Leib** is a doctoral student in Environmental History at Yale University. Her work focuses on histories of the built environment, landscape architecture, and the perceptions, representations and repercussions of environmental and technological change in North America during the seventeenth through twentieth centuries. She holds Masters degrees from Harvard University in Landscape Architecture and in the History and Philosophy of Design and Media, and a Bachelor of Arts in Architecture from Princeton University.

**Catherine McNeur** is Associate Professor of Environmental History and Public History at Portland State University and author of *Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City* (Harvard University Press, 2014). She is currently writing *Sister Scientists: The Forgotten Women Who Transformed American Science* (under contract, Basic Books). Along with her colleague, Professor Vivek Shandas, she has helped create [www.canopystory.org](http://www.canopystory.org), a crowd-sourced digital storytelling site about Portland's urban trees.

**Kara Murphy Schlichting** is an Assistant Professor of History at Queens College, City University of New York. Her work in late-19th and 20th-century American History sits at the intersection of urban, environmental, and political history, with a particular focus on coastal spaces and city planning in greater New York City. Her book *New York Recentered: Building the Metropolis from the Shore* (University of Chicago Press, 2019) is part of the press's History of Urban America series.

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