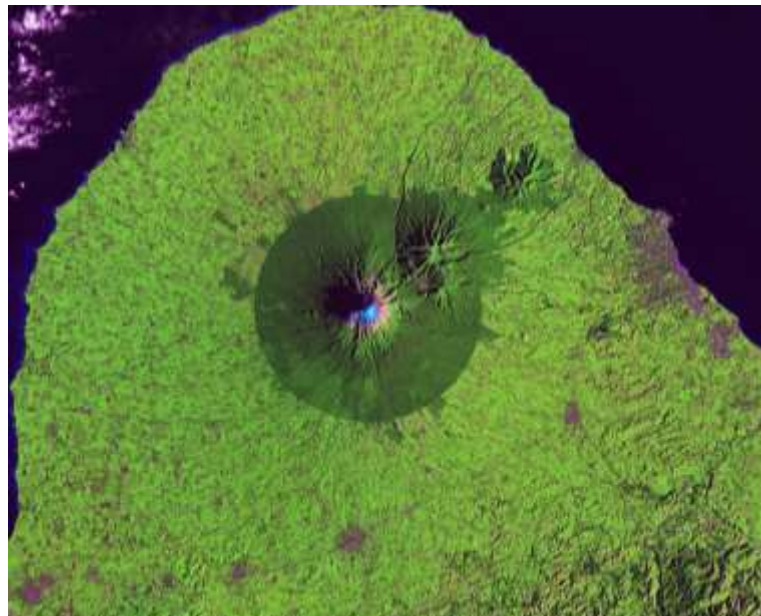


Call for Applications 2025

Planetary Scholars & Artists in Residence Program

PROTOTYPING A PLANETARY DEMOCRACY Eight Fellowships on Planetary Agency & Politics

In political responses to anthropogenic planetary distress, the core principle of freedom no longer seems to be a priority. As the Earth's critical biophysical systems are growing increasingly fragile, approaching collapse, the bases for the livelihoods of millions of people and more-than-human beings are under threat. Equipped with reformative control mechanisms dating back to the onset of the environmental movement (e.g., the sustainability paradigm or the IPCC), democratic systems have failed to avert the present *polycrisis*. Instead, fossil-fueled, extractive ways of living *off* – as opposed to *with* – the planet continue to prevail while ecosystems collapse, species go extinct, and geopolitical conflicts abound. In the meantime, democracies have transformed from proactive into reactive forces. Unexpressive of the collective “will” of other than human political agents, nation-state- and human-centered governments remain incapable of coordinating collective action to keep the Earth habitable. However, the freedom of *all* humans, including future generations, is inextricably linked to the vibrancy of the biosphere; the struggle for civil rights and the struggle for the planet are one. To preserve democratic values and avoid dictatorship in answer to the planetary crisis, political institutions need to recalibrate towards the earthly multitudes that shape the condition of our lives.



*A starting point from where to think further:
Local Māori tribes and the government of New Zealand share guardianship of Mount Taranaki, which has
been declared a legal person in 2017. © United States Geological Survey 2020*

The [Panel on Planetary Thinking](#) at the Justus-Liebig-Universität (JLU) in Giessen, Germany, seeks scholars and artists with visions of designing these future institutions. For the periods **April-June** and **September-November 2025**, we award **eight fellowships** for scientific and creative projects that conceptualize and experiment with strategies to integrate more-than-human agencies into politics. To restore the proactive capacity of democratic systems to foster freedom, equality, and solidarity, *all* “voices” that pose demands to and are affected by their decisions must participate. Democratic thinkers consider these to include not only the perspectives and intelligences of more-than-human life but also those of ecosystems, ecoregions, and planetary forces, as well as the ones provided by the emergent technosphere or (in)animate matter.¹ However, concrete plans are missing for realizing this political practice or differentiating between the collectives and individuals within this unwieldy crowd. To contribute to closing this gap, we need insights on **(1) how PLANETARY AGENCY** manifests and **(2) how PLANETARY POLITICS** can answer to more-than-human political agency. As a result of this final round of our consecutive, four-year fellowship program, we aim to design a **planetary democracy** prototype.

Planetary Thinking on Agency & Politics

We do not simply live ‘on,’ but are part of an ever-changing planet—alongside a multitude of others. To grapple with what that means and how we can meet our human responsibilities, the **Planetary Scholars & Artists in Residence Program** [2022-2025] facilitates dialogues between the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, life sciences, and the arts. The program’s overarching questions touch upon the following dimensions:

- In terms of the **past**: How did planetary forces form us? How did we obtain planetary forces that are capable of transforming Earth?
- Concerning the **present**: How can humans deal with irregular-regular planetary changes beyond their influence? What does it mean to have such powers, how should they be deployed, and when should they be restrained?
- And **prospectively**: Which planetary forces beyond our influence can we anticipate? Which planetary dynamics can we ally or reunite with, and which alliances should we quit (if possible)?

Currently, the third group of fellows is working on the overarching theme of **PLANETARY TIMES**—their projects address the planetary evolution in information processing, comparative planetary histories, the practice and philosophy of de-extinction, as well as planetary timescales and the conception of eternity investigated through case studies on glaciers, permafrost tunnels, and cryopreservation facilities. Previous fellows have investigated two other theoretical premises of planetary thinking: **PLANETARY MATERIALS** [2022] and **PLANETARY SPACES** [2023]. In this final round, we wish to bundle creative and scientific potentials to apply this planetary lens while conceptualizing and designing the building blocks needed for a planetary democracy (**PLANETARY AGENCY** and **PLANETARY POLITICS**, 2025). Applicants may focus on increasing our understanding of more-than-human agencies by rendering them visible, tangible, and interpretable through political terms. From there, we wish to reflect on and experiment with the respective institutional structures and democratic practices that enable these agents’ political inclusion. Therefore, applications may

¹For an overview on key texts in the field from where we aim to think further, we refer applicants to the [list of references](#) attached to this Call.

focus on either **PLANETARY AGENCY** or **PLANETARY POLITICS** or address both dimensions complementarily. Applicants should aim to generate insights that enhance the current state of research and practice outlined in this Call, and they are welcome to apply for both terms if their projects require more than one period to be realized.

Projects seeking insights into the implications we can draw from **PLANETARY AGENCY** on the institution building of a planetary democracy include, but are not limited to:

- The **(co-)shaping** of the Earth, other planets, ecosystems, and human societies by
 - physical, planetary, or cosmic forces (e.g., the impacts of gravity and seismic forces on architectural design, the structuring of societies by bodies of water, or the geopolitical consequences of solar storms);
 - microbial, fungal, vegetal, and nonhuman animal life (e.g., the terraforming capacities of bacteria, the information exchange in forest ecosystems via mycorrhizal networks humans draw upon, or the co-shaping of societal life between humans and domestic animals);
 - technological or “artificial” life (e.g., the social and political impacts of Large Language Models and other AI technologies, as in oil extraction or conservation efforts, or the use of robotics in research, therapy, or space exploration);
- Research on **more-than-human communication** (e.g., plant bioacoustics utilizing digital technologies, biomimetic robots, and supported by artificial intelligences).

Projects focusing on **PLANETARY POLITICS** should aim to design the building blocks for a planetary democracy prototype. Possible foci include, but are not limited to:

- Concrete **proposals for new institutional frameworks, practices, and spaces** that enable this new institution to answer to more-than-human agencies (e.g., more-than-human voting practice, constituencies, or parliaments);
- Visionary expansions of **political concepts, theories, and real-world experiments** that
 - recognize and answer to more-than-human political agents (e.g., more-than-human rights, interspecies democracy, multispecies justice, or planetary commons);
 - aim for safeguarding planetary habitability (e.g., Earth System Governance, planetary federalism, or ecological democracy);
 - practice more-than-human collaboration, inspiring more-than-human politics (e.g., Animals in the Room, Organisms Democracy, the Embassy of the North Sea, Terra0, The Internet of Animals, or The Internet of Trees);
- Research and experiments exploring the inspirations we can draw from the **political dimensions inherent to planetary agencies** (e.g., efforts in more-than-human translation, engagement with democratic arrangements of insects or herd animals, or more-than-human forms of protest or preferences).

Fellowship Awards & Expectations



Left: Exhibition "Unstable Planetary Spaces" by Jason Waite & Adenike Oladosu (Planetary Spaces cohort) at Kunsthalle Giessen © Endres. Right: Claudia Hartl (Planetary Materials cohort) takes a core sample from a beech © Mörsdorf

All fellows are expected to reside in Giessen (or its proximity) throughout the period(s) of their fellowships. They will be granted a stipend of **5,000 euros/month**, which is supposed to cover all travel and living expenses. In addition, funding for workshops, guest speakers, exhibitions, publications, etc., is available upon request. During their residency in Giessen, fellows will be fully integrated into the JLU's academic life, have full access to its libraries, and may be put in touch with researchers from its comprehensive range of [research facilities](#). The Panel also maintains a range of cooperations with other organizations, ranging from Giessen's theater to its cinema and makerspace. All fellows are expected to participate in the regular panel meetings and to design an engaging **workshop** with and for a transdisciplinary audience in collaboration with their co-fellows. Depending on their individual scholarly and/or artistic subject matters, they may conceptualize the workshops in a format they choose, such as a **masterclass**, an **exhibition**, or a **performative activity**.

Comfortable apartments with fully equipped kitchens have been reserved in the university's '**Alexander von Humboldt**' **guest house**, but fellows are welcome to take up residence elsewhere according to their preferences. They are provided with newly renovated and furnished **co-working office/studio spaces** at the *Panel on Planetary Thinking's* headquarters within the city center — inside one of Giessen's most characteristic, old-style buildings.



Co-working spaces for our fellows © Bauer

The Panel and the [Kunsthalle Giessen](#), the city's leading **art space** for contemporary art, are

planning a **final exhibition** to showcase the artistic work of fellows from all cohorts of the program: Planetary Materials [2022], Planetary Spaces [2023], Planetary Times [2024], Planetary Agency & Politics [2025]. The co-curated show opens in November 2025 and runs until February 2026. For this special occasion, the Kunsthalle's director, Nadia Ismail, will join the jury to select the artists for 2025. All travel expenses to revisit Giessen for the show's opening are covered for the fellows residing in Giessen in the summer term.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any specific requests. As we work closely with the JLU's international office, future fellows will receive adequate support on any formalities connected to their stay in Giessen (e.g., questions about health insurance or residence permits).



*Space Age Lounge and expanding Planetary Library.
© Muthuwahandi*

Requirements and Application Procedure

- fellows should have an advanced academic or artistic record relevant to Planetary Agency, -Politics, or democratic theory; as we prioritize the respective project's relevance for our theme as against academic degrees, holding a PhD is not a prerequisite;
- fellows have to commit to taking up residence in or in the proximity of Giessen during the period they apply for;
- fellows are obligated to (co-)organize one workshop that may include an exhibition or a performative activity;
- artists interested in contributing to the final exhibition should be available for remote coordination from October 2024 onwards;
- fellows should be willing to participate actively in the activities outlined above.

Please send your application (in English) as a **single PDF** and include the following:

- [1.] **Cover letter** (one page max.) stating your motivation to apply;
- [2.] **Curriculum vitae**;
- [3.] **artist portfolio** on works connected to planetary thinking (for artists); which may include a **suggested work** for the exhibition (one-page max.);
- [4.] **project description** (one page max.) that outlines your planned contribution to building the planetary democracy prototype (for both scholars & artists);
- [5.] tentative **abstract for a workshop** or event of an alternative format (one page max.);
- [6.] An outline of any **specific requests** (materials/equipment needed or individual requirements regarding furnishing office spaces/studios, etc.)

Please also note that:

The title of your PDF should reflect the **period(s)** you are available for and your **thematic focus**:

“LastName_Summer/Winter_Agency/Politics,”

“LastName_Summer/Winter_Politics,”

“LastName_Winter_AgencyPolitics,”

“LastName_SummerWinter_Politics,” or other constellations.

Applicants are welcome to apply individually or as transdisciplinary pairs (artist and scholar) with a clearly defined project in mind to which they will dedicate their fellowship. Please note that **two individual CVs** are required for joint applications, and your personal ideas and perspectives on your collaborative project should be clearly outlined.

The deadline for applications is **July 24, 2024**. Applications must be sent via email to panel@planet.uni-giessen.de. Shortlisted applicants may be invited for online interviews in late August/early September 2024. Decisions will be announced shortly after.

For more information, please see our [website](#) or consult us via email.

We are very much looking forward to reading your applications!

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