

Karoline von Günderrode as Philosopher

University of Sydney workshop

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Talk 1 • Thursday, 28 November

AEDT 8:00am–8:35am

CET 10:00pm–10:35pm Wednesday 27 Nov

GMT 9:00pm–9:35pm Wednesday 27 Nov

EST 4:00pm–4:35pm Wednesday 27 Nov

Jesper Lundsryd Rasmussen, University of Copenhagen

»I foresee a period, in which our Earth could die«. Günderrode and Steffens on the Discovery of the Earth as an Object of Ethics

The period around 1800 saw an increasing interest in the earth from almost all branches of human culture. From poetry, philosophy and philology to mineralogy and geology that which was formerly well-known as one of the four elements, earth, now rose to prominence as the earth system. Contrary to the conception of earlier times, the earth system was now being discovered as a living whole with a proper history and dynamics. Not only did this new notion of the earth demand novel ways of describing earthly processes, it led, for the first time, to the inclusion of earth into the register ethics. The earth showed itself to be a fragile as well as monstrous entity that called for human veneration.

The paper argues that this normative dimension is clearest visible in the works of Henrik Steffens and Karoline Günderrode. Based on their main notions and archival material from Günderrode's studies of Steffens' writings, it places Steffens as a key figure in the constellation that elevated the earth to a proper object of intellectual interest.

5 minute break

Talk 2 • Thursday, 28 November

AEDT 8:40am–9:15am

CET 10:40pm–11:15pm Wednesday 27 Nov

GMT 9:40pm–10:15pm Wednesday 27 Nov

EST 4:40pm–5:15pm Wednesday 27 Nov

Joanna Raisbeck, Lincoln College Oxford

Günderrode's Spinozist pantheism

The proposed paper will offer an outline of the main premise of my book on Günderrode: that panentheism, understood as Herder's vitalist reading of Spinoza, offers an attractive intellectual position for Günderrode, and the questions associated with it concern her for the entirety of her work. This is because it offers a palatable way of navigating between the poles of deism and deterministic materialism. What is at stake is relational. Firstly, how the individual relates to the whole – for Günderrode, the individual cannot be independent, and is instead dependent on the whole, from which it emanated and to which it must return. Secondly, what constitutes individual agency: the individual is indeed determined by being part of the whole, part of nature, but not to the point of fatalism, which would nullify the possibility of individual will as well as individual development. The philosophical and indeed scientific question that panentheism helps address is how spirit relates to matter. Günderrode draws on Herder, on Platonism, and also on Neoplatonism, and also on the idea that matter itself may be dynamic rather than inert (in metaphysical terms, corresponding to an element of spirit). This is an idea that found confirmation in Günderrode's studies of chemical theories and Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, which was itself influenced by developments in chemistry and physics in the late eighteenth century. These theories of the composition of matter are significant for Günderrode because they serve as a useful defence against some of the philosophical and religious anxieties of the period. This will be shown by readings of a selection of the poetry and prose from Günderrode's third and final collection, *Melete*.

5 minute break

Talk 3 • Thursday, 28 November

AEDT 9:20am–9:55am

CET 11:20pm–11:55pm Wednesday 27 Nov

GMT 10:20pm–10:55pm Wednesday 27 Nov

EST 5:20pm–5:55pm Wednesday 27 Nov

Jacinta Shrimpton, University of Sydney

The merging of knowledge and feeling in Karoline von Günderrode's poetry and dialogues

Günderrode (1780-1806) develops an oblique but consistent theory of knowledge, in which the boundary between feeling and knowledge is liminal and complex. Like Schiller (1759-1805) she rejects the Kantian dichotomy of thought and feeling and posits instead the nature of the self as an integrated whole. We find in her works an urge, desire, or longing for knowledge, driven by an incompleteness or sundering of the self. Akin to Hemsterhuis (1721-1790), Günderrode appears to employ a variation of “domain-indifference,” in that while she establishes different forms of knowing connected with different aspects of the self, knowledge and feeling are consistently present together and the distinction between them is blurred. Because knowledge is present in all parts of the conscious Günderrodian self, her conception of it is necessarily broad and diverse. I will focus on spiritual knowledge and self, where the boundary between knowledge and feeling seems constantly to be on the brink of dissolving, if not fully coalesced. As I see it, this is one example amongst many in which Günderrode explores the permeable and evanescent nature of boundaries; a consistent theme throughout her writing. Knowledge, feeling, and self are, I argue, ultimately inseparable for Günderrode, and because of their overlap, there are certain types of knowledge that the conscious human being cannot access because we do not have the requisite self. Knowledge is an inter-connective tissue within us, and for our relationship to the rest of the world - both human and more-than-human.

35 minute break

Talk 4 • Thursday, 28 November

AEDT 10:30am–11:05am

CET 12:30am–1:05am Thursday 28 Nov

GMT 11:30pm–12:05am Wednesday 27 Nov

EST 6:30pm–7:05pm Wednesday 27 Nov

Benjamin Norris, Rowan University

Earth as Necrobiome: The Philosophical Significance of Corporeal Decay in
Günderrode’s “The Idea of the Earth”

M. E. Benbow et al describe the intertwined site of life-in-death and death-in-life as a “necrobiome” understood as “the community of species (e.g., prokaryotic and eukaryotic) associated with decomposing remains of heterotrophic biomass, including animal carrion and human corpses.”[1] Though it was not initially articulated as a philosophical concept, the necrobiome foregrounds the dynamic spatiality of the intermingling of life and death in an ecosystem. It is consequently a fruitful concept for the developing field of necro-ecology. In addition to emphasizing the intimate interconnectedness between the human and the non-human world (commonly featured in many romantic and idealist *naturphilosophies*) necro-ecology also undermines the absolute separation between life and death. The purpose of this paper is to deploy these central tenets of necro-ecology to provide a reading of Günderrode’s 1805 “The Idea of the Earth”. I outline how this perspective opens new avenues for interpreting the philosophical significance of corporeal decomposition in Günderrode’s understanding of life, death, and immortality.

5 minute break

Talk 5 · Thursday, 28 November

AEDT 11:10am–11:45am

CET 1:10am–1:45am Thursday 28 Nov

GMT 12:10am–12:45am Thursday 28 Nov

EST 7:10pm–7:45pm Wednesday 27 Nov

Martin Arndal, University of Copenhagen

Karoline von Günderrode and the Touch of Life

In this presentation, I will outline the meaning of the concept of “Berührung” in Karoline von Günderrode’s natural philosophy and poetry. Along with other both British and German Romantics, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), and Friedrich Schlegel, Günderrode took up the notions of “Touch” and “Berührung” and redefined them in light of advances within physics and philosophy, promulgated by thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and Joseph Schelling. Rather than simply denoting a point of physical contact, touch was suddenly used to describe distant effects (What Novalis calls “Berührung in distans”) as well as being considered a source of life. It is in this latter meaning, that Günderrode takes up “Berührung” and centralizes it in her cosmological account of the creation of life as outlined in her essay ‘Idee der Erde’. The aim of the presentation is thus to unfold a novel aspect of Günderrode’s *Naturphilosophie* both by reconceptualizing it according to a philosophy of touch and considering the intellectual sources and heritage of this novel use of the concept.

5 minute break

Talk 6 • Thursday, 28 November

AEDT 11:50am–12:25pm

CET 1:50am–2:25am Thursday 28 Nov

GMT 12:50am–1:25am Thursday 28 Nov

EST 7:50pm–8:25pm Wednesday 27 Nov

Margherita Giordano, Università del Piemonte Orientale

A Different Female Perspective on the Philosophy of Nature: Sophie Mereau's *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung* between Spinozism and Vitalism

Sophie Mereau is a fascinating figure in Early German Romanticism: active in Jena during its peak cultural ferment, she was at the center of its literary and philosophical circles and became one of the most successful women writers of her time. While her production is distinctly literary, it engages with philosophical themes that resonate with some of the same concerns we can find in Karoline von Günderrode's thought, including pantheism and the philosophy of nature.

This presentation will focus on Mereau's debut novel, *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung* (1794), and an unpublished fragment, to explore how her narrative fiction addresses metaphysical questions about the ground of reality and its relationship to human beings. Mereau's exploration of these metaphysical problems hints at her familiarity and engagement with the debates surrounding vitalism, mechanism, and the interpretation of Spinoza during the Pantheismusstreit, offering a different (and under-explored) perspective on issues that are similarly central to Günderrode's philosophy. In Mereau's case, narrative fiction becomes the means to explore the various conceptual alternatives within this controversy, as she takes the materialist and fatalist interpretation of Spinoza very seriously, while also trying to chart a path towards a vitalist perspective. Through such intellectual exercise, Mereau appears to take the initial steps toward a vision in which love is seen as the metaphysical force that guarantees unity and harmony within the cosmos.

This approach not only reflects a shared preoccupation with key Romantic questions but also highlights the originality of Mereau's approach to these debates.

Thank you!

