



**FAKULTA  
HUMANITNÍCH STUDIÍ**  
Univerzita Karlova

**Appraisal of the MA Thesis *More-than-human cohabitation: gentrification, displacement and belonging* by Lindi Dedek**

In this thesis, Lindi Dedek examines the history, present and possible futures of the well-known Berlin department store Karstadt that is currently slated for demolition and rebuilding. Tracing how this seemingly peripheral matter becomes a matter of concern for the author, the thesis asks after processes of (more-than-) human gentrification, displacement and belonging when the former cathedrals of consumption cease to be profitable. A wide-ranging literature review (not ‘literary overview’) charts feminist genealogies of more-than-human approaches in multispecies studies and geography of gentrification to ecofeminisms that have critiqued capitalist consumerism, patriarchy, colonialism, the nature-culture divide and human exceptionalism. The methodology chapter sets out research design and methods that combine participants observation and interviews at Karstadt (including four interviews already conducted in 2020) with an analysis of existing media and promotional documents, focusing also on affective traces. It also presents a reflection on the author’s positionality and what it enabled and foreclosed.

Ostensibly separating human and more-than-human aspects, Chapter 3 discusses the current plans for reconstruction and their history between the monumental (with its colonial and gendered imprint) and the green(washing) of eco-gentrification, as well as the store’s ongoing decline. Importantly, it introduces a remarkable crew of mostly white, retired women, regular visitors of the store’s rooftop café who support the store with their meagre consumption. Lindi shows how the terrasse is a space of community of those no longer deemed productive, long-term customers who are absented in the plans of reconstruction. Chapter 4 zooms in on the agency and dis/placements of materials, particularly cement that formed the monumentality of the building and the landfill in the adjacent park. It also attends to untended flowerpots and the generic food of a container café built in the adjacent parking lot. The women on the terrasse remain unconvinced by attempts to include ‘nature’ – evidently more comfortable with natureculture intermingling than urban planners assume.

The thesis is well written, with a fine ear for historical echoes and contradictions, and apt to capture the atmosphere of solidarity on the terrace, as well as tensions and ambivalences: monumentality and ‘historical value’ is also what might conserve structures such as Karstadt;



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and expressed solidarity between the women might go with white privilege and a rejection of ‘the dirt’ outside. I commend the strategy of repeated (re)contextualization that eschews closure and shows that displacement existed all along, particularly in the 1930s and 80s, as well as in Karstadt’s environs. In the end, the analysis suggests that what makes community on the cemented terrasse includes people, as well as the air, fake flowers, comfortable seats, the view of the sunset over the Berlin skyline, a remainder of former monumentality – the terrasse is a public, communal and perhaps even queer space as Lindi suggests. As yet, there is little evidence that the isolated plants can potentiate multispecies ecologies or refuges as do the counter-gardens described by Myers.

In the defence, I would like to invite Lindi Dedek to comment on three smaller queries. First, even though they were not researched at length, what can be said about the counter proposals of activist groups such as Initiative Hermannplatz or Nicht Ohne Uns that initially lured the attention of the author? Would they include the motely crew on the terrasse and/or seed other biocultural refugees? Second, while the department store is in decline, it might still be revived for capitalist consumption – hence I’m not sure about the term capitalist ruins as spaces of abandonment. Third, can the author clarify how Munoz’s concept of brown commons is used in the analysis? Do the women on the terrasse belong to the brown commons?

I already look forward to hearing more about the fate of the Karstadt building. In further work, Elspeth Probyn’s definition of belonging by might be useful where ‘belonging expresses a desire for more than what is, a yearning to make skin stretch beyond individual needs and wants’ (Probyn 1996, 6).

I recommend the thesis for defence and suggest the grade excellent (1).

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Dagmar Lorenz-Meyer, Ph.D., supervisor