

## SALAMANDER ENCOUNTERS: A FEMINIST APPROACH TO INFRASTRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS OF ANIMAL–WATER RELATIONS

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**ABSTRACT** — This essay pursues the idea of a world that leaves behind the model of modern humanist thought, according to which man is the creator of the world, while the animal is deprived of it. In this way, the author attempts to break with the distinction according to the measure of man and to avoid anthropocentrism. In doing so, she takes into account the current crisis situation of the so-called “Anthropocene water” (Neimanis) or Aquatocene (Šebjanič) in relation to water infrastructure issues.

These tendencies have been emphasized in recent decades by environmental studies and the new realisms and materialisms in the humanities and arts, with particular attention also paid to the conceptual tools and practices of feminism. For feminist theorizing, the author focuses on the philosophical thinking of Malabou and Neimanis: These two positions are of great help in rethinking certain artistic practice that deals more or less explicitly with the problems of the existing water infrastructure from the perspective of posthumanism, which links the human and animal worlds.

The main artistic reference is a series of works, *Lygophilia* (2017–2020), by Slovenian artist/researcher Robertina Šebjanič about two endangered aquatic animals – the “Mexican salamander” or axolotl and the “Slovenian proteus.” Interpreted through a feminist filter, her work is addressed through the posthuman phenomenological approach of feminist (art) theory and critique. This approach is linked to the common pursuit of a transformative thinking of posthumanism in relation to the infrastructural dimensions of animal-water relations. The author’s aim is to critique infrastructure through posthuman feminist phenomenology and to explain why this strand of philosophy provides a good basis for developing feminist infrastructural critique through the analysis of artistic practice.

**KEYWORDS** — feminist critique of infrastructure, bodies of water, posthuman feminist phenomenology, human-animal relationship, paradigm of salamander, contemporary art practice, Robertina Šebjanič

**INFRASTRUCTURE, FEMINISM, ART** — The common dictionary definition of infrastructure is a basic facility or object that enables the economic activity of a society. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

defines infrastructure as (1) “the system of public works of a country, state or region, *also*: the resources (such as personnel, buildings, or equipment) required for an activity”; (2) “the underlying foundation or basic framework (as of a system or organization).” “*Infra-* means ‘below;’ so the infrastructure is the ‘underlying structure’ of a country and its economy, the fixed installations that it needs in order to function.” This includes roads, bridges, dams, water, sewage, electricity, and communication systems, railroads and subways, airports, and ports, which are generally built by the government and are publicly owned. Some authors also speak of intellectual infrastructure or scientific research infrastructure, but the meaning of these terms can be very vague. Nevertheless, we are also interested in such definitions of infrastructure. In a broader sense, infrastructure is also the organization of this activity, including personnel and relevant legislation (e.g., transport, energy, and telecommunications infrastructure). The term “social infrastructure” refers to physical facilities that are used to carry out activities of general interest. Recently, much emphasis has been placed on the digital infrastructure that permeates the lives of individuals and society as a whole. Thus, the term infrastructure can also refer to ICT and informal and formal communication channels, as well as the political and social networks of a particular social group. “[I]nfrastructure is defined by the movement or patterning of social form. It is the living mediation of what organizes life: the lifeworld of structure” (Berlant 2016: 393).

— As can be read in the public invitation, the editors of this thematic issue write that infrastructure is omnipresent, indispensable, and often invisible. On the one hand, people’s lives and survival depend on it; on the other hand, it is responsible for global warming or climate catastrophe. Krasny points out that modern infrastructures

“rested on the twin ideologies of human supremacy and colonial patriarchy, known in the history of ideas as the Enlightenment and since the turn of the century as the Anthropocene epoch, a geological period marked by the catastrophic impact of humans having become a geological force. Urbanization gave built form to these ideologies, which were founded on inequality, nesting at its core the new technologies of steam industrialization and the economies of extractive fossil capitalism” (Krasny 2022: 116).

— Activist theory and critical scholarship have begun to draw attention to the consequences of these ideologies, including in

terms of the absence or continued inability to adequately maintain and support these infrastructures. Given the global scale of the infrastructure crisis, its ongoing maintenance, repair, and care are necessary. Repairing or replacing a broken infrastructure is “necessary for any form of sociality to extend itself” (Berlant 2016: 393).

— The main interest of this essay is water infrastructure. Anthropological studies emphasize three contemporary perspectives on water infrastructures, namely the sociotechnical, the technopolitical, and the phenomenological (Wells / Wakhungu / Webb 2021). There is often overlap between these approaches; water infrastructures are also often intertwined with other types of infrastructures. We are particularly interested in the phenomenological approach, which pays special attention to the sensory realm of the body, the emotional and aesthetic experiences of the world created and regulated by infrastructure (Larkin 2013, in Wells et al. 2021). This approach is closely related to a post-humanist or multispecies perspective that challenges notions of embodiment and human subjectivity. In this context, non-human or more-than-human agency is ascribed to other forms of life and a wider range of materials and matter. For scholars concerned with the materiality of water infrastructure, non-human agents include water and other earthen or synthetic materials used in the channeling of water in all its forms. Some scholars speak of “infrastructure assemblages” that affect people’s embodied experiences of the world (ibid.: 2021).

— The text pursues the feminist critique of infrastructure developed through the analysis of certain artistic practices. The critique of infrastructure has already received some attention in the context of the feminist approach to the problem of climate change: “Big infrastructure responses to climate change seek to protect the heteropatriarchal capitalist status quo” (Hamilton et al. 2021: 237). Several authors argue that a transformative feminist response requires an alternative, collective, feminist infrastructure. This is not about neoliberal resilience, but about “attention to and redistribution of low-stake vulnerability as an infrastructural politics” (ibid.: 2021).

— Looking at water infrastructure from a feminist perspective is linked to the problems of the social and symbolic construction of gender and gender-specific conceptualizations. Feminism as a social and cultural struggle, which is often (unnecessarily) relativized, concerns conflicts over fundamental values in a given society. When we turn to the contribution of contemporary art practices to feminist reflection on the role of water infrastructure in the current global crisis (not only of climate, but also of the environment, related to

water insecurity, etc.), we should take into account the fact that feminist philosophical reflections on gendered conceptualizations have been in the minority in the corpus of knowledge on climate change until recently (Tuana 2016). It is therefore useful to link this kind of reflection to our discussion of practical artistic manifestations that address environmental issues, using the aquatic environment as an example. The example of artistic practice is used to raise awareness of the inadequacies of existing water infrastructures (such as the consequences of water resource overuse and the associated pollution) and to try to not only improve the existing situation, but also to be part of enabling other worlds. We focus on artistic practice that connects human and non-human bodies, environments, resources, and technologies to rethink infrastructural activities and alliances between humans and non-humans. We also pay attention to feminist approaches and methodologies that explore how contemporary art practice confronts or deals with the problems of posthumanism.

**POSTHUMAN FEMINIST PHENOMENOLOGY: ON ANIMAL-WATER RELATIONS IN ART** —

In addressing this topic, it is useful to mention a broad theme of the animal that has been thoroughly explored by modern and contemporary thinkers such as Derrida and Agamben. According to Derrida, “[t]he history of modern metaphysics, which determines the essence of man as animal rationale, divides as follows. There are two symmetrical sides to unconditioned subjectivity: rationality as spirit on the one hand, animality as body on the other” (Derrida 1989: 73). The question of the animal is never very far from the transcendental teleology of reason as Eurocentric humanism. For Agamben, we are dealing with the anthropological machine of modernity, which “functions by excluding as not (yet) human an already human being from itself, that is, by animalizing the human, by isolating the nonhuman within the human” (Agamben 2004: 37). Oxana Timofeeva summarizes this debate as follows: “The abyss between man and his poor relative is thus the abyss of an ontological inequality” (Timofeeva 2008: 141). Posthumanism goes further, i.e., beyond Agamben’s anthropogenesis and other related discourses on animality. But what role can posthuman feminism, or more precisely, posthuman feminist phenomenology, play in this context?

— Many artistic responses to the current situation focus on the ontological transformation of the traditional hierarchy of humans over non-humans, the decentering of the human subject, and the aesthetics of the non-human. This also applies to the relationship and interaction between humans and animals, which is at the center of this debate and certain artistic practices. Some new philosophical

orientations and their implications for art are of particular interest to the field of treatment outlined above. In contrast to the current structure of humanism, which concentrates on the cognitive subject, directions of a new materialism and realism are emerging. What these directions have in common is a critique of anthropocentrism as a central step towards posthumanism. Of particular importance are the versions of materialism introduced by feminism that focus on the material conditions of women's bodies, lives, and labor. This is primarily a critique of the neutral attitude towards the body. Feminist writers examine the social and symbolic construction of gender, reality, and truth and show that epistemological and ontological claims are always embodied and therefore never neutral. Many feminists have adopted materialist and realist arguments and strategies. These positions also question the separation between humans and non-human animals, which has become increasingly important in both feminist theory and artistic practice. Posthuman feminism can be understood as a response to other contemporary ideas and theories of posthumanism. As Braidotti and Haraway emphasize, posthuman feminism is a profoundly ethical orientation that rejects anthropocentrism and the binary phallogocentrism of man in relation to nature. A significant part of contemporary art practice also offers new ways of addressing and transforming modern humanism. Posthuman feminism is therefore a promising critical approach for contemporary art theory and philosophy. It refers here to artistic creation as an ethical-aesthetic, material, and epistemological practice that questions the boundary between human and non-human animals. We are particularly interested in art projects that address issues of environmental degradation and ecological violence related to the operation of water infrastructures and the need for their maintenance and care, as the survival of endangered aquatic animals depends on it.

— The assumption that the questions of posthumanism are also a problem or a question of feminism is evident in the works of various authors, as we can see from the title of the recently published book *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* by Astrida Neimanis from 2017 or the title of Braidotti's new book, *Posthuman Feminism* from 2022. According to Braidotti, posthuman feminism is a "philosophy of heterogeneous living systems" (2022: 113). Neimanis (2017) articulates her position on how to think a "body of water" as a posthuman phenomenology between Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze. She assumes that we experience our bodies not only on the subjectivized human level, but also as more-than-human bodies. Her explanation is characterized by a Deleuzian reconsideration of

bodies, but begins with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (primacy of embodied perception, etc.). Her posthuman phenomenology is necessarily based on feminist theory. Posthuman feminism reinforces the politics of location that earlier feminist authors (Rich, Lourde, and others) have already elaborated. It is not immediately clear how the tools of embodied phenomenological analysis can be applied to experiences that lie below or beyond the level of human perception.

— Works of art can activate and amplify in “me” the lived experience of water; they allow me “to access, and amplify, my own watery politics of location, channelling through my corporeal seas” (Neimanis 2017: 55).

“Writing, images, objects, and other art forms can work in these ways, giving us access to an embodied experience of our wateriness that might otherwise be too submerged, too subcutaneous, too repressed, or too large and distant (or even too obvious, mundane, and taken for granted), to readily sense...” (Neimanis: 55).

— Neimanis proposes to consider art “as amplifier of an embodied politics of location” (ibid.: 56). She also explores how science can serve as another kind of amplifier. Many of our embodied experiences today require the “sensory organs” of science (theories, experiments, measuring instruments, etc.). Her posthuman phenomenology affirms that scientific and phenomenological perspectives are not necessarily incompatible. The new materialist feminist engagements with science are also helpful here.

— All these assumptions/points of Neimanis' posthuman feminist phenomenology provide us with a useful conceptual tool for the reflection and interpretation of art and also fit very well into the observation of Robertina Šebjanič's artistic practice, which deals with two endangered aquatic animals, the “Mexican salamander” or axolotl and Proteus from the Dinaric karst (including Slovenia).

— Her recent work is based on mapping and monitoring water environments as a critical artistic practice that encourages the viewer to develop empathy and care for endangered ecosystems and to reflect on the need to work towards a more sustainable future. The artist presents us with water systems as a mirror reflecting the consumer's attitude towards nature. The projects include research findings (e.g., chemical pollution and underwater noise in rivers and oceans) that testify to the already known consequences of pollution and also point to yet-unknown effects. She opens her artistic practice to different scientific disciplines (biodiversity research,

measurements of pollution and social perception, etc.) as well as to DIY principles and our different senses (in addition to sight, hearing, and even smell).

— The artist incorporates living aquatic systems as a medium in her work, taking into account scientific protocols, procedures, and tools. She operates in a broader field that combines artistic and scientific practice. At the center of her artistic research is an interest in various aquatic life forms and the latest advances in science and technology. The inclusion of scientific instruments demonstrates her interest in what happens below the waterline and the impact this has on our “watery” bodies. In this way, the artist also participates in questioning the hegemonic understanding of the body as an autonomous whole that still prevails today. Bodies as “bodies of water” (Neimanis 2017) are, on the one hand, permeated by environmental changes through infrastructures, while, on the other hand, the life of bodies is also connected to nature and other living beings. Šebjanič’s artistic and research practice can be understood as a critical and creative response that explores the boundaries and connections between humans, other living entities, the environment, and related infrastructures. The processual nature of the project also comes into play in the gallery, as the entry of living systems into the artwork means that it is constantly evolving. The artist is therefore not interested in creating fixed and final objects, but something that is never quite finished and open to unpredictable elements (see Trebušak 2020).

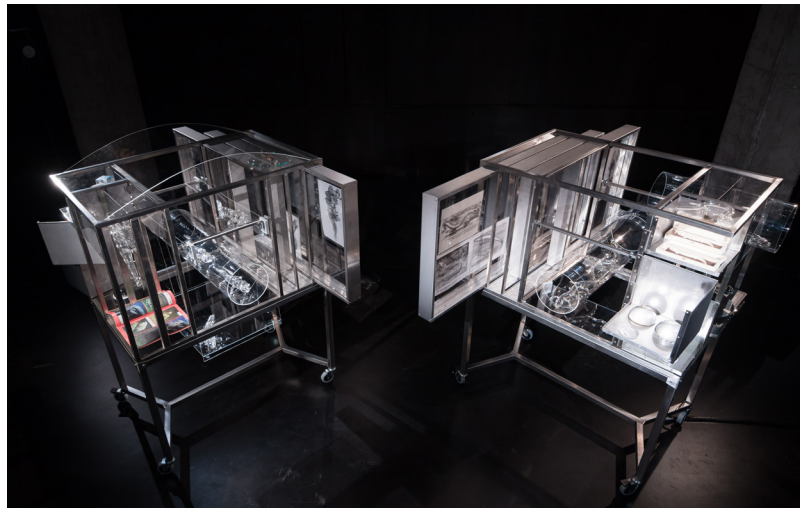
— The projects under consideration develop a unique approach that can be defined by a posthuman feminist understanding of concepts such as figuration. Astrida Neimanis proposes understanding figurations in a similar way to Haraway and Braidotti, namely as *embodied concepts* (2017: 5). They are not a fantasy or metaphor, but a situated imaginative “intervention” that transcends the framework of the known towards the yet unknown posthuman world. Such figurations open up the space for “the inventions of care” that Bojana Kunst writes about in her latest book (Kunst 2021).

— The theoretical framework of the intertwining of human and non-human bodies includes feminist concerns regarding the care for these more-than-human “entanglements” observed by critical feminist – especially intersectional, materialist, as well as phenomenological – approaches (see Braidotti 2022, Krasny 2022, Neimanis 2017, Stępień 2022, etc.). According to these new approaches, bodies are never just human, but posthuman, interwoven with material, social, and technological infrastructures. Krasny claims that “bodies are interdependent insofar as they depend on the provision of care

and protection to survive and thrive. Ontologically, all bodies are always in need of care and protection” (Krasny 2022: 123). Thinking about the infrastructural entanglements of human and non-human bodies leads us to the dimension of care and the complex ethical and political implications of caring for such bodies and living systems, as we can also see in the case of Robertina Šebjanič’s art project *Lygophilia* (2017–2020), which was initiated in Mexico and continued in Slovenia.

— Under the label “Lygophilia,” the artist has created a series of research-based works, in which she explores the love (Gr.: *philōō*) for darkness (Gr.: *lúgē*) and little-known aquatic animals in places inhospitable to humans, the Mexican axolotl and the Slovenian proteus. Apart from the fact that they hide from the light, they share a parallel evolution and endemism. The axolotl’s only natural habitat is the swampy parts of Lake Xochimilcho near Mexico City, while the proteus is only found in the Dinaric karst caves in Europe. Due to anthropogenic factors, especially pollution in recent decades, their habitats have changed drastically, and both animals are threatened with extinction.

— The first work in the series is the video essay *Piscis ludicrous / Transfixed Gaze\_Lygophilia* (2017/2018) together with the sound composition *Dark Drops\_Lygophilia*: Field recordings of water droplets by the artist were processed into an audio composition that brings the acoustics of the natural cave habitat of the proteus into the gallery space. Next came the installation *Neotenous dark dwellers\_Lygophilia* (2017/2018) in the form of cabinets



reminiscent of old natural history museums and scientific laboratories, with objects, texts, videos, and widgets that “amplify” our view of interconnectedness with other species in today’s more-than-human world. The final part of the series is the installation *Odorantur\_Lygophilia* (2019/2020), in which the artist invites the public into the proteus’ habitat by stimulating different sensory perceptions (including smell). The entire project presents the proteus and the axolotl as a species threatened with extinction in its natural environment, as a subject of scientific research (considering the salamander’s extraordinary regenerative abilities), and

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Robertina Šebjanič, *Neotenous dark dwellers\_Lygophilia*, installation, 2018. Photo: Miha Godec. The project reflects on our encounters with other species – axolotl and proteus – and the more-than-human world. It is based on the exploration of local aquatic ecosystems and related infrastructure to address environmental issues and activism related to the survival of both animals.



as cultural heritage (part of ancient mythology and national symbols, representing biopolitical and decolonial relations).

“Both proteus and axolotl are aquatic creatures and, as such, both bear witness to the pollution and deterioration of their respective waters, which happen to be also *our waters*” (Bureaud 2019: 2).



### ROBERTINA ŠEBJANIČ'S ARTISTIC PRACTICE, BODIES OF WATER AND PARADIGM OF SALAMANDER

Robertina Šebjanič's interdisciplinary artistic research focuses on various aspects of the aquatic environment, including its infrastructure, and serves as a starting point for exploring broader social and ecological issues. Her series of projects on the theme of two endangered endemic aquatic creatures from different cultures – axolotl or “Mexican salamander” and “Slovenian proteus” (olm, human fish, or baby dragon) (*Lygophilia*, 2017–2020) – presented in the form of audiovisual installations, could also be related to the paradigm of the salamander and the concept of plasticity in the context of contemporary feminist thought (Malabou 2011, 2022). Robertina Šebjanič's artistic research is close to feminist thinking and the critique of anthropogenic environmental degradation. Her work can be related to the efforts of the feminist critique of the crisis of sustainability of life. The theme of Šebjanič's artistic practice should be considered in the context of the much broader geological changes in living conditions on Earth, which are leading to an ecological catastrophe due to the growth of the world's population, global warming, the consumption of natural resources, carbon emissions, and the mass extinction of animal and plant species. The latter also threatens the endemic animal species that are the focus of the *Lygophilia* art project. In her work *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (2017), Astrida Neimanis highlights the interconnectedness of the various anthropogenic water crises our planet is currently facing (from drought and drinking water scarcity to excessive weather phenomena and chronic pollution – the latter including the problem of extinction of certain aquatic fauna), as well as the importance of the wet/watery structure of our bodies in relation to the pressing issue of global survival. The author traces the emergence of modern water alongside colonial and “global” water, particularly in the context of the emerging Anthropocene discourse. While the prevailing rhetoric presents the Anthropocene as a primarily stony

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Robertina Šebjanič, *Neotenous dark dwellers\_Lygophilia*, installation, detail, 2018. Photo: Miha Godec. *Lygophilia* brings together ancient mythology and science and is close to feminist thinking and the critique of anthropogenic environmental destruction.

and terrestrial phenomenon, she turns to the “Anthropocene water” (Neimanis 2017: 156).

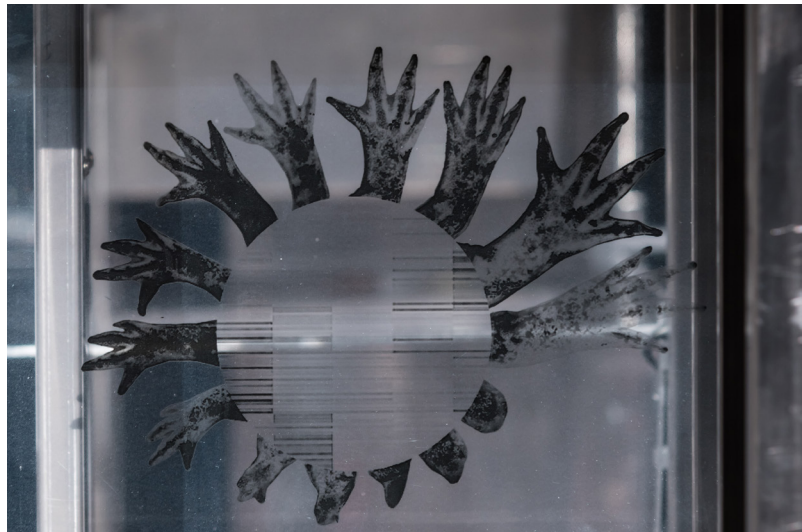
— Neimanis has developed a new concept of embodiment from the perspective of the aqueous structure of our bodies, which is inextricably linked to these pressing ecological questions. Thinking about embodiment as something fundamentally connected to water encounters difficulties when confronted with the prevailing Western humanistic understanding of embodiment. For us as “watery bodies,” our boundaries are much more open and vulnerable as they are in a constant process of absorption, transformation, and exchange. Therefore, bodies of water undermine the idea that our bodies are necessary or only human. Our “watery relations” as “hydrocommons” that are more-than-human thus pose a further challenge to anthropocentrism and the privilege of human embodiment (Neimanis 2017: 2). This is an understanding of embodiment that takes into account both the individual situation and the specificity and participation in a shared network of wet relations, which Neimanis calls the “posthuman politics of location” (ibid.: 4). Thinking of oneself as a body of water not only rejects the separation of humans from nature “out there,” but also inspires many cartographies of space, time, and species. This way of thinking is also a call to reflect on our ethical responsibility towards the many other bodies of water we coexist with – Robertina Šebjanič’s work can be understood as such a call. Again, we can refer to a posthuman feminist understanding of concepts as “figurations,” embodied concepts and “living maps” that raise public awareness of the human position within the more-than-human world in the manner of an “intervention.”

— Contemporary figurations of watery bodies are a direct response to the problems of endangered water systems – including art projects that are of particular interest here. Although our bodies are also made of air, rock, earth, and increasingly plastic, the notion of ourselves as bodies of water emphasizes a particular kind of planetary assemblages that require our immediate response. Watery bodies concern environmental waters, feminist theory, and our own bodily participation. Here we can trace the extension of feminist embodiment theory into a distinctly posthuman realm. Many feminist theorists have made an important contribution by rethinking corporeality beyond humanism (Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, Donna Haraway, Myra Hird, Astrida Neimanis, Elizabeth A. Wilson, and many others – to name but a few). “Bodies of water” as a figuration has emerged from other forms of feminism, suggesting that such figurations are already present in ecofeminism and anti-colonial thought. In the hydrosphere, water

is redistributed through various networks and vectors that intersect with infrastructure and the medical and chemical industries (pollution of the world's waters with pharmaceuticals and chemicals – these are primarily the residues of industrial production and daily human consumption). Šebjanič's projects are well-informed about the circulation of waste, chemicals, and other pollutants from the general environment in the water systems that affect the bodies of humans, animals, and other living entities.

— In considering Robertina Šebjanič's work on two endemic, endangered aquatic species, both extremely sensitive to pollution, a looser and associative relationship to Catherine Malabou's salamander paradigm and the concept of plasticity (which also has a connection to feminism) might be productive. At the beginning of the 2009 essay "The phoenix, the spider and the salamander," which Malabou dedicates to the concept of plasticity, is the verb "to recover": "to heal, to repair, to relocate a lost object or normal state, to reclaim, to recuperate" (Malabou 2011: 67). The author offers three paradigms of recovery, each based on a specific understanding of healing, reconstruction, return, and regeneration. Of particular interest to us is "the paradigm of *salamander*" (Malabou's own post-deconstructive concept of plasticity) (ibid.: 74). Malabou's research on plasticity led her to an interest in "regenerative" medicine, which develops "a set of auto-repairing or self-regenerating techniques for organs or tissues" (ibid.: 80). This type of medicine is called regenerative medicine because certain animals are able to "re-engender" one or more damaged or amputated body parts. The salamander is the best-known and most spectacular example (ibid.: 81).

— Malabou's concept of "plasticity" becomes the "foundation" of the philosophical (and we can add: artistic and also feminist – concerning the *plastic* nature of "woman") field of healing or restoration. The term means the ability to restore health and refers directly to organic life. It is a different process of wound healing and restoration (beyond text or symbolic order). Today, medicine tends to rediscover this capacity for self-healing inscribed in the memory of species. On the other hand, certain art practices address the need



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Robertina Šebjanič, *Neotenous dark dwellers\_Lygophilia*, installation, detail, 2018. Photo: Miha Godec. The extraordinary regenerative abilities of both animals place them at the center of current scientific research.

to enable the restoration of the natural environment – including the aquatic environment with the need to maintain and repair massive hydrological infrastructures – by using both material and symbolic means to sensitize the public with an urgent call to action.

**TOWARDS A POSTHUMAN FEMINIST PHENOMENOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF WATER INFRASTRUCTURE WITH/THROUGH CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICE**

Our approach to the problems of infrastructure in relation to posthumanism is informed by philosophical and feminist discourses on the subject of the human-animal relationship. The text is particularly interested in how an animal is treated, represented, or figured in certain philosophical, feminist, and artistic discourses, and how this relates to the critique of infrastructure that is a central concern. We focus our feminist theorizing by working with the positions of Catherine Malabou's post-deconstructivist thinking and Astrida Neimanis' posthuman phenomenological thinking. By aiming to establish affective connections beyond the human realm with animals and other living entities, posthuman feminist phenomenological reflections and artistic figurations shake the existing categorical structure of Western/European humanism and its associated infrastructures.

Our aim is to critique infrastructure using critical posthuman feminist phenomenology and to explain why this strand of philosophy provides an excellent basis for developing a feminist critique of infrastructure through the analysis of artistic practice. The phenomenological approach to water infrastructures tends to consider the sensory and emotional implications of human and non-human interactions and non-anthropocentric thought and action – the same purpose is served by the artistic practice concerned with salamander encounters that interests us here.

Robertina Šebjanič's audiovisual installations focus on the exploration of aquatic ecosystems to address environmental issues and activism. Her projects emerge from a reflection on our interconnectedness with other species and the more-than-human world. The process of their creation is inextricably linked to the conduct of scientific research. Her artistic practice is also characterized by the pursuit of social and environmental change by raising awareness of the current state of aquatic living systems and seeking to develop empathy and care in order to identify and solve problems.

What makes Robertina Šebjanič's approach to water infrastructure and posthumanism, if not central, at least close to feminist aspirations, are the epistemological and political dimensions that connect art to real problems related to massive global water

infrastructures such as environmental violence, excessive exploitation of natural resources, etc., in an attempt to resist, counteract, and contribute to the transformation of this world for the better.

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Figure 1: Robertina Šebjanič, *Neotenous dark dwellers\_Lygophilia*, installation, 2018. Photo: Miha Godec. The project reflects on our encounters with other species – axolotl and proteus – and the more-than-human world. It is based on the exploration of local aquatic ecosystems and related infrastructure to address environmental issues and activism related to the survival of both animals.

Figure 2: Robertina Šebjanič, *Neotenous dark dwellers\_Lygophilia*, installation, detail, 2018. Photo: Miha Godec. *Lygophilia* brings together ancient mythology and science and is close to feminist thinking and the critique of anthropogenic environmental destruction.

Figure 3: Robertina Šebjanič, *Neotenous dark dwellers\_Lygophilia*, installation, detail, 2018. Photo: Miha Godec. The extraordinary regenerative abilities of both animals place them at the center of current scientific research.

// Artist's website

Šebjanič, Robertina: <https://robertina.net/lygophilia/>

// About the Author

Mojca Puncer holds a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Ljubljana. She is an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Maribor and works at the Faculty of Education, Department of Fine Arts. She also works as an independent researcher, theorist, critic, and curator in the field of contemporary art practice. She is a member of the editorial board of the magazine for the fine arts *Artwords* and the executive committee of the Slovenian Society of Aesthetics. She is the author of the books *Contemporary Art and Aesthetics* (2010) and *Interspaces of Art* (2018).

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