

FEMINIST NIGHTSCAPES

ABSTRACT — The night presents a time of heightened urban injustice and violence. Starting from this observation of gendered and racialized infrastructural urban injustice, Elke Krasny, Sophie Lingg, and Claudia Lomoschitz, initiated Feminist Nightscapes. Conceived of as a long-term practice, these walks are co-organized with cultural institutions and open to interested FLINTA persons. Central motivation for Feminist Nightscapes is to take back the night, a political practice of walking first developed in the 1970s, and to use art-based means including scores, music, joy, laughter, and play, as well as critical memory practices in collective performances in solidarity with others. With this contribution we share some of the theoretical groundings relevant to Feminist Nightscapes and our understanding of urban injustices that co-join infrastructural, epistemic, environmental, and labor injustices. We also offer to the readers a number of scores to test out and practice together with others in their own urban environments in order to take back the night in solidarity and to counteract urban injustices.

— We, Elke Krasny, Sophie Lingg, and Claudia Lomoschitz, started working on *Feminist Nightscapes* in early 2020. This text brings together the concerns and motivations that led us to work on taking back the night through collective and public performances and an introduction to theorists whose work is relevant to understanding the infrastructural injustice as experienced when walking. In the last part, we offer the readers a new *Feminist Nightscapes* script specifically developed on the occasion of this publication; the scores and songs invite the readers to engage critically and joyfully with the urban infrastructures of their cities.

— Building on *Take Back the Night* marches organized by feminist activists since the 1970s, we develop collective walks with groups of people in different cities. *Take Back the Night* fought against the patriarchal, racist, and sexist violence targeting and harming female* and gender-nonconforming bodies moving through cities at night. Many people do not have a choice not to navigate the city at night because of their conditions of labor and thus have to find ways of resisting and surviving the patriarchal violence of the night. Many people who do not have to move from here to there during the night ‘choose’ to avoid going out in order not to expose themselves to the threats the night poses and are thus restricted in their movements. Many people insist on going out at night, even

though they know that the night is an unsafe time for them, as they claim their right to the city at night and use urban infrastructures for nightly pleasures. Honoring the feminist legacies of *Take Back the Night* manifestations, we use collective walks for emancipative imaginaries and transformative practices of reclaiming the night.

— Why nightscapes? The suffix ‘-scape’ is “used to form nouns referring to an area that has a particular character because of the type of things that can be seen, heard, smelled, or experienced in it, or to a work of art that represents such an area” (Cambridge Dictionary 2024). Nightscapes refers to the specificity of the night with an interest in the particular conditions that shape moving through cities at night. *Feminist Nightscapes* focus the attention on site-specific and locally defined conditions and meanings of the night for marginalized, classed, sexualized, and racialized people and their ways of navigating cities at night with the aim to create solidarity practices for taking back the infrastructures of the night collectively and imaginatively.

— While infrastructures might be held to be neutral and therefore the same day and night, their conditions of access, use, and maintenance actually differ vastly between day and night and are a territory of maximal frictions, tensions, and conflicts that play out differently in and across the minds and bodies of urban subjects. Focusing on the night, one has to ask who can use which infrastructures easily and comfortably and who has no choice but to move through the city at night as their essential labor keeps infrastructures running 24/7. Emotionally, psychologically, bodily, and epistemically the infrastructures of cities at night are experienced very differently by urban inhabitants. Those who are marginalized and vulnerabilized by hegemonic regimes of urban politics and economies are also marginalized and vulnerabilized by urban infrastructures. As “cities are complex and evocative sites of transformation, with infrastructural networks,” *Feminist Nightscapes* studies and performs the “intimate connections of constantly shifting bodies and things into new social, material, and affective constellations” (Pereira-Edwards 2020: 1). *Feminist Nightscapes* walks create moving constellations that raise awareness for the impact of infrastructures at night on the affective, epistemic, social, material, and ecological dimensions of urban life.

— Our starting point for *Feminist Nightscapes* was the idea of a “feminist city” that allows freedom of movement for all bodies and genders, in which FLINTA* groups move through the night, discover places together, dance, sing, perform scores, stroll, look after each other, care and support each other (Kern 2020).

Art-based practices including scores, prompts, and songs, as well as research-based practices unearthing marginalized and resistant urban histories, are combined to create the choreographies for the collective performance of *Feminist Nightscapes* along the route of each walk together with all the participants. These ad-hoc groups are formed by the people who respond to the public announcement of *Feminist Nightscapes*. We move through public urban spaces, investigate the existing infrastructures, use them critically and playfully, and test out care-full imaginaries for different urban infrastructures.

— In groups of around 40 people, we move through public urban spaces and explore caring “non-sexist cities” in the here and now and for queer feminist futures (Hayden 1980). Our interest is in writing scores for collective urban research and practices of solidarity that highlight not only the limitations and conflicts, but also the joys and potentials of infrastructures, their histories, and daily uses. Infrastructures are never neutral. They produce uneven conditions of access, support, and use. They are spread unevenly across cities and create conditions of infrastructural abundance as well as infrastructural scarcity. Infrastructures also result in unjust and extractive conditions of labor, as the cleaning, maintenance, and repair are not only badly paid, but also rob people’s nightly sleep as they have to keep infrastructures running 24/7.

— Modern urbanization, which has come to define the planetary condition of life regardless of whether people live in cities or rural environments, is deeply infrastructuralized. This ongoing process of infrastructuralization linked to the interests of national and globalized economies penetrates not only the life conditions of human bodies, but the condition of the planet at large. This “deep impact of infrastructures” is perhaps best “captured in the concept of infrastructural intimacy,” which is helpful to understand and study the “the inter-penetrative effects of the infrastructure,” as bodies are intimately bound up with infrastructures and connected to each other by infrastructures (Krasny 2022: 121; see also Berlant 2016). We argue that infrastructuralization is the material expression of extractive and exploitative economies rooted in the interests of capital and governed by politics of coloniality and patriarchy. Therefore, the effects of infrastructures have to be analyzed and understood through the critical lenses of ableism, classism, racism, and sexism. *Feminist Nightscapes* are motivated by the following concerns: How can we better grasp the infrastructural violence that reproduces ableism, classism, racism, and sexism? What would it feel like to live in a non-ableist, non-classist, non-racist, and non-sexist city where

infrastructures enable everyone to move freely and without fear of infrastructural lack, harm, and violence? Which spaces and infrastructures are open to FLINTA* people in the city at night? Which spaces and infrastructures are maintained by whose badly paid and unpaid labor? We also ask the following: How did working-class women* move through colonial, capitalist, modern cities in the past? How did activists practice taking back the night, understanding that the night is a precarious and potentially threatening time for classed, racialized, and sexualized bodies? How did movements, including women's movements, gay and lesbian movements, trans movements, or crip movements redefine the access to hegemonic, state-defined, or capital-centric urban infrastructures, most broadly understood and including spaces of work, education, and politics? How have activists, artists, researchers, scholars, educators, policymakers, architects, urbanists, and many others contributed to emancipating and empowering urban infrastructures, including self-organized infrastructures for care as well as cultural and political work? We further dream about the following questions: How can women* and non-gender conforming persons enjoy the night *otherwise*? How can they use urban infrastructures playfully, imaginatively, and creatively at night without exposing themselves to the risks of emotional and bodily violence, racist and sexist policing, and all other forms of colonial-patriarchal domination? How can there be a different awareness for all urban critters, including animals and plants, and their use of urban infrastructures at night?

— *Feminist Nightscapes* makes use of scores, the Fluxus-derived artistic method of giving instructions to persons so they can participate in and perform an action in order to create collective choreographies and performances by the participants throughout the night walks. The collective performances of the scores are combined with providing research-based, site-specific urban narratives with a particular interest in histories of emancipation, struggle, and resistance in relation to the conditions of politics, labor, infrastructures, and ecologies.

— Together with the participants of each walk, we collectively perform urban sites and infrastructures *otherwise*, in order to rewrite histories of urban violence, to inform ourselves about past histories of struggle and resistance, and, at the same time, imagine infrastructural joys beyond the given. *Feminist Nightscapes* is understood as an emancipative and radical pedagogical tool for collective queer feminist urban practice and for emergent solidarity and future organizing.

CRITICAL WALKING THEORIES FOR APPROACHING URBAN INFRASTRUCTURES

— *Feminist Nightscapes* mobilize walking together as a collective public performance, at once a critical analysis-cum-urban historiography from the margins, the edges, and the forgotten and transformative practice of imagining and using public urban spaces and infrastructures otherwise. In order to better understand the analytical and transformative potential of walking and to develop more critical approaches to infrastructural(ized) urban histories and more nuanced scores for rehearsing emancipative infrastructural imaginaries, we rely on critical walking theories. We engage with theorists and writers who have been thinking with and thinking because of walking in decolonial, feminist, and race-critical ways. Their work offers support and inspiration to not only begin to grasp that the act of walking provides a different approach to theory altogether (Lugones 2003), but also makes abundantly clear that walking bodies and their movements are confined and controlled by the dominating and violent gaze of hegemony (Yancy 2013), which brings us to ask how infrastructures reproduce hegemonic ways of seeing and ordering the movements of bodies. Furthermore, approaching the gaps and silences in the archive by way of “critical fabulation” allows us to perform walking today in relation to histories of potentials. Honoring and remembering the potential histories of resistant, deviant, and wayward ways of walking hold that there are lost archives of walking that can be opened and re-imagined through “close narration” (Hartman 2019: xii).

— Philosopher George Yancy develops a race-critical phenomenological approach to walking which is motivated by his own experience as a teenager. “Walking while Black in the ‘white gaze’” (Yancy 2013) describes how he was threatened and attacked by the police because of walking while black. Yancy discusses how the white gaze of the public is linked to the continuation of racist stereotyping and epistemic violence. While Yancy centers his own experience as a starting point for a race-critical philosophy of walking, literary scholar Saidiya Hartman draws attention to how people who are walking are turned into the raw material of research by sociologists. The chapter “An Atlas for the Wayward,” included in her book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, describes how sociologists turned the white gaze of scrutiny and science on black urban subjects (Hartman 2018). Sociology is rendered legible as a form of policing and surveillance, as it captures black bodies and their movements in public as data of movements on streets or meetings on corners. Hartman turns to such data produced

by sociologists in order to read these data otherwise and to not only trace the histories of urban violence, but also the histories of disobedience, joys, and beauty claimed by black bodies, in particular black female bodies in movement in the big cities in the United States of America at the end of the nineteenth century. Turning data into tracing the movements of individuals is achieved through Hartman's method of "critical fabulation" (ibid.). Yancy's and Hartman's observations on walking are relevant to developing feminist walking practices as they draw attention to the structural violence that makes walking bodies fearful and vulnerable and, at the same time, draw attention to the performance of beauty, disobedience, and waywardness, which can only be traced in the gaps and holes of the archive by way of imagining critical fabulations. We aim to write scores that are aware of the violence of infrastructures, and, at the same time, we aim to work with scores to reimagine and reclaim the potential of infrastructural joy and resistance. In the text "Why Loiter?" (Phadke / Khan / Ranade 2011), written by the sociologist Shilpa Phadke, together with the journalist Sameera Khan and the architect and researcher Shilpa Ranade within the urban context of the Indian megalopolis of Mumbai, a city with more than 20 million inhabitants, the authors state that "women don't loiter" (ibid.: 11). Even though written from the perspective of a megacity like Mumbai, loitering is connected to a gendered discomfort in many, also smaller cities and towns. For the authors, the possibility of loitering creates a certain degree of freedom; it stands for fun and pleasure in public space, which is not easily possible in many cities for bodies that do not conform to hegemonic cis-hetero-male ideas (ibid.: 13). The conditions for this impossibility are complex, ranging from violence and harassment to assaults. Loitering has long been policed; in particular the homeless, the poor, and the racialized are prevented from loitering, which is seen as a form of idleness to be punished and controlled (Pereira-Edwards 2020: 2). The authors claim a right to fun, pleasure, and link to this a right to loitering (Phadke / Khan / Ranade 2011: 20). This right is undoubtedly connected to the "act of claiming public" (ibid.: 21) and thus also linked to the right to risks connected to this use of different public spaces, which is also formulated by the authors. The search for pleasure in public space and the willingness to take risks is itself a "profoundly feminist act with potentially radical implications" (ibid.: 18).

**FEMINIST NIGHTSCAPES INFRASTRUCTURAL AWARENESS WALK:
12 SCORES** _____ The following provides a collection of scores for an infrastructural awareness walk. We invite you, dear reader, to

organize a *Feminist Nightscapes* walk in your area. Gather together a group of friends and colleagues, agree on a meeting point and a time after dusk, and make use of the scores for a collective walk in your neighborhoods. As preparation, print out the scores or have them on your mobile. We suggest that you plan your route beforehand and choose your route so the scores can be meaningfully connected to studying and reimagining infrastructures in your part of the world. Each score should be performed at a different site: Read each score out loud and perform them together with the group; allow time for reflection and discussion at the end of the walk in a park, a cafe, a square, etc.

SCORE 1: IMAGINE A NEW BODY PART _____ Imagine your body could grow a new feminist body part or organ that supports you in the urban infrastructure. Which feminist organ would you need for the city you move in? How does this organ support you? What does your feminist body part look like? What would its consistency be? What would your feminist organ sound like? How would it make you feel? Find a name for your “feminist organ.” Take some time to imagine and use your feminist body part. You can close your eyes while doing that.

SCORE 2: THINK OF NIGHT WORKERS _____ When was the last time you heard a baby phone, in your home, in your neighbor’s home? When was the last time you had to stay up late at night to meet a deadline? When was the last time you needed to go to the emergency room at the hospital after midnight? When was the last time you rang the doorbell at the night pharmacy? When was the last time you took the first bus in the morning? This score is dedicated to all the essential workers who work at night and keep urban infrastructures running. We invite you to think of all the labor that is needed to guarantee the continuation of urban infrastructures during the night.

SCORE 3: DISMANTLING UNFEMINIST INFRASTRUCTURES _____ Stop for a moment: Look at the urban infrastructures. What do you see? What do you think remains invisible? What do you hear? What do you think remains inaudible? What would you need to loiter? Close your eyes and imagine how the place could change? What infrastructure would you need? And which infrastructures would you dismantle? Take three minutes to imagine that you could change this place and transform it into a feminist city. Share what you imagined.

SCORE 4: THINKING ABOUT AIR _____ When was the last time you thought about the air around you? While walking, focus on your breath, on your breathing – on air entering your lungs. While breathing in, your body expands, depending on the depth of breath, on the speed of your movement, or on the surroundings. Pollen, particles, fumes, viruses, pollution – What do you think of the air you are breathing right now? Which urban infrastructures in your immediate surroundings influence the quality of the odor, heaviness, or lightness of the air – positively or negatively? What would have to change for a better quality of air in the area that you are at? What kind of air did you always want to breathe? Do you remember the best air you ever inhaled?

SCORE 5: FEEL THE PRESENCE OF ANIMALS AND PLANTS _____ Stop for a moment at a quiet corner to experience the place you are at from a different perspective. We cohabitate with multiple species in this city, rainworms keep the soil in parks alive, bats and mice inhabit dark pockets of a city, doves cover rooftops and wait at bus stops, flies and bees roam around flowers and waste. Which animals do you think inhabit the specific infrastructures around you? Where do these animals rest, where do they build their infrastructures? Where do they find food supplies and how do they maneuver through the city? Can you hear any bird sing where you are at? Did you ever wonder where the birds sleep? Or how a bird feels about heavy traffic on city roads? We invite you to take a few minutes and think about the city from the perspective of an animal you could encounter here. Maybe you feel like writing a short text on your phone that you send as a message to a friend.

SCORE 6: MOVE WITH THE URBAN WATER _____ Think about all kinds of rivers, lakes, and other bodies of water you know in your city. Are they on the surface or have they been overbuilt as the years progressed? Where are the city's large water channels? Do you know the city's ancient waterways? Have you ever thought of submerging yourself or even swimming in one of your local waters? At midnight? Perhaps there is a river, a creek, a pond, a lake, a public swimming pool, or a fountain close by. If you feel safe, take some friends and try to visit a body of water in your area. What would be necessary for you to take a swim in your local waters? No policing? Detoxifying the waters and riparian areas? Public access to the water sites? Unearthing the river? Accessibility in the form of stairs, ramps, handrails, lifts, non-slip surfacing, and lighting? A group of friends? Privacy?

SCORE 7: EXAMINE INFRASTRUCTURE DISCRIMINATION _____ The guidelines for urban planning, urban design, and public infrastructure design have changed in recent years. Hostile architecture has been increasingly normalized in urban design, co-creating the public space as a site of class- gender-, race-, and disability discrimination. For many people with walking disabilities and visual impairment, it is still not possible to have full access to many public spaces. You might come across urban sites derived from different periods of urban planning. When was this space constructed and with whom in mind was this place created? Can you detect different policies of urban planning at the urban site where you are now located? Whose bodies have not been considered? Who can move around in this specific site and who cannot easily do so? Could you imagine changes that could be made, so the cityscape becomes a more just and inclusive one? Formulate concrete suggestions for the transformation and improvement of this space, for more just and more joyful futures. Take some notes and share your ideas with friends.

SCORE 8: ANALYZE SPACES OF FEAR _____ What causes fear? Do parking lots cause fear or do reports of violent crimes that have taken place in parking lots cause fear? When fear takes possession of a space, then spaces are turned into spaces of fear. Spaces of fear do not speak of perpetrators. In the 1990s, positions within feminist discourses led to the establishment of so-called victim feminism, perpetuating social power relations and hierarchies. In March 2022, the European Commission made an EU-wide proposal for a directive to combat violence against women. The proposal talks about victim groups; it does not talk about perpetrator groups. If we start to understand spaces as spaces for perpetrators and not as spaces of fear, then we are resisting the invisibilization of perpetrator violence at the level of language. Are there spaces of fear in the city where you live? Discuss the terms that are being used to describe these spaces even though the space is not the problem. Share with the others how you navigate situations in such spaces.

SCORE 9: GATHER FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCES _____ What collective knowledge do you have of existing networks, initiatives, groups, and barter communities that organize self-care collectively? How can we join them, locally, transnationally? How can we share our knowledge of these existing resources, of existing self-care initiatives? Together we collect names, information, and links to existing initiatives, locally as well as translocally and internationally.

SCORE 10: TRAVEL IN TIME _____ Try to go back in time: What do you think the place where you are walking right now might have looked like 100 years ago? Which women were able to spend time here? How did women live in this neighborhood at that time? People of which socio-economic background, gender, and racialized background could move freely through the city? Which people had to perform labor that was bound to walking through the city? Who used the infrastructure before me? Who were the people? What do you think has changed in the last 100 years? Now come back to the present. From here and now start your journey again, this time 100 years into the future: How could this area look in 100 years? What could have changed to make the neighborhood meet your infrastructural expectations of a non-sexist city? Imagine how this city can be transformed into a feminist city in the next 100 years. Feel free to share your imagination with a friend via a phone or text message.

SCORE 11: IMAGINE A FEMINIST COMPANION OF THE NIGHT _____ We walk with humans, dogs, sometimes cats, and rarely turtles. What do you think of when you hear the idea of a feminist companion of the night? Who would they be? What kind of infrastructure would they need? What would you tell your feminist companion about the urban infrastructures of your city? Introduce your feminist companion of the night to the group with whom you are walking.

SCORE 12: SHARE FEMINIST JOYS _____ Imagine the night would be safe for everyone. Always and everywhere. What would you like to do in public space? At midnight? At 4:00 in the morning? Just before sunrise? Alone? With a group of friends? Think about ideas and wishes; share them with your group.

_____ We hope you are encouraged to experiment with the scores and organize a small night walk with friends and feminist colleagues. If you do so, feel free to contact us if you would like to share some of your thoughts and experiences you made during the walk. We would be curious to know in which city and at what time during the night you used the scores and how you performed them with the infrastructures in your neighborhood. We would love to hear from you in which context you organized your walk, whether you organized your walk with a feminist organization, with a group of friends, or with a group of students, and we would feel very honored if you shared with us your discussions and the concerns raised during the walk. Feel warmly invited to get back to us; you can contact us via e-mail or IG @feminist_night_scapes.

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// About the Authors

Elke Krasny, Ph.D., Professor of Art and Education at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Krasny focuses on concerns of care, reproductive labor, social and environmental justice, commemorative practices, and transnational feminisms in art, architecture, infrastructures, and urbanism. She is co-editor of the book *Radicalizing Care: Feminist and Queer Activism in Curating* (London: Sternberg Press, 2021). Her 2023 book, *Living with an Infected Planet. COVID-19 Feminism and the Global Frontline of Care* (Bielefeld: transcript), focuses on militarized care essentialism and feminist recovery plans in pandemic times. <https://www.elkekrasny.at>

Sophie Lingg (she/her) experiments in and researches digitality, digital mass media, and their use for artistic work and art education. Since 2019 she has been working at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna's Art and Education Program, where she is currently writing her dissertation on artistic and artistic-activist work on social media (supervised by Elke Krasny). She is co-editor of the book *Radicalizing Care: Feminist and Queer Activism in Curating* (London: Sternberg Press, 2021). Sophie was part of the Erasmus+ research project Digital Didactics in Art Education didae.eu. <https://sophielingg.at/>

Claudia Lomoschitz is an artist. She works as a researcher and lecturer at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna's Art and Education Program. She completed her M.A. in Performance Studies at the University of Hamburg and studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and the Royal Danish Academy of Copenhagen. She is currently writing her dissertation (supervised by Elke Krasny). Her work has been shown at brut Wien (*Vibrant Void*, 2024), Kunsthalle Wien (*Lactans*, 2023), Kunstraum Nieder sterreich (*PARTUS Gyno Bitch Tits*, 2021) and Tanzquartier Vienna (*G.E.L.*, 2021). <http://claudialomoschitz.com>

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Sigrid Adorf / Kerstin Brandes / Edith Futscher / Kathrin Heinz / Marietta Kesting / Julia Noah Munier / Franziska Rauh / Mona Schieren / Rosanna Umbach / Kea Wienand / Anja Zimmermann
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