

INFRASTRUCTURES UNDER PRESSURE: PRACTICING WITH SITES OF STRUGGLE

ABSTRACT — “Infrastructures Under Pressure: Practicing with Sites of Struggle” is composed of short contributions by ten authors who are part of the Ecologies of Care group instituted and convened by Elke Krasny and Urška Jurman. Working in different sites across the territories of Europe, the ten short contributions offer explanations of the specificity of infrastructures under pressure in their local contexts, as well as of the curatorial and artistic practices used to develop long-term transformations of these infrastructures through use, care, and new aesthetic and ethical imaginaries. Life-affirming practices against capital emerge from critical curatorial and art-based practices that stay with their sites for a long time, sometimes for more than a decade, as they counteract infrastructural violence and work on new practices of care and repair.

— “Ecologies of Care is a group of curators, artists, architects, and researchers convened by Urška Jurman and Elke Krasny in 2021. Taking the meanings of *curare* – to care and to cure – which forms the etymological root of the word ‘curating,’ we approach interdependencies in care as ethico-political and corpo-material relations, and pay special attention to new modes of art and cultural practice that enable meaningful social and environmental encounters and that create lasting and transformative relations” (<https://ecologiesof-care.org/about>). Bringing together curatorial practices, artmaking, organizing, and research around infrastructures under pressure, the contributors to the Ecologies of Care group are concerned with curating as organizing, activism, research, and collaborative practice with artists with a special interest in the social and ecological life of public environments in urban as well as rural contexts.

— This practice-driven contribution consists of case studies that introduce the site-specific infrastructural pressures as well as the ways of working within conditions of ongoing struggle. Rather than critique only, the practices are also concerned with resistance and transformation by way of bringing together different concerns and interests ranging from activism to policy and urban governance. Moreover, these examples show how curators and artists are concerned with the continuation of the everyday use of infrastructures such as gardens, parks, or bodies of water that are essential to life-affirming social and environmental practices. Each

author's text consists of a short description of the site, an image, and a short bibliography.

// References

Ecologies of Care <https://ecologiesofcare.org/about> (May 8, 2024).



// Figure 1

Polonca Lovšin, *A Plan with a Goat*, August 31, 2010, photo: Tomaž Tomažin

// Urška Jurman

Infrastructure Under Pressure: Beyond a Construction Site, Community Garden in Ljubljana (2010–2022)
Site: Ljubljana, Slovenia

How can a long-dormant construction site in the middle of a residential neighborhood in Ljubljana be transformed into a space that is socially and environmentally meaningful? How can a long fenced-off plot of municipal land that is considered a piece of real estate and an infrastructure for the capitalist production of space be transformed into a social and ecological infrastructure – “caring infrastructure?” (Krasny 2022: 68–76).

— These kinds of questions occupied the initiators (Obrat Association) when we began with the *Beyond a Construction Site* project. As a group that shared an interest in critical spatial practice, we started by learning about the context of the site and communicating with neighborhood residents. The project was launched as part of a cultural festival in the summer of 2010 and with the support of the Municipality of Ljubljana, which backed the project by making a contract for the temporary use of the land. The qualities of the

specific location (an enclosed, overgrown parcel of land) and its surroundings (a residential area), combined with the feedback collected from the residents, transformed our primary abstract idea of a green community space into a tangible urban community garden project.

— When entering the site, we started care-fully, by noticing and getting acquainted with what was already growing on location and – to maintain and increase biological diversity – searching for a balance between the self-grown vegetation and the spaces for planned gardens. A multispecies perspective on spatial design was also crucial for Polonca Lovšin’s art project *A Plan with a Goat*. She spent a day on the site with the goat Hana and charted her movements and activities (eating, resting, etc.) around the overgrown terrain. On the basis of her notes, Lošin drew up a plan for organizing the plot.

— Even though the goat Hana attracted a lot of curiosity from the neighbors, not many joined the first working actions. The spring of 2011 brought new energy and optimism when local residents responded to our invitation to “Make Your Own Garden.” However, the pressure of a precarious condition of the caring infrastructure slowly growing on a former construction site was looming. How can a project of a temporary use of space avoid the gentrification process? One attempt in this regard was engaging in public discourse and forging alliances. Creating a community garden that is at the same time open to the public and to diverse uses (educational, cultural, ...) was also part of our strategy. As was the idea of a porous community – a community that is not exclusive, a community that also involves a more-than-human perspective, and a community that nurtures rather a sense of *being-with* than a sense of *being-in*. The community grew over the years, as did the trees on the site. The garden slowly transformed into a sort of forest garden that was precious to the whole neighborhood, especially in increasingly hot summers. In 2021, Obrat, in collaboration with garden participants, proposed to the municipality to preserve the site as a public green area and not to build on it, as was intended according to the city’s spatial plan. The municipality rejected this proposal but accepted our alternative to keep the land in public ownership for non-profit housing. *Beyond a Construction Site* is soon to become a construction site again, but in twelve years the garden project managed to influence the transformation of the original plan for the developer-driven project into a project under the City of Ljubljana’s Public Housing Fund and thus demonstrated that a more inclusive city can grow from a (community-driven) garden.

// References

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// Figure 2

Elena Rucli, *Academy of Margins*, 2022

// Vida Rucli

Infrastructure Under Pressure: A Village Becoming a Ruin Site: Topolò/Topolove, Italy.

Can we speak of an *infrastructure under pressure* when observing a depopulated village in Northern Italy slowly becoming a ruin, eaten up by the forest? And what kind of pressure is the forest placing upon the mountain village? Is that an ecological pressure, the overgrowing woods rewilding what were once cultivated fields, or is that actually a social pressure, or better an *un-pressure*, namely that historical process that supported the exodus of the population inhabiting the village throughout the whole twentieth century? And if, as it is evident, the two are intertwined or, better, one is the consequence of the other, how can curatorial and artistic practices hold these complexities, crawl into and through them, and act upon them?

— In the following paragraph, I will briefly introduce the curatorial practice of Robida, a collective I helped co-found in 2017, in relation to the village of Topolò/Topolove, situated on the mountainous borderland of Italy and Slovenia (therefore the duality of its name): I would base the curatorial, political, and cultural approach of Robida on two spatial verbs – *opening up new spaces* and *remaining*.

— Topolò is a village of 25 inhabitants, located at the end of a road that stops before a dense young forest starts. The border

with Slovenia is 500 meters as the crow flies: From the village it is possible to see that some parts of the mountains that surround the place are nowadays Slovene territory. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the village counted nearly 400 inhabitants: The vast majority of them emigrated throughout the century, motivated by economic as well as political reasons.

— Those families who decided to remain experienced many of the tragedies of the century: World War I – here, on what is today the border between Italy and Slovenia, ran the Isonzo front, where one of the biggest Italian defeats left destruction and misery on the population and territory; Fascism, with the annihilation of the linguistic and cultural traditions of the Slovene ethnic minority inhabiting the borderland area; World War II, with people from the village fighting and dying in Partisan groups and some of them being deported to concentration camps (Gariup / Gariup / Rucli 1994); and the Cold War period, which didn't soothe the wounds created by Twentieth Century history on the place and people and, on the contrary, made them more profound. The stigma of speaking the Slovene local dialect and the Italian secret services (Cacciatore 2021) controlling the area and its inhabitants compelled the population to massively leave the village (Zuanella 1998).

— Today the village is only partially inhabited. Many houses are ruins, others are used for summer holidays by those people who emigrated to France, Belgium, Switzerland, or Italian cities and who return every year to spend the summer in the village. Ruderal plants and a young forest occupy the terraced landscape that embraces that village – a *third landscape* (Clément 2004) that appears as a dense, old, and inaccessible forest in the summer, and discloses beautifully made dry stone walls in the winter when the trees without leaves allow us to observe through them the infrastructures for cultivation which the inhabitants of the place built and which were abandoned fifty years ago.

— Can the entire village and the landscape embracing it be understood as an *infrastructure* for the curatorial, dwelling, and research practice of the Robida collective? Founded as an association in 2017 but already informally active since 2014, the collective develops actions and reflections around the questions the village itself opens and holds: Collective actions of care-taking of the abandoned terraced fields constantly confront us with questions of responsibility and heritage (how to rethink the beautiful dry stone structures, how to preserve them); the local Slovene dialect, which we are almost unable to speak, makes us ponder about what language to cultivate and use; the empty houses, barns, and hayracks

in their frail state demand us to think about how to cohabitate with ruins, with those surrounding us and those of our capitalist world. Through a magazine, a community radio, pedagogical programs, and inhabiting the village daily, Robida takes Topolò as the infrastructure of its actions and reflections, approaching it through two main verbs of action: to *open up new spaces* and to *remain*.

—— To explore, look for, and open up new spaces within or around the village of Topolò means to concretely extend the agency we have over space by always including new portions of the village and of the landscape which need to be taken care of, cleaned, maintained, and rethought. To open new spaces is not only a physical action of *actually* opening closed houses or reopening old paths covered by vegetation and retracing them, but it is also a metaphorical gesture: For us it means to be open to the unexpected, to find the unknown within what we have an intimate relation to, to find new spaces where to situate ourselves and our practice, to find new meanings and to project desires and dreams.

—— And in developing desires and dreams, we always think about how the future of a landscape that was used for productive reasons, worked on, and maintained mainly by men, can be reimagined and reactivated today from a feminist perspective. How to stay in this immense land and reimagine what activities can happen on it.

—— To remain is a verb that, instead of holding stillness and passivity, becomes the signifier of a political action. The Italian anthropologist Vito Teti (2022) coined the term *restanza*, the union of *restare* (to remain) and *resistenza* (to resist): “Because to remain, one should walk and travel through the invisible spaces of the margins” (translated by the author).

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// Figure 3
Autonomi Akadimia in the Akadimia
Platonos, Athens, 2020, photo by Joulia
Strauss

// Joulia Strauss

Infrastructure Under Pressure: Akadimia Platonos Site: Athens, Greece

Hecate, the Middle Eastern refugee goddess of magic and witchcraft, the twin of Apollon, has been censored from Ancient Greek mythology. Apollon alone, the god of order and anthropocentric beauty, has been guarding the Hellenic culture since then. Indigenous Europe, which sees all living as sacred, has ended at this point of the divide of the siblings of physis and techne.

— One ancestral trace has remained from those times: A school can be in a beautiful garden, where knowledge can be shared while walking and learning from the luminous spirits of trees, from pantherine movements of cats, and conversations enmesh into the sound healing carpet of cicadas.

— The word *Academia*, now used to signify educational institutions, originates from the *Akadimia Platonos*, a public park in Athens. This park was later given Plato's name because he was teaching there. Yet Plato's "Republic," the militarized state, has pre-conditioned the empire we still live in. Its invention of nations and borders remains the main justification of murderous border politics.

— *Autonomi Akadimia*, a self-organized grassroots university and a durational artwork, is an infrastructural critique as action. It suggests a transformation of the educational system of Europe. Here, we are conjuring a reuniting of art and physis in ecofeminism. We are recovering political philosophy from the academies. We are

weaving together different Indigenous epistemologies. Here, we esteem knowledge of the good life above all forms of knowledge.

But, as part of a ‘development’ plan, the mayor of Athens, Kostas Bakoyiannis, wants to build on this site a “Museum of Athens” for which hundreds of trees are planned to be cut down, destroying the ancient habitat that unites the ruins of Plato’s Academy. The city of Athens, already a living museum, doesn’t need more concrete. Its inhabitants and guests need oxygen.

——— “Apollon Apartments H-3 H-4 is set in Rhodes Town. The property is 1640 feet from Temple of Apollon, 2953 feet from Clock Tower and 1640 feet from Ancient Stadium,” as found on booking.com. This is all that is left of the ancient Greek mythology. The current government, “New Democracy,” has diverted the infrastructural state budget for fire protection. The extinction-endangered deer of Rhodos has passed away. More than twenty thousand humans are homeless. Tourists don’t feel like spending holidays participating in Kyriakos Mitsotakis’ “war with fire.”

——— Greece is a ghetto of Europe. It is a magnifying glass that allows the northern, economically privileged zone to see its patriarchal core: The infrastructure of Europe is based on a principle of outsourcing the problems to its peripheries and extracting from the very same peripheries. The evacuation chaos of tourists is proof that life is cyclical: One cannot have the good life in the misery one has created. The days of the infrastructures that don’t assume the oneness of all living are numbered.

——— Welcome to Athens in Spring 2024! Artists, philosophers, shamans, scientists, environmental and political activists from Athens and many other places will gather in the *Akadimia Platonos* to perform a oneness of the world. We seek to attribute personhood to the *Akadimia Platonos*: #LegalRights4AkadimiaPlatonosJungle, and to its subterranean river, Kifissos, that flows under the lush cypresses and olive trees of this unique and endangered ecosystem.

——— We counteract the ongoing politics of war with ecofeminist practices of love.



// Figure 4
Climate Care Festival at Floating
University, credit: Mor Akadir, 2023

// Rosario Talevi

Infrastructure Under Pressure: Floating University Site: Berlin, Germany

A soft and caring infrastructure collaborates with the existing environment and its agents. Such is the case, I would argue, of the Floating University in Berlin. The site was designed in the early 1930s as a rainwater retention basin to serve the Tempelhof airfield and adjacent avenues, and it was encased in concrete after World War II by the US Army. Today, it remains as a fully functioning water infrastructure, holding and diverting rainwater into the city's canal system.

— After the Tempelhof airport was decommissioned in 2008, the city's redevelopment plan proposed to build over the airfield and relocate the neighboring rainwater infrastructure. This would have transformed the 22,500-square-meter, city-owned piece of land occupied by the basin into a valuable, profitable asset in Berlin's real estate portfolio. However, the Tempelhof referendum of 2014 saw Berliners vote against the city to prevent any kind of construction on the airfield. The result of this referendum not only protected the unique inner-city hybrid green space (Tempelhofer Feld) but also provided protection for the basin.

— The rainwater collection basin had been closed off to the public for over 80 years and when the site was opened up as the Floating University in 2018, to establish a *natureculture* learning site, it was an explicit decision to re-activate the water infrastructure as a cultural and socio-political space. In 2020, Tempelhof GmbH – the state-owned company entrusted with managing the basin – announced plans for an “infrastructural improvement.”

Since then, the main concerns of Floating e.V. – the association caring and culturally programming this unique site – have been to enable the coexistence of the basin’s technical infrastructure, including its maintenance, care, and planned renewal, with our cultural programs, and that all technical and cultural works take place in solidarity with the existing ecosystem.

— Despite its concrete floor and the water’s partial level of toxicity, the basin is already a habitat for many species. In addition to the spontaneous forest that has grown surrounding it, a vast reed bed has been terraforming in the basin’s center. This reed bed has an additional important function: It is a water-cleansing mechanism that consequently acts as a natural filter. But beyond its rich ecological undertaking, the reed bed and the many life forms within it have become an affective entity imbued with multiple meanings for us humans present on site: a symbol of regeneration and restoration, a soundscape, a mystical creature, a floating companion.

— On a cold morning last March, the reed bed was violently uprooted without any preliminary announcement by Tempelhof GmbH’s maintenance department. In shock and sadness, Floating e.V. demanded answers from the company, who disclosed that the reason for the removal was the detection of human feces in the water. According to them, the feces had contaminated the entirety of the basin and an exhaustive cleansing was carried out to prevent the polluted water from flowing into the sewer system, potentially resulting in a €15,000 fine. To complicate the matter further, this technical action has been contested not only by the Floating association, but by the Kreuzberg district’s environmental office, which had declared the reed bed a protected habitat.

— Days after the attack on the reed bed, Floating e.V. members salvaged and repurposed some of the “toxic” reed and replanted it throughout the basin as an act of resistance.

— Further on, as our cultural programs are site-symbiotic, they have also addressed and responded to the pressure exerted by the city. For example, by organizing an impromptu, one-day grieving ceremony in remembrance of the lost reed bed; or by dedicating the upcoming Climate Care Festival to questions of care-taking, maintenance, and mediation of hybrid urban infrastructures.

— Today, despite this violent disturbance, the reed continues to regenerate and thrive. However, it remains a mystery where the feces came from and its exact level of toxicity, or even if it ever existed. Such violent and irreversible action raises many questions around the problematic interpretation of scientific measures used to justify urban development procedures: How are levels of toxicity interpreted and

for what purposes? Might the level of water pollution be interpreted by management companies and instrumentalized as a tactic to remove habitat and, later on, to remove us – the caretakers – from the site?

— The difference between Floating e.V. and the City of Berlin's conception of "improvement" is stark. For the city, improving this water infrastructure means subjugating the biological community present on site, intervening in its ecology, and remaking it in the image of technocracy; prioritizing their ideas of productivity, progress, and efficiency. At Floating e.V. we yearn for more nuanced ways of implementing urban transformation which – scaffolded by our cultural programming – are earthbound, friendly to multiple species, and considerate of more-than-human life cycles.¹⁾

1)

For a longer version of one of the Floating University's chronicles, see Talevi, R. / Karjevsky, G. (2023). Floating University: A Natureculture Learning Site. In: Utting, B. (eds.) *Architectures of Care: From the Intimate to the Common*. Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge. Parts of this article borrow from a text which has been co-authored with Gilly Karjevsky throughout the years. I thank Gilly for the fruitful collaboration.



// Figure 5

Oil Game, Refinery Board with Carlos Aguiar and Nuno Maio, photograph by Miguel Oliveira, 2023

// Inês Moreira

Infrastructure Under Pressure: Refinery Site: North of Porto, Portugal

The heavily developed Atlantic waterfront north of the city of Porto (Portugal) is an extensive board where different temporalities, ecologies, and social conditions interplay. It sits in a borderline situation: a dystopian landscape waiting for severe economic speculation. This slice of coast extending from the mouth of the Leça River to Cabo do Mundo (End of the World) conjoins over a river that became a port entrance for fishing boats, cargo ships, and leisure cruises, flanked by the urban beach of Matosinhos, where dozens of surf schools spread out. To the north, the rocky seashore supports the Piscina das Marés (Tidal Swimming Pools) and the Casa de Chá da Boa Nova (Boa Nova Tea House), both designed by the prized

architect Siza Vieira, while his third intervention is the beach walk that elegantly hides the oil pipelines connecting the oil tanker port to the nefarious GALP refinery operating since the 1960s. Facing it are upper-middle-class housing units.

— Announced on December 21, 2020, the decommissioning of the refinery led to the start of dismantling in 2023, subtracting infrastructure and preparing the land for subsequent redevelopment plans and projects. Its condition under transformation makes it a flagship of the politics for a decarbonized society, while its proximity to the sea makes it a desirable target for real estate investment and financial speculation: What margin for a public interest on the grounds? Which decarbonization project? Which cure for its inextricably toxic soils?

— Dismantlement, recycling, or recuperation, operations of active economic investment, aim for strategic plans and are entrapped by the timing of urbanism, architecture, real estate, or other instituted politics of space. The refinery of Leça da Palmeira is privately owned by GALP, public access is prohibited (and dangerous), and the destinations under debate are a negotiation between private stakeholders. Although publicly announced, the concrete plans of the masterplan headed by Dutch architecture company MVRDV, and its international consortium, have not yet been revealed apart from the brands and company names involved.

— Facing the relevance of the future of this 290-hectare-large swath of land, the lack of civic participation in the process, and of debate on dismantling, decontamination, conversion, and development, we launched the platform refineryboard.pt to observe, monitor, and reflect on the future of the refinery. Created in 2022 by two women (Inês Moreira and Joana Rafael) interested in toxicities, contamination, and unbeloved legacies of industrial society, the platform initiates research processes and promotes public events creating evidence of the transition processes. As an alternative to the lack of physical and documentary access to the refinery grounds and files, the curatorial strategy of refineryboard.pt assumes the perimeter of the land, witnessing from the outside, as public, in a modest position and deliberately critical perspective.

— We created a new board game *Oil (Petróleo)*, redesigning a 1970s game – *Crude: The Oil Game* – to now play the decontamination and subtraction processes of the dismantlement of the refinery, transforming a global monopoly oil economy game into a greener, more diverse, and inclusive society game board. *Oil* was played as *Oil Tournament 2023* (Torneio de Petróleo 2023), and became a podcast, inviting citizens to debate and play their strategies and

personal experiences: architects, environmentalists, archaeologists, designers, and historians, moving their pieces and negotiating the complexity of a site under transformation.

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Refinery Podcast: <https://refineryboard.pt/wp/events/> (May 8, 2024).



// Figure 6

Dario Ligoi, Lago Bullicante, 2023

// **Alessandra Pomarico**

Infrastructure Under Pressure: A Former Factory, a Rebellious Lake, and the Ongoing Struggle of Interconnected Communities

Site: Rome, Italy

This year marks the centenary of SNIA Viscosa, a chemical textile factory that opened in 1923 in Pigneto, a neighborhood in Rome whose name recalls a long-vanished pinewood. By accident or maybe a miracle, a forest found its way back there, on the shore of a newly-formed lake, now the largest body of water in the city center, bringing back wildlife in the middle of what was once a large urban factory complex and now a contested space. During World War II, SNIA Viscosa produced rayon used to make soldiers' backpacks, part of the meager equipment the fascist government provided to the troops sent to the Northeastern Front, while the factory's basement doubled as an air raid shelter for nearby residents. A strategic location close to Termini train station, Sapienza University, and the bustling boulevard Prenestina, the area was historically inhabited

by working class and migrant populations, the legacy of workers' struggles and leftist tradition still very much alive, intersecting today with feminist and migrant struggles, the right to the housing, and environmental issues. The factory closed in 1954, the site was abandoned and vigorously reclaimed by nature. In the 1970s, part of the area, including what was left of the industrial infrastructure, was bought from the local council by the tycoon Antonio Pulcini, who planned to build a shopping center with an underground car park. When excavations began in 1992, an underground aquifer was ruptured, giving rise to flooding and the emergence of the so-called *Lago Bullicante*, also known as the *Rebellious Lake*, the lake that resists. While Pulcini and the municipality fought over legal codes, site zoning, and unvetted plans, the neighbors started to spontaneously appropriate the space, a flourishing oasis in the middle of the city. A group of local activists occupied part of the factory outside of Pulcini's acquisition, creating the social and cultural center Ex-SNIA, organizing to protect the area, and demanding its transformation into a public park and a common good. Following assembly after assembly, tireless awareness-raising, fundraising, forensic work, and cultural events, in 2020 the campaign achieved its aim of having the lake and eighteen acres of land designated as a "natural monument." It seemed an important victory to safeguard the area from gentrification, further real estate speculation, and a long history of collusion or dubious decisions from the various administrations. We are called to appreciate a conjoint resistance of both human and more-than-human communities, a reclaiming of defunct "chemical infrastructures" (Murphy 2013), and the emergence of a rich natural and social ecosystem in the demise of an industrial past – all of this in the cracks of neoliberal policy. The two-decade-long mobilization sustained by a large constituency of activists, scholars, scientists, journalists, architects, students, families, migrants, and other community members led to the creation of the *Parco delle Energie*, an initiative comprising a sustainable eco-village, a permanent forum, an industrial archeology archive, and a plethora of initiatives and collectives.²⁾ Here, university researchers are experimenting with bioelectrochemical systems (BESs) and bio-remediator technologies to mitigate the impact of the carbon disulfide from the factory, which is highly poisonous and known to cause harmful physical, neurological, and reproductive effects. A relevant reference is the PHOENIX project which looks at how collaborating with microorganisms' ability to care for and clean polluted sites can bring remediation of toxic environments (Dillon 2021).

2)

I would like to thank Lorenzo Romito and Giulia Fiocca (Stalker) for sharing their experience, knowledge, and work on the site with DAFNE (Environmental Damages and Formation of New Ecosystems), Scuola di Urbanesimo Nomade, and for their precious article *Hypothesis Rome*.

— Hundreds of species inhabit this site, now crucial for its biodiversity and wildlife. Nevertheless, the current administration (Democratic Party) ignored the movement's demands for a legal expropriation, granting approval to Pulcini's "restoration plan" in his portion of the factory and in around four hectares of land, greenlighting his development plan to start over. Precedents from other global cities foretell the likelihood of skyscrapers going up, expensive apartments advertised with lake views, surrounded by a city park. Capital is able to capture and co-opt the energy of struggles and extract profit from them. What can a politics of refusal teach us? How to oppose a value form of participation³⁾ and what modes of resistance could reverse the logic of accumulation, and the monetization of everyday life? How can we restore, heal, and regenerate our neighborhoods and lands without becoming ensnared in these extractive relationships? In many ways, the site continues to be a battleground, its story emblematic of the anthropocentric, modern, western, patriarchal, and capitalist paradigm, and its ongoing violence against the "body-territory," against all forms of life and those defending it (Cabnal 2015). If we understand our bodies being molecularly constituted by the space they inhabit, its climate, its geography, its history, as Latin American decolonial ecofeminists suggest, the interconnected relation between land and people as one large metabolism becomes more manifest. The health of territories corresponding to the health of communities, as described by Gabón, and a "terrestrial politics," as introduced by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, as well as a cosmology based on symbiotic relations might reverse power and current necropolitics, as they interrupt the false sense of separating humans from nature (Gabón 2018; Latour / Weibel 2020). If we are ready to listen, the multispecies rebel community of *Lago Bullicante* can teach us new-old ways to resist and *re-exist*.

3)

Collective Ultra-red, often involved in artists and activists' spaces, warn about *value-form participation* to highlight how grass-roots participation is being co-opted by institutions and the political-economic development apparatus, as a strategy to ultimately neutralize activists' demands (Ultra-red 2008).

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// Figure 7

Micol Roubini, *The Magic Mountain*, 2023, video still.

// Gabi Scardi

Infrastructure Under Pressure: The Magic Mountain by Micol Roubini

Site: Former Asbestos Mine, Balangero, Italy

Northern Italy: Micol Roubini, a video artist, confronts the village of Balangero, Turin, and the nearby disused quarry, once Europe's largest open-pit asbestos mine from 1918 to 1990. Today, Balangero seems like a suspended territory. Its inhabitants have been the greatest (human) victims of both mining and the decision to close. The former quarry, where environmental exposure to asbestos is unavoidable, is off-limits. It is subject to soil remediation. Therefore, it is also impossible to predict what the future of the area will be and how long the process will last, since humans have no control over it. With a paradoxical mixture – awareness, but also nostalgia – Balangero is a place of estrangement, dispossession, alienation; a margin. Along with other asbestos industries, this area represents one of the darkest situations in Italian industrial history and is a prime example of the effects of the extraction vision. It represents a labor history linked to the blackmail of the right to work as an alternative to the right to health. In the 1960s, the evidence that asbestos caused fatal diseases was indisputable worldwide. But asbestos companies did not cease production. On the one hand, they offered favorable working conditions and, on the other, they developed systematic marketing: Asbestos-laden products were disseminated enormously in domestic use and, above all, in those infrastructures that are the basis of modern life.

— Today, while big business is still resisting compensation for asbestos victims, the privileged world no longer uses asbestos – even though any kind of infrastructure can contain it. But the global South

does. Asbestos is still being mined and manufactured in the many countries where there is no protective legislation, and promoted, particularly to the vulnerable sections of the population. Eternit, in particular, is still used to build infrastructure and insulate homes. Favelas are full of it. Reflecting the radical injustice taking place in the world, hazardous work and the unequal spread of contaminated infrastructure make global geopolitical dynamics visible.

— Roubini's practice is based on careful research, observation, and listening, and on building a relationship with the people involved. Her works are based on documentary elements but also include reinterpretations and recreations of facts. Her visions are based on a rigorous discipline of images. To shape an understanding of Balangero reality, Roubini approached the situation on different scales and from different points of view: individual, social, political, and environmental; all interconnected. Researchers and professionals such as occupational physicians, epidemiologists, botanists, lichenologists, anthropologists, and dream experts were among her interlocutors. One of her lines of research was to collect the shared dream memory of the territory. In several stories, the lethal osmosis between the landscape and the body that absorbs white dust emerges. The vitality of dreams can be seen as a way to challenge society-dominant models, the passivity and the feeling of failure and loss, and to recover personal experiences and history. Another line concerns the gradual transformation of the mountain: The area is filmed as it changes from a heavily human-made landscape to a reforested or rewilded landscape. Indeed, once the site has lost its functional and consumable quality it becomes possible to shift the focus from the human experience to the place itself, its life taking shape and long-term cyclicity. The footage includes images of a species of lichens, the only life form capable of metabolizing asbestos fibers. The slowness with which they develop, however, makes it impossible for them to be utilized: Exceeding human individuals' times is a way for these organisms to avoid exploitation and instrumentalization. Their existence becomes an extraordinary example of free cooperation for a possible safer environment. This is a very different model from the one that reflects deeply rooted social, economic, health, and infrastructural inequalities entrenched in the history of exploitation and clearly represented by the history of asbestos and other industries.

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Infrastructure in this case encompasses a dispositive of technologies, processes, and discourses that are essential to the management of water for the extraction of coal. Moreover, water itself also exhibits infrastructural character, as it provides the basis for economic activities in the region from an economic perspective, but first and foremost enables the life of human and non-human communities. By infrastructural character, I refer to the transitive and reproductive properties of infrastructures that create conditions for something else to become possible (see also Larkin 2013). Kregg Hetherington defines infrastructure as “part of an assemblage which fades into the background and which enables the foregrounding of other parts” and “that which comes before something else, that which lays the conditions for the emergence of another order” (Hetherington 2017: 40). In the case of smooth functioning, infrastructures, as has been noted many times, easily get out of focus. The processuality and dynamism of infrastructures are obscured. But this should not conceal the fact that cuts and interruptions are possible at any time and occur continuously, which can bring problems, but also creates the possibility of critical intervention (see Vishmidt 2017).

// Figure 8

Nada Rosa Schroer, *Fluid Circulations*, Halde, Northern Germany, 2022

// Nada Rosa Schroer

**Infrastructure Under Pressure: Fluid Circulations.
Towards a Hydrofeminist Infrastructure Critique
Site: River Rhine, Germany**

In this contribution, I turn to the water bodies in the lignite mining area of the Rhenish Revier and the infrastructure of the so-called water management of the energy company RWE Power.¹⁾ The relationship to water in the region is determined to a considerable extent by the infrastructural penetration of the fossil energy industry. The

corporation uses a gigantic network of pipes, wells, and pumps to extract some 580 million cubic meters of groundwater from lignite mines each year (Joerres et al. 2021).²⁾ Examining the *hydrosocial cycles*³⁾ shaped by extraction reveals the ways in which society, infrastructure, and water mutually generate each other, the power relations that determine these dynamics, and how they are put under pressure.

— In the Rhineland, this literally occurs through a geological drop in pressure: As a result of the lowering of the groundwater level in the open-cast mining region, the underground aquifers relax and drain into the lignite mines. Flora and fauna on the surface lose connection to their source areas. Therefore, many water bodies in the affected area depend on the redistribution of sump water through corporate infrastructure. The question of who will pay for the maintenance of irrigation and landscape renaturation after the phase-out of lignite is still an open political question.

— This also affects the Gillbach, a 28-kilometer-long stream in the Rhine-Erft-district. Its original source, Bethlehem Forest, was dredged by the Bergheim and Fortuna-Garsdorf opencast mines between the 1950s and 1980s. Today, it serves as a wastewater channel for the cooling water of the Niederaussem coal power plant. When the plant is shut down in the near future, the Gillbach threatens to dry up. What do artistic-curatorial approaches of hydrofeminist infrastructure critique offer in order to intervene in the scenario of dehydration?

— Apart from its technological function, Brian Larkin understands infrastructure as “concrete semiotic and aesthetic vehicles oriented to addressees” (Larkin 2013: 329). It mediates narratives. Exploiting water for fossil economic interests through infrastructural control corresponds to the Western patriarchal understanding of ‘nature’ as a raw material for industrialization and progress. This narrative materializes in RWE’s water management. This understanding can be countered by the posthumanist concept of *bodies of water* (Neimanis 2012). As in many non-Western water cosmologies, also from a hydrofeminist perspective, water possesses a material-cultural agency. Water is a connecting element between human and more-than-human bodies. This relationship gives rise to a responsibility for these transcorporeal fluid assemblages of human and more-than-human waters which Neimanis calls *hydrocommons* (Neimanis 2009, 2017).

— In the case of the Gillbach, the responsibility for the hydrocommons is expressed through a political and cultural struggle for an irrigation infrastructure to keep the hydrosocial cycle

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This makes RWE Power one of the largest water consumers in Germany.

3)

The term hydrosocial cycle refers to a “socio-natural process by which water and society make and remake each other over space and time” (Linton / Budds 2014: 6). ‘Water’ and ‘society’ do not exist separately, but as entities that continually constitute each other in a relational-dialectical process.

alive. To support the preservation of the creek, a walk with artists, researchers as well as citizens and politicians of the municipality of Rommerskirchen took place within the framework of the project *Fluid Circulations*.⁴⁾ Here, the chairperson of the environmental committee of Rommerskirchen, Katharina Janetta, together with colleagues, founded a cross-party ‘task force’ to raise awareness about the importance of the water body and thus increase the political pressure of the municipalities.⁵⁾

— Through a mix of mobilization, exchange, and somatic exercises, the walk aimed at building a “social infrastructures capable of sustaining a feminist response to ecological crisis” (Hamilton et al. 2021: 237). With the press present, the participants shared stories about their struggle and discussed methods of restorative justice and ecological care. To provide a relational understanding of water and to allow the experience of a transcorporeal connection, artists of *Fluid Circulations* offered somatic exercises.

— During the coffee break, citizens of the municipalities shared personal anecdotes and memories about their lives at the Gillbach. Holding space and listening to each other evoked the cultural agency of the water and strengthened the affective connection to the stream. Interestingly, critique of the extent of anthropogenic deformation did not lead to a nostalgic evocation of supposedly untouched landscapes. Rather, participants acknowledged the historically evolved intertwining of landscape and technology and called for its reuse in the sense of ecological regeneration, for example, by installing solar-powered groundwater pumps along the course of the stream to ensure water supply. The scenario of infrastructural dismantling by the energy company opened space for new infrastructural stories of a regenerative use of technology and of ecological care to emerge. The fossil narrative of control and exploitation gave way to the one of maintaining the hydrosocial coexistence of humans and non-humans on the Gillbach.

— Surprisingly, a political shift occurred after the walk: The local press covered the event, and shortly thereafter the responsible company RWE and the public water management association Erftverband, contrary to previous indications, signaled that they were once again considering preserving the Gillbach (Schneider 2023b).

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The transdisciplinary research and exhibition project *Fluid Circulations – Hydro-feminist Explorations of Postindustrial Landscapes* started in October 2022 with a four-day field research on water bodies located along the infrastructures of the eternity tasks of post-mining – water treatment plants, pumping stations, and discharge points – as well as water bodies compromised by open-pit mining. Through regular online group meetings and public online talks, the research continued and was made available to the public with an exhibition from March 4 to March 24, 2023 at KunstWerk Köln e.V. Participating artists: Maria Lucia Cruz Correia, Diane Hillebrand, SU Yu Hsin, Margarida Mendes, Marta Niedbał, Nina Paszkowski, Vanja Smiljanić, and ZAKOLE.

5)

RWE representatives had initially denied that the Gillbach had not carried any water in its upper reaches before it was used as a cooling water canal. However, in joint research by the task force and the team of the district archive, this claim was refuted. As a response the public water management association Erftverband published a statement in which it announced the fossil energy group's assessment that the permanent preservation of the Gillbach would be “unsustainable” due to the energy requirements and emissions of the necessary infrastructure and would contradict “the imperative of conserving our water and energy resources.” It was conveniently taken into account that plants and animals of the Gillbach would “naturally not survive” the draining. This statement was rejected by the municipalities and increased the awareness of the need for political intervention. Source: Interview with Katharina Janetta, see also: Schneider, 2023a.

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// Figure 9

Anna Zilahi, Laura Szári, Varsányi Szirének, Gergely Ofner, *Missa Echologica*, 2021, photograph by Dávid Biró

// Eszter Erdosi

**Infrastructure Under Pressure: Organic Infrastructures:
The Echo of Tihany Under Pressure in Anna Zilahi's
Missa Echologica (2021)
Site: Lake Balaton, Hungary**

The Echo of Tihany is a sound phenomenon near Lake Balaton in Hungary, the shore of which is a popular domestic holiday

destination in the country. The phenomenon has been both an organic feature of the landscape and the subject of literary works, thus contributing to the sociocultural and ecological richness of the area. Recently, the Echo has been steadily receding, partly because of the expansion of real estate projects for Hungarian elites in the area, the infrastructures of which also overburden local communities that are not prepared for such changes (Molnár 2022, Zilahi 2021). These processes also fit the broader environmental narrative of Lake Balaton, whereby the privatization of public, accessible outdoor recreation spaces around the lake, such as public beaches, helps satisfy the capitalist hunger of government elites and oligarchs, while simultaneously disregarding their impact on local human and other-than-human communities (Fónai et al. 2023). Thus, the Echo sits within a restructuring of the landscape that happens both politically (via privatization) and geologically (via adding to and removing from the landscape), and which stages a clash between ecological infrastructures and those facilitated by a capitalist-extractivist ethic.

— *Missa Echologica* (2021) is a choir piece that was first shown at the OFF-Biennale Budapest in 2021, as part of the exhibition titled *Aclim!*, curated by the Hungarian artist group xtro realm. The lyrics of the piece were conceived by Anna Zilahi and its music was composed by Laura Szári. *Missa Echologica* takes the form of a video piece, shot by Gergely Ofner, in which Zilahi performs the piece along with the female acapella choir Varsányi Szirének. Its lyrics consist of nine O Antiphons, which are “centered on different symbols linked to femininity and the ecosystem of Tihany” (Zilahi 2021). As such, the lyrics reference the “crucial components” of local flora and fauna, as well as other materials that characterize the region’s landscape, from algae and swans to mud or reed (ibid.). The piece was also inspired by the legend of a nymph whom the king of Lake Balaton fell in love with. The king’s feelings remained unrequited, and he cursed his love in response by turning her into an echo, and thus obligating her to repeat the sounds of others and ripping away her identity (ibid.). As per the description of the work by the artist, “[e]cological destruction and patriarchal oppression are rooted in the same logic of power. The two strands converge in a votive antiphon, a responsorial festive choir piece” (ibid.). However, instead of representing the other-than-human constituents of the landscape as passive and submissive, the piece and the lyrics present a counterpoint to patriarchal and capitalist domination, by underlining the agential force of the other-than-human world, the aspect of which becomes crucial for its consideration within an

analytical framework that foregrounds the infrastructures at play. — By paying tribute to the constituents of the ecological environment that enable the existence of the phenomenon and facilitate the movement of sounds that give voice to the Echo, the piece calls into question what we mean by infrastructure in the first place and expands the conceptualization of the term to include organic networks. As the artist’s statement reads, “*Missa Echologica* is an ecofeminist prayer that simultaneously speaks up for a nature exploited by humans and pushed into the background as well as the liberation of the identity-stripped Echo” (ibid.). Beyond its characterization as a form of prayer, the piece can also be read as a statement that reclaims the kind of infrastructure that is being lost as a result of extractivist ethics. As such, female voices and lyrics blend to reclaim an organic infrastructure against a capitalist-extractivist one, whereby organic space and its constitutive elements transfer and transform vocal matter first into echoing sounds, and subsequently into materials of literature, local folklore, and embodied or emotional reactions to the phenomenon. In his paper *The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure*, Brian Larkin highlights the “conceptual roots” of infrastructure as normatively positivist fantasies that have been built upon modernist visions of idealized progress (Larkin 2013: 332). As a counterpoint to Larkin’s position, *Missa Echologica* offers an alternative vision of infrastructure that prioritizes the organic environment and clashes with patriarchal power structures by showing the socially and ecologically generative power of the landscape.

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